



## Con-way Leads Campaign to Counter Ban on 'Killer' Trucks

By Jeff Plungis

May 3 (Bloomberg) -- Trucking companies led by Con-way Inc. and safety groups are each trying to change a law limiting the access of 97,000-pound trucks to U.S. interstates, as growing freight traffic adds to congested highways.

Safety advocates and U.S. senators including Frank Lautenberg, a New Jersey Democrat, want to extend the 20-year-old federal law restricting triple-trailers to 19 states and ban them on all U.S. highways. Trucking companies and shippers want to give all states the authority to allow heavier or longer trucks on interstates within their boundaries.

Bigger trucks would save the industry 2 billion gallons of diesel fuel a year, or more than \$8 billion at today's prices, according to the Coalition for Transportation Productivity, a trade group supported by trucking companies and shippers.

"These big trucks shouldn't be on any of these roads," said Jackie Gillan, vice president of Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety, which is funded by insurance companies and consumer groups. "This is a classic case of the trucking industry putting productivity ahead of safety."

Lautenberg will introduce the Safe Highways and Infrastructure Preservation Act, as he did in 2009, the Washington-based Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety said today. On his website Lautenberg describes backing a similar effort in New Jersey to ban "triple-trailer 'killer trucks.'"

The House sponsor of the truck-safety bill, Representative James McGovern, a Massachusetts Democrat, was joined by safety advocates, family members of victims killed in truck accidents and International Brotherhood of Teamsters president James Hoffa today at a news conference in Washington.

### Safety Cited

The groups cite almost 4,000 annual truck-related fatalities a year. Large trucks are involved in 9 percent of fatal crashes, though they make up 3 percent to 4 percent of registered U.S. vehicles, according to an Advocates for Highway and

Auto Safety fact sheet. Bigger trucks would require 25 percent longer stopping distances, the group says.

U.S. highways weren't engineered for longer or heavier trucks, and exit ramps are too short for drivers to operate on them safely, said Hoffa, leader of the Teamsters truck-driver union, which opposes lifting weight limits.

"Our highways were not built for bigger trucks. They weren't built for longer trucks," Hoffa said. "When I look in that rear-view mirror, I don't want to see a bigger truck bearing down on me."

### Efficiency Argument

Trucking companies such as Con-way and Werner Enterprises Inc. say bigger, heavier trucks are more efficient, cleaner and statistically safer than conventional, single-trailer, 80,000- pound big rigs.

Nestle SA, based in Vevey, Switzerland, says allowing 97,000-pound trucks with six axles on all U.S. interstates would allow it to reduce shipments by 115,000 a year, according to a company fact sheet on the Coalition for Transportation Productivity website. That means trucks would drive 34.4 million fewer miles and use 5.7 million fewer gallons of fuel, Nestle says. That would save \$23.4 million based on yesterday's average U.S. retail diesel price of \$4.10 per gallon.

### 'Truly Tough Problem'

The American Trucking Associations wants transportation officials in all states to be allowed to decide for themselves whether to allow bigger trucks on interstates within their boundaries. Trucks need to be able to carry more freight to handle an expected 25 percent increase in volume over the next 10 years, the Arlington, Virginia-based group says.

"Even if we squeeze every bit of truck productivity that we could, we're still going to have an enormous congestion problem, absent some massive federal investment in roads and bridges," Bill Graves, ATA's president and chief executive officer, said in an interview. "That's the truly tough problem for Congress."

Allowing longer-combination vehicles throughout the western U.S. would reduce truck miles driven by 25.5 percent, which would have saved 140 lives in 2008, according to an ATA policy paper published last week.

### Dueling Coalitions

“The biggest opponents of more productive trucks are the small cartel of freight railroad companies and their surrogates that claim more productive trucks will somehow divert rail freight,” the ATA said in its policy paper. Trucks and railroads compete for only 10 percent of the U.S. freight market, the ATA says.

Trucking companies Con-way, Old Dominion Freight Line Inc. and Arkansas Best Corp.; the National Industrial Transportation League and the National Association of Manufacturers are backing a group called Cleaner Safer Trucking, said former U.S.

Transportation Secretary James Burnley, who is also involved in that effort.

The Owner-Operator Independent Drivers Association, a trade group based in Grain Valley, Missouri, whose members compete with companies like Con-way, sides with safety advocates, saying that larger trucks are difficult to control and damage highways and bridges.

The Coalition Against Bigger Trucks, a Washington group backed by the American Association of Railroads and the owner- operators, underscores that argument by showing a picture of a collapsing bridge on its website.

#### Owner-Operators

The owner-operators, who oppose their larger-company competitors on many regulatory issues, are also fighting proposed rules requiring shorter driver shifts, mandatory on-board electronic recorders and speed-limiting devices, as well as a trade agreement with Mexico that would allow cross-border truck traffic.

Damage to roads by heavier trucks would be offset by having an extra axle, according to the ATA.

That won't fully compensate for the wear big trucks cause, former Representative James Oberstar said at the Washington news conference. One 80,000-pound truck does as much damage to a bridge as 9,600 cars, said Oberstar, a Minnesota Democrat who chaired the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee before Republicans assumed control of the House in January.

There are 7 million trucks on the road today, compared with 1 million when interstates were built in 1956, he said.

Bigger trucks would only make that worse, said McGovern, the Massachusetts Democrat. It's doubtful that Congress will come up with enough money to repair the damage, while the Highway Trust Fund is already undercapitalized, he said.

“It's not fair to go ahead with bigger sizes and weights and put the burden on our local communities,” McGovern said at the news conference. “We don't need trains on our highways.”

## 'Irrational Passion'

Trucks carry 77 percent of U.S. freight by volume and 92 percent by economic value, according to the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials. The average interstate mile carries 10,500 trucks per day today; that's expected to increase to 22,700 by 2035, according to AASHTO.

Nineteen states, mostly in the West, allow bigger trucks on interstate highways or on their turnpikes, according to the U.S. Department of Energy's website.

Safety data show that larger trucks are statistically less likely to be involved in fatal accidents, Burnley said. In 2009 and 2010, triple-trailer combinations were safer than either doubles or singles, according to millions of miles of data compiled from trucking companies, Burnley said.

"These are people that have an irrational passion that's very anti-truck," Burnley said of the safety groups.