

Michaud Introduces Bill to Address National Patchwork of Truck Weight Laws

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WASHINGTON, DC – Last night, Congressman Mike Michaud, a member of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, introduced the Safe and Efficient Transportation Act (H.R. 1799). The bill will allow Maine and other states to increase the weight of trucks allowed on the Interstate System within state borders to make them consistent with surrounding states. The current patchwork of differing weight requirements harms safety by forcing trucks onto roads not designed for their use and hurts the economy by reducing the efficiency of freight networks. The bill is cosponsored by Congresswoman Jean Schmidt (R-OH).

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“This bill represents a step forward in my work with the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure to provide an acceptable resolution to the truck weight problems throughout our country, especially in Maine,” said Michaud. “Thoughtful implementation of a federal truck weight exemption for the remainder of Maine’s Interstate, and changes like it in other states, would help our struggling economy. It would allow our industries in Maine to be more competitive and save on fuel. It would also help reduce pollution by making sure we are getting the most out of every truck mile travelled. And most importantly, it would promote safety for Mainers by making sure more heavily loaded trucks aren’t forced to take secondary roads through town centers in their travels up and down our state.”

Currently, most of Maine’s Interstate highways are subject to the federally mandated truck weight limit of 80,000 pounds. However, Maine’s state limit is 100,000 pounds — and it would be difficult to lower it due to the demands of Maine’s major industries, especially forest products, and the through traffic from the surrounding states and Canadian provinces which all have 100,000 pound limits on all of their roads. Governor Baldacci, the Maine Legislature, the Maine Department of Transportation, the entire Maine congressional delegation, and hundreds of Maine small businesses have requested an exemption from federal truck weight limits.

“In working on this issue for years, I have come to realize that Maine is not the only state affected by truck weight mismatches,” said Michaud. “In order to move forward on this issue, I have made this a national bill that would allow affected states like Maine to opt into an increase in truck weights in their states. States that do not want increased weights would not have to have anything forced on them. I recognize that what makes sense for Maine may not make sense for other places.”

A comprehensive Maine Department of Transportation study has shown that the state of Maine would save between \$1.7 and \$2.3 million a year in reduced pavement repair. According to the U.S. Department of Transportation, there would be a 20-year pavement restoration cost savings of nearly \$2.5 billion dollars utilizing the 97,000-pound six-axle truck.

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Safe and Efficient Transportation Act of 2009 (H.R. 1799)

Section-by-Section

Section 1 – Title

This section entitles the bill the “Safe and Efficient Transportation Act of 2009”

Section 2 – Increasing Weight Limitations for Certain Vehicles

The Safe and Efficient Transportation Act would allow a state to authorize six axle vehicles of up to 97,000 lbs. in gross vehicle weight to travel on their Interstate Systems.

This bill requires states to produce an annual report including routes within the state on which a truck weight limit in excess of 80,000 are allowed, a description of the operating requirements of those vehicles as required by the state, and safety statistics. The bill would also require a five year assessment of impacts, if any, of these vehicles on pavement and bridge maintenance costs. The bill also allows the Secretary of Transportation to terminate operation of vehicles over 80,000 lbs. on any routes on which it is determined that such operation poses an unreasonable safety risk.

Section 3 – Safe and Efficient Vehicle Bridge Infrastructure Improvement Program

This section establishes a Safe and Efficient Vehicle Bridge Infrastructure Improvement Program to apportion the funds raised through adjustments to the Overweight Vehicle Tax as described in Section 4. These funds would be kept in the Safe and Efficient Vehicle Trust Fund described in Section 5, until allocated to states in which the allowed weight limit, either as a result of this bill or previous exemptions, exceeds 80,000 lbs. This program would fund bridge modifications and repair.

Section 4 – Overweight Vehicle Tax

This section adjusts the overweight vehicle tax by raising the cap to \$800 per year.

Section 5 – Safe and Efficient Vehicle Trust Fund

This section establishes a Safe and Efficient Vehicle Trust fund to receive the funds being raised through the increase in the overweight vehicle tax cap. Allocations to states under the Act would be distributed from this fund.