TESTIMONY
Of
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Before the

Subcommittee on Highways and Transit
Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure
United States House of Representatives

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"Truck Weights and Lengths"
"Assessing the Impacts of Existing Laws and Regulations"

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Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee:

My name is Vince Brezinsky. I have been a line-haul truck driver for approximately 31 years, having logged just short of 2 million miles driving a variety of commercial motor vehicles including doubles and triples. I have driven in various parts of the country including the northeast corridor and more recently, in the past twelve years, in the southwest, working for Roadway. In my current job, I drive the Dallas, Texas to Springfield, Missouri run of 432 miles. Out of the six trips I drive per week, four of those are usually driving doubles.

While I am a member of Teamsters Local Union 745 in Dallas, Texas, I am here today representing the 1.4 million members of the International Brotherhood of Teamsters, and in particular, the approximately 600,000 members who turn a key in their truck to start their day of work on America's interstates, state highways and city roads, delivering goods and services throughout the country. About 140,000 of those drivers operate tractor trailers with some driving doubles or triples. Only those drivers with the safest driving records are usually afforded the opportunity to drive doubles and triples. Of course there is a monetary advantage in doing so, but not all of our members want to drive these Longer Combination Vehicles (LCVs). Almost all Teamster members drive for companies in the Less-

than-Truckload (LTL) segment of the industry. By far, we have a very good safety record, and our Teamster members have the protection of the union in refusing to drive any vehicle that does not conform to current truck size and weight limitations.

The Teamsters Union sees no reason to increase truck size and weight, and we continue to support the freeze implemented by the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act of 1991 (ISTEA). There are several reasons for this position, and I think it is important that you hear from a driver's perspective the unique challenges that operating these longer and heavier vehicles present.

There is no question that greater alertness is required in driving these vehicles because there is less margin of error. Greater stopping distances and longer acceleration periods to merge with oncoming traffic require a driver to be much more forward thinking in his driving habits. According to the National Safety Council's Defensive Driving Course for Professional Truck Drivers, the total stopping distance for an 80,000 lb. truck traveling at 55mph is 335 feet compared to 225 feet for a passenger car. At 65mph, that stopping distance for a truck increases to 525 feet versus 316 feet for an automobile. As you could imagine, it is extremely difficult to judge those distances in congested traffic. It is also extremely difficult now to get a

tractor trailer up to highway speed in the merge lanes that currently exist. It would be even more difficult to perform that feat with a heavier and/or longer truck.

Leaving a highway onto a cloverleaf or exit ramp presents its own set of challenges, as most ramps are not built for LCVs. Trailers are too long to make the kind of tight turns required, and I'm sure the Subcommittee members have seen the tire marks on the jersey barriers of the exit ramps. Recently, I was on vacation in Long Island, NY. I accompanied a friend on an errand to Brooklyn and noticed how short the ramps were. I thought to myself how I used to make these turns with a 48-foot trailer, which was the longest I pulled back then, let alone the 53-foot trailers I now pull in the west and Midwest. My tandems would be so far forward to make the turn that the rear overhang of the trailer would be an added hazard that I would have to worry about, especially when negotiating a right hand turn in city operations. This is probably why you still can't take 53-foot trailers more than a mile off a four-lane highway in several states in the northeast. The truth is that our current highway system is not built for longer and heavier trucks, and a major investment in our infrastructure would be necessary to create the safe environment in which to operate these vehicles on the entire interstate system.

Another challenge to drivers is keeping track of automobiles traveling along side our rigs. The "No-Zone" area – that area where a car is not in sight of the truck driver's side view mirrors – is substantially increased with longer combination vehicles. I drive a 62mph unit in a 70 to 75mph speed limit area, and sometimes the impatience of smaller, faster vehicles also causes problems. As I try to overtake a slower vehicle and get a safe distance from that vehicle to return to the slow lane, these vehicles try to get around your right hand side before I can maneuver back. The longer the vehicle, the more impatient they get. My company retrains us every three years using the Smith System of Driving to try and help us meet some of these challenges, such as checking the mirrors every 3 to 5 seconds.

Beyond the problems with operating heavier and longer trucks, consideration must to given to the current state of our highways and the potential damage that may occur. The American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE) estimates that the U.S. needs $1.6 trillion over the next 5 years to bring our nation's infrastructure up to good condition. We are facing a $3.8 billion shortfall in the Highway Trust Fund for 2009. A third of our major roads are in poor condition, and at least a quarter of America's bridges are obsolete.

