



American Short Line and Regional Railroad Association

July 28, 2023

The Honorable Kay Granger, Chair
House Committee on Appropriations

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro, Ranking Member
House Committee on Appropriations

The Honorable Sam Graves, Chair
House Committee on Transportation &
Infrastructure

The Honorable Rick Larsen, Ranking Member
House Committee on Transportation &
Infrastructure

The Honorable Glenn Thompson, Chair
House Committee on Agriculture

The Honorable David Scott, Ranking Member
House Committee on Agriculture

Dear Chairs Granger, Graves, Thompson and Ranking Members DeLauro, Larsen and Scott:

The American Short Line and Regional Railroad Association (ASLRRA) represents the nation's 600 Class II and Class III small business railroads and hundreds of railroad industry suppliers. Class II and Class III railroads, commonly referred to as short line railroads, are the "first-mile" and "last-mile" of the freight rail network. Short lines operate nearly 50,000 miles of track, or approximately 30 percent of the national rail network, connecting thousands of manufacturers, businesses and farmers in communities and small towns to larger markets, urban centers, and ports. These businesses operate in 49 states, and in some cases, they account for the state's entire rail network.

Two bills pending before the House of Representatives would greatly impact the short line industry. These bills are H.R. 3372, a so-called 10-year "pilot program" that would increase truck weights from 80,000 lbs to 91,000 lbs on our nation's interstate highways, and H.R. 2948, a bill that would allow an increase from 80,000 lbs to 88,000 lbs for auto haulers carrying electric vehicles. **We strongly urge you to oppose these measures.**

Increasing truck weights threatens to eliminate a cost-effective and environmentally sustainable way to move freight, and consumers will ultimately pick up the tab.

Railroads – particularly short lines – compete aggressively with trucks to service shippers. Truck weight increases will give the trucking industry an even larger competitive advantage than they have now and will shift freight from rail to truck in countless communities, resulting in the loss of railroad service. A small reduction in freight can cause catastrophic economic impact to a small railroad, even forcing a railroad out of business. As railroads shutter, and transportation options are reduced, heavier trucks will result in increasing transportation costs for consumers and a reduction in supply chain efficiency.

Heavier trucks will mean more wear and tear to public roadways – another cost to be borne by taxpayers.

The trucking industry is not burdened by the full share of costs associated with building and maintaining the infrastructure it uses. This includes national and local roads and bridges, many at the end of their useful life. In contrast, railroads and their rights of way are purchased, maintained and operated largely at no cost to the taxpayer. Until the trucking industry pays its fair share of the cost to build and maintain the roadways it uses, heavier trucks should not be considered.

Moreover, rail is a far more efficient way to move goods and freight. One train can take hundreds of truckloads off our nation’s highways. Diverting traffic from rail to truck is particularly concerning when it comes to hazardous materials. A 2020 study found that 91,000-pound trucks would divert up to 20% of rail carload traffic over a five- year period. The diverted traffic – including hazardous materials -- would end up on our highways, adding more trucks to the road, causing more pavement and bridge damage, and increasing the risk to the public.

The dangers of heavier trucks simply aren’t worth the costs.

A 10-year pilot program would essentially turn the American highway system into a proving ground for heavier trucks. The Transportation Research Board (part of the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine) has recommended that the U.S. Department of Transportation study the impacts heavier trucks will have on infrastructure, traffic and safety without putting motorists at risk. There is also existing data showing that heavier trucks present significant safety risks, like longer stopping distances. If a pilot program is desired, there are already some existing roads with higher weight limits which can be studied and function as a pilot program without the need for this proposed dramatic expansion of heavier trucks.

The ASLRRA, along with more than thirty national organizations representing law enforcement, first responders, local governments, organized labor, and others, including the International Association of Chiefs of Police, National Association of Police Organizations, National Association of Emergency Medical Technicians, American Public Works Association, National Association of Counties, National Association of Towns and Townships, National League of

Cities, United States Conference of Mayors, International Brotherhood of Teamsters, and SMART Transportation Division oppose heavier trucks and we urge you to do the same. We appreciate your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'C. Baker', written in a cursive style.

Chuck Baker
President

American Short Line and Regional Railroad Association (ASLRRA)