

Why FRA Supports The Safe Routes Act (H.R. 2493, S.1818)

February 2024

Sponsors: Senator Ron Johnson (R-WI) & Congressman Mike Gallagher (R-WI-8)



Why Support the Safe Routes Act:

- Provisions of the Safe Routes Act allow trucks transporting logs, pulpwood, chips or biomass access to the safer U.S. Interstate Highway System at legal state GVW.
- Limits transportation distance to 150 air miles from point of harvest to storage or processing facility on interstates which are three to four times safer than rural secondary roads.
- Provides for state legal weight tolerance in effect on the enactment date of the legislation. States cannot arbitrarily raise their weight limits after the bill is passed into law.
- Reduces pedestrian and vehicle encounters with log trucks.
- Saves fuel and reduces emissions and damage on state rural roads.
- Improves the U.S. forest industry's global competitiveness.

In the US, weight limits on interstate highways are established by the federal government while weight limits on other roadways are established by state or local governments. State weight limits for log trucks exceed federal interstate highway weight limits in all major timber-producing states. This disparity discourages log trucks from traveling loaded on interstate highways. Log trucks traveling on non-interstate roads have a greater risk of accidents as they encounter two-way traffic, intersections, school zones, pedestrians, and driveways. Allowing trucks transporting raw forest products (logs, pulpwood, chips, or biomass) access to the U.S. Interstate Highway System at legal state gross vehicle weight (GVW) is safer.

- Published studies in the peer-reviewed International Journal of Forest Engineering showed the safety and efficiency benefits of allowing log trucks access to the interstate system at state-legal gross vehicle weights. These studies showed that access to an interstate route for a short distance that avoided small towns, school districts, and intersections would lower accident rates, reduce CO2 emissions, cause less damage to rural roads, and reduce transportation costs for small logging businesses (Conrad, 2020 and Blinn, 2023). On a per-load basis, log trucks have a lower fatality rate than other heavy trucks in 83% of the lower 48 states (Blinn, 2023).
- Another separate study of log trucks in Georgia showed that 50 percent of accidents occurred in urban areas. This same study also showed that 41 percent of the log truck accidents occurred within five miles of an interstate (Conrad, 2018).
- Findings of a nationwide study of fatal log truck crashes in the U.S. stated that the most common pre-crash event occurred when another vehicle traveled into a truck's lane from the opposite direction (Cole, 2019).
- All these studies suggest that moving log trucks to interstates would be safer.
- This suggestion is supported by a pilot project in Maine where trucks are permitted to haul heavier weights. The Maine Department of Transportation statistics showed that truck accidents decreased 23 percent, the number of fatalities decreased by 33 percent, and property damage was reduced by 11 percent after the pilot went into effect.
- The Maine pilot is consistent with national findings that rural interstate highways are three to four times safer than secondary roads (Maine DOT, 2010).
- Reduces the carbon footprint of transporting raw forest products as less fuel is used due to fewer stops and shifting, and a shorter, more direct route provided by the interstate.

Request:

- ❖ Cosponsor Safe Routes Act (H.R. 2493, S.1818)
- ❖ Vote in favor of House Bills
 - H.R.3372 authorizes a pilot program allowing trucks to haul 91,000 pounds on 6 axles on interstates
 - H.R. 3013, S.1649 streamlines the process to obtain a commercial drivers license (CDL)
 - H.R. 3318 establishes a 10% axle weight variance for dry bulk materials



About FRA:

The Forest Resources Association (FRA) represents the interests of nearly 360 organizations and businesses in the forest products industry. Our members include forest landowners, suppliers, consuming mills, associated businesses, and state forestry associations.

The Mission of FRA is to promote the interests of its members in the economic, efficient, and sustainable use of forest resources to meet the needs of the wood fiber supply chain through private enterprise. FRA members are represented in 49 states and 384 congressional districts.

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