

**STATEMENT OF THE HONORABLE PETER A. DEFazio**  
**CHAIRMAN**  
**SUBCOMMITTEE ON HIGHWAYS AND TRANSIT**  
**COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE**

**HEARING ON**  
**TRUCK WEIGHTS AND LENGTHS: ASSESSING THE IMPACT OF EXISTING LAWS AND REGULATIONS**

July 9, 2008

Truckers are the backbone of our nation's transportation system and our economy. Today more than 2.7 million large trucks operate on our roads, moving 61% of the freight tonnage in the United States. That is significant. Without trucks goods wouldn't get to market. Commercial traffic has doubled over the past two decades and that's only expected to increase.

There are a number of groups out there advocating for changes to our existing truck size and weight laws and this hearing is meant to hear all of the relevant issues prior to reauthorization of our surface transportation programs next year.

There are obvious safety concerns with larger, heavier trucks. In 2006, 5,000 people were killed in crashes involving large trucks and an additional 106,000 were injured. At the same time, there are those that advocate that bigger trucks will reduce the number of trucks on the road, make trucking more efficient and saving on fuel and carbon emissions. The question is which side is right?

The Federal government got involved with truck size and weight standards in 1956 to protect its investment in the Interstate system. However, today there are probably more exceptions to the rules than there are rules. As we will hear from our witnesses today, there is a real lack of uniformity in regulations and we are left with a patchwork of state exemptions, waivers, and permits. Our current system just doesn't make sense.

Another issue that should be addressed is do trucks pay their fair share for the use of roads and bridges? FHWA found in 2000 that combination trucks weighing 80,000 to 100,000 pounds pay just 50 percent of the cost of the damage they cause to the highway system. Trucks weighing more than 100,000 pounds pay only 40 percent. It seems that our Federal truck taxes should be evaluated to better match the pavement and bridge wear caused by heavier trucks. My state of Oregon is the only state that, in lieu of a fuel tax, levies a weight-mile tax. The Oregon model is hailed as a great way to ensure that heavy trucks pay their fair share of road damage. Since 1990, Oregon has also charged a specific weight distance tax that considers axle weights – which applies only to the heaviest trucks.

One thing we can all agree on is that the safety of our roads and the vehicles that operate on them is paramount. However, such a patchwork of state laws makes enforcement a challenge. We need to look forward to a new vision for truck size and weight standards and I look forward to hearing from our witnesses today on their thoughts on that vision.

Thank you.