



816 SW Tyler, Topeka, Kansas 66612

February 2, 2017

TO: House Committee on Transportation  
From: Ron Seeber, Senior Vice President of Government Affairs, Renew Kansas

**RE: Written 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 submitted on behalf of Renew Kansas. Renew Kansas is a voluntary trade association with membership encompassing the entire spectrum of the fuel ethanol processing, storage, and transportation industry in the state of Kansas. Ethanol plants receive, store and handle grain commercially in bulk as the grain is the raw input for the ethanol production process.

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. Current 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.<sup>1</sup> 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 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 ethanol plants find it increasingly difficult to compete for

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<sup>1</sup> *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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the limited amount of commercial truck drivers. For a commercial carrier to haul a load of grain to a Kansas ethanol plant today, rather than Nebraska, the driver would lose revenue on the difference in the authorized load capacity between our two states. This creates an economic disadvantage for farmers and ethanol plants when purchasing and receiving grain. Passage of HB 2095 would allow our state to economically compete with our neighboring states.

Our member ethanol plants purchase grain from local farmers for use in their plants. In order to receive this grain, it is most often transported by truck. 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.<sup>2</sup>

While the national interstate system handles 55% of the total truck traffic, the transportation of agriculture commodities is more dependent on state roads.<sup>3</sup> HB 2095 would authorize more efficient transportation of agricultural commodities by allowing for a reasonable increase in the maximum gross vehicle weight standard. 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.<sup>4</sup> 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, adding an additional, sixth axle reduces a truck's impact even when allowing for increased truck weights.<sup>5</sup>

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.<sup>6</sup> However, the study also reveals that these impacts are mitigated with the addition of a sixth axle, even up to 92,000 pounds.<sup>7</sup>

Reducing the wear and tear on road and bridge surfaces can save local units of government money on road repair.<sup>8</sup> One study suggests that the state of Minnesota would save \$4.43 million annually by allowing 90,000 pound, 6-axle configurations.<sup>9</sup>

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

<sup>3</sup> *Heavier Semis: A Good Idea? An Update of the 2009 Study*, United States Soybean Export Council Report, Prepared by: Informa Economics, Jan. 2015.

<sup>4</sup> *Heavier Semis*, at XVII.

<sup>5</sup> *Heavier Semis.*, at

<sup>6</sup> *Freight Weight Analysis for Kansas Highways, Executive Summary*, Kansas Dept. of Transportation, Feb. 5, 2015

<sup>7</sup> *Id.*

<sup>8</sup> *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.

<sup>9</sup> *Transportation Research Synthesis*, at Table 5, page 6.

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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.”<sup>10</sup>

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.<sup>11</sup> 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.

Amending the bill to allow for six-axle weight configurations would also result in less traffic congestion as more agricultural commodities are transported using fewer numbers of trucks. This 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.<sup>12</sup> Further, a six-axle, 90,000 pound truck has greater surplus braking capacity and a shorter stopping distance than a standard five-axle 80,000 pound truck.<sup>13</sup>

Kansas ethanol plants would experience efficiencies and cost savings through adoption of a six-axle, 90,000 pound truck configuration. HB 2095 more closely 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 Kansas ethanol plants. 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.

*Ron Seeber*  
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<sup>10</sup> Email correspondence on Thursday, January 5, 2017, between Randy Stookey, KGFA, and Lucas Beenken, Public Policy Specialist, Iowa State Association of Counties.

<sup>11</sup> *USDOT Comprehensive Truck Size and Weight Limits Study, Presentation of Technical Results*, U.S. Department of Transportation Federal Highway Administration, June 18, 2015.

<sup>12</sup> *Heavier Semis*, at XV.

<sup>13</sup> *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.