

**As We See It: October 2023**

## **Inconsistent Federal Transportation Policy Hurting the Economy and Environment**

The U.S. Federal Transportation Policy is a disjointed, bureaucratic hodgepodge of restrictions and requirements lacking consistency across the states, imposed under the extortive threat of federal funding losses.

### **What weighs more? A ton of milk or a ton of logs?**

A ton is still a ton, there is no difference. Why, then, can a truck hauling milk carry heavier loads than a truck carrying logs on the Federal Interstate? This is but one example of the vagaries of a federal policy that allows specific commodities exemptions or authorization to carry more weight on the Federal Interstate System.

In many areas, there is a wide disparity between the speed and weight limits on state and interstate roadways, even when compared with other Interstate Highways. For instance, in New England states, trucks hauling timber are authorized to access the Federal Interstate System at 100,000 pounds. Meanwhile, on a specific 23-mile corridor of federal interstate in Minnesota, trucks are allowed to haul timber up to 99,000 pounds. Other sections of the interstate in different states are grandfathered in at higher weights than the standard Interstate weight limit.

### **Are particular Federal Interstate Highways in New England or other states built to a different engineering standard than federal interstates in other states?**

The answer is no, they are all built to the same standards. Similar bureaucratic manipulation is apparent with the Electric Vehicle push. The heavier electric semi-trucks would by law have been forced to carry less cargo, thus increasing transportation costs which would be passed onto the consumer. But EV semi-trucks have now been authorized to carry 2,000 more pounds (4,000 in Europe) to accommodate the heavier batteries of the EV semi-trucks. So again, what weighs more? Batteries or logs?

Optimum transportation weights are recognized as a major contributing factor in maximizing transportation efficiency, reducing consumer costs, and improving safety while resulting in less carbon emissions. Transportation engineering studies have recognized the opportunity to safely increase truck weights on the federal interstate system. Congress has established precedents with carve-outs and exemptions in select

states for specific commodities, routes, and weights. Globally, other countries and regions, specifically Canada and the European Union, allow for heavier weight limits on their roadways.

**Why doesn't Congress and the Administration establish competitive, efficient, and uniform weight standards for the federal interstate system?**

It seems that the influence and targeted opposition of the railroad lobbyists are derailing (pun intended) the overriding goals of the Transportation Department to provide safe and efficient avenues for the nation. It would be much better for our national transportation goals if the railroad industry invested in their equipment, tracks, and safety instead of investing in politicians. With the history of accidents and hazardous chemical spills exposing communities to life-threatening situations, the railways have plenty to focus on.

This year Congress has the opportunity to put the economy, environment, and public safety above monopolistic railroad interests by supporting the Safe Routes Act of 2023. This Bill has been introduced in both the Senate and House of Representatives. Failure to pass the Safe Routes Act of 2023 will continue to expose the public to unnecessary safety risks, increase consumer product costs, generate more carbon emissions, and contribute to climate change by requiring the use of more fossil fuels.

The question for Congress and the Administration is simple – Are you going to establish uniform, consistent, and fair Federal Transportation Policies across the country, or are you going to continue to allow unelected lobbyists to dictate transportation policy at the expense of the general public?

The Administration and many in Congress profess wanting to reduce fossil fuel use, reduce carbon emissions, improve the economy, create rural jobs, and support general welfare and safety. This is the perfect opportunity to demonstrate their commitment to these priorities by passing the Safe Routes Act of 2023. Choosing not to support the Safe Routes Act of 2023 would be a demonstration of whose best interest is being served by our elected officials.