



May 19, 2011

Legislation

Lautenberg introduces bill to freeze larger, heavier semis. On May 3rd, U.S. Senator Frank Lautenberg (D-NJ) introduced legislation designed to keep larger, heavier trucks off the road. The bill would extend the current limit of 80,000 lbs and maximum length of 53 feet for tractor-trailer trucks on interstate highways to the National Highway System.

Lautenberg's bill, the Safe Highways and Infrastructure Preservation Act (SHIPA) of 2011, would extend the current weight limit and freeze on triple-trailers to the entire 160,000-mile National Highway System (NHS), while still allowing certain exemptions, including for firefighting equipment. The NHS includes both interstate highways and smaller national highways. Most truck size and weight restrictions (53-foot length maximum and 80,000-lb weight maximum) already apply to the 44,000-mile Interstate Highway System. The bill would extend certain restrictions to the much bigger 160,000-mile National Highway System (NHS).

Similar legislation has been introduced in the House of Representatives by Rep. Jim McGovern (D-MA).

A competing piece of legislation – the “Safe and Efficient Transportation Act” (SETA) – has been reintroduced in the U.S. Senate by Senators Mike Crapo (R-ID), Herb Kohl (D-WI), Susan Collins (R-ME), and Rob Portman (R-OH) and in the House by Representatives Jean Schmidt (R-OH) and Michael Michaud (D-ME). The legislation allows states the option to raise interstate weight limits from 80,000 lbs to up to 97,000 lbs if the semi is equipped with a sixth axle.

In 2009, the Soy Transportation Coalition published a study, “Heavier Semis: A Good Idea?” The analysis examined the impact on motorist safety, infrastructure wear and tear, and farmer efficiency by increasing weight limits from 80,000 lbs to 97,000 lbs provided that a sixth axle is added to the semi configuration.

The research revealed that motorist safety and infrastructure integrity are not compromised by allowing heavier semis with the additional braking friction and weight disbursement a sixth axle provides.

Moreover, a 97,000 lb semi would accommodate 183 additional bushels of soybeans per truck load. Soybean farmers could expect \$1.2 million fuel savings when diesel prices are \$2 per gallon and \$2.5 million in savings when diesel is \$4 per gallon. The reduced number of deliveries could result in farmers gaining an entire day of productivity if semi weight limits are increased.

Additional information about the Soy Transportation Coalition study can be accessed at:

<http://soytransportation.org/whatsnew/STCSummarySemiWeightLimitAnalysis3.pdf>

Bill introduced to provide safe parking for truckers. Congressman Paul Tonko (D-NY) reintroduced a bill on May 10th to increase the availability of safe parking spaces for truck drivers. The bill, known as “Jason’s Law,” would create a grant program to reduce truck parking shortages and help pay for expansion and safety improvements at existing rest areas.

The proposal is named after Jason Rivenburg, who was murdered in March of 2009 during a robbery attempt for a meager \$7 at an abandoned gas station in South Carolina. Jason, a long haul trucker, had stopped to rest in compliance with federal regulations that require truckers to rest after 11 hours of driving. The case called attention to the nationwide shortage of safe, accessible rest stops for truckers, and led Congressman Tonko to introduce a similar bill in the previous Congress.

Administration

DOT extends comment period for proposed hours of service regulations. The Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA) recently announced it would extend the comment period for its proposed hours-of-service (HOS) rules for commercial truck drivers.

The original comment period closed in March. The FMCSA has yet to announce when the extended comment period would expire.

This new HOS proposal would retain the "34-hour restart" provision allowing drivers to restart the clock on their weekly 60 or 70 hours by taking at least 34 consecutive hours off-duty. However, the restart period would have to include two consecutive off-duty periods from midnight to 6:00 am. Drivers would be allowed to use this restart only once during a seven-day period.

Additionally the proposal would require commercial truck drivers to complete all driving within a 14-hour workday, and to complete all on-duty work-related activities within 13 hours to allow for at least a one hour break. It also leaves open for comment whether drivers should be limited to 10 or 11 hours of daily driving time, although FMCSA currently favors a 10-hour limit.

Commercial truck drivers who violate this proposed rule would face civil penalties of up to \$2,750 for each offense. Trucking companies that allow their drivers to violate the proposal's driving limits would face penalties of up to \$11,000 for each offense.

Other key provisions include the option of extending a driver's daily shift to 16 hours twice a week to accommodate for issues such as loading and unloading at terminals or ports, and allowing drivers to count some time spent parked in their trucks toward off-duty hours.

DOT announces \$2 billion in high speed rail grants. On May 9th, U.S. Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood announced \$2 billion in high-speed rail awards. Nearly 100 applications from 24 states, Washington, DC, and Amtrak were submitted to DOT for the funding.

The DOT's Federal Railroad Administration selected 15 states and Amtrak to receive \$2.02 billion for 22 high-speed intercity passenger rail projects. The Northeast Corridor from Washington, DC, to Boston, Massachusetts, will receive \$795 million in order to increase train speeds from 135 to 160 miles per hour on certain segments of the route and improve on-time performance.

Some of the other recipients include:

- \$404.1 million to expand high-speed rail service in the Midwest – primarily directed at the Detroit to Chicago route and the Chicago to St. Louis route.
- \$300 million to further develop high speed rail in California.
- \$268.2 million to purchase 48 high-performance passenger rail cars and 7 quick-acceleration locomotives for 8 corridors in the Midwestern States: Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Michigan, and Missouri.
- \$2.8 million for an engineering and environmental analysis to construct a new high-speed rail station in Ann Arbor, Michigan, that will better serve passengers and allow more than one train to serve the station simultaneously.
- \$5 million to complete engineering and environmental work for establishing the Northern Lights Express – a high-speed intercity passenger service – connecting Minneapolis to Duluth, with 110-mph high-speed rail service.
- \$13.5 million to advance the design of a new bridge over the Mississippi River on the Chicago to St. Louis Corridor, replacing a bridge built in the 1890s.

Surface Transportation Board

Begeman sworn in as Vice Chair of STB. Ann Begeman was sworn in May 2, 2011 as a member of the U.S. Surface Transportation Board (STB), bringing two decades of experience in transportation policy to the agency.

Ms. Begeman has served as a senior aide on Capitol Hill for 21 years, playing a key role in the crafting of major transportation legislation, including the ICC Termination Act, which created the STB.

Immediately prior to joining the STB, Ms. Begeman served as Republican Staff Director for the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation. She has also served as Acting Chief of Staff and Legislative Director for Senator John McCain and as a legislative assistant to Senator Larry Pressler. Ms. Begeman has also worked in the private sector, serving as a benefits specialist for First American Bankshares, Inc. She earned a B.S. in business administration from the University of South Dakota.

Ms. Begeman was first nominated by President Obama on December 20, 2010. She was also nominated on January 5, 2011 and confirmed by the U.S. Senate on April 14, 2011, for a term that expires Dec. 31, 2015. Ms. Begeman was then named vice chairman by the Board, a role that rotates between members each year. She was sworn in by STB Commissioner Francis P. Mulvey.

“I am honored to have been nominated and confirmed for this important post,” Ms. Begeman said. “I look forward to working with all stakeholders, my new colleagues and Board staff.”