

Heavier Trucks Endanger Texas Motorists and Damage Infrastructure

Prepared by CABT, January 2019

Proponents of heavier trucks are likely to introduce bills in the Texas Legislature for the 2019 session to raise the maximum legal weight of trucks from the current limit of 80,000 pounds up to as much as 100,000 pounds—an increase of 10 tons. Many law enforcement professionals and local elected officials throughout Texas, and their respective statewide associations, are opposed to allowing heavier trucks for three compelling reasons: these trucks endanger motorists, damage roads and bridges, and cost taxpayers money.

This proposal to increase truck weights by 25 percent will be pushed by a coordinated and well-funded organization of oil, shale and natural gas industry groups. Since these heavier trucks cannot run on Interstates, they will run on a wide variety of state and local roads. This proposed increase will be the second attempt in two years to increase truck weights. This piecemeal approach could ultimately lead to a statewide increase in truck weights, affecting every corner of Texas.

Congress has consistently rejected similar proposals because of concerns for public safety and infrastructure damage. In 2016, the U.S. Department of Transportation (USDOT) issued a report recommending against any increases in the weight of trucks. That report found that heavier trucks had serious safety problems and would impose additional costs to our highway infrastructure.¹

Heavier Trucks Have Dramatically Higher Crash Rates

Trucks are an important part of Texas' economy, but bigger trucks are simply unsafe. Allowing trucks to haul even heavier loads only increases the dangers to residents. USDOT found in its 2016 report to Congress that heavier trucks had anywhere from 47 percent to 400 percent higher crash rates in limited state testing.²

Large-truck crash rates at the current weights in Texas have risen in recent years. Overall, there were 16,124 large-truck crashes in Texas in 2017—that is 7 percent higher than the previous year.³ Heavier trucks would make a bad situation worse.

The Problems with Heavier Trucks

More severe crashes. The severity of a crash is determined by the velocity and mass of a vehicle. If its weight increases, so does the potential severity of a crash.⁴ Any increase in crash severity increases the likelihood of injuries becoming more serious or resulting in fatalities.

More likely to roll over. Heavier trucks tend to have a higher center of gravity because the additional

¹USDOT; 2016. *Comprehensive Truck Size and Weight Limits Study, Final Report to Congress*

² Ibid.

³ Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration, 2017

⁴ Op. Cit. 2016 USDOT

weight is oftentimes stacked vertically. Raising the center of gravity increases the risk of rollovers.⁵

Increased wear and tear. Increasing the weight of trucks causes additional wear and tear on key safety components. The 2016 USDOT study found that trucks weighing over 80,000 pounds had higher overall out-of-service (OOS) rates and **18 percent higher brake violation rates** compared to those at or below 80,000 pounds.⁶ This is especially important because a 2016 study by the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety found that trucks with any out-of-service violation are **362 percent more likely to be involved in a crash.**⁷

Heavier Trucks Would Cause Significant Infrastructure Damage to Texas Roads and Bridges

Currently, road damage from oil and gas operations in Texas is estimated at \$1.5 to \$2 billion each year—this *does not include routine damage to roads and bridges from stress by heavy trucks in other industries.*⁸

There were 25,649 Texas bridges rated in fair/poor condition in 2017—that is over 47 percent of bridges statewide.⁹ Many of these bridges could not accommodate these much heavier trucks.¹⁰ These bridges would need to be reinforced or replaced, costing Texas taxpayers millions of dollars more.

Heavier trucks will directly impact these costs, pushing them significantly higher and leaving Texas taxpayers to pay the bill.

Heavier Trucks Would Threaten Local Texas Communities

Approving these up to 100,000-pound trucks would mean more dangerous and damaging trucks running on local roads through Texas towns and communities where people live and work. And local roads are more vulnerable to the damage caused by the bigger trucks because they typically are older, built to a lower standard and in worse condition.

⁵USDOT; 2000. *Comprehensive Truck Size and Weight Study*

⁶USDOT; 2016. *Comprehensive Truck Size and Weight Limits Study, Final Report to Congress*

⁷ Insurance Institute for Highway Safety; 2016. *Crash Risk Factors for Interstate Large Trucks in North Carolina*

⁸ TAMEST Shale Task Force: *Environmental and Community Impacts of Shale Development in Texas*, June 2017

⁹ Federal Highway Administration, 2017

¹⁰Op. Cit. USDOT 2016.