



**House
Legislative
Analysis
Section**

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**REVISE LOG HAULING TRUCKS'
TIE-DOWN RULES; EXTEND
ALLOWABLE LENGTH**

**House Bill 6486 as introduced
First Analysis (12-4-02)**

**Sponsor: Rep. Judson Gilbert II
Committee: Transportation**

THE APPARENT PROBLEM:

Pulpwood (logs whose diameter is less than 10 inches) and saw logs (logs larger than 10 inches in diameter) are transported from the forest to the mill by trucks and trailers. The logs are cut in 8 foot 4 inch lengths, or 100 inches, as specified by the mills.

Generally when loads of unprocessed logs are transported to the mill, they are cross-hauled, or stacked in a way that the load runs horizontally, the ends of the logs facing the edges of the roadway. The cross-hauled stacks of logs, called decks, are bound by chain to the bed of the truck. Arranging the decks and securing the chains poses hazards for the timbermen who load the trucks.

During the winter months when the logs and the chains that bind them to the truck-bed are ice-covered, a log can slip out of the deck as the ice melts while the product is being transported to the mill. Once out of the deck, a log can bounce off the truck, and create a serious safety hazard on the highway. In fact, in 1998, and under similar circumstances, a mother and her two-year old son were killed when a log hauling truck lost its load on a roadway in the west end of the Upper Peninsula.

In order to haul logs more safely, some timber industry representatives are pioneering a new log truck design called a crib truck. They have suggested that logs should be hauled in crib trucks so they can be loaded lengthwise (rather than be cross-hauled), arranged in a manner so that the ends of the logs are perpendicular in relation to the cab of the vehicle, thereby giving the load far greater stability. In a crib truck, the sides of the log-hauling truck are staked—generally, a minimum of two stakes on each side of the vehicle per tier of logs—and the truck is fitted with headboards and bulkheads at the front and back of the trailer, forming a kind of cage.

According to committee testimony, there are currently two crib trucks operating in Michigan, the

result of a waiver from federal regulations issued about 2 ½ years ago by the U. S. Department of Transportation. The waiver was issued on the condition that a study be undertaken to determine the safety of the new design. That study, managed by Lt. Tom Ranta of the Upper Peninsular Motor Carrier Division of the Department of State Police, is now underway at Michigan Technological University where engineers are testing the dynamics and structural integrity of the crib trucks, as well as their ease of movement given the turning radiuses at intersections, and the width of the streets upon which they travel. According to a Michigan Department of Transportation spokesperson, a preliminary report of study results is expected later this month.

Under current federal and state laws, the maximum length for a truck and semi-trailer or trailer that is used to transport saw logs, pulpwood, and tree length poles is 70 feet. Generally, the overall length of the crib trucks is longer, at 75 feet, after the safety devices, or cages, are added at both ends.

Legislation has been proposed to allow longer log trucks and also to reduce the load tie-down requirements when the load is arranged lengthwise on a crib truck.

THE CONTENT OF THE BILL:

House Bill 6486 would amend the Michigan Vehicle Code to extend the allowable length of log hauling trucks, and revise the tie-down requirements under certain circumstances.

Currently the law specifies that the normal maximum length of a single vehicle is 40 feet, and any single bus or motor home, 45 feet. Under the bill these provisions would be retained, and in addition the bill would specify that the normal maximum length of a crib vehicle on which logs or tubular products were loaded lengthwise would be 42.5 feet. Further, the

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law currently specifies that certain vehicles and combinations of vehicles cannot be operated on a designated highway in excess of certain lengths. In particular the law specifies that truck and semi-trailer or trailer combinations cannot exceed 65 feet, except that a person can operate a truck and semi-trailer or trailer that does not exceed an overall length of 70 feet if it is designed and used to transport saw logs, pulpwood, and tree length poles. House Bill 6486 would retain these provisions, but specify that a crib vehicle and semi-trailer or trailer designed and used to transport saw logs or tubular products could not exceed an overall length of 75 feet.

House Bill 6486 also would add a section to the code to prohibit a person from operating a crib vehicle carrying logs in which the logs were loaded lengthwise of the vehicle, unless the logs were loaded and secured as follows:

- the vehicle had sides, sideboards, or stakes; a front headboard, bulkhead, or frontgate; and a rear headboard, bulkhead, or endgate, each of which was strong enough and high enough to assure that the load would not shift or fall from the vehicle;

- the sides, sideboards, headboard, bulkhead, or front- or rear-end gate that were in direct contact with the ends of the logs did not have an aperture large enough to permit logs to pass through it;

- there were a minimum of two stakes on each side of the vehicle per tier of logs;

- vehicles with steel stakes and pockets had cross chains for each tier if the load extended more than five feet above the loading surface (however, vehicles with permanent steel gusseted bunks would not be required to have cross chains);

- three additional lights were on the upper rear of the vehicle;

- vehicles over 102 inches wide had lights placed at each stake along the longitudinal length of the vehicle; and,

- not more than one-half the diameter of the top logs extended higher than the stake tops when loaded.

