

Testimony of

Jeff G. Honefanger
Manager, Special Hauling Permits Section
Ohio Department of Transportation
Vice Chair, Sub-Committee on Highway Transport
American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials

Regarding

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

U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure

July 9, 2008

Founded in 1914, AASHTO represents the departments concerned with highway and transportation in the fifty States, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico. Its mission is a transportation system for the nation that balances mobility, economic prosperity, safety and the environment.



Mr. Chairman, members of the Committee, good morning.

I am Jeff Honefanger, Manager of the Ohio Department of Transportation Special Hauling Permit Section, appearing on behalf of the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO). I am the Vice-Chair of AASHTO's Subcommittee on Highway Transport which is responsible for truck size and weight issues for AASHTO. With me today is Mr. Denny Silvio of the Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development. Mr. Silvio has over twenty years of work experience related to size and weight permitting and enforcement, and currently serves as the Chair of the Oversize/Overweight Permit Task for the Subcommittee on Highway Transport.

Thank you for the invitation to speak and answer questions today regarding current and future issues related to the size and weight of vehicles moving on our nation's highways.

The importance of effective enforcement of truck size and weight laws and regulations is not widely recognized or understood. One facet of its importance can be seen in the facts and figures on freight movement today and in the future.

In 2005, trucks on highways carried 77 percent of all domestic freight by tonnage and 92 percent of freight by value, accounting for 61 percent of all ton-miles of freight moved. The forecast for 2035 is that trucks and the highway freight system will carry 80 percent of all domestic freight by tonnage and 95 percent of all freight by value), accounting for 65 percent of all ton-miles of freight moved.

Trucking is a \$620 billion industry and will reach one trillion dollars before 2015. For every dollar spent on freight transportation in the United States, 90 cents are spent on trucking. In 2005, the industry moved 11.8 billion tons of freight in half a billion loaded trucks; by 2035 it will move 23.2 billion tons in a billion trucks.

Trucking employs more than three million drivers, including 1.3 million drivers of long-haul, heavy-duty trucks. With an additional 5.6 million people employed in trucking-related jobs, the total industry employment equates to about one job for every 15 people in the U.S. work force. Representing about five percent of the U.S. gross domestic product (GDP), the trucking industry is a major direct contributor to the country's economy and because of the dependence of commercial supply chains on truck-based logistics, its indirect influence on the economy is even greater.

Accommodating the projected highway freight demand will be a major challenge. Every truck on the road today will have one more truck behind it by 2035. If the highway freight system cannot keep up with the additional demand, maintain productivity, and keep transportation costs down, then the consequences will be higher freight transportation prices, reversing many of the productivity gains of the last decades.

The trucking industry is lagging other freight modes in increasing productivity by hauling more freight per vehicle and labor hour. As operating costs and customer demands go up, pressure is mounting to revisit and lift the current national caps on larger and heavier trucks.

That pressure is being felt in a new environment. Traditionally size and weight laws, regulations and enforcement were focused principally on infrastructure protection and safety, which remain preeminent concerns. Today, however, the case for change includes additional factors such as the need to move more freight more efficiently, and the imperatives of energy conservation and greenhouse gas emissions reduction.

As the nation looks for ways to retrofit its freight infrastructure for the 21st century, a number of proposals have been advanced nationally and within states and regions that could lead to revisions in truck size and weight on existing infrastructure or on new infrastructure such as dedicated truck lanes or truckways.

Assessing these proposals should include all of the above considerations as well as impacts on other modes of transportation, in particular freight rail, and the consequences for the overall efficiency and productivity of the nation's multimodal freight transportation system.

Within this large and very complicated issue area, I have been asked to focus today on the subject of Oversize/Overweight Permits. This subject is very complex and has numerous nuances that would require volumes to cover completely. In broad terms, Oversize/Overweight Permits enable vehicles whose loads exceed statutory dimension and weight limits to travel safely, efficiently and legally on public roadways. Using Ohio as an example, and in general terms, a permit is required whenever a vehicle or load exceeds eight feet, six inches in width, thirteen feet, six inches in height, has a trailer or load length greater than fifty three (53) feet and a gross vehicle weight greater than eighty thousand (80,000) pounds. A permit would also be required if the weight on an axle exceeds twenty thousand (20,000) pounds or on an axle tandem group exceeds thirty four thousand (34,000) pounds. In state fiscal year 2008, which ended June 30, 2008, the Ohio Department of Transportation issued two hundred seventy-five thousand, one hundred and thirty-six (275,136) Oversize or Overweight permits

Oversize/Overweight permits are documentation of a special privilege granted by an entity having jurisdiction over a roadway, to waive the statutory dimension and weight limitations in order to allow a vehicle that would be otherwise illegal, to travel. The time duration on Oversize Overweight can vary from state to state. Typically, the time duration is one day to ten days for a single trip permit up to permits that are valid monthly, quarterly or annually. Regardless of the time period, this special privilege is more than a revenue instrument employed by states. Oversize/Overweight permits are not a paper process designed to circumvent dimension and weight laws, either. They are means by which a state manages the safe movement of exceptional loads, while preserving the transportation infrastructure and assuring the safety of others on the roads.

