

West Virginia, 25301, Telephone: (304) 347-5268.

**SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:** In lieu of preparation of an environmental impact statement, the FHWA, in cooperation with the West Virginia Division of Highways (WVDOH) will prepare an environmental assessment for the proposed East Beckley Transportation Improvement Project. The project begins at the intersection I-64 just east of Beckley, and extends northward to connect with Appalachian Corridor L (US 19), a distance of approximately 7 miles. This project is considered necessary to provide for the existing and projected traffic demand. Alternatives under consideration include (1) taking no action; (2) using alternate traffic modes; (3) improve the existing system by constructing a four lane, limited access highway on new location. Incorporated into the study with the various building alternatives will be design variations of grade and alignment.

Letters describing the proposed action and soliciting comments will be sent to appropriate federal, state, and local agencies, and to private organizations and citizens who have expressed or are known to have an interest in this proposal. A public meeting will be held in Beckley when appropriate. Public notice will be given of the time and place of the meeting. A draft environmental assessment will be available for public and agency review and comment prior to the public meeting.

To ensure the full range of issues related to this proposed action are addressed and all significant issues identified, comments and suggestions are invited. Comments or questions concerning this proposed action or the modification of environmental document type should be directed to the FHWA at the address provided above.

(Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance Program Number 20.205, Highway Planning and Construction. The regulations implementing Executive Order 12372 regarding intergovernmental consultation on Federal programs and activities apply to this program)

Issued on: December 16, 1999.

**Henry E. Compton,**

*Environmental Coordinator, Charleston, West Virginia.*

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## DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

### Federal Highway Administration

[FHWA Docket No. FHWA-99-6466]

#### Specialized Hauling Vehicle (SHV) Study

**AGENCY:** Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), DOT.

**ACTION:** Notice of study; request for comments.

**SUMMARY:** The FHWA is announcing the initiation of a study required by Congress in the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21). Section 1213(f) of the Act directs the Secretary to examine the economic, safety and infrastructure impacts of truck weight standards on specialized hauling vehicles (SHVs). The Secretary is to report the results of the study to Congress and make any recommendations he determines appropriate as a result of the study, by June 9, 2000.

SHV's are generally single-unit trucks that have high tare (empty) weights from heavy-duty cargo-carrying bodies and special equipment to help load or unload their cargoes. They often require short wheelbases in order to access and maneuver safely at the types of loading and/or unloading facilities they serve. Because of the short wheelbase, the maximum legal weight for an SHV as determined by the federal bridge formula is often below the vehicle's gross weight limit as determined by individual single and tandem axle limits. SHV's are commonly considered to include: solid waste removal trucks, home fuel oil delivery trucks, construction material dump trucks, and cement transit mixers. Certain tractor-semitrailer dump vehicles hauling bulk construction materials might also be considered SHVs.

To gather data for this study, the FHWA requests information from State DOT officials, vehicle manufacturers, SHV operators, and other interested parties having knowledge of the weights and dimensions of the various types of SHVs, how these vehicles are used in various operations (trash removal, fuel oil delivery, hauling of construction/building materials), and the effects of truck size and weight limits on the productivity, safety and infrastructure impacts of those operations. The Agency is particularly interested in what provisions, if any, each State has excepting or permitting these vehicles to operate at weights above standard weight limits.

**DATES:** In order to be fully considered in the study, comments are requested by

February 28, 2000. The docket will remain open for comments until the study is completed, but the study schedule may not allow full consideration of comments received after February 28, 2000.

**ADDRESSES:** Your signed, written comments must refer to the docket number appearing at the top of this document and you must submit the comments to the Docket Clerk, U.S. DOT Dockets, Room PL-401, 400 Seventh Street, SW., Washington, D.C. 20590-0001. All comments received will be available for examination at the above address between 9 a.m. and 5 p.m., e.t., Monday through Friday, except Federal holidays. Those desiring notification of receipt of comments must include a self-addressed stamped envelope or postcard.