House Bill 6486 specifies further that tie-downs would not be required if the following loading procedures were used:

- the distance between a tier of logs and a headboard, bulkhead, front- or rear-end gate, or another tier of

logs did not allow a log to lose contact with a side stake if a log were to shift forward or backward; and,

- each tier of logs was loaded to the same height from the stake tops to prevent movement.

Finally, House Bill 6486 specifies that one tie-down assembly that met the requirements of this act and federal regulations would be required for each tier of logs under the following conditions:

- there was a distance large enough between a tier of logs and a headboard, bulkhead, front- or rear-end gate, or another tier of logs to allow a log to lose contact with a side stake if a log were to shift forward or backward; or,

- each tier of logs was not loaded to the same height from the stake tops to prevent movement.

MCL 257.719 and 257.720

FISCAL IMPLICATIONS:

No fiscal information is available at this time. (12-4-02)

ARGUMENTS:

For:

The timbermen who are pioneering crib trucks to transport logs in Michigan's northern logging industry have undertaken their mission in the interest of safety—both increasing the safety of the roadways for those who travel upon them together with the log-hauling vehicles, and also increasing the safety of their fellow workers who must chain and secure the decks of logs, often working in hazardous conditions where their loads are unstable. Their efforts to revolutionize log transport within their industry should be supported, despite the fact that the changes in truck design they propose would violate federal regulations concerning the overall length and weight of log-hauling vehicles.

For:

If the law is rewritten to allow timbermen to increase the length of wood hauling trucks to 75 feet, then operators of the trucks could equip their trailers or the beds of the vehicles with stronger headboards, bulkheads, and stakes to ensure the product is transported safely. Further, the larger vehicles could be better lit, so passing motorists and those charged with regulating the transport can better see the size of the load.

Response:

In December 1999, the legislature passed Senate Bill 581, later enacted as Public Act 7 of 2000, which allowed log haulers to increase the *width* of their vehicles. Now, legislation is proposed to increase the *length* of the log trucks. As all motorists are well aware, larger vehicles and heavier loads can make public thoroughfares less safe for automobile traffic on narrow two-lane roadways.

Against:

Spokespeople for the Michigan Department of Transportation caution that the federal government could sanction the state, withholding 10 percent of its federal transportation funds—or \$80 million—if Michigan law allows trucks to travel upon its roadways that exceed the federal maximum length and weight restrictions. They point out that already Michigan allows the heaviest trucks on the continent—exceeding the weight of log trucks in every state and throughout Canada—with a limit set at 164,000 pounds of gross vehicle weight. The department advises that the federal government is unlikely to look away, if Michigan enacts this bill into law. Instead, spokespeople urge that policymakers await the results of a crib truck safety study currently underway, and then allow the U.S. Department of Transportation to consider the safety record of crib trucks, as it considers whether they should be allowed, or even encouraged, to work on the state's highways.

In particular, spokespeople from the department note that there are currently two crib trucks in operation in Michigan, both equipped with safety devices designed by their drivers. Because the length of the crib trucks exceeds federal regulations by five feet, the crib trucks are the subject of the federal Log Truck Safety Study that is being managed by Lt. Tom Ranta of the Upper Peninsula Motor Carrier Division in Marquette, Michigan. The study was required when the federal government waived the length and weight regulations for the new trucks two and one-half years ago, in an effort to study their design features and records of safety. The study of the crib trucks' structural integrity, and also their ease of movement given both the turning radiuses at the intersections they must negotiate, and also the width of the roadways they travel, is being undertaken by engineers at the Michigan Technological University. Preliminary study results are expected during December 2002, later this month.

POSITIONS:

Casperson Trucking supports the bill. (12-4-02)

Anthony Paul Bellman, Inc. supports the bill. (12-4-02)

The County Road Association supports the bill. (12-4-02)

The Department of Transportation opposes the bill. (12-4-02)

The Department of State Police opposes the bill. (12-4-02)

Analyst: J. Hunault

■ This analysis was prepared by nonpartisan House staff for use by House members in their deliberations, and does not constitute an official statement of legislative intent.