

Increased Truck Size & Weight Limits

<p>ISSUE TYPE</p> <p>AGENCY</p> <p>STATUS</p> <p>DIVISION IMPACT</p> <p>INTERESTED PARTIES</p>	<p>Legislative (Federal)</p> <p>Congress</p> <p>Active/Tracking</p> <p>Rail, MC</p> <p>AAR, ATA, OOIDA, Coalition for Transp. Productivity (CTP), Coalition Against Bigger Trucks (CABT), Coalition for Efficient Responsible Trucking, Public Citizen, Americans for Modern Transportation (AMT)</p>	<p>KEY DATES</p> <p>April 14, 2016 – USDOT Comprehensive Truck Size and Weight Limits Study recommends no changes to federal truck size and weight limitations</p> <p>Nov. 27, 2018 – TRB recommends areas for additional research to support truck size and weight regulations</p> <p>May 29, 2020 – 82 Members of Congress sign letter opposing any increase to Interstate truck size and weight limits</p> <p>June, 2020 – Study commissioned by CABT finds increased truck size and weight would reduce intermodal and railroad traffic by up to 58 percent</p>	<p>MOST RECENT ACTION</p>
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Summary

In 1991, Congress froze truck size and weight limits on federal highways. Trucks traveling on Interstate highways are limited to gross vehicle weights of 80,000 pounds though state permits may be obtained for special movements. Truck tractor-semitrailer-trailer combinations are restricted to 28.5 feet and truck tractor-semitrailer combinations are capped at 48 feet, unless states have “grandfathered” approvals for longer lengths through previously passed legislation.

The 2012 Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century (MAP-21) Act directed the U.S. Department of Transportation (USDOT) to conduct a Comprehensive Truck Size and Weight Limits Study assessing the differences between trucks operating within the federal truck size and weight limits and trucks legally operating in excess of federal limits.

USDOT released the final [Comprehensive Truck Size and Weight Limits Study](#) in April 2016. Rather than recommend changes to federal truck size and weight limitations, the study suggested future areas of research, including assessments in truck weight and configuration in crashes, long-term bridge performance, and other related topics.

In response to this study, the Transportation Research Board of the National Academies of Sciences published a [report](#) in November 2018 recommending seven areas

for additional research. The report also predicted it could take four to six years to collect sufficient research on this topic.

In 2017, a group of shippers, including Amazon, FedEx, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, the National Retail Federation, XPO Logistics, and more, formed the Americans for Modern Transportation (AMT) Coalition. AMT argues the widespread adoption of twin 33-foot trailers, among other improvements, can increase productivity and efficiency and reduce congestion on U.S. highways.

Citing COVID-19’s impact on supply chains and consumer trends, AMT reaffirmed its position in several [letters](#) to Congress in 2020. In these letters, AMT asserts twin 33-foot trailers would move the same amount of freight with 18 percent fewer truck trips, resulting in annual savings of \$2.8 billion in reduced shipping costs.

The Coalition Against Bigger Trucks (CABT), whose membership includes the Association of American Railroads (AAR), the Owner-Operator Independent Drivers Association (OOIDA), and the International Brotherhood of Teamsters, oppose any increase to current truck size and weight limits. They argue larger trucks would create more damage to highways and bridges, cause additional traffic congestion and consequently, reduce air quality.

In June 2020, a [study](#) commissioned by CABT examined the impacts of truck size and weight on intermodal and rail-to-truck traffic. The study compared six different truck size and weight scenarios to quantify the resulting traffic diversions for each. The study found that increased truck length and weight could reduce intermodal and railroad traffic by 20-58 percent depending on truck configuration.

Over 80 Members of Congress (all Democrats) signed a [letter](#) in May 2020, urging Transportation and Infrastructure Committee Chairman DeFazio (D-OR) to reject any proposals that would increase truck size and weight limits on Interstate highways, including state and industry-specific exemptions or pilot programs. The letter argued such proposals would result in decreased motorist safety and higher costs to maintain infrastructure.

Potential Impact to Intermodal Freight Transportation

Following are some potential impacts of truck size and weight increases on intermodal freight transportation:

Impact 1:

Increased truck size and weights could lead to more highway and bridge damage, resulting in the need for additional spending on this type of infrastructure maintenance and enhancement. This would reduce the available funding for intermodal projects such as intermodal connectors, removal of grade crossings, and terminal expansion projects, at a time when additional capacity is needed.

Impact 2:

The economic subsidies enjoyed by longer combination vehicles distort the relative pricing for over-the-road trucking service vs. rail intermodal service and could lead to a reduction in the use of intermodal transportation.

Impact 3:

Increased use of longer combination vehicles, at the expense of intermodal service, would substantially increase fuel consumption and lead to a corresponding increase in greenhouse gas emissions and a reduction in air quality.

Impact 4:

Any changes to the current size and weight structure would cause many intermodal service providers to consider a competitive response. Fleet owners would be required to evaluate the current inventory, size and configurations of domestic and international containers, their respective chassis configurations and railcar fleet designs.