

Enforcement of Vehicle Size and Weight Restrictions

Topic Selection Background Paper

May 2011

BACKGROUND

The trucking industry plays a critical role in Minnesota's economy, especially in the movement of commercial goods to market. However, overweight vehicles can cause significant damage to pavement, bridges, and railroad crossings. According to the Governor's proposed budget for the upcoming biennium, overweight trucks are "a major source of highway damage or deterioration."¹ In addition, vehicles that exceed weight or size restrictions can pose safety risks due to longer stopping distances and greater likelihood of serious injuries or fatalities in accidents.

The Department of Public Safety (DPS) enforces laws related to the operation and movement of commercial vehicles on all Minnesota roads, although it focuses its efforts on trunk highways. The department has six weigh stations and 46 mobile enforcement staff. The department provides training to local law enforcement agencies, which also have authority to enforce the state's commercial vehicle laws.

The Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT) establishes seasonal load limits for trunk highways. State law exempts some vehicles (including school buses, garbage trucks, milk trucks, and farm vehicles) from weight restrictions, and MnDOT can issue permits authorizing oversize or overweight loads on trunk highways.²

POSSIBLE EVALUATION ISSUES

1. Is there adequate, consistent enforcement of vehicle size and weight restrictions on Minnesota's highways? Does Minnesota have sufficient equipment and staffing to monitor compliance with these restrictions and address noncompliance?

¹ State of Minnesota, *Governor's Recommendations: Fiscal Year 2012-13 Operating Budget, Public Safety Department* (St. Paul, February 15, 2011), 74.

² Counties, cities, and townships issue these permits for local roads.

2. To what extent have the recommendations of Minnesota's 2005 strategic plan for commercial vehicle weight compliance been implemented?
3. Have reasonable exemptions from vehicle weight restrictions been made in state law and by MnDOT?

DISCUSSION

A June 2005 DPS-MnDOT strategic plan said that compliance with vehicle weight requirements appears to be a "significant problem."³ The plan said there was a need for additional enforcement staff, enforcement-related technology, interagency cooperation, and performance measurement. A 2006 analysis suggested that Minnesota's number of citations issued for weight violations per 1,000 trucks was well below the rates for neighboring states and the nation as a whole.⁴

The evaluation outlined here would be feasible. We would review DPS and MnDOT enforcement and permitting records, and we would interview agency staff. We would probably also look at statewide court data on criminal violations and fines related to vehicle size and weight. On a limited basis, we might interview local law enforcement officials about their enforcement practices.

Enforcement of vehicle restrictions is not a highly visible issue, but it is an important one. OLA could provide an objective study of an issue that directly affects the integrity and safety of Minnesota roads.

³ URS Corporation, *Minnesota Statewide Commercial Vehicle Weight Compliance Strategic Plan for the Departments of Transportation and Public Safety* (Minneapolis, 2005). The plan concluded this while noting that weight compliance had not been comprehensively measured.

⁴ Sandy H. Straus and John Semmens, *Estimating the Cost of Overweight Vehicle Travel on Arizona Highways*, Paper presented to Transportation Research Board Annual Meeting, January 2006.