As recently as two weeks ago, emergency road construction had to be performed on one of the I-30 bridges in Dallas, TX due to a hole opening up. You could see right through to the highway below. In west Texas on some areas of I-20, road construction crews are constantly repairing the highway due to tire ruts in the road from eighteen-wheelers. It is very difficult to control my truck, especially double trailers, when the road surface is dry, let alone when it rains or with some of the high cross winds that you experience in west Texas. With hardly any scale houses in all of west Texas, and generally not open if you happen upon one, I'm sure there are enough overweight vehicles adding to the problem. I believe Texas is one of the states mentioned for a pilot program, and I don't believe the additional weight on trucks will be scrutinized as it should be. Even a fairly reputable company like mine has, on occasion, tried to get me to pull overweight units, which I refused to do. Their opinion was that there were no scales between here and there.

The *National Surface Transportation Policy and Revenue Study Commission: Transportation for Tomorrow, December 2007*, cites heavy trucks as a major source of highway and bridge damage. The report indicates that U.S. highways are "buckling" under levels of demand unforeseen by the engineers who designed them, and the federal government

is underfunding bridges by 40 percent of what is needed. In a road test conducted by the American Association of State Highway Officials, it was established that it takes 9,600 cars to cause the road damage caused by one fully loaded 80,000-pound truck.

For those that claim an increase in truck size and weight will mean fewer trucks, fewer trips and fewer miles traveled on our highways, history does not bear that out. According the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA), over the past twenty years (from 1986 to 2006), there has been a 49 percent increase in registered large trucks and a 76 percent increase in miles traveled by large trucks. Trips continue to increase because of just-in-time delivery, and the number of trucks on U.S. highways has steadily increased, even after increases in both the size and weight of large trucks. Further increases could actually lead to even more truck traffic as lower shipping rates due to increased sizes and weights could result in diverting freight from other modes of transportation. That might sound good for increasing Teamster Union membership, but let me tell you, our highways are overused and heavily congested, resulting in constant delays and longer travel times.

I would like to address the saving fuel myth of heavier trucks. As a truck gets heavier, MORE FUEL is used. Heavier loads require greater

horsepower, and the low sulfur fuel in use today doesn't provide the same pulling power or takeoff power in today's truck engines. On some of the newer tractors, the computer can sense the need for more horsepower, and more fuel is used in order to get it. I believe all model year 2008 tractors and higher have to use a low sulfur fuel, which gives even a lower fuel mileage rating than 2007 and lower models. So increasing the weight will result in even more fuel usage.

While the Teamsters Union is opposed to allowing Mexican trucks to travel beyond the commercial zones until all U.S. vehicle and driver safety standards can be met, we have great concern over what an increase in U.S. truck size and weight would mean for both Canadian and Mexican trucks operating in the U.S. Currently, both Mexico and Canada permit heavier trucks. The Canadian government does not regulate truck size and weight, leaving it to the provinces. As a result, the weight limit on trucks in Canada is generally 137,850 pounds, which is 70 percent heavier than the U.S. limit of 80,000 on the Interstate highways. In Mexico, the federal government sets the standard – 106,900 pounds – but there is little or no enforcement by the Mexican government. I have had some problems with overloaded trailers coming from Mexico to our Laredo terminal. I had a load of tire tread for recapping going to Abilene, TX weighing in at 85,000 gross, 5,000

overweight, and a 28' trailer with 35,000 pounds on it when 25,000 would be the limit. The company had to spend time and money in order to correct a problem that should have been taken care of at the border crossing. It makes me wonder how many other units are going north undetected. The only checks against these heavier trucks traveling into the U.S. are the weigh-in-motion scales at the U.S. border crossings. Strict inspections and enforcement must continue at both borders so that heavier foreign trucks do not add to the burden of repairing and rebuilding our infrastructure.

According the Federal Highway Administration (FHA), in 2002, trucks carried 797 million tons of international shipments, worth about $1.2 trillion. By 2035, that number increases to 2.1 billion tons of international freight valued at about $6.2 billion. A 1998 FHA study warned that increased NAFTA truck traffic would endanger Minnesota bridges along I-35, which has become a major north-south international trade route. Before its collapse, overweight trucks carried loads of up to 136,000 pounds on the I-35W Bridge. It is estimated that the bridge carried 144,000 vehicles per day, including 4,760 commercial trucks. We need to continue to insist that Canadian and Mexican trucks adhere to our size and weight standards when traveling in the U.S. and make sure that the proper inspection and enforcement mechanisms are in place.

In summary, the Teamsters Union opposes any changes in the current truck size and weight regime. There is no logical reason to entertain an increase in either truck size or weight. The FMCSA has done an inadequate job of enforcing current weight limits on our highways. There is strong evidence that most bridge and road damage is caused by heavy trucks. There are real safety, highway design and operating issues involved in expanding the use of heavier trucks and double and triple trailers on the National Network. Any projected gains in productivity may prove to be negligible. And finally, the states and the federal government lack the funds needed to properly repair, maintain and expand our infrastructure to meet growing transportation needs, let alone build out the reinforced infrastructure necessary to operate longer and heavier vehicles on the current system.

Mr. Chairman, that concludes my testimony and I am happy to answer any questions.