

“Supersizing Hits Freight World”

That was the Headline in the August 16th Wall Street Journal. I could see the hair on the back of every group that lobbies for truck safety, including smaller trucks and shorter hours of service begin to rally their troops based on a quick glance. But let’s take a look beyond the headline. The "Safe and Efficient Transportation ACT (SETA) of 2010," S. 3705, introduced August 4th by U.S. Senators Mike Crapo (R-Idaho), Susan Collins (R-Maine) and Herb Kohl (D-Wisc.). The Identical legislation in the U.S. House of Representatives, H.R. 1799, currently has 54 co-sponsors.

When you dig into this proposed legislation you will find that it is not as bad as the headline would lead you to believe. In fact it makes a lot of common sense. The bill authorizes states to allow the operation of trucks on the Interstate Highway System with a gross weight of 97,000 pounds. Current law limits the weight of 5-axle trucks traveling on the Interstate System to 80,000 pounds. The legislation requires that trucks operating above 80,000 pounds to add a sixth axle to compensate for the extra weight. The extra axle adds additional braking capacity, preventing an increase in stopping distances, and prevents pavements from sustaining more damage. The truck’s trailer size is not increased.

This proposed legislation will raise the federal interstate weight limit in a way that would improve highway safety and shipping efficiency. SETA is a bipartisan plan to improve our economy and transportation network by striking the right balance. Accounting for the weight of the added axle, SETA would allow 40,000 pound shipments to increase to 55,000 pounds, an increase of 38%. This legislation would directly benefit truckload shippers with palletized density higher than 12 pounds per cubic foot. Below this density, trailers will cube out.

Studies show that the biggest contributor to truck accident rates is the vehicle miles they travel - not the weight they haul. Many trucks leave loading docks with significant space in their trailers, meaning they travel more miles than necessary to deliver products. If current weight restrictions remain, this inefficiency problem will only worsen. In fact, the U.S. Department of Transportation estimates that many more trucks

and vehicle miles will be needed as our economy recovers and begins to grow. What some folks still fail to realize is that SETA would actually reduce the number of trucks and vehicle miles necessary to meet demand, which would make roads safer now and in the future. It would allow our industries to be more competitive with our neighbors and it would save on fuel. It would also help reduce carbon output by making sure we are getting the most out of every truck mile traveled. Most importantly, it would promote safety for states by making sure more heavily loaded trucks aren't forced to take secondary roads through town centers in their travels and remain on the Interstate Highway System.

Passage of this bill is likely to generate new pressures on shippers to rethink their supply chains. You need to develop a 55,000 Pound Strategy. Can you ship more weight? Should you shift between Rail, Intermodal, TL, and LTL modes? How can you optimize your inbound and outbound shipments?

How will this change your warehouse(s)? Can you load heavier containers at overseas plants? What will it do to Hours-of-Service? Will carriers renegotiate fuel surcharges stemming from the added weight? Will customers accept larger loads?

Data2Logistics Business Intelligence Team is available to support you with this and other supply chain challenges that you face. Please contact Karin Speaker at 919.550.8103 or via e-mail at Karin.Speaker@Data2Logistics.com.