Generally, states have similar processes and practices when issuing permits. In Ohio's case, our process utilizes an automated system that begins with an internet based permit application. Once an application is submitted, our system verifies that the carrier has sufficient liability insurance, checks for construction restrictions, confirms that adequate clearances exist and performs an analysis on every bridge on the proposed route. The application is given a final review by a technician, and if approved, the system accounts for the fees and the oversize/overweight permit is forwarded to an automated faxing system, where the permits is sent to any location the applicant requests. Whenever vehicles exceed fourteen feet in width, fourteen feet, six inches in height or one hundred twenty thousand (120,000) pounds of gross vehicle weight, they are

classified as Superloads and receive a more detailed analysis from our staff. Currently, there are no differences in fees for a “routine” and superload permits. However, the processing times differ. Typically, routine permits are issued in fifteen minutes or less. A superload takes on average three days.

Often, these superloads have unique restrictions or special conditions assigned on the permit. For example, a bridge may need to be crossed at a walking speed to reduce the vehicle’s impact on the structure. This condition would also warrant law enforcement in order to provide safe and effective traffic control. Unique restrictions may include day and time of travel, these lessen a vehicle’s affect on congestion.

While other states may have similar processes and practices, some significant differences exist in what states will permit. These differences are often dependent upon the conditions of the state’s infrastructure. For example, of the fifty states, Ohio is ranked thirty-fifth in geographic size, seventh in population and second in the number of bridges on the highway system. Because of high traffic volumes in small geographic area and numerous bridge restrictions, our standards can be more restraining than some other states.

Each state has its own fee structure for Oversize/Overweight permits. As previously stated, Ohio does not differentiate between a routine permit and a superload permit. This is because Ohio currently assesses only a fixed administrative fee. Some states assess a mileage based fee, using the vehicles weight and travel mileage to determine the fee. Some states assess a fee that combines a fixed fee in combination with a mileage based fee. Establishment of fees for a monthly, quarterly or annual permit vary based on each state’s system.

Oversize/Overweight permits are a balancing act. While safety and infrastructure preservation are the primary responsibilities of any Department of Transportation, when evaluating the issuance of a permit, there are economic development considerations as well.

Oversize/Overweight permits have an important role in the economic well being of a state, a region and even the nation.

This is demonstrated through some of the differences in permitting practices between states which are related to factors other than infrastructure. For example, states in which agricultural products contribute significantly to economic vitality have often established overweight permits to expedite the transport of such commodities. If a state is heavily industrialized, permit weight maximums for equipment such as mobile cranes, which support industry activities, tend to be higher in order to facilitate their movement. Coastal states are generally more liberal in granting overweight permits for intermodal ocean containers being transported to or from port facilities. Striking a balance between infrastructure preservation and the creation or retention of jobs is already a delicate endeavor. When state Oversize/Overweight permits become part of the incentives, the long term effect of the short term solution, can be a dilution of the function of Oversize/Overweight permits causing additional burden to the highway system.

Fortunately, by and large, state permitting processes have and continue to effectively manage the movement of oversize and overweight commercial vehicles and loads. Without them, the national highway infrastructure would undoubtedly be irreparably damaged and the funding

deficit for roads and bridges totally unmanageable. Even so, there are challenges on the horizon that must be addressed if these programs are to continue to be effective. Some of these are:

- **Increasing permitted truck volumes** – States must utilize work forces that are shrinking due to funding constraints to attempt to manage permit applications that are growing with increased truck volumes. Automation efforts have proved useful in this effort, but are not “cure alls”.
- **Larger and heavier loads** – The national trend is that permitted loads are getting bigger and tend to weigh more than before. There are a variety of reasons for this trend: transport efficiencies, commodity assembly issues, shipping costs related to alternate methods of transport, etc. Unfortunately, roads and bridges across the nation are aging and deteriorating and were simply not designed to support such loads.
- **Recovering the costs of the wear and tear caused by Oversize and Overweight permitted vehicles** - Oversize/Overweight fees differ greatly from state to state. Some states have a fee structure that incorporates some form of wear and tear assessment. Other states, such as Ohio, have set fees to cover only the costs of administration of the Oversize/Overweight Permit process. Determining the actual impact cost to the infrastructure associated with an Oversize/Overweight permitted vehicle has proven to be extremely difficult.
- **Statutory “creep”** – Over time, there is a tendency for more and more permits to be established and the sizes and weights allowed to grow. Once permits are in place, it is very difficult to amend or do away with them, even if highway infrastructure conditions change. Furthermore, once precedents are set, it becomes much easier to grant additional allowances for even larger loads.
- **Impact of growth of global economy** - Intermodal container load volumes doubled over the past decade and represent both a unique challenge and an opportunity for improving operational processes. While overweight permits are often issued for the movement of these containers, attempting to verify that any given load is within weight allowances is very difficult once they leave the port facilities. A federal mandate that ports install scales for the purpose of confirming compliance with permit weight requirements would go a long way toward addressing this need, provided that all such facilities were included in the requirement. Competitive disadvantages would result if this were not the case.
- **Effective enforcement of Oversize/Overweight permits** - Law enforcement agencies are facing ever increasing demands on their officers with fewer resources. Without available competent and capable enforcement, Oversize/Overweight permits become less meaningful. Innovative practices and uses of technology need to be developed.

