

Truck Size and Weight

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The U.S. Department of Transportation's Comprehensive Truck Size and Weight Study

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Minnesota Truck Size and Weight Project

The second issue of *Public Roads* magazine published in 1918 focused on the problems State highway departments were encountering as the result of truck traffic. The lead article, “*The Highways of the Country and the Burden They Must Carry*,” summarized the issues of that era, many of which are still familiar today:

Apparently the point has been reached where the demands of traffic have exceeded the strength of the average road to meet them. Highways designed to withstand the pounding of ordinary loads, that have stood up under imposts they were intended to sustain, no longer appear to be adequate to meet the present-day conditions. Widespread failure is demonstrative of the fact the roads can not carry unlimited loadings. Their capacity is limited.

There are two aspects of truck weight that are interdependent and that interact with the highway infrastructure -- axle weight (loading) and GVW. As shown in Table VI-1, the effect of axle weight is more significant to pavements and short-span bridges, whereas GVW is of more significance to long-span bridges.

Table VI-1
Highway Infrastructure Elements Affected by TS&W Limits

Highway Infrastructure Element		Axle Weight	GVW	Axle Spacing	Truck Length	Truck Width	Truck Height
Pavement	Flexible	E		E			
	Rigid	E		e			
Bridge Features	Short-Span	E		E	E		
	Long-Span		E	e	E		
	Clearance					e	E
Roadway Geometric Features	Interchange Ramps		e		E	e	
	Intersections				E	e	
	Climbing Lanes		E				
	Horizontal Curvature		e		e		
	Vertical Curve Length		E				
	Intersection Clearance Time		E		E		
	Passing Sight Distance				e		

Key: E = Significant Effect
e = Some Effect

Industry Challenges and Considerations

TS&W limits affect freight transportation costs because they control the amount of payload that can be carried in a truck. Increases in truck weight limits increase the allowable weight per trip, so fewer trips are required to carry the same amount of goods. Freight transportation cost savings due to increases in TS&W limits accrue to shippers, carriers, and consumers.

Truck-Pavement Interaction

The gross vehicle weight (GVW) of a vehicle is not the prime determinant of a vehicle's impact on pavements. Rather, pavements are stressed by loads on individual axles and axle groups directly in contact with the pavement. Of course, the GVW, along with the number and types of axles and the spacing between axles, determines the axle loads.

Axle groups, such as tandems or tridemms, distribute the load along the pavement, allowing greater weights to be carried and resulting in the same or less pavement distress than that occasioned by a single axle at a lower weight. While spreading the axles in an axle group is beneficial to short-span bridges, it is detrimental to pavement. It is not GVW but the distribution of the GVW over axles that impacts pavements.

Over time, the accumulated strains (the pavement deformation from all the axle loads) deteriorate pavement condition, If the pavement is not routinely maintained, the axle loads, in combination with environmental effects, will accelerate the cracking and deformation. Proper pavement design relative to loading is a significant factor in pavement life, and varies by highway system and the number of trucks in the traffic stream.

Pavement Considerations

Engineers design roads to accommodate projected vehicle loads, in particular, heavy vehicle axle loads. The life of a pavement is related to the magnitude and frequency of these heavy axle loads. Pavement engineers use the concept of an equivalent single-axle load (ESAL) to measure the effects of heavy vehicles on pavements. Any truck axle configuration and weight can be converted to this common unit of measure. Adding axles to a truck can greatly reduce the impact on pavement.

The effect of ESALs on pavements is not constant throughout the calendar year. During the winter when the ground is frozen, a given traffic loading does much less damage to pavements than at other times of the year. During the spring, pavement layers are generally in a saturated, weakened state due to partial thaw conditions and trapped water. A given traffic loading during spring thaw results in five to eight times more damage to pavements than that same loading at other times of the year.

A conventional five-axle tractor-semitrailer operating at 80,000 pounds gross vehicle weight (GVW) is equivalent to about 2.4 ESALs. If the weight of this vehicle were increased to 90,000 pounds (a 12.5 percent increase), its ESAL value goes up to 4.1 (a 70.8 percent increase), because pavement damage increases at a geometric rate with weight increases.