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:** Mr. William P. Linde, Office of Transportation Policy Studies, HPTS, (202) 493-0173, or Mr. Charles E. Medalen, Office of the Chief Counsel, HCC-20, (202) 366-1354. FHWA, 400 Seventh Street, SW., Washington, D.C. 20590-0001. Office hours are from 7:45 a.m. to 4:15 p.m., e.t., Monday through Friday, except Federal holidays.

#### SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

##### Electronic Access

Internet users may access all comments received by the U.S. DOT Dockets, Room PL-401, by using the universal resource locator (URL): <http://dms.dot.gov>. It is available 24 hours each day, 365 days each year. Please follow the instructions online for more information and help.

An electronic copy of this document may be downloaded using a modem and suitable communications software from the Government Printing Office's Electronic Bulletin Board Service at (202) 512-1661. Internet users may reach the Office of the Federal Register's home page at: <http://www.nara.gov/fedreg> and the Government Printing Office's database at: <http://www.access.gpo.gov/nara>.

##### Background

SHVs are generally single-unit trucks that, along with special cargo-carrying bodies, have equipment to help load and/or unload their cargoes. These specially equipped vehicles typically have high tare (empty) weights. SHVs are commonly considered to include: trash removal, home fuel oil delivery, dump, and cement transit mixers. Their operations often involve travel in inner city business districts, residential areas, or construction sites to load or unload. In these environments, SHVs require

short wheelbases in order to access and maneuver safely at the facilities they serve.

For several reasons, the specialized characteristics of these vehicles result in high ratios of transport costs to commodity values relative to those of general freight commodities. First, the specially equipped cargo-carrying bodies are generally used to haul low-value, bulk commodities and typically have high tare weights. When considered with the Federal weight standard applied to the short wheelbase of these vehicles, the high tare weight and high density of the commodities hauled generally restrict the legal payload well below the cargo capacity of the vehicle. Second, given the specialized characteristics of the cargo-carrying body of the vehicle, backhaul, or reload, opportunities are limited or nonexistent, resulting in a high percentage of empty miles. These vehicles' commodity and transport operating characteristics result in relatively high transport costs per ton-mile of cargo carried.

In order to accommodate vehicle operators' desire to utilize more of the cargo carrying capacity of the vehicle and reduce transportation costs, many States allow higher axle and gross weights off the Interstate Highway System than are allowed under Federal weight limits that apply to Interstate Highways. A 1993 study of dump vehicles conducted for the State of Maryland showed that 15 states and the District of Columbia allowed three-axle single-unit dump vehicles to operate on non-Interstate roads at gross weights above the maximum allowed under Federal axle-weight limits. In many cases these higher limits were also allowed on the Interstate Highway System through grandfather rights that allow States to retain weight limits that were higher than Federal limits when the Federal limits went into effect.

The increased productivity of higher weights comes at a price in terms of increased infrastructure deterioration and potential degradation to vehicle handling and stability. When loaded to higher weights, these vehicles cause disproportionate wear to pavements and bridges relative to those operating at Federal weight limits. In addition, the higher weights coupled with short cargo-carrying bodies typical of SHVs make them less stable than trucks of the same dimensions carrying less weight or trucks of greater length carrying the same weight.

### Study Approach

The FHWA proposes to proceed with the study in three phases: (1) Outreach

to understand views on SHV weights held by various interested groups and to gather information on vehicle dimensions, costs, and operating characteristics including trip patterns, areas of operation, roadway classes traveled, operating weights and annual mileage; (2) analysis of current SHV operations including economic, safety and infrastructure impacts; (3) identification of changes that have the potential to improve productivity and safety while minimizing infrastructure impacts.

#### *Phase 1: Public Outreach*

The FHWA is soliciting public input on all aspects of SHV operations as well as on the general study approach described in this notice. The Agency is particularly interested in participation by State DOT officials, vehicle manufacturers, and SHV operators and each group's perspectives on the effects of truck size and weight limits on the productivity, safety, and infrastructure impacts of SHVs. Previous studies of SHV impacts prepared for individual States are also of interest and the FHWA requests that States having undertaken such studies send a copy of the study report to the docket.

The Agency is seeking information on: (1) The segments of the trucking industry that use SHVs, (2) current size and weight limits, including exceptions and permitting, for SHVs by State, (3) vehicle characteristics, (4) operating costs, and (5) trip characteristics. This information is needed for all types and sizes of SHVs.

