

Testimony of
ANDREW R. YOUNG
Member of the Owner-Operators Independent Drivers Association (OOIDA)
Member / Chair of the Trucking Safety Section of the Ohio Association for Justice (OAJ)
Before the
OHIO SENATE COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION
Regarding
HB 35 - "Transportation & Public Safety Budget"
March 6, 2013

HEAVIER TRUCKS ON OHIO'S HIGHWAYS

Good morning Chair Manning, Vice Chair Patton, Ranking Member Cafaro and distinguished Senators of the Senate Transportation Committee. I thank you for this opportunity to testify with regard to HB 35. My name is Andy Young and I am here to speak with you about the provision increasing the weight limits of trucks on Ohio's highways from 80,000 pounds to 90,000 pounds. My experience on this issues comes from three very different perspectives: (1) as a small business trucking professional; (2) as the Chair of OAJ's Trucking Safety Section; and, (3) as a former City Councilman and proud resident of Senator Manning's Senate District and our hometown, North Ridgeville, Ohio.

First, from the trucking industry perspective, I am the owner of a Peterbilt 359 semi-tractor and the owner of a start-up small business trucking company; and, I hold an Ohio Class A Commercial Driver's License. As the owner of a semi-truck, I am also a card-carrying member of the Owner-Operator Independent Drivers Association (OOIDA).

OOIDA is the national trade association representing the interests of independent owner-operators and professional drivers on all issues that affect small-business truckers. OOIDA's members make up more than 150,000 small-business men and women in all 50 states who collectively own and operate more than 260,000 heavy-duty commercial trucks. 50% of all motor carriers are one-truck operations. 96% of the nation's 500,000 active motor carriers operate 20 or fewer trucks and are small businesses.

While shippers and some segments of the trucking industry argue that the "trucking industry" supports truck weight increases, nothing can be further from

the truth. The small business-trucking professionals that make up OOIDA do not want heavier trucks on America's highways. I am here on behalf of OOIDA to explain why small truck companies do not want an increase in truck weight limits.

HIGHER OPERATING COSTS FOR SMALL BUSINESS TRUCKERS

Increasing truck weight will lead to an increase in operating and equipment costs for small business truckers. Specifically, increasing the load weight limits to 90,000 pounds will cause the following: (1) accelerated brake and tire wear (safety-critical equipment); (2) structural stresses on frames and suspensions; (3) strain on the engine and drive train components; (4) increased vehicle maintenance costs; (5) overall accelerated deterioration of equipment; and, (6) increased fuel costs. Shippers are unlikely to increase load compensation to cover these additional costs. While large fleets can absorb these increased costs or segment out a portion of their fleet to serve heavier loads, small business truckers do not have this luxury.

SAFETY CONCERNS

Truckers such as OOIDA's members know from firsthand experience that further increase in weights of commercial trucks can endanger highway users. Here is a quote from Todd Spencer, Executive Vice President of OOIDA: "It's a hard enough job to maneuver 80,000 pounds and no one knows better than the men and women who drive trucks for a living that heavier trucks can reduce safety margins for themselves and other motorists. Most want no part of increasing the weight limit, either as drivers or even as motorists sharing the road."

To allow vehicle weight to increase beyond the current Federal limits of 80,000 pounds would seriously jeopardize the safety of commercial drivers and the motoring public. Vehicle stability, mobility, and maneuverability would be substantially reduced placing lives on Ohio's highways at a new risk. Driving an 18-wheeler, combination semi-tractor and trailer is a complex task. For example, imagine a situation which leads to an emergency stop forcing a trucker to stand on his or her brakes with 90,000 pounds behind their back. Stress induced driver fatigue is compounded greatly when operating heavier loads. The already-stressful commercial driving task would be heightened to new dangerous levels with increases in weight limits because vehicle weight directly affects handling characteristics.

Heavier weight adversely affects vehicle stability, increases stopping distances, exacerbates “brake fade” on downgrades and potentially creates a hazardous situation in the event of an emergency stop. The heavier the vehicle the more problems the vehicle will have interacting with other vehicles on the highway. Congestion is likely to get worse because heavier trucks require more time to merge on highways. Speed differentials between heavier trucks and other motorists weaving in and around trucks increases the chance of collisions. Truck drivers must not only understand the handling characteristics of the vehicles they operate, but they must also be aware of cargo securement issues; the realities of highway congestion; and, early recognition of distracted, careless motorists with whom they must share the roads.

In many cases, center of gravity rises in proportion to heavier weight, increasing the risk of rollover. This past week on I-77 in West Virginia, a trucker was passing another vehicle when the center of gravity of the steel coil he was hauling caused his truck to overturn. The trucker died. A witness believed his cargo shifted while he was passing this other vehicle.

In addition to my experience as an owner of a small truck business, I am a Partner at the law firm of Nurenberg, Paris representing injured truck drivers and other motorists who have been in highway accidents. I have witnessed first hand how lives on the highway can be changed instantly when an 80,000 pound vehicle is involved in an accident. The heavier the vehicle, the greater the potential highway fatalities and other serious injuries.

I am also here on behalf of the Ohio Association for Justice (OAJ) as the Chair of the Trucking Safety Section. On behalf of injured truck drivers, motorists, and passengers on Ohio’s highways, OAJ stands with OOIDA in opposition to increasing the weight limits of trucks.

INFRASTRUCTURE DAMAGE

Finally, on behalf of all Ohio residents and taxpayers, I oppose including the weight limit increase in the “Transportation & Public Safety Budget” bill because including it will increase costs to the State of Ohio and its taxpayers.

Increasing weight limits for trucks increases costs to taxpayers because heavier trucks will accelerate the deterioration of Ohio’s highways and bridges and increase our State’s infrastructure budgetary concerns.

Many bridges are on the threshold of becoming deficient or weight-limited, and heavier trucks will speed up their deterioration. Trucks are already being re-routed off of some of our bridges due to the weight they carry. Heavy trucks have been re-routed around the current innerbelt bridge in Cleveland. The necessity of the new bridge and the costs to taxpayers associated with that project are a direct result of years of heavy truck traffic. Can we afford this additional strain to Ohio's already strained highway budget?

Beyond the highways, trucks often are required to travel on local roads and neighborhood streets to pick-up and deliver goods to local stores and businesses. Sometimes this involves traveling on neighborhood streets and other roads built to lower standards. As a former Councilman for the City of North Ridgeville, I understand constituent concerns over pot holes and stretched Safety and Service Department budgets.

CONCLUSION

HB 35 should not include a provision concerning truck weight. Heavier trucks place a burden on Ohio's infrastructure and increase the hazards on our roadways. Increasing truck weight limits also harms Ohio's economy. The benefits of a truck weight limits increase will only be seen by a small number of shippers, while all Ohioans, including small business truckers, will shoulder the added heavy burden of the aforementioned detriments. The costs to the small business trucking companies; the costs due to increased severity of accidents; and, the costs to taxpayers for our failing infrastructure outweigh any potential benefit from including this provision in HB 35.

Thank you Chair Manning, Vice Chair Patton, Ranking Member Cafaro and all of the other distinguished Senators of this Committee for allowing me the opportunity to testify today. I will be happy to try and answer any questions that you may have for me.