




New Study Shows Short Lines at Risk of Huge Traffic Losses from Bigger Trucks

"Under the Most Aggressive Scenarios for increasing truck size/weights, the great majority of general merchandise traffic would be subject to diversion"

Bigger trucks would be devastating to Short Line and Regional railroads according to a study released on September 10, 2007, by Carl Martland, Research Affiliate, Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering, MIT. Martland concluded that Short Line Rail and Regional Rail operations would be heavily impacted from freight diversion if truck sizes and weights were increased, assuming that truck drivers and equipment (and highways) were available to handle the increase in truck traffic. The released results of the study showed that an increase in truck weight from the current 80,000 pound limit to 97,000 pounds could reduce short line merchandise traffic by 44% and overall short line traffic by 17%. Allowing long double and triple trailer trucks – LCVs – with weights up to 148,000 pounds could *eliminate 71% of the general merchandise traffic* and reduce overall short line traffic by 28%.

Truck Configuration	Decline in rail traffic merchandise	Total decline in rail traffic
 97,000 lb singles	44%	17%
 110,000 lb triples	28%	11%
 129,000 lb turnpike doubles	71%	28%

The Martland study analyzed a hypothetical set of 100 origin-to-destination freight movements representing a typical mix of commodity and customer characteristics that are handled by short lines. The study looked at trip distances of from 50 to 1,200.

A total of nine different truck configurations and weights were considered ranging from increasing the load limits on existing tractor-trailer combinations from 80,000 pounds to 90,000 pounds to the heaviest long double trailer trucks weighing 148,000 pounds.

Earlier government and industry studies had shown that increasing truck size and weight would divert substantial portions of Class I freight from rail to the highways. The diversion problem, however, is even more serious for the Short Line and Regional rail operations. Trucks are more competitive with rail on the shorter hauls and short line railroads have higher proportion of their traffic in the categories most subject to diversion, i.e. less coal and more general merchandise.

Bulk Traffic Also at Risk

Larger trucks would become a more serious competitive threat for bulk rail freight for distances up to 300 miles. The threat is greatest where rail freight service is least efficient, whether because of high circuitry, short trains, expensive track structure, or inefficient facilities for loading and unloading - problems which are generally more serious for the short lines than for the Class I railroads.