

June 12, 2017

The Honorable Mario Diaz-Balart, Chairman
The Honorable David Price, Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Transportation, Housing and Urban Development, and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Diaz-Balart and Ranking Member Price:

As the Subcommittee prepares for Thursday's hearing to review the FY 2018 budget request for the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT), our broad and diverse coalition urges you to reject any provisions that would increase federal truck size and weight limits including the creation of any "pilot programs" or special interest exemptions to evade current limits.

Current trends show that truck crashes are too frequent and too often are fatal. In 2015, 4,067 people were killed in crashes involving large trucks. According to data from the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT), this is an increase of more than 4 percent from the previous year and a 20 percent increase from 2009. Furthermore, this is the highest fatality number, and the first time truck crash deaths have exceeded 4,000, since 2008. Truck crash injuries are also rising significantly. In 2015, 116,000 people were injured in crashes involving large trucks. This is the highest number of injuries since 2004, and there has been a 57 percent increase in the number of people injured in large truck crashes since 2009. The annual number of deaths and injuries is completely unacceptable and would not be tolerated in any other mode of transportation.

In addition to this massive death and injury toll, our nation's roads continue to receive a grade of "D" from the American Society of Civil Engineers. The report revealed that one of every five miles of highway pavement is in poor condition and that there is a significant and increasing backlog of rehabilitation needs. Additionally, one in eleven of the nation's 615,000 bridges in the National Bridge Inventory were structurally deficient.

Any proposals that would allow heavier and longer trucks on our nation's roads and bridges will further endanger the safety of motorists, and inflict even more damage and destruction to our infrastructure and should be rejected.

In fact, attempts to increase truck size and weight limits were defeated during the last Congressional session by both the Senate and the House in strong bipartisan votes. In addition to documented safety and infrastructure problems, the American public consistently and overwhelmingly rejects bigger and heavier trucks in countless opinion polls.

Furthermore, Congress directed the U.S. DOT to conduct a Comprehensive Truck Size and Weight Study in the 2012 MAP-21 law (Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century Act (MAP-21), Pub. L. 112-141). In April of last year, U.S. DOT transmitted the completed study to Congress and recommended that no changes be made to federal truck size and weight laws.

Trucks heavier than 80,000 pounds have a greater number of brake violations, which are a major reason for out-of-service violations. Alarming, trucks with out-of-service violations are 362 percent more likely to be involved in a crash, according to a North Carolina study by the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety (IIHS). Tractor-trailers moving at 60 mph are required to stop in 310 feet – the length of a football field – once the brakes are applied. Actual stopping distances are often much longer due to driver response time before braking and the common problem that truck brakes are often not in top working condition. In 2016, violations related to tires and/or brakes accounted for five of the top ten most common vehicle out-of-service violations. Moreover, increasing the weight of a heavy truck by only 10 percent increases bridge damage by 33 percent. The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) estimates that the investment backlog for bridges, to address all cost-beneficial bridge needs, is \$123.1 billion. The U.S. would need to increase annual funding for bridges by 20 percent over current spending levels to eliminate the bridge backlog by 2032.

The study also found that introducing double 33 foot trailer trucks, known as “Double 33s,” would be projected to result in 2,478 bridges requiring strengthening or replacement at an estimated one-time cost of \$1.1 billion. It is important to note that this figure does not account for the additional, subsequent maintenance costs which will result from longer, heavier trucks. Moreover, double trailer trucks have an 11 percent higher fatal crash rate than single trailer trucks. They also require more stopping distance, take more time to pass, have bigger blind spots, cross into adjacent lanes and swing into opposing lanes on curves and when making right angle turns. Simply put, bigger trucks mean bigger safety problems.

We strongly oppose any so-called “pilot program” to allow heavier trucks in a select number of states because it opens the flood gates to widespread disregard for well-researched and well-supported national policies. The piecemeal approach also makes enforcement and compliance more difficult, burdens states with reasonable truck weights to succumb to pressure for higher weights, and creates deadly and costly consequences for highway safety and infrastructure.

Despite misleading claims to the contrary, research and experience shows that allowing bigger, heavier trucks will not result in fewer trucks. Since 1982, when Congress last increased the gross vehicle weight limit, truck registrations have increased 95 percent. The U.S. DOT study also addressed this assertion and found that any potential mileage efficiencies from use of heavier trucks would be offset in just one year.