However, a six-axle tractor-semitrailer at 90,000 pounds has an ESAL value of only 2.0, because its weight is distributed over six axles instead of five. An added pavement benefit of the 90,000-pound six-axle truck is that fewer trips are required to carry the same amount of payload, resulting in almost 30 percent fewer ESAL miles per payload ton-mile.

Tables V-1 through V-3 compare the relative pavement consumption of various axle groups and truck configurations evaluated in the study at the maximum allowable weights that would be allowed in the various scenarios. These comparisons are based on the effects of the axle groups and their loads relative to an 18,000-pound single axle load.

These relative effects are expressed in load equivalency factors (LEFs) that may be defined as the number of repetitions of a reference load and axle combination (such as the 18,000-pound single axle) that is equivalent in pavement life consumption to one application of the load and axle configuration in question.

Table V-1. Theoretical Load Equivalency Factors for Various Axle Groups and Loads for Major Types of Rigid and Flexible Pavement Distress

Axle Group	Load (pounds)	Load Equivalency Factors *		
		Rigid Pavement Fatigue (10-inch thickness)	Flexible Pavement (5-inch wearing surface)	
			Fatigue	Rutting
Steering Axle Single tires	12,000	0.6	1.4	1.3
	20,000	3.1	4.0	2.2
Single Axle Dual tires	17,000 (STAA double)	0.9	0.9	0.9
	20,000	1.6	1.5	1.1
Tandem Axle	34,000	1.1	1.6	1.9
Spread Tandem-Axle (10-foot Spread)	40,000	1.4	3.0	2.2
Tridem-Axle (9-foot spread)	44,000	0.6	1.4	2.4
	51,000	1.0	2.5	2.8

* Based on 18,000 pound single axle with dual tires

Source: Gillespie, et. al. "Effects of Heavy-Vehicle Characteristics on Pavement Response and Performance,"

Table V-2. Theoretical Load Equivalency Factors for Scenario Vehicles

Configuration	Gross Vehicle Weight (pounds)	Number of Axles in Each Group (S=Steering Axle)	Load Equivalency Factors ***		
			Rigid Pavement Fatigue (10-inch thickness)	Flexible Pavement (5-inch wearing surface)	
				Fatigue	Rutting
Three-Axle Single Unit Truck	54,000	S,2	4.2	5.6	4.1
Four-Axle Single Unit Truck	64,000	S,3	3.6	5.4	4.6
	71,000	S,3	4.1	6.5	5.0
Five-Axle Semitrailer	80,000	S,2,2	2.8	4.6	5.1
Five-Axle Semitrailer (10-foot Spread)	80,000	S,2,2 (spread)	3.1	6.0	5.4
Six-Axle Semitrailer	90,000	S,2,3	2.2	4.4	5.6
	97,000	S,2,3	2.7	5.5	6.0
STAA Double (five-axle)	80,000	S,1,1,1,1,1	4.2	5.0	4.9
B-Train Double (eight-axle)	124,000	S,2,3,2	3.3	6.0	6.5
	131,000	S,2,3,2	3.8	7.1	6.9
Rocky Mt. Double (seven-axle)	120,000	S,2,2,1,1,1	6.0	7.6	7.3
Turnpike Double (nine-axle)	148,000	S,2,2,2,2,2	5.0	7.8	7.3
Triple (seven-axle)	114,000 (LTL operation)*	S,1,1,1,1,1,1,1	6.0	6.8	6.7
	132,000 (TL operation)**	S,1,1,1,1,1,1,1	10.2	10.4	7.9

