

House Bill 2818 A-Engrossed

Testimony regarding changes to Multi-State Highway Transportation Agreement.

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INTRODUCTION

House Bill 2818 changes the Multistate Highway Transportation Agreement, a state statute that describes Oregon's policy and approach to discussions with other states regarding, among other things, vehicle size and weight standards. HB 2818 appears to make the statute more open and receptive to advocacy of increased size and weight in addressing a state's transportation needs. Such a policy, at least described in the statute, would not take into account all of the principles that Oregon has historically outlined as key to discussions regarding increase in truck size and weight standards.

WHAT THE BILL DOES

HB 2818 makes a number of changes to the agreement that is set in state statute. Some changes include the following:

- Deletes references to prior failed efforts to change vehicle size and weight standards in western states.
- Deletes references to states losing federal highway funds if vehicle weights and widths are increased.
- Deletes the recognition of a desire for national uniformity of size and weight restrictions.
- Specifies that each jurisdiction can have two representatives on the Cooperating Committee, the group that meets for discussions under the agreement. Each representative would be entitled to a vote when the committee makes decisions.
- Deletes the requirement that the committee's annual report be given to the Transportation Committee of the Western Conference, Council of State Governments and the Western Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (WASHTO).
- Makes it an objective of the agreement that each participating jurisdiction issue special permits authorizing vehicles or combinations exceeding maximum weights or lengths to operate in interstate commerce.
- Establishes objectives of the agreement that participating jurisdictions want to:
 - Establish transportation laws and regulations to meet regional economic needs and to promote an efficient, safe and consistent transportation network.
 - Develop standards that facilitate the most efficient and environmentally sound operation of vehicles on highways consistent with and in recognition of principles of highway safety.
 - Establish programs to increase productivity and reduce congestion, fuel consumption and related transportation costs and enhance air quality through the uniform application of state vehicle regulations and laws.

DISCUSSION

Oregon has historically taken the position that truck size and weight standards should not be increased until all relevant issues have been addressed and resolved. Size and weight discussions need to consider more than meeting regional economic needs, facilitating efficient operations and reducing congestion and fuel consumption, all of which can be accomplished with bigger and heavier trucks.

Most of Oregon's bridges were designed when the weight limits were 60,000 pounds as opposed to today's 80,000 pounds. Even at today's legal weight limits, cracks are appearing in Oregon's bridges at an alarming rate, resulting in restrictive load postings, which in turn result in routing more truck traffic along local roadways and through cities. The most recent is Fords Bridge near Roseburg. Repairs to the

bridge will cost an estimated \$700,000 and will only be a temporary fix. The entire bridge will need to be replaced in the next three to five years. This has not been previously anticipated and will come at the expense of other badly needed highway and bridge projects.

Many of Oregon's highways were designed when length limits were 60 or 65 feet as opposed to today's 75 or 105 feet. Even at today's length limits, drivers are faced with seeing vehicles that may be uncomfortably close to the lane lines.

While federal limitations currently provide some protection against increased size and weight on Federal Aid highways, Oregon has become aware of attempts to change those federal limitations. Attached is a letter signed by, among others, Oregon Congressman Earl Blumenauer, strongly opposing attempts to change the federal restrictions. If Congressman Blumenauer and others are unsuccessful, the proposed changes to the Multistate Highway Agreement could result in Oregon being leveraged into increasing allowable size and weight even if the state and trucking industry in Oregon were opposed to doing so.

When the Western Governors Association met in mid-1999 and considered a resolution on the subject, Oregon urged that any discussion of changing truck size and weight limit should be based on sound policy principles that take into account:

- The impacts on the highway infrastructure.
- Assessment of all public costs and benefits.
- Mechanisms for improved cost responsibility and cost recovery.
- Highway safety and accident records.
- Mechanisms for improved monitoring of truck safety.
- Calculations of efficiency gains across all modes.
- Federal and state government administrative burdens on the trucking industry.
- Impact on the Clean Air Act.

The provisions of HB2818 do not appear to provide a mechanism to account for all of those principles.

As result of our concerns, we proposed amendments intended to ensure that the work resulting from the Multistate Highway Transportation Agreement takes into account the full breadth of the stability of the highway infrastructure and the financing that supports it. The proposed amendments also are intended to add impacts to other modes of transportation to the work under the agreement, and require that the work not focus on incremental changes for which there is no overarching policy.

SUMMARY

As drafted, House Bill 2818 changes the Multistate Highway Transportation Agreement to free up Oregon's policy and approach in discussions with other states regarding vehicle size and weight standards. In articulating the objectives of the agreement, the bill makes it more appropriate for the state to advocate increases in vehicle size and weight limits when such changes would benefit the state economy and environment without regard to the existing infrastructure.

Without the amendments, participants meeting under the Multistate Highway Transportation Agreement would not necessarily be considering all the relevant issues surrounding proposals to increase truck size and weight standards. This runs counter to Oregon's historic position on the subject as most recently expressed at a 1999 meeting of the Western Governors Association. We believe that our proposed amendments adequately address the breadth of the agreement.