



Kansas Grain & Feed Association (KGFA)
Kansas Cooperative Council (KCC)
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February 1, 2017

TO: House Committee on Transportation; Richard Proehl, Chairman
From: Randy Stookey, Vice President & General Counsel, Kansas Grain and Feed Association
Leslie Kaufman, President/CEO, Kansas Cooperative Council

RE: Testimony in Support of HB 2095, providing a special vehicle permit for certain vehicle combinations

Chairman Proehl and members of the House Committee on Transportation. Thank you for the opportunity to comment today in support of HB 2095. This testimony is being jointly submitted on behalf of the Kansas Cooperative Council and the Kansas Grain and Feed Association.

The KCC's membership includes grain storage elevators, farm marketing and agricultural supply cooperatives, rural electric and telecommunications companies, insurance and risk management operations, credit unions, and Farm Credit system members. KGFA is a voluntary state association with a membership encompassing the entire spectrum of the grain receiving, storage, processing and shipping industry in Kansas. KGFA's membership includes over 950 Kansas business locations and represents 98% of the commercially licensed grain storage in the state.

As drafted, HB 2095 would allow motor carriers to obtain an annual special permit allowing them to transport up to 90,000 lbs. on six-axle truck configurations, consistent with the USDOT Federal Highway Administration's Federal Bridge Formula, on non-interstate roads. Federal standards for commercial vehicles on the interstate system allow 20,000 pounds on a single axle, 34,000 pounds on tandem axles, and 80,000 pounds total gross vehicle weight (GVW). Off of the interstate system, however, states may set their own commercial vehicle weight standards.

The majority of states utilize increased gross vehicle weights at the state level.¹ In Iowa, in 2010, maximum truck weights were increased to 90,000 pounds on six axles, and 96,000 pounds on seven axles. Similarly, in Nebraska, motor carriers may transport 90,000 pounds on six axles and 95,000 pounds on seven axles. Oklahoma law was recently amended to allow motor carriers to transport 90,000 lbs. on six-axle configurations. Minnesota law authorizes a seasonal maximum cap of 98,000 pounds. North Dakota's maximum gross weight on seven axles is 105,000 pounds, and South Dakota allows up to 129,000 pounds on seven axles. Similarly, some states, such as Missouri, have amended their

¹ *Heavier Semis: A Good Idea? An Update of the 2009 Study*, United States Soybean Export Council Report, Prepared by: Informa Economics, Jan. 2015.

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standards to allow for a 10% weight overage during the harvest season (but please note, that type of overage is not part of HB 2095, as introduced).

As Iowa, Nebraska, Oklahoma, North Dakota, South Dakota, Minnesota, and other states have allowed for increased gross vehicle weights, Kansas grain elevators find it increasingly difficult to compete for the limited amount of commercial truck drivers. For a commercial carrier to haul a load of grain from a Kansas elevator today, rather than in Nebraska, the driver would lose the revenue on the difference in the authorized load capacity. This creates an economic disadvantage for farmers and grain elevators when marketing and transporting their grain. Passage of HB 2095 would allow our state to economically compete with our neighboring states.

Our member grain elevators store millions of bushels of wheat, corn, milo, soybeans and other agricultural commodities across the state. After purchasing grain from local farmers, it is stored and then marketed to buyers both locally and around the world. In order to move this grain to market, it must be transported to either a local buyer or shipped across the state or country.

A significant portion of our membership must rely on truck transport for moving grain. In recent years, we have seen a shortage of commercial truck drivers in the U.S. This shortage is expected to increase to 175,000 drivers by the year 2024.² Additionally, many Kansas grain elevators are not located on a serviced rail line.³ These facilities have no choice but to truck their grain into commerce.

While the national interstate system handles 55% of the total truck traffic, the transportation of agriculture commodities is more dependent on state roads.⁴ HB 2095 would authorize more efficient transportation of agricultural commodities by allowing for a reasonable increase in the maximum gross vehicle weight standard.

At the same time Kansas struggles with these logistical hurdles in bringing grain to market, we also experienced record, or near record, crop yields. This combination of record yields, along with logistical constraints has led to longer storage times and more grain being stored in temporary flat storage structures. Use of such alternative storage may result in grain degradation, lower prices for farmers, decreased revenue for elevators, and an overall negative impact on Kansas rural economies. For this reason, the goal and intent of HB 2095 is relevant to our members.

It is true that simply increasing total truck weights without adding additional axles to spread that weight can cause more wear and tear on road and bridge surfaces than a lighter vehicle. However, the amount of wear and tear of any vehicle on a road surface is a function of the vehicle weight, the number of points of contact with the road surface, and the volume of traffic.⁵ Increasing the number of truck axles allows the gross vehicle weight of a truck to be distributed to the road surface over more contact points, which spreads out the stress of the truck on the road surface and decreases the impact of the load. Therefore,

² *Truck Driver Shortage Analysis 2015*, Bob Costello & Rod Suarez, American Trucking Associations, October 2015.

³ Track removed along the Nebraska, Kansas & Colorado short line, and rail along Boot Hill & Western was railbanked from the UP interchange at Bucklin to the BNSF interchange in Dodge City.

⁴ *Heavier Semis: A Good Idea? An Update of the 2009 Study*, United States Soybean Export Council Report, Prepared by: Informa Economics, Jan. 2015.