Despite these and other challenges and concerns, there is cause for optimism. Research is underway to examine the effectiveness and practicality of existing technologies. Together state and federal interests are working together to find solutions to these vexing problems.

Two years ago I had the honor and privilege of being co-chair of an International Scan Team, comprised of federal and state representatives that examined European approaches on vehicle size and weight enforcement. We saw how various technologies were utilized to enforce size and weight laws, verify Oversize/Overweight Permits and protect highways. As a result of this scan, evaluations are being conducted on the practicalities of adopting many of the European practices here, in the United States. But even as these evaluations are taking place, there are “real life” applications of the European techniques learned, being implemented.

Louisiana offers one example how you can apply the lessons learned through a strong federal and state partnership to reduce the damage inflicted upon the highway infrastructure by heavy trucks. Heavy trucks were producing significant damage to the temporary structure erected to replace the westbound I-10 Twin Span Bridge, which was severely disabled by Hurricane Katrina. The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) determined that establishing a weigh station equipped with Weigh-in-Motion technology west of the bridge would provide the necessary protection from heavy trucks and thus greatly reduce maintenance costs and speed up construction of the new permanent structure. The results produced a true success story, maintenance costs were immediately and significantly reduced once the new station became operational. It continues to be a very effective resource in meeting the goal of safeguarding an essential link in the transportation chain.

When major incidents or disasters happen, Oversize/Overweight permits issued by a state are verifications that the permitted vehicle can move without an adverse incident on the permitted roadways. Oversize/Overweight permits assure that vehicles will clear overhead structures, not damage bridges and be able to successfully navigate the geometrics of the route. Further, an issued Oversize/Overweight permit will facilitate and expedite the movement of the permitted vehicle. For example, if a law enforcement officer stops the vehicle, the driver, by producing the appropriate permit, will not be delayed while the officer tries to verify the validity of the movement.

Another positive reality associated with oversize and overweight permitting is that there are many success stories of states and the trucking industry working together to mitigate the impact of permit loads on the highway system as they facilitate the safe and efficient movement of large commodities. As the size and numbers of loads have increased, so has the level of participation of government and industry representatives working together to find viable solutions to the problems associated with such moves. Associations like AASHTO serve as catalysts in this process.

In the last couple years AASHTO’s Subcommittee on Highway Transport has held working sessions with industry organizations representing manufactured housing, mobile cranes, utilities, wind turbines, and boat carriers. Each of these trucking industry sub-groups has distinctive characteristics and needs leading to concerns with “one size fits all” regulation. AASHTO has agreed with the National Marine Manufacturers Association on proposed changes to federal boat carrier regulations and hopes to come to similar understandings with other segments of the industry.

More generally, organizations such as the American Trucking Associations have advanced proposals for change in truck size and weight law and regulation, and others, such as the American Road and Transportation Builders Association, have made proposals that would significantly change how highway freight movement infrastructure would be managed and financed.

Individual states, such as Minnesota and Wisconsin have underway or have completed analyses of possible changes in their size and weight laws. Coalitions of states including those on I-95, I-70, and I-10 are investigating the possibility of new infrastructure for trucks.

AASHTO, in its recommendations to the National Surface Transportation Policy and Revenue Study Commission stated that,

States, in collaboration with the freight transportation industry and the federal government, should investigate the feasibility of regional adjustments in truck size and weight in particular corridors that demonstrate important economic benefits and meeting safety, pavement/bridge impact and financing criteria.

AASHTO is in the process of carrying out this recommendation in cooperation with the U.S. DOT and the trucking industry.

Mr. Chairman, Members of the Committee, the importance of the subject you have under discussion today would be hard to exaggerate. Oversize/Overweight permitting is more than a process granting permission to a vehicle to travel and as such cannot be looked at in isolation. Oversize/Overweight permits touch on safety, infrastructure protection, and the economic vitality of other transportation modes. In today's challenging transportation environment, productivity, fuel costs, driver shortages, congestion, green house emissions, pavement life and bridge dependability are additional pressures that have to be considered when issuing an Oversize/Overweight permit. It is in the interest of us all to take on the challenges as vigorously and effectively as we can. On behalf of the AASHTO member states, I promise that we will work with you in that effort.

Thank you