



Parents Against Tired Truckers and Citizens for Reliable and Safe Highways

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## **TRUCK CRASH VICTIMS WARN MOTORISTS ABOUT BIG RIG AMENDMENT TO FEDERAL APPROPRIATIONS BILL ALLOWING DRAMATIC TRUCK SIZE & WEIGHT INCREASES ON MAINE AND VERMONT INTERSTATE HIGHWAYS AND BRIDGES**

ARLINGTON, VA (December 9, 2009) – Truck crash victims and survivors today issued a warning to New England motorists regarding the insertion of an amendment to the federal transportation appropriations bill that will allow 108,000 to 120,000-pound tractor-trailers to operate on Interstate roads and bridges in Vermont and 100,000-pound trucks on all Maine Interstate highways. The current Vermont standard for truck weights is 80,000 pounds gross weight, as established by federal law.

Last night, U.S. House and Senate conferees to the Transportation, Housing and Urban Development, and Related Agencies (THUD) Appropriations legislation agreed to a FY 2010 funding bill that authorizes a one-year pilot program permitting trucks on all of Maine's Interstate highways to exceed federal law by 20,000 pounds and by even larger margins – up to an additional 40,000 pounds – on Vermont's Interstate highways. In fact, Maine will allow trucks under a wide range of special permits to far exceed even 100,000 pounds gross weight.

Given the already deplorable condition of Vermont roads, this legislative action is a highly regressive public policy that will hasten the deterioration of Vermont Interstate highways and bridges while threatening the safety of everyone on Vermont's roads by allowing big tractor-trailer rigs to pile on additional tens of thousands of pounds of extra weight.

That extra weight has already been proven to dramatically accelerate infrastructure deterioration in a New England state that already has a woefully underfunded highway program and both roads and bridges that are rated as extremely poor by both the American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE) and The Road Information Program. ASCE found that almost 40 percent of Vermont's bridges were deficient or obsolete, one of the worst records of bridge condition and safety in the nation. Trucks weighing 120,000 pounds on Vermont's Interstate bridges will demolish old, unrepaired Vermont bridges at a frightening rate, according to the findings of studies released by the National Academy of Sciences. This kind of dramatic leap in truck gross weight can trigger a catastrophic bridge collapse.

The Truck Safety Coalition, Citizens for Reliable and Safety Highways, Parents Against Tired Truckers, and other safety groups expressed their grave concerns about this exemption that was quietly inserted in the bill without an opportunity for a single public hearing on the public safety and infrastructure dangers of overweight trucks in these states.

“Motorists in Maine and Vermont deserve more than being human guinea pigs in this dangerous experiment,” said John Lannen, Executive Director of the Truck Safety Coalition. “A report back to Congress on the effectiveness of this one-year program isn't even due for two years, which leads us to believe that this experiment will likely continue until the report is issued and analyzed by Congress.”

Each year, about 5,000 people are killed and more than 100,000 are injured in truck crashes. The chances of a big truck crash resulting in deaths and serious injuries increase with each extra ton of weight over the 80,000 pound

gross vehicle weight limit in federal law. A big truck weighing even a legal 80,000 pounds is 50 to 100 percent more likely to be involved in a fatal crash than a truck weighing 50,000 to 65,000 pounds. (University of Michigan Transportation Research Institute (UMTRI), 1988; Federal Highway Administration, 1997)

A 100,000 pound truck takes 25 percent longer to stop than an 80,000 pound truck and a 120,000 pound truck can travel as much as 50 percent further before stopping than an 80,000 pound truck, especially if these big trucks have unadjusted brakes. (UMTRI, 1983; Insurance Institute for Highway Safety 2003; National Academy of Sciences 1990; National Highway Traffic Safety Administration 2004; Commercial Vehicle Safety Alliance 2000)

“These special interest exemptions clearly threaten the lives of everyone using Maine’s and Vermont’s interstates and will have regional and nationwide ramifications leading to increased deaths and injuries and accelerated destruction of our nation’s infrastructure,” said Julie Magnan of Burlington, Vermont, who survived a semi-tractor trailer crash that killed her husband in 2002. “Vermont and Maine families may pay with their lives and their wallets because of this reckless action by Congress. Vermont will now be used as a principal trucking corridor from Boston to Canada, which will lead to more trucks on our roads and increased costs to maintain our interstates and bridges.”

“Allowing much heavier trucks on old, worn-out bridges in Maine and Vermont could result in another catastrophic bridge collapse like the one on I-35 in Minneapolis in June 2007,” Magnan added. “Dozens of people could die from a major bridge failure in either state.”

More than 1 out of 3 of Vermont’s roads are currently in poor or mediocre condition. Driving on roads needing repairs in Vermont already costs the state’s motorists \$167 million each year in extra vehicle repairs and operating costs – a hefty \$296 price tag for each motorist. Motor vehicle crashes in Vermont cost the state \$221 million each year in medical costs, lost productivity, travel delays, and workplace, insurance, and legal costs. [The Road Information Program (TRIP)]

The statistics are equally grim in Maine. In addition to being one of the deadliest states in truck crashes, Maine received a D grade in 2009 from ASCE for its roads and a D+ for its bridges. ASCE describes a grade of D as “with a risk of failure high.” Thirty-six (36) percent of Maine’s bridges are deficient or obsolete – again, one of the worst records in the U.S. -- and 29 percent of its major roads are in poor or mediocre condition. Additionally, Maine has been warned by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) that several Interstate bridges are fracture-critical under the very high gross weights the state is currently allowing on old Interstate bridges and that hundreds of bridges are being severely stressed with the excessive weight of 100,000 pound trucks that could lead to the failure of at least 7 of these bridges.

Daphne Izer, who co-founded Parents Against Tired Truckers (P.A.T.T.) in 1994 after a fatigued truck driver killed her 17-year-old son Jeff and his three close friends, cautioned, “This increase in truck weights unnecessarily jeopardizes motorists both by making them drive on the roads with heavier trucks and also by threatening more widespread, rapid destruction of our roads and bridges. No one thought such a tragedy could happen in Minnesota with the I-35 bridge collapse. It could happen in Maine.”

The safety advocates also pointed out that increasing truck size and weight will not decrease the number of truck trips, result in fewer truck miles traveled, or improve safety by reducing the number of trucks on the highways. Past increases in truck size and weight have not resulted in fewer trucks, fewer trips or fewer miles traveled. The number of trucks on U.S. highways has consistently grown over the past few decades even after several increases in both the sizes and weights of large trucks. [Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration 2004 and 2003]

Large, extra-heavy trucks are highly fuel inefficient. The U.S. DOT found that a 5- or 6-axle semi-trailer combination truck weighing 100,000 pounds, rather than 80,000 pounds, suffered a 10.4 percent reduction in diesel fuel mileage -- a serious policy and environmental issue given the increasing scarcity of petroleum and skyrocketing diesel fuel prices. [Western Uniformity Scenario Analysis, (U.S. DOT), 2004]

“The public understands the dangers of driving on the roads with overweight trucks and the roadway and bridge damage caused by them all too well,” said the Truck Safety Coalition’s John Lannen. A recent national survey conducted by the Truck Safety Coalition found that 2 out of 3 Americans oppose the trucking industry’s efforts to allow trucks that would carry heavier loads on U.S. highways.”

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