



**House  
Legislative  
Analysis  
Section**

Washington Square Building Suite 1025  
Lansing, Michigan 48909  
Phone 517-373-6466

**TIMBERHAULERS' TRUCK LENGTH**

**Senate Bill 462 with House committee amendments**  
**First Analysis (12-11-87)**

**Sponsor: Sen. Mitch Irwin**  
**Senate Committee: State Affairs, Tourism and**  
**Transportation**  
**House Committee: Transportation**

12-11-87

12-11-87

12-11-87

**THE APPARENT PROBLEM:**

Michigan Vehicle Code restrictions on the maximum allowable length of truck-trailer combinations are creating problems for northern Michigan's logging industry. Under the code, the maximum length of a truck tractor-trailer or -semitrailer combination is 59 feet, although vehicles in operation before 1983 may extend to 65 feet. Amendments to the code in 1986 created an exception to the 59-foot limit for certain three-part combination rigs: there is no limit on the overall combination length of a truck tractor, semitrailer, and trailer or truck tractor and two semitrailers, as long as the cargo-carrying portion of each semitrailer or trailer does not exceed 28.5 feet, and the rig operates only on specially designated highways. The exception does not apply to two-part combinations (truck and trailer or semitrailer combinations), and many feel that this omission was a legislative oversight. As a result, the Motor Carrier Division of the Department of State Police has a moratorium on ticketing two-part combinations for violating the 59-foot limit, to give their owners an opportunity to seek a change in the law.

**THE CONTENT OF THE BILL:**

The bill would amend the Michigan Vehicle Code to add the combination of a truck and semitrailer or trailer to those combinations whose overall length would be unlimited if the cargo-carrying loading surface portion of each truck, trailer or semitrailer (including load) did not exceed 28.5 feet, and if the combination was operated on highways specially designated by the Department of Transportation and local authorities.

The code currently provides that the length of trailers and semitrailers should be based on the cargo-carrying portion of the vehicle only (including load). Under the bill, the length of a truck would also be based on the cargo-carrying portion of the vehicle only (including the load).

MCL 257.719

**HOUSE COMMITTEE ACTION:**

The House Transportation Committee amended the bill to make it more specific by providing that the cargo-carrying loading surface portion of each truck, trailer or semitrailer could not exceed 28.5 feet.

**FISCAL IMPLICATIONS:**

According to the Department of Transportation, the bill would have no fiscal implications to the state. (12-10-87)

**ARGUMENTS:**

**For:**

The bill would resolve problems faced by Michigan's timber industry, which relies heavily on truck-semitrailer or truck-trailer rigs that exceed 59 feet. Although

combinations that employ a trailer or semitrailer in use before 1983 may be as long as 65 feet, newer combinations are subject to the 59-foot limit. While the state police are refraining from ticketing these combination vehicles to allow their owners to seek a change in the law, approval of the bill is important to the industry and the state economy. The timber industry operates at least 100 of the two-part rigs that are over 59 feet, each of which is worth approximately \$110,000-\$120,000. The owners of these vehicles should not have to replace them at a great economic loss or risk being ticketed for their use.

**Against:**

While it might be appropriate to increase the length limit for two-part combinations, it would be unwise to include these rigs among the combinations whose total length is subject to no limit at all as long as their load-carrying sections do not exceed 28.5 feet. While it can be argued that legislative oversight was responsible for including the two-part combinations in the 50-foot limit, it does not necessarily follow that these combinations should be treated the same as three-part rigs. According to the state police, federal law prohibits states from applying a length limit to three-part combinations whose load-carrying portions are not over 28.5 feet. That regulation does not cover truck-trailer or -semitrailer combinations, however, which were subject to a 65-foot limit in the past, and which still may extend to 65 feet if a pre-1983 trailer or semitrailer is used. Sixty-five feet is the current limit on car-haulers, and should be reapplied to two-part rigs.

**Response:** The longer, lower rigs encouraged by federal law are safer in two respects: they have a lower center of gravity and a longer tongue, which gives the driver more reaction time and greater control over the vehicle. (The term "tongue" is used to describe the connector between tractors and trailers, and trucks and trailers.) The extra eight or ten feet over the 59-foot length does not make much difference to the motoring public when passing a rig, but can mean a lot to the truck driver in terms of increased maneuverability. Further, if the two-part combinations were subject to a 65-foot limit, the law should "grandfather" the 10-20 two-part rigs that exceed 65 feet and represent over \$1 million of equipment.

**Rebuttal:** The law should not grandfather the 10-20 two-part rigs that exceed 65 feet. People who have purchased or driven two-part truck combinations which are longer than 65 feet have always operated illegally! If the legislature allows these truck combinations to be grandfathered it will send a message to the trucking industry encouraging people to buy illegal rigs and then work to get the law changed to make them legal. In addition, if timberhaulers are exempted from the 65-foot limit it is quite conceivable that the state will face several lawsuits from others in the trucking industry citing unfair treatment.

S.B. 462 (12-10-87)

***POSITIONS:***

The Michigan Association of Timbermen supports the bill.  
(12-10-87)

The Michigan Trucking Association supports the bill.  
(12-10-87)

The Automobile Association of America supports the bill.  
(12-10-87)

The Mead Paper Co. supports the bill. (12-10-87)

The Department of State Police opposes the bill. (12-10-87)