**Request for Information:** Respondents to this notice are requested to address the following items or questions in comments to the docket. The responses to these questions will be used to perform the impact analyses of Phases 2 and 3 of the study.

#### Segments of the Trucking Industry Utilizing SHVs

1. Specialized hauling vehicles are generally considered those vehicles with operating characteristics requiring short wheelbases for accessing, and maneuvering safely in, loading and unloading locations. They also have specialized equipment for loading/unloading, carry bulk commodities, and tend to have relatively short trip lengths with empty backhauls. Vehicles commonly considered SHVs include dump trucks, solid waste haulers, home fuel delivery trucks, and cement transit mixers. What other specific types of trucks meet these general criteria and should be included when considering policy issues related to specialized hauling vehicles?

#### Vehicle Characteristics

2. What are the current tare (empty) weights and dimensions of various types of SHVs? The following dimensions are important for the study:

- Vehicle width.
- Track width.
- Wheelbase.
- Chassis height.
- Axle spreads between axle groups and within axle groups.
- Height of center of gravity for cab, chassis, and cargo space.
- Cargo space dimensions or cargo capacity.

How have vehicle weights and dimensions changed in recent years? Are changes in vehicle weights and dimensions anticipated in the future?

3. What is the typical horsepower of various SHVs?

#### Trip Characteristics

4. What is the payload—the difference between the maximum allowable vehicle weight and the empty weight—of various SHVs? What is the density of the commodity hauled (pounds per cubic foot)?

5. What are the typical usage patterns of various SHVs? What is the average trip length? If there are large variations in trip length from day to day or season to season, what is the distribution of trip lengths during the year? What percentage of mileage is operated while fully loaded? Partially loaded? Empty? What percentage of mileage is operated on Interstate Highways? On other limited access highways? On other arterial roads? On local roads? What is the average annual mileage for different types of SHVs?

#### Operating Costs

6. For purposes of estimating economic impacts of changes in vehicle weight limits, what are the average hourly wages for operators of various types of SHVs? What is the cost and the expected useful life (in years and mileage) of the various types of SHVs? What is the fuel consumption when empty and when loaded of the various types of SHVs?

7. What operating taxes and user fees do the various types of SHVs pay by State? At what weights in excess of Federal standards are SHVs allowed to operate and does operating at those weights require a special permit or additional fee? If so, what is the weight/fee schedule?

#### Size and Weight Regulations

8. How do Federal weight limits affect operations of various SHVs? Which weight limits (axle load, bridge formula,

or gross vehicle weight) have the most significant impact and why?

9. How do Federal divisible load regulations affect SHV operations?

10. How do Federal weight limits affect the safety of SHVs? What would be the impacts of changes in weight limits on safety?

11. How do Federal weight limits affect infrastructure costs? What would be the impacts of changes in weight limits on pavement and bridge costs?

12. Are there any operating restrictions (speed, time of day, route) on SHVs operating under excess weight permits that would not apply to the same vehicle operating within Federal weight standards?

13. What opportunities exist to improve productivity while also improving safety and minimizing adverse impacts on pavements and bridges?

#### *Phase 2: Analysis of Current SHV Operations*

Many States have special weight provisions on non-Interstate highways for specific trucking operations such as dump trucking. Although not always the case, these special weight provisions are often extended to the Interstate System through grandfather rights. The analysis undertaken in this phase of the study will examine the economic, safety and infrastructure impacts of the current set of truck size and weight limits for SHVs, including divisible and non-divisible overweight permit provisions of the various States. This will be accomplished utilizing data gathered in the Phase I Outreach, as well as established data sources including the Truck Inventory and Use Survey (TIUS) collected by the Department of Commerce, and Trucks Involved in Fatal Accidents (TIFA), an enhancement of National Highway Traffic Safety Administration safety data compiled by University of Michigan Transportation Research Institute. Analytical tools used in the Department of Transportation's Comprehensive Truck Size and Weight Study will be used to assess infrastructure and safety issues.

State provisions for higher operating weights allow SHV operators to carry a given volume of commodity in fewer trips. This increase in productivity has the positive effects of reduced truck travel, which decreases fuel consumption and related emissions, and lower transportation costs per ton-mile.

