

Old Dominion President Urges Change In Federal Size-and-Weight Regulations

By Neil Abt
News Editor

WASHINGTON — The president of one of the nation's largest less-than-truckload carriers said changing existing federal truck size-and-weight regulations not only makes environmental and financial sense, but also offers safety and infrastructure benefits.

In particular for the LTL sector, David Congdon, head of Old Dominion Freight Line, called for the approval of triple-trailer combinations on interstate highways throughout the United States.

"We are using every proven means to be as green as we possibly can be," Congdon said, citing Old Dominion's adoption of fuel-efficient equipment and onboard

technologies. "Increasing vehicle productivity is the only meaningful lever left to pull."

Congdon participated on a "green trucking" panel discussion here on Jan. 23 during the Transportation Research Board's annual meeting.

"More productive trucks are a big part of the answer to the nation's current and future freight transportation problems," Congdon said. "The benefits would be felt immediately."

His sentiment was shared by several other participants, including John Woodrooffe, head of the Vehicle Safety Analytics Group at the University of Michigan Transportation Research Institute.

"Truck productivity is being limited by policy, and not technology," he said. "To the extent possible, we should allow science

Like Congdon, Woodrooffe said the results from a number of longer-combination-vehicle studies — based on both simulations and real-world data from the United States and Canada — show clear gains in overall fuel efficiency through the use of fewer trucks. It also shows safety benefits though "advanced" policies governing LCV operations and less damage to highways because additional axles mean each one is taking less of a load.

Additional research from Maine found allowing LCVs on interstates is a more efficient and productive option than other, shorter routes.

Mark Berndt of Wilbur Smith Associates and Mike Tunnell of the American Transportation Research Institute said when comparing similar truck runs on Interstate 95 and Route 9, I-95 takes up to 33 fewer minutes and saves up to 2 gallons of diesel, even though an extra five miles are driven. There are also lower emissions because the engine was running less time and stopping at fewer traffic lights.

Old Dominion's Congdon called federal regulators' push to get trucks off the road a "great idea." However, he said demands from shippers can make increased use of intermodal shipping difficult.

For example, shippers seeking next-day LTL service, or two-day

service over 1,400 miles, make using intermodal service tricky under current regulations, Congdon said.

"More productive trucks will get trucks off the highway," he said.

He also gave what he believed was a simple explanation as to why studies show an increase in safety in areas where triple trailers are used.

Besides obtaining a special endorsement, Congdon said that these drivers at Old Dominion also undergo specialized training to better understand how to operate the triples safely when changing lanes or entering or exiting highways.

"The result could be a better driver behind the wheel," said Congdon, who holds a commercial driver license.

Also during the discussion, Cheryl Bynum, manager of the Environmental Protection Agency's SmartWay program, said SmartWay now has nearly 3,000 members and 3.6 billion gallons of fuel has been saved as a result of participation.

She said SmartWay is studying ways to conduct aerodynamic drag tests, as well as enhanced idle-reduction test methods, to better account for factors including wind, durability and noise.

Looking further into the future, Bynum said SmartWay would try to improve tests on retreaded tires and trailer skirts.