



Shippers Coalition Statement for the Record

House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee Highways and Transit
“Freight Forward: Overcoming Supply Chain Challenges to Deliver for America”
May 10, 2023

The Shippers Coalition is a joint effort of more than 80 of the nation’s most prominent manufacturers, agribusinesses, and trade associations, including Anheuser-Busch, PepsiCo, Coca-Cola, the American Chemistry Council, the Consumer Brands Association, Niagara Bottling, Tyson Foods, Procter & Gamble, and the National Cattlemen’s Beef Association, among others. Our coalition members deliver, or arrange for the delivery of thousands of truckloads of goods to consumers daily. Clearly, we have a vital interest in improving the supply chain and the freight transportation network, as such improvements will benefit consumers, the economy and the nation.

Our members are completely mode neutral, using trucks, railroads and vessels to move products and supplies. We welcome improvements in the supply chain, and in service to shippers, from any mode. The Shippers Coalition is also committed to safety and would not support any initiative that it considered to be unsafe.

Supply chain challenges have plagued American consumers for the last several years. From the inability to get critical goods during the COVID-19 pandemic to the potential railroad strike, which would have cost the economy \$2 billion per day, we have seen the fragility of our supply chain. The effective, efficient and safe movement of freight is the backbone of the American economy, and Congress must pass common-sense legislation to better achieve those goals, fortify our supply chain, and strengthen the competitiveness of the nation’s economy.

The SHIP IT Act is a holistic solution to some of the challenges in the movement of freight, including providing incentives to recruit and retain drivers, reducing regulatory burdens on truck drivers, and creating efficiencies and reduced emissions through modest gross vehicle weight (GVW) limit reform.

One of the solutions included in the SHIP IT Act that could immediately relieve pressure on the supply chain is modestly increasing gross vehicle weight limits through a state opt-in pilot program on the Interstate System. Under current Federal law, the general rule is that the gross vehicle weight limit for vehicles on the Interstate System is 80,000 pounds. The Federal Government does not regulate weight off the Interstate System (other than provide that a vehicle that can operate on the Interstate under Federal law must have reasonable access to and from the Interstate, a limited concept, not a displacement of State weight laws on roads throughout the State). Many states already allow heavier than 80,000 pounds GVW trucks off the Interstate System.

Currently, many shippers reach the current 80,000 pounds weight limit before the truck is full and are forced to send trucks out that are only three-fourths filled, requiring companies to send more trucks out than what otherwise would be necessary to meet the current demand.

Increasing that weight limit to 91,000 pounds on six axles, or the maximum allowed under the bridge formula, whichever is lower, would move trucks back to the better-built Interstates where they belong instead of state and local roads where they drive past schools, neighborhoods, and parks. The additional axle required for vehicle participation in this opt-in pilot program means there will be an extra set of brakes on these trucks, which the US Department of Transportation (USDOT) has found will allow the trucks to stop shorter than current five axle configurations.

Companies across the United States have already proven they can safely implement authority to utilize trucks with GVW over 80,000 pounds. A provision of the CARES Act allowed states to issue permits allowing trucks to operate above federal weight limits on Interstates during the COVID-19 crisis to provide much-needed supplies to families and communities. While this waiver authority was only available for 120 days, companies across the US were able to take advantage of this provision and found an increase in efficiency and a reduction in carbon dioxide emissions with no increase in reportable accidents when they were able to fill trucks to a higher capacity. Further, other countries allow GVW higher than 80,000 pounds. One of our member companies has long operated six axle vehicles in Canada at GVW above 80,000 and with safety experience per movement equivalent to its U.S. experience. The pilot program included in the SHIP IT Act would further allow data to be collected during the life of the pilot program, in those states that opt in.

The recent investments made through the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) is helping to repair structurally deficient roads and bridges. The proposal in the SHIP IT Act will not lessen those dollars. The addition of a sixth axle better distributes the weight, protecting roads and bridges from wear and tear. In its 2015 Comprehensive Truck Size and Weight Study, USDOT found that the use of these six-axle vehicles at weights up to 91,000 pounds GVW would reduce life-cycle pavement costs.

Finally, the GVW provision in the SHIP IT Act does not increase the size of the trailer, it simply allows the trucks to be filled up more than what is currently available. The provision also explicitly excludes doubles and triples from this proposal. Simply, this is a carefully crafted, limited, state option weight pilot program; there is no size increase of any kind in it.

We must not wait for another crisis to occur, but rather take active steps now to strengthen our supply chain, and the SHIP IT Act is the solution. The Shippers Coalition is supportive of this thoughtful legislation and believes it is the right next step forward to help ensure consumers can get goods at the lowest possible cost, with attention to safety and emissions reduction.