

Agriculture Transportation Coalition

"The principal voice of agriculture in U.S. transportation policy"

Trucking – Chafing under Congestion and Regulation

Navigating HOS and ELD. The Hours of Service regulations got tougher about 6 years ago, but that did not create untenable situations. The “fudge factor” smoothed out some situations when drivers were stuck in the truck due to traffic, weather, etc. Then the ELD mandate eliminated this option.

The hue and cry from the trucking industry and shippers induced the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration to consider adjustments to the Hours of Service rules to make it easier for truck drivers following Electronic Logging Device implementation.

Proposed changes (all of which the AgTC supports) include:

- Expanding the current 100 air-mile "short-haul" exemption from 12 hours on-duty to 14 hours on-duty, in order to be consistent with the rules for long-haul truck drivers;
- Extending the current 14-hour on-duty limitation by up to two hours when a truck driver encounters adverse driving conditions;
- Revising the current mandatory 30-minute break for truck drivers after 8-hours of continuous driving; and
- Reinstating the option for splitting up the required 10-hour off-duty rest break for drivers operating trucks that are equipped with a sleeper-berth compartment.

Truck Weights. If there is one single thing Congress could do to increase trucking capacity, reduce congestion on the roads, get trucks off the roads, reduce lines at the terminals, and relieve the truck driver shortage, it would be to increase allowable truck weights to a uniform national standard, from the current 80,000 to 105,000 lbs (with the extra axle). Canada, European Union, Oregon, Washington, North Dakota, Idaho and a number of other states already have this in place

This increase in productivity would increase US export competitiveness against producers of the same ag and forest products in Canada and elsewhere. It remains a top priority of the AgTC. Unfortunately, legislation to increase truck weights has been de-railed by the railroads, who see trucks as competition.

There is now a patchwork of exemptions from the 80,000 pound limit: 129,000 lbs for sugar beets in Idaho and North Dakota, higher weights for paper in Maine, citrus in Florida. AgTC is working with Pepsi, International Paper, etc. to establish pilot “heavy” truck projects in various states.

Other Efficiency Proposals. The DRIVE Safe Act would allow a driver under 21 to drive a commercial motor vehicle in interstate commerce after completing an apprenticeship established by its employer and pursuant to regulations to be developed by DOT.

FMCSA is currently undertaking a 3-year pilot program to collect data on the safety impact of allowing 18, 19 or 20 year olds with military experience to drive in interstate commerce.