

December 23, 2010

The Honorable John E. Baldacci
Office of the Governor
#1 State House Station
Augusta, Maine 04333-0001
Via Fax: 207-287-1034

Dear Governor Baldacci:

We write to urge you to take action to stop trucks that weigh 100,000 pounds gross vehicle weight (GVW), from traveling on Maine's roads under the jurisdiction of State law. As you know, the federally authorized one year pilot project that allowed trucks to exceed the federal weight regulations and weigh more than 80,000 pounds GVW on Maine's Interstate highways has expired (Section 194 of the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2010, Public Law No. 11-117). One of the primary arguments used to get this special interest pilot project enacted was the false assertion that allowing these overweight trucks on Interstates will be safer than keeping them on state secondary and local roads. However, this mischaracterization of the issue leaves out the option of reducing the state weight limit and the fact that 100,000 pound trucks are dangerous on *any* road – Interstate or secondary. Years of convincing and compelling research show that overweight trucks are more deadly and more destructive regardless of the roads on which they operate.

The Maine Department of Transportation (MaineDOT), by its own admission, allows these trucks on secondary roads even though they increase "potential conflicts with vehicles and people" ("Interstate Highway Truck Weights – White Paper," MaineDOT, September 20, 2010). MaineDOT allows these heavy, overweight trucks to operate through school crossings, across cross walks and to pass by more than 3,000 private driveways exposing Maine families, pedestrians and children to "potential conflicts" with these overweight trucks. MaineDOT even cites a study to show that "the crash-rate experience of five- and six-axle combination trucks is seven to ten times higher on Maine's non-Interstate highways than on the Maine Turnpike, which is currently exempt[ed] from federal weight limits." Yet, MaineDOT has never limited the routes or prohibited these heavy trucks from endangering the public on state and local secondary routes.

The assertion that allowing 100,000 pound trucks to use the Interstates would improve safety on state and local roads is further undermined by MaineDOT's own contradictory claim. In the "White Paper," MaineDOT states that "Six-axle 100,000-pound semi-trailers have operated on Maine's roads for over 20 years safely and effectively." No grave safety concern is expressed, just the opposite. Similarly, Mr. Dale E. Hanington, President & CEO of Maine Motor Transport Association (MMTA), stated in a September 4, 2009 letter to Senators Inouye, Cochran, Murray and Bond, that, "As an example of the impact of our current situation, let's just look at one trip from Augusta to Houlton. Using the secondary roads, a driver will encounter no fewer than 20 traffic lights, more than 270 intersections, and over 3,000 driveways. The driver will also pass several school and fire stations." Nevertheless, Mr. Hanington concluded that "It is important to note that several hundred similar trips are made daily under these conditions and done so safely."

MaineDOT and the MMTA clearly contradict themselves. These 100,000 pound overweight trucks are either safe and effective on the secondary roads as both organizations have claimed, in which case they need not and should not be allowed expanded access to the Interstates, or they are not operating safely and effectively on secondary roads, in which case the State should restrict their access on those roads. MaineDOT and MMTA cannot have it both ways.

Moreover, the numerous dangers intrinsic to overweight trucks to which MaineDOT knowingly put children, pedestrians and home-owners at risk include longer stopping distances, more loss of control crashes, and increased risk of rollovers. (*Comprehensive Truck Size and Weight Study*, U.S. DOT, 2000). A 100,000-pound truck takes 25 percent longer to stop than an 80,000-pound truck. In fact, when a six-axle truck at 80,000 pounds GVW is allowed to carry 100,000 pounds, the payload increases by as much as 35 percent but there is absolutely no increase in braking power. Federal standards require passenger cars to stop in 215 feet, but big tractor-trailers take up to 355 feet to stop – more than the length of a football field. By contrast, a fully loaded 100,000 pound truck takes 444 feet to stop and a 120,000 pound truck requires 533 feet to come to a full stop.

The stopping distances are even greater if trucks do not have well-maintained brakes. Truck inspections often find up to one-third of all trucks with out-of-adjustment brakes, the most frequent citation by enforcement authorities for placing a large truck out of service (*Study of the Braking Performance of Heavy U.S. Vehicles*, National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, 1987). If the State was truly concerned about the safety implications of higher truck weights, it would not allow 100,000 pound trucks on state and local roads in the first place, and would certainly rescind excessive weight permits rather than increasing the miles of roads and number of bridges over which these trucks can travel.

Additionally, when six-axle 100,000 pound trucks were permitted on the remainder of the Interstate highways in Maine, the number of these large, heavy trucks attracted to the Interstate routes increased the exposure while using state and local roads to get to and when departing the Interstate highways. According to data released by MaineDOT and the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) 6 Month Report on the Pilot Program, the number of six-axle 100,000 pound trucks traveling north of Augusta that entered I-95 at Sidney *nearly tripled* from about 400 to over 1,100 per week immediately after the pilot project started. The total number of six-axle 100,000 pound trucks using both I-95 and a parallel state route combined *almost doubled*, from about 600 to about 1,100 per week. Thus, any potential benefit while traveling on the Interstate highway is negated by the increase in exposure of additional trucks that have to travel on state and local roads, where they have a much higher crash rate, in order to gain access to, and when departing from, Maine's Interstate highways.

With the holiday season upon us, we ask that you put the safety of motorists traveling on Maine's roads before special trucking interests. These overweight trucks should not be traveling through neighborhoods or next to families traveling on the Interstates.

Sincerely,

Daphne Izer, Founder
Parents Against Tired Truckers
Lisbon, ME

John Lannen, Executive Director
Truck Safety Coalition
Arlington, VA

Joan Claybrook, Chair
Citizens for Reliable and Safety Highways
Washington, DC

Jacqueline Gillan, Vice President
Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety
Washington, DC

Andrew McGuire, Executive Director
Trauma Foundation
San Francisco, CA