CABT
Coalition Against Bigger Trucks

NEWS CONFERENCE STATEMENT OF MARK BURTON

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Good Morning. My name is Mark Burton, and I am the Director of Transportation Economics for the Center for Transportation Research at the University of Tennessee. I have served in this role for the past 10 years.

I stand here today to publicly release findings of a study, *An Analysis of Truck Size and Weight: Phase I – Safety*, conducted by the Multimodal Transportation and Infrastructure Consortium (MTIC) at Marshall University, a University Transportation Center recognized by the USDOT Research and Innovative Technology Administration (RITA). This study looked at the safety issues surrounding truck size and weight. And the bottom line, for all of us, is that bigger, heavier trucks will further endanger the lives of motorists by exposing us to measurably greater risks.

It is well known that crash statistics are generally insufficient, and they are difficult to capture. Lacking the data to produce definitive new empirics, the Marshall-led study team explored a wide range of information and carefully evaluated large numbers of both domestic and international academic studies. In doing so, they identified opportunities to carefully combine, update, and extend existing empirical results. They also gathered feedback from heavy truck operators, as well as the community of law officers who enforce truck-size and weight limits and who investigate truck-involved crashes. These added efforts yielded four key findings:

- First: Double-trailer configurations are 15.5 percent more likely to be involved in fatal crashes than single-trailer trucks. The USDOT study found an 11-percent higher fatal crash rate.

- Second: The combination of disparate data sources that, together, suggest single-trailer combination trucks with six or more axles – presumably the heaviest trucks – have an eight-times greater fatal crash involvement than five-axle singles.

- Third: 95 percent of the law enforcement officers interviewed indicated flatly that heavier or longer trucks would be “more dangerous” because the additional weight and length would add to an already complicated chain of events.

- Fourth: 90 percent of truck drivers surveyed believed that increased use of 97,000-pound, six-axle trucks would negatively impact highway safety, and 88 percent believed that greater use of longer combination vehicles would negatively impact highway safety.

The Marshall study underlines the importance of revisiting existing data with an eye for additional analytical opportunities, and that both truck drivers and law officers can provide compelling qualitative information. It is surprising, given these findings, that the current USDOT Truck Size and Weight study effort largely ignores both potential paths.

After reviewing the methodological standard being used, I do not believe USDOT-led studies will furnish complete or sufficiently reliable results. Of greater concern, I believe the methodological standards used by USDOT will lead to findings that may give Congress the false impression that longer and heavier trucks are not a safety issue for the American people. And frankly, that is just not true. Further, I share the widespread belief that USDOT should integrate findings from the Marshall study in its report and, at the very least, incorporate feedback from law officers and truck drivers.

The decision Congress makes will have real-world implications and it is one that should be made with all available facts. Rushing to conclusions without all of these facts is too great a risk when the lives of American motorists are at stake.

Thank You