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National Academy Peer Review Committee First Report Condemns U.S. DOT Study Process

Public Health and Safety Leaders, Truck Drivers, Law Enforcement and Truck Crash Victims Oppose Changing Federal Law to Allow Deadly Bigger and Heavier Trucks in Every State

Call On Obama Administration Put the Brakes on Flawed DOT Study on Safety and Damage Issues

Multimodal Transportation & Infrastructure Consortium Releases Truck Size and Weight Report Results Confirm Truck Size and Weight Increases Endanger Motorists Majority of Law Enforcement and Truck Drivers Surveyed Endorse Safety Fears

WASHINGTON, D.C. (Wednesday, April 9, 2014) – Today, a broad coalition of public health and safety groups, truck drivers, law enforcement, and families of truck crash victims joined U.S. Representative Jim McGovern (D-MA) on Capitol Hill to oppose any increases to federal truck size and truck weight limits as Congress debates the next multi-billion dollar surface transportation reauthorization bill. Concerns about a dangerous and deadly policy change in federal law are heightened because the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) is currently conducting a study on truck size and weights which has significant flaws and potential biases.

A report released yesterday by the National Academy of Science's Transportation Research Board (TRB) peer review panel verified many of the concerns and criticisms by these groups about the flawed methodology being used and the short time frame for completing the study. The report concluded that these two factors would likely yield inaccurate study results. The DOT study will potentially influence decisions in Congress and states for decades to come on the safety of allowing overweight and oversized trucks to share the road with motorists.

Congressman Jim McGovern (D-MA) stated, "I have serious concerns about the study that the Department of Transportation is conducting on this critical issue. If DOT does not include the most common configurations of big trucks in their analysis, then the validity of the study will be called into question. We want and need the best possible study, and if the process is flawed, this will all be an exercise in futility. Truck size and weight issues have significant safety and cost implications. We need to get this right."

"What has been made clear today is that the DOT's study on the impact of truck size and weight is flawed," said Teamsters General President James P. Hoffa. "Congress cannot base policy decisions on this study when the driving public's safety is at risk. Larger, heavier trucks will lead to more congestion on our highways, and put increased stress on our already crumbling infrastructure."

Joan Claybrook, Chair, Citizens for Reliable and Safe Highways (CRASH), concurred, "The on-going problems plaguing the U.S. DOT Truck Size and Weight Study need immediate attention and corrective action by the Obama Administration. If not, this study will become the lottery prize for corporate trucking interests pushing for bigger, heavier and more deadly trucks on our highways. Serious mistakes and chronic missteps by DOT, as we have already seen, will produce a shoddy, inaccurate study that puts corporate profits ahead of public safety."

Over the past three years, the United States has endured increases in the number of fatalities and injuries caused by large truck crashes. Fatalities have increased by 16 percent since 2009 from 3,380 to 3,921, and the number of people injured in these crashes has increased by a staggering 40 percent, from 74,000 to 104,000.

Jacqueline Gillan, president of Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety, stated, “Years of compelling and convincing research shows that bigger and heavier trucks are dangerous, deadly and destructive. Also, there is overwhelming public opposition to sharing the highway with overweight and extra-long trucks and with good reason. If truck size and weight limits are increased, the American public will pay with their lives and their wallets.”

Three quarters of Americans say they oppose bigger and heavier trucks on our highways, and polls conducted over the past 15 years show similar results. The American public has consistently affirmed their overwhelming support for truck weight limitations, and firm opposition to holding taxpayers responsible for paying for infrastructure damage caused by heavier trucks. This opposition spans almost every major demographic, geographic, and partisan group. Furthermore, eight out of ten (82 percent) Americans support the view that trucks pulling double or triple trailers are more dangerous than those pulling just a single trailer.

Dr. Georges Benjamin, Executive Director of the American Public Health Association, stated, “I am here today as we celebrate National Public Health Week to raise awareness of the importance of promoting wellness and preventing disease and injury. Protecting motorists and truck drivers from preventable death and injury is an excellent example of this year’s theme, ‘Public Health: Start Here.’ While the public health community recognizes that moving goods by truck is an essential part of our nation’s freight transportation system, the economic and emotional toll of truck crashes is unnecessary, unacceptable and preventable. Compared to other modes of freight transportation the mortality and morbidity toll is staggering. Truck transportation is responsible for 3 out of 4 freight transportation-related fatalities and 9 of 10 injuries.”

Additionally, findings were publicly released for the first time today from a recent report, *An Analysis of Truck Size and Weight Issues, Phase I – Safety*, conducted in 2013 at Marshall University by the Multimodal Transportation and Infrastructure Consortium (MTIC). The report shows a 15.5 percent higher fatal crash rate when double trailer trucks are involved in a crash compared to single trailer trucks, and a more than eight times higher fatal crash rate for trucks with six or more axles, presumably the heaviest of trucks, as compared to those with five axles.

Mark Burton, Director of Transportation Economics for the Center for Transportation Research at the University of Tennessee said, "This report 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."

The report, conducted at Marshall University by MTIC, also found that 95 percent of law enforcement officers believe heavier and longer trucks would be more dangerous. Furthermore, 88 percent of truck drivers believe greater use of longer-combination vehicles would negatively impact highway safety.

Bruce Gower, Chief of Police for the city of Clyde, Ohio said, "Adding extra weight to big rigs or making them longer and adding trailers will definitely make them more dangerous. Hit something with a five-pound sledgehammer, it's going to do so much damage. Hit something with a forty-pound sledgehammer, it's going to do a lot more damage. For me, it's a matter of simple physics. Heavier weights traveling at high speeds mean an increase in crash severity, putting motorists in Ohio and across the country in even more danger."

Jennifer Tierney whose father was killed in a truck crash in 1983, volunteers as North Carolina Volunteer Coordinator for the Truck Safety Coalition and a Member of FMCSA’s Motor Carrier Safety Advisory Committee (MCSAC), said, “I urge Transportation Secretary Foxx, who is from my home state of North Carolina, to immediately correct the deficiencies in the U.S. DOT truck size and weight study. The results of the U.S. DOT study will influence transportation policy for decades to come, and we cannot base life-altering decisions on poor methodology and questionable results. Additionally, I implore Congress to focus on remedying the current truck safety problems, and not create new ones by increasing truck size and weight limits.”