

Oregon Highways and Commercial Vehicle Size and Weight

Overview

Laws regarding allowable weight limits, lengths, and widths of commercial motor vehicles are designed to ensure safe vehicle operation on Oregon's roadways and to preserve the state's investment in highway and bridge infrastructure. At the same time, the regulations foster the productivity of shippers and receivers in support of the state's economy and competitiveness. The current regulations contain exceptions, usually granted through permit, that ensure the economic viability of Oregon's basic industries, including agriculture, forestry, and manufacturing.



History of commercial vehicle weight limits in Oregon

The Federal Highway Administration is responsible for federal regulations governing commercial vehicle weights on federal highways including interstate highways. The Oregon Department of Transportation's Motor Carrier Transportation Division has administrative and enforcement responsibilities to ensure adequate compliance with federal and state regulations. Counties and local jurisdictions also administer and enforce commercial vehicle size and weight regulations on their roads.

National weight standards apply to commercial vehicle operations on the interstate highway system. Off the interstate highway system, states may set their own commercial vehicle weight standards.

Federal commercial vehicle maximum standards on the interstate highway system are:

- Single axle: 20,000 lbs.
- Tandem axle: 34,000 lbs.
- Gross vehicle weight: 80,000 lbs.

In addition to the general standards described here, federal law includes provisions, exemptions, and variations applicable to particular states, routes, vehicles, or operations. These exemptions and variations let states allow commercial vehicles in excess of the national standards.

Regulating size and weight through permits

Like other states, Oregon issues single-trip and annual variance permits for overweight, over-height, over-width, over-length, and other unusual truck loads. The permits include

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routing plans, road restriction information, and other permit conditions. Permits and routing cover state and federal highways. They can also cover county roads, with county approval, but most Oregon counties issue their own permits.

Oregon law allows motor carriers to obtain permits to operate trucks continually in excess of the gross and axle weight limits. ODOT uses five weight tables that outline allowable truck wheelbase lengths, axles and weight:

- Weight Table 1 outlines legal weights, up to a maximum 80,000 lbs., for which no permit is required.
- Weight Table 2 outlines extended weights, up to a maximum 105,500 lbs., for which a motor carrier can obtain an annual continuous operation permit.
- Weight Tables 3, 4 and 5 outline all over heavy haul weights for which a carrier is required to obtain either an annual or single trip permit. Heavy non-divisible loads are often legally moved under these permits.

ODOT Motor Carrier Transportation Division staff work with ODOT's bridge and roadway engineers to identify safe routes for over-dimension vehicles.

Number of permits issued

Oregon issued 163,780 continuous trip permits and 125,252 single trip permits in 2005 (the most recent year data is available) for weight, length, width and height variances.

Regulating size and weight through enforcement

ODOT motor carrier enforcement officers check commercial vehicle size and weight at ports of entry and weigh stations throughout the state. They also check the mechanical safety of vehicles and credentials of drivers. County weighmasters and local law enforcement officers routinely join in special operations. ODOT auditors use records of trucks passing through a weigh station to verify highway-use (weight-mile) tax reports and payments submitted by motor carriers.

How do Oregon's weight limits compare with other states?

Out of seven Western states – Colorado, Idaho, Oregon, Montana, Utah, Washington, Wyoming – Oregon's 105,500-pound weight limit is tied for lowest.

*Maximum allowable weights in WASHTO states
(Western Association of Highway Transportation Officials)*

WASHTO STATES	Maximum Weight for Divisible Loads
Arizona	129,000 lbs.
California	80,000 lbs.
Colorado	110,000 lbs.

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Idaho	105,500 lbs.
Montana	137,800 lbs.
Nevada	129,000 lbs.
New Mexico	86,400 lbs.
North Dakota	105,500 lbs.
Oklahoma	90,000 lbs.
Oregon	105,500 lbs.
South Dakota	129,000 lbs.
Texas	80,000 lbs.
Utah	129,000 lbs.
Washington	105,500 lbs.
Wyoming	117,000 lbs.

Oregon's weight-mile tax

Oregon is one of only a handful of states that use a highway-use or weight-mile tax to fund highway infrastructure preservation, maintenance and safety. All commercial vehicles over 26,000 lbs. must pay weight-mile tax. Oregon's weight-mile tax is based on the weight of the vehicle, the distribution of that weight on the axles, and the distance traveled. The more a truck weighs and the more distance it travels, the more tax it pays. In addition, vehicles over 98,000 lbs. must also pay a road use assessment fee.

How does a bridge become weight-restricted?

Bridges can become posted or restricted because of damage caused by an accident or weather event, or because of deterioration due to age or normal wear and tear. As part of its inspection process, ODOT load-rates at-risk bridges to determine the maximum weight the bridge can continue to carry. When a bridge is load-limited or weight-restricted, vehicles above a particular weight are prohibited from using the bridge. Heavier vehicles must either use an alternate route or seek a permitable detour. A bridge is weight-restricted to extend the service life of the bridge until it can be repaired or replaced and to ensure the safety of the traveling public.

Decreasing or increasing commercial vehicle weight limits

States are often asked to consider increasing or decreasing commercial vehicle weight limits. Departments of Transportation are then challenged to balance their support of economic development and their responsibility to protect the state's investment in infrastructure. ODOT is particularly sensitive to the balance because the state is currently investing unprecedented sums in repairing and replacing roads and bridges.

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Until the Aug. 2007 bridge collapse in Minneapolis, the discussion surrounding truck size and weights centered on increasing weight allowances. In fact, a recent study recommends reform of federal truck size and weight regulations, which may entail allowing larger trucks to operate on the nation's highways (See the 2002 Transportation Research Board Special Report 267, Regulation of Weights, Lengths, and Widths of Commercial Motor Vehicles – <http://gulliver.trb.org/publications/sr/sr267.pdf>). ODOT, however, has aggressively fought any effort to increase the size and weight of loads.



Some suggest that Oregon should limit divisible loads to 80,000 lbs. like some other states. If Oregon were to limit divisible loads, it would affect the more than 75,000 trucks that currently have an annual extended weight permit to operate at weights from 80,001 to 105,500 pounds. The economic impact of disallowing the movements would be enormous for both the trucking industry and Oregon consumers. Carriers would put more trucks on the road as they break larger loads down into smaller ones.

There would be increased costs for capital equipment, fuel, drivers, insurance, etc. There would be increased congestion on the highways and increased pollution in the air. General increases in shipping costs would raise the cost of all consumer goods sold in Oregon. It is vital to understand the trade-offs between economic benefit and increased infrastructure costs that occur when considering load limits.

ODOT believes the appropriate balance has been struck. The agency is able to manage the bridges at the current weight limits, while allowing the trucking industry to have some flexibility in truck weights. With Oregon's weight-mile tax and gas tax, Oregon has cost responsibility, which requires cars and trucks to pay proportionately for use of the highways.