⁵ *Heavier Semis*, at XVII.

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adding an additional, sixth axle reduces a truck's impact even when allowing for increased truck weights.⁶

The six-axle, 90,000 lbs. truck configuration proposed in HB 2095 would reduce axle weights from 17,100 lbs. (currently authorized on 85,500 pound 5-axle trucks), to 15,000 lbs. (90,000 pound, 6-axle trucks). In 2015, the Kansas Department of Transportation conducted an analysis on the impact of allowing 92,000 pound trucks on Kansas roadways. According to the analysis, allowing weights above 85,500 pounds - without the addition of an additional axle - would require additional road maintenance.⁷ However, the study also reveals that these impacts are negated with the addition of a sixth axle, even up to 92,000 pounds.⁸

While local governments may incur some costs associated with testing and posting existing bridges, it is our understanding that federal funding exists to help to offset some of these costs. Additionally, reducing the wear and tear on road and bridge surfaces can save local units of government money.⁹ One study from the Minnesota DOT even suggests that Minnesota could save \$4.43 million annually by allowing 90,000 pound, 6-axle configurations.¹⁰

In 2010, when the law was changed in Iowa to allow trucks hauling grain to carry up to 90,000 pounds on six axles, and up to 96,000 pounds on seven axles, both the Iowa State Association of Counties (ISAC) and the Iowa County Engineers Association (ICEA) supported the legislation. In a recent conversation with a representative of the Iowa State Association of Counties, it was relayed that the primary reason the ISAC and the ICEA supported the legislation was that "the increase was done in a responsible way," and that "there is less wear and tear on the secondary roads if the load weight can be spread out among more axles, so a moderate increase in the total weight spread over an additional axle is actually better for the road system."¹¹

Additionally, allowing six-axle, 90,000 pound trucks could potentially reduce the number of trucks on Kansas roads thus decreasing the number of truck miles driven and reducing the amount of road wear currently caused by trucks.¹² Both the reduction in axle weight and the potential for a reduction in truck volume would decrease the amount of wear on Kansas roads by allowing six-axle, 90,000 pound trucks.

Frequently, in Kansas, commercial trucking and rail are not interchangeable modes of transportation for agriculture. Consider grain elevators hauling grain to a nearby feed yard, flour mill, feed mill, ethanol plant, or even to the nearest train loading facility. These grain elevators, out of necessity, will utilize truck transport rather than rail service, especially as the first phase of accessing the market.

⁶ *Heavier Semis*, at

⁷ *Freight Weight Analysis for Kansas Highways, Executive Summary*, Kansas Dept. of Transportation, Feb. 5, 2015

⁸ *Id.*

⁹ *Transportation Research Synthesis, Benefits and Costs of Increasing Truck Load Limits: A Literature Review*. Local Research Board, Minn. Dept. of Transportation, Research Services & Library. Prepared by CTC & Associates. January 2015.

¹⁰ *Transportation Research Synthesis*, at Table 5, page 6.

¹¹ Email correspondence on Thursday, January 5, 2017, between Randy Stookey, KGFA, and Lucas Beenken, Public Policy Specialist, Iowa State Association of Counties.

¹² *USDOT Comprehensive Truck Size and Weight Limits Study, Presentation of Technical Results*, U.S. Department of Transportation Federal Highway Administration, June 18, 2015.

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Amending Kansas law to allow for six-axle weight configurations could also result in less traffic congestion as more of our state's agricultural commodities are transported using fewer trucks. A reduction in truck density would improve motorist safety, which research shows has a direct correlation with truck traffic congestion over a given stretch of road.¹³ Further, a six-axle, 90,000 pound truck is a safer vehicle than a standard five-axle 80,000 pound truck, as it has greater surplus braking capacity and requires a shorter stopping distance.¹⁴

Kansas farmers and grain elevators would experience efficiencies and cost savings through adoption of a six-axle, 90,000 pound truck configuration. When utilizing an 80,000 pound, 5-axle truck, a Kansas farmer that produced a total of 135,000 bushels of grain would require approximately 144 trips on Kansas roads to transport the grain to storage or market (92 for corn, plus 26 for soybeans, plus 26 for wheat). If the farmer's delivery location is 25 miles from the farm (50 miles roundtrip), the farmer would cover 7,200 miles to transport the grain. However, if utilizing a six-axle, 90,000 pound truck, this same farmer would save 18 trips to storage, driving 900 fewer miles on Kansas roads.¹⁵

HB 2095 mostly harmonizes Kansas truck weight standards on six-axle commercial vehicles with other states in our region, and provides a reasonable, necessary and limited remedy to the current economic disadvantage of grain shippers in our state. In addition, the proposal introduces a safer truck configuration that could mitigate wear and tear on Kansas roads. As such, we respectfully request that the committee pass this bill out favorably. Thank you for allowing us the opportunity to testify in support on HB 2095.

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¹³ *Heavier Semis*, at XV.

¹⁴ *Transportation Research Synthesis, Benefits and Costs of Increasing Truck Load Limits: A Literature Review*. Local Research Board, Minn. Dept. of Transportation, Research Services & Library. Prepared by CTC & Associates. January 2015, at 6.

¹⁵ Numbers courtesy of *Soy Transportation Coalition*.