Higher allowable operating weights of SHVs also impact the condition of highway infrastructure. Pavement damage per SHV vehicle mile traveled increases due to heavier axle loadings. Bridge stresses per SHV loading also

increase with the higher weights. Bridge stresses depend not only on the gross weight of the vehicle, but on the concentration of the load, or the bridge area supporting the load. Thus, a short wheelbased SHV will generally cause more bridge stress than longer wheelbased vehicles of the same gross weight and lower gross weight vehicles of the same wheelbase.

Increased SHV weights may also impact highway safety. Because they generally haul dense, bulky commodities on short wheelbases, vehicle handling characteristics may be affected. At higher weights, there may be an increase in rollover propensity from a higher center of gravity and reduced braking capability from a high gross weight to braking axle ratio.

This phase of the study will provide illustrative examples of the operational economics, infrastructure and safety impacts for States where SHVs routinely operate legally at weights in excess of the Federal standard. The effectiveness of various permit program fee structures in recovering additional infrastructure cost will be assessed and to the extent practical, the impact of these programs on illegal overweight operations. The analysis will utilize information collected during Phase 1 of the study supplemented with data from TIUS and TIFA and other analytical tools developed for the Comprehensive Truck Size and Weight Study.

#### *Phase 3: Analysis of Weight Standards for SHVs*

Based on the Phase 2 assessment of Federal and State weight limits and permitting practices and the current usage of SHVs, Phase 3 of the study will analyze the implications of alternative Federal axle load, gross vehicle weight, and bridge formula weight limits and alternative permitting practices as they apply to SHVs. Factors to be considered shall include transportation costs and other economic impacts, safety, and pavement, bridge, and other infrastructure impacts.

The method for Phase 3 analysis will be similar to that used in Phase 2, an illustrative case study of potential economic, infrastructure and safety impacts from increased weights for various types of SHVs in States where weights are currently determined by the Federal Bridge Formula and Federal axle limits. Many of the analytical tools developed for the Comprehensive Truck Size and Weight Study will be used in assessing impacts of alternative weight limits and permitting practices.

**Authority:** 23 U.S.C. 315; 23 U.S.C. 217 note; 49 CFR 1.48.

Issued on: December 16, 1999.

**Kenneth R. Wykle,**

*Federal Highway Administrator.*

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## DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

### Federal Railroad Administration

[Docket No. FRA-1999-6404]

#### **Extension of Comment Period; Petition for Grandfathering of Non-Compliant Equipment National Railroad Passenger Corporation**

On October 18, 1999, the National Railroad Passenger Corporation (Amtrak) petitioned the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) for grandfathering of non-compliant passenger equipment manufactured by Renfe Talgo of America (Talgo) for use on rail lines between Vancouver, British Columbia and Eugene, Oregon; between Las Vegas, Nevada and Los Angeles, California; and between San Diego, California and San Luis Obispo, California. Notice of receipt of such petition was published in the **Federal Register** on November 2, 1999, at 64 FR 5920. Interested parties were invited to comment on the petition before the end of the comment period of December 2, 1999.

On December 2, 1999, FRA extended the comment period in this proceeding until December 15, 1999, following a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request that certain items in FRA files referenced in Amtrak's petition be made available for review (see 64 FR 68195; Dec. 6, 1999). Talgo has objected to release of certain of the requested information under FOIA exemption 4 (5 U.S.C. 552(b)(4)), which exempts from release trade secrets and commercial or financial information obtained from a person that is privileged or confidential. On December 15, 1999, FRA further extended the comment period in this proceeding until 10:00 a.m. on December 27, 1999 to enable FRA to finalize its response to the FOIA request, and to permit the responder time to analyze the documents released by FRA (see 64 FR 71846; Dec. 22, 1999). Unfortunately, processing the FOIA request has taken longer than anticipated; FRA released documents on November 30, December 10, and December 21. FRA has redacted from the documents released information that is protected under FOIA exemption 4. On December 13, the FOIA requester again asked FRA to further extend the comment period so that the requester would have 15 days after receipt of all