



NEW STUDY SHOWS MAJOR DIVERSION OF FREIGHT FROM RAIL TO ROADS IF BIGGER TRUCKS ALLOWED

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A new study, commissioned by the Coalition Against Bigger Trucks, was just released showing major diversion of freight traffic from rail to truck if longer and heavier trucks are allowed by Congress. This study shows some **“scenarios will reduce intermodal traffic by 20-25 percent and railroad carload traffic by as much as 20 percent. More disruptive scenarios could reduce both intermodal and certain carload traffic by nearly 60 percent.”**

The author of the study is Mark Burton, Appalachian Transportation Institute, Marshall University. Previously, Burton was the Director of Transportation Economics, Research Associate Professor at the University of Tennessee-Knoxville. He has over 40 years of experience in freight economics and has authored numerous articles and other publications on rail and truck movement of goods.

This study will be an important resource in the ongoing debate in Congress and state legislatures as these bodies consider the issue of truck size and weight. A core argument for proponents of bigger trucks is that heavier and longer trucks will mean fewer trucks on the road, thereby making our roads safer and causing less damage to roads and bridges. This study confirms bigger trucks mean more trucks on our roads, creating more dangers for American motorists and further stressing our already inadequate infrastructure system.

Additional background

- Current federal law limits the size of two trailers tethered together, so-called twin trailers or double trailers, to no more than 28 feet in length per trailer. Federal law limits the weight of any single trailer to no more than 80,000 pounds on the interstates.
- Each year, lawmakers are pressured to raise the limits for the weights and lengths of trucks that travel public highways. Doing so would lower truck costs and thereby benefit a relatively small subset of the nation’s freight shippers and provide greater profits for some of the largest trucking companies.
- However, the downsides to changing the federal limits are serious:
 - Relaxing weight and size limits would lead to increased crash-related casualties, unaffordable wear and tear on highways and the diversion of freight traffic from congestion-reducing, environmentally friendlier non-highway alternatives to all-highway truck routings.
 - Increasing truck size and weight limits would slash the use of intermodal truck-rail freight shipping which is contrary to national transportation policies that seek to promote the efficient use of rail and truck transportation partnerships.
 - The most aggressive changes to truck size and weight standards could be ruinous to rail carriers and to the public sector policies designed to mitigate the growth of truck-related harms.

Additional details on the new study

- The new study used decades of actual truck and rail pricing and demand data, including data as recent as 2019,

to estimate the shipper and carrier response to various truck size and weight scenarios over a period of five years. The study estimates these impacts for both intermodal and carload freight traffic.

- The new study evaluated the diversion impacts of six different truck configurations: 91,000 pound single trailer trucks with six axles; 97,000 pound single trailer trucks with six axles; 80,000 pound double 33 ft trailer trucks; 91,000 pound double 33 ft trailer trucks; 97,000 pound double 33 ft trailer trucks; and 120,000 pound double 33 ft trailer trucks.
- The new study did not attempt to estimate the likely increase in rail operating and capital costs that would result from changes to container and/or trailer dimensions.

Findings

The diversion volumes vary significantly by truck configuration. For example, an increase in allowed total gross truck weights from 80,000 to 91,000 pounds (but with no change in trailer length) is estimated to result in the diversion of 2.6 million annual railroad carloads and 1.8 million intermodal units. Alternatively, an increase of truck weights to 120,000 pounds combined with twin 33-foot trailers leads to a predicted diversion of 7.5 million annual rail carloads and 8.5 million diverted intermodal shipments. The diversion estimates for each configuration can be found in the table below.

Rail Traffic Diversions (net loss after 5 years)				
Configuration	Intermodal	% of Total	Carload	% of Total
91,000 lbs. - Single	1,841,320	12.7%	2,654,986	20.4%
97,000 lbs. - Single	3,042,936	20.9%	4,287,168	33.0%
80,000 lbs. Double 33s	2,857,553	19.6%	22,487	0.2%
91,000 lbs. Double 33s	4,698,873	32.3%	2,654,986	20.4%
97,000 lbs. Double 33s	5,900,490	40.5%	4,287,168	33.0%
120,000 lbs. Double 33s	8,507,972	58.5%	7,517,974	57.8%

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