

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

May 29, 2020

The Honorable Peter A. DeFazio
Chairman
House Committee on Transportation & Infrastructure
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman DeFazio,

As the Committee considers legislation related to surface transportation this Congress, we urge you to reject any proposals that would increase the maximum allowable weight or length of trucks on interstate highways including state and/or industry specific exemptions as well as pilot programs. We commend your ongoing work to address the complex challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, and we appreciate the need to ensure the efficient movement of critical goods during this crisis. Looking ahead, we ask you to keep in mind that any increase to truck size or weight would present both an unacceptable risk to motorist safety, including the safety of truck drivers themselves, and an unaffordable strain on roads and bridges in our communities.

In 2016, the Department of Transportation (DOT) completed a three-year study of the impacts of longer and heavier trucks on our roadways and recommended that there be no changes in current truck size and weight laws. The study found that heavier trucks had a 47 to 400 percent higher crash rate in limited state testing. A 2013 study found that double-trailer trucks have an 11 percent higher fatal crash rate than single-trailer trucks. The higher crash rates are consistent with DOT findings in the 2016 study that longer double-trailer trucks would take 22 feet longer to stop than current twin-trailer trucks on the road today, and heavier and longer trucks had higher out-of-service rates than currently allowed 80,000-pound trucks.

We are also concerned with the extraordinary economic costs that would accompany changes to truck size or weight limits. DOT found that increasing truck weight by only ten percent over the current 80,000-pound limit would increase bridge damage by 33 percent; allowing a double 33-foot trailer configuration would trigger more than a billion dollars in costs just to prevent catastrophic events on bridges. Heavier and longer trucks would almost certainly mean more trucks on the road as freight is diverted onto our roads from other modes of shipping, creating billions of dollars in new repair and maintenance costs.

The added dangers and costs of allowing heavier and longer trucks will not just be felt on our interstates. With trucks travelling billions of miles a year on local roads, we fear that the burden of increased infrastructure deterioration and the increased risk of fatal crashes will fall disproportionately on small towns and communities. Many states and localities are already unable to keep pace with existing infrastructure needs, and these added costs and risks will likely prove too much to bear.

Congress has repeatedly rejected proposals to increase truck size and weight in a bipartisan fashion, and a large coalition of stakeholders – including public safety advocates, law enforcement organizations, local government groups, representatives of truck drivers, and members of the trucking industry – have joined in that opposition. These stakeholders understand the important role that trucking plays in our economy and in our response to COVID-19, but they also understand that allowing longer and heavier trucks on our roads will cost us dearly, not only in tax dollars, but also in lives.

Thank you for your consideration and for the Committee’s continual efforts to ensure the safety of all who use our roads.

Sincerely,



James P. McGovern
Member of Congress



Haley M. Stevens
Member of Congress

Brian Higgins
Member of Congress

John B. Larson
Member of Congress

C.A. Dutch Ruppensberger
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