

MnDOT is wrong to push for megatrucks

- It says that allowing heavier trucks with more axles would reduce wear and tear on roads and increase safety. That's balderdash.

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For better or worse, trucks and cars must coexist on the Twin Cities freeways. That's a given. But bigger, heavier trucks — even those so large that they are prohibited on the nation's interstate freeways — are being proposed by, of all people, the Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT).

Larger, heavier trucks will increase deaths and injuries, while worsening congestion and intensifying road and bridge wear. Since these megatrucks are prohibited from the nation's interstates, that means they'll be on highways and byways — some of them rumbling through Twin Cities neighborhoods near you.

Here's a little background: MnDOT's "Truck Size and Weight Project," which was supposed to be a "comprehensive review of Minnesota's truck size and weight laws," was really a project with a preconceived outcome. According to the project website, its purpose was

"to propose changes in Minnesota's laws that provide for increases in heavy-truck size and/or weight limits when traveling on state and local roads and bridges, in order to support the State's economic growth."

It was a project, undertaken at taxpayer expense, with a big truck agenda.

Our greatest concern should be safety. Federal law sets the maximum vehicle size and weight permitted on interstate highways. Federal regulations limit what most of us would call a semi — a full-size tractor with up to a 53-foot trailer — to a maximum of 80,000 pounds. On some roads, a semi may pull two 28-foot trailers, rather than just one, but the weight still tops out at 80,000 pounds for the entire rig. If a state permits a heavier rig, it must stay off the interstate system.

MnDOT proposes allowing heavier trucks, as long as they have more axles. Instead of an 80,000-pound limit, a typical semi could weigh as much as 97,000 pounds with seven axles, or, with a twin trailer, up to 108,000 pounds with

eight axles.

MnDOT's plan is opposed by the Minnesota Trucking Association, which along with AAA, the Minnesota State Troopers Association, the Minnesota Police and Peace Officers Association, the Minnesota Transportation Alliance and several others groups, testified against it at the Minnesota House of Representative's Transportation Committee meeting this month. Although many of us spoke against these recommendations over the summer, MnDOT is pursuing them anyway.

MnDOT says that more freight on a truck with more axles leads to fewer trips, less wear and tear on the road and, with fewer "interactions" between cars and trucks, a safer highway system too.

That's balderdash. Trucks that big — or, as MnDOT likes to say, "not bigger, just heavier" — traveling on state roads are much more dangerous than they would be on the Interstate System, according to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. They're more likely to roll over, they're harder on bridges and they're noisier.

Forty-five percent of the miles currently driven by semis in Minnesota are on our interstate roads;

are you ready for them to start rolling through your town instead? And, if it really becomes a lot cheaper to make shipments on these behemoths, won't more shippers use them, diverting traffic from rail to truck? Won't truck owners be forced to put these bigger rigs to work? We think it will lead to more truck trips, not fewer.

What are possible alternate routes for these trucks? For trips to or from the Twin Cities, rather than Interstate Hwy. 35, a trucker might be forced to use Hwy. 3 through Northfield and Faribault, or Hwy. 65 through Cambridge and Mora. Rather than I-94, Hwy. 55 through Buffalo and Glenwood or Hwy. 10 through Elk River and Wadena are logical choices. And how in the world would these huge trucks get across the metro area: Old Shakopee Road, Hwy. 100 and Hwy. 36?

If you are as concerned with this proposal as we are, contact your state senator and state representative immediately. We should do everything we can to see that this dangerous plan does not succeed.

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