



KANSAS STATE TROOPERS ASSOCIATION

To: Senate Transportation Committee

From: Mitch Mellick, President
Kansas State Troopers Association

Date: March 15, 2017

Re: Testimony in Opposition - HB2095 – Special vehicle permit for certain vehicle combinations

Chairman Petersen and members of the committee:

Thank you for considering the concerns of the Kansas State Troopers Association (KSTA) regarding HB 2095. The KSTA is a membership organization made up of more than 400 members. The makeup of the membership includes troopers, motor carrier inspectors and capital police officers, both active and retired. The KSTA is a member of the National Troopers Coalition (NTC) which consists of 42 member associations, like the KSTA, in 38 states representing over 40,000 State Troopers nationwide. The NTC participates in the Coalition Against Big Trucks (CAB) as part of its mission to protect the health, safety and welfare of their members as well as the motoring public which is of course part of the core purpose of the KSTA.

The NTC joined with others at the national level to encourage Congress to reject a proposal in 2015 to increase truck weight limits from 80,000 pounds to 91,000 pounds. That proposal was rejected due in part to the opposition from law enforcement organizations like the NTC. Having been thwarted at the national level, those seeking increases in truck weight limits have been attempting a patchwork approach at the state level across the country, similar to HB 2095. This patchwork approach makes enforcement and compliance more problematic for our members.

The KSTA opposes HB 2095 and the increase in weight limits from 85,000 pounds to 90,000 pounds on 6 or more axles. Attached to our testimony is a white paper from the CAB updated January of this year for your review. It sets forth a concise description of the concerns and history of how these matters have developed.

Thank you for considering the concerns of the men and women of the Kansas State Troopers Association.

Heavier Trucks Endanger Motorists and Damage Infrastructure

Prepared by CABT, January 2017

Congress voted in 2015 to reject a proposal to increase truck weight limits from 80,000 pounds to 91,000 pounds¹. Those companies who would profit from bigger trucks can be expected to renew their efforts in this Congress. Yet, a two-year Comprehensive Truck Size and Weight Limits Study completed by USDOT in 2016 recommended that Congress not approve any heavier or longer trucks². As explained below, there is compelling evidence that heavier trucks would add new dangers to our roads and damage our infrastructure.

Heavier Trucks Have Dramatically Higher Crash Rates

The 2016 USDOT study found that heavier trucks with six axles—both 91,000-pound and 97,000-pound configurations—had higher crash rates in the three states where there was sufficient data³:

Idaho	-	99 percent higher crash rates for six-axle trucks up to 97,000 pounds
Michigan	-	400 percent higher crash rates for six-axle trucks up to 97,000 pounds
Washington	-	47 percent higher crash rates for six-axle trucks up to 91,000 pounds

USDOT noted that the consistency of the higher crash rates added validity to these findings, but more data would be needed to draw national conclusions. However, these findings are consistent with earlier studies that have found higher crash rates are associated with increases in gross vehicle weight^{4,5}.

The Problems with Heavier Trucks

More severe crashes. The severity of a crash is determined by the velocity and mass of a vehicle. If its weight increases, so does the potential severity of a crash⁶. Any increase in crash severity increases the likelihood of injuries becoming more serious, or resulting in fatalities.

More likely to roll over. Heavier trucks tend to have a higher center of gravity because the additional weight is oftentimes stacked vertically. Raising the center of gravity increases the risk of rollovers⁷.

Increased wear and tear. Increasing the weight of trucks causes additional wear and tear on key safety components. The 2016 USDOT study found that trucks weighing over 80,000 pounds had higher overall out-of-service (OOS) rates and **18 percent higher brake violation rates** compared to those at or below

¹ On Nov. 3, 2015, an amendment offered by Rep. Reid Ribble (R-Wis.) to the Transportation Reauthorization Act was defeated on a bipartisan vote, 236 to 187.

² USDOT; 2016. *Comprehensive Truck Size and Weight Limits Study, Final Report to Congress*.

³ Ibid.

⁴ USDOT; 2013. *Highway Safety and Truck Crash Comparative Analysis, Final Draft Desk Scan*; "Crash rates tend to increase with increases in GVW." 1995 University of Michigan Transportation Research Institute (UMTRI) study summary; and "The study also noted an increase in fatal crash rates at higher GVWs." 1988 UMTRI study summary.

⁵ Marshall University, 2013. *An Analysis of Truck Size and Weight: Phase I – Safety*.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ USDOT; 2000. *Comprehensive Truck Size and Weight Study*.

80,000 pounds⁸. This is especially important because a 2016 study by the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety found that trucks with any out-of-service violation are **362 percent more likely to be involved in a crash**⁹.

Heavier Trucks Would Cause Significant Infrastructure Damage

USDOT found in its 2016 study that thousands of Interstate and other National Highway System bridges could not accommodate heavier trucks¹⁰. These bridges would need to be reinforced or replaced, costing billions of dollars. USDOT estimates the following:

- The 91,000-pound, six-axle configuration would negatively affect more than 4,800 bridges, costing \$1.1 billion
- The 97,000-pound, six-axle configuration would negatively affect more than 6,200 bridges, costing \$2.2 billion

NOTE: USDOT only studied 20 percent of the nation's bridges for this analysis. The remaining 80 percent are likely to be the most vulnerable to heavier trucks. In fact, only 1,360 of the bridges considered by USDOT are currently "structurally deficient" (i.e., likeliest to need repair and/or replacement with heavier truck weights), while 70,427 of total bridges are classified as "structurally deficient."

Experts Agree that Bigger Trucks Are More Dangerous

Congress rejected bigger-truck proposals in 2015 in large part because of opposition from national and local law enforcement, including the National Troopers Coalition and the National Sheriffs' Association:

"The bottom line is bigger and heavier trucks make our roads and highways unsafe due to, among other things, greater stopping distances and higher risk of rollover." (Sept. 23, 2015 National Troopers Coalition letter to Congress)

"We are united nationwide in our opposition to both heavier and longer trucks. Please stand with the National Sheriffs' Association and its members and reject heavier and longer truck provisions." (Oct. 20, 2015 National Sheriffs' Association letter to Congress)

The Truckload Carriers Association (TCA), representing over 700 trucking companies, opposes heavier trucks¹¹.

Patchwork Exceptions Undermine Enforcement and Compliance

Some bigger truck proponents have sought to remove the federal weight limits for individual states. USDOT has criticized this kind of piecemeal approach for our Interstate Highway system, finding that it makes enforcement and compliance more difficult, contributes little to productivity, and may have unintended consequences for safety and highway infrastructure¹².

⁸ USDOT; 2016. *Comprehensive Truck Size and Weight Limits Study, Final Report to Congress*.

⁹ Insurance Institute for Highway Safety; 2016. *Crash Risk Factors for Interstate Large Trucks in North Carolina*.

¹⁰ USDOT; 2016. *Comprehensive Truck Size and Weight Limits Study, Final Report to Congress*.

¹¹ Truckload Carriers Association; September, 16, 2015. Letter to Rep. Reid Ribble (R-Wis.).

¹² USDOT; 2004. *Western Uniformity Scenario Analysis: A Regional Truck Size and Weight Scenario Requested by the Western Governors' Association*.