Annual truck crash fatalities are equivalent to a major airplane crash every other week of the year. Any change overturning current truck size and weight laws will further strain and erode our crumbling infrastructure, present dire safety risks and disrupt efficient intermodal freight transportation. It is critical that any proposals which would increase the size or weight of trucks be rejected, including pilot programs and measures to preempt state limits. Thank you for your consideration of our position.

Sincerely,

Joan Claybrook, Chair
Citizens for Reliable and Safe Highways and
Former Administrator, National Highway
Traffic Safety Administration

Jacqueline Gillan, President
Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety

Georges C. Benjamin, MD, Executive
Director
American Public Health Association

Chuck Baker, President
National Railroad Construction and
Maintenance Association

John Lannen, Executive Director
Truck Safety Coalition

Dave Tennent, Executive Director and CEO
Railway Engineering-Maintenance Suppliers
Association

Jack Gillis, Director of Public Affairs
Consumer Federation of America

Andrew McGuire, Executive Director
Trauma Foundation

Michael Drudy, Executive Director
Railway Systems Suppliers, Inc.

Michael Brooks, Acting Director
Center for Auto Safety

Linda Wilburn
Weatherford, OK
Board Member, PATT
Mother of Orbie Wilburn
Killed in a truck crash 9/2/02

Gary Wilburn
Weatherford, OK
Volunteer, Truck Safety Coalition
Father of Orbie Wilburn
Killed in a truck crash 9/2/02

James P. Hoffa, General President
International Brotherhood of Teamsters

Thomas D. Simpson, President
Railway Supply Institute

John Risch, National Legislative Director
SMART-TD (UTU)

Karen Wiley, MSN, RN, CEN, 2017 President
Emergency Nurses Association

Linda Bauer Darr, President
American Short Line and Regional Railroad
Association

Dominick L. Stokes
Vice President for Legislative Affairs
Federal Law Enforcement Officers
Association

Steve Owings, Co-Founder
Road Safe America

Daphne Izer, Founder
Parents Against Tired Truckers (PATT)

Brad Roseberry, Vice President
Coalition Against Bigger Trucks

Janette Fennell, Founder and President
KidsAndCars.org

Ed Slattery
Lutherville, MD
Board Member, PATT
Husband of Susan Slattery
Killed in a truck crash 8/16/10
Sons Matthew & Peter Slattery critically
injured

Morgan Lake
Sunderland, MD
Volunteer, Truck Safety Coalition

Injured in a truck crash 7/19/13

Larry Liberatore
Severn, MD
Board Member, PATT
Father of Nick Liberatore
Killed in a truck crash 6/9/97

Kate Brown
Gurnee, IL
Volunteer, Truck Safety Coalition
Mother of Graham Brown
Injured in a truck crash 5/2/05

Julie Branon Magnan
South Burlington, VT
Volunteer, Truck Safety Coalition
Injured in a truck crash 1/31/02
Wife of David Magnan
Killed in a truck crash 1/31/02

Tami Friedrich Trakh
Corona, CA
Board Member, CRASH
Sister of Kris Mercurio, Sister-in-Law of Alan
Mercurio, Aunt of Brandie Rooker &
Anthony Mercurio
Killed in a truck crash 12/27/89

Santiago Calderon
Arcata, CA
Volunteer, Truck Safety Coalition
Injured in a truck crash 4/10/14

Michelle Lemus
Los Angeles, CA
Volunteer, Truck Safety Coalition
Injured in a truck crash 4/10/14

Peter Malarczyk
Hastings-on-Hudson, NY
Volunteer, Truck Safety Coalition
Injured in a truck crash 12/29/15
Son of Ryszard and Anita Malarczyk
Killed in a truck crash 12/29/15

Monica Malarczyk
Hastings-on-Hudson, NY
Volunteer, Truck Safety Coalition
Injured in a truck crash 12/29/15
Son of Ryszard and Anita Malarczyk
Killed in a truck crash 12/29/15

Alan Dana
Plattsburgh, NY
Volunteer, Truck Safety Coalition
Son of Janet Dana, Uncle of Caitlyn &
Lauryn Dana, Brother-in-law of Laurie Dana
Killed in a truck crash 7/19/12

Michelle Novak
Delevan, NY
Volunteer, Truck Safety Coalition
Aunt of Charles "Chuck" Novak
Killed in a truck crash 10/24/10

cc: Members of the U.S. House Committee on Appropriations