*LTL= Less-than-truckload

**TL=Truckload

*** Based on 18,000-pound single axle with dual tires

Table V-3. Theoretical Load Equivalency Factors Per 100,000 Pounds of Payload

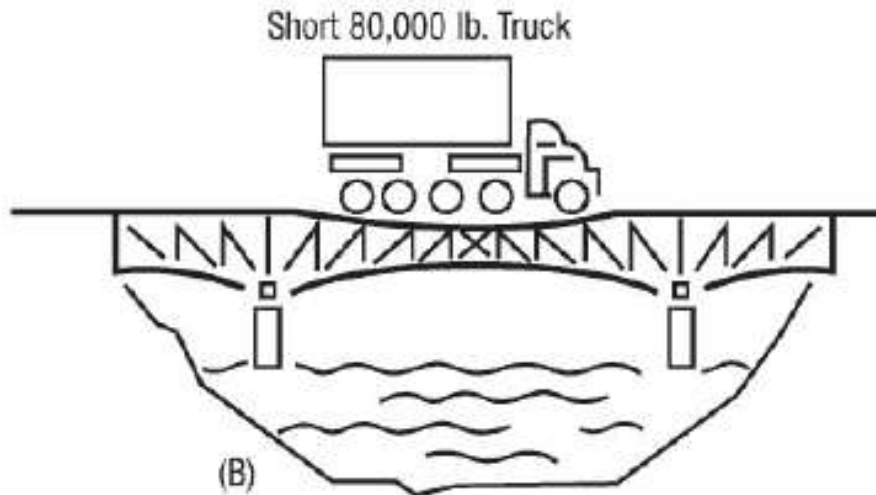
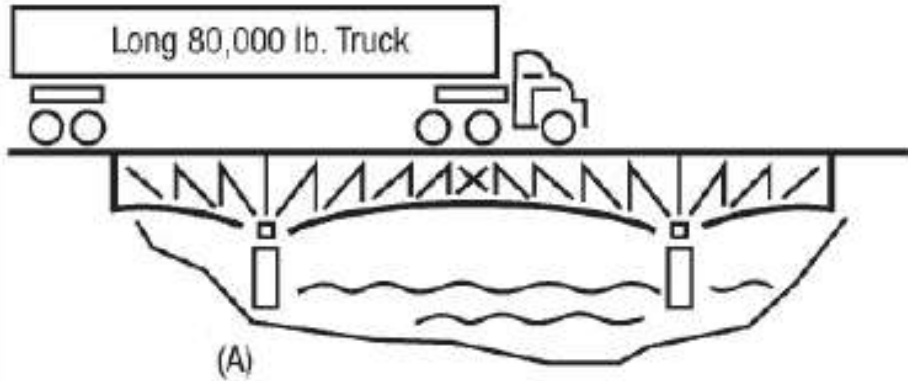
Configuration	Gross Vehicle Weight (pounds)	Empty Weight (pounds)	Payload Weight (pounds)	No. Of Vehicles per 100,000 pounds of payload	Load Equivalency Factors		
					Rigid Pavement Fatigue (10-inch thickness)	Flexible Pavement (5-inch wearing surface)	
						Fatigue	Rutting
Three-Axle Single Unit Truck	54,000	22,600	31,400	3.18	13.4	17.8	13.0
Four-Axle Single Unit Truck	64,000	26,400	37,600	2.66	9.6	14.4	12.2
	71,000	26,400	44,600	2.24	9.2	14.6	11.2
Five-Axle Semitrailer	80,000	30,500	49,500	2.02	5.7	9.3	10.3
Five-Axle Semitrailer (10-foot Spread)	80,000	30,500	49,500	2.02	6.3	12.2	10.9
Six-Axle Semitrailer	90,000	31,500	58,500	1.71	3.8	7.5	9.6
	97,000	31,500	65,500	1.53	4.1	8.4	9.2
STAA Double (five-axle)	80,000	29,300	50,700	1.97	8.3	9.9	9.7
B-Train Double (eight-axle)	124,000	38,700	85,300	1.17	3.9	7.0	7.6
	131,000	38,700	92,300	1.08	4.1	7.7	7.5
Rocky Mt. Double (seven-axle)	120,000	43,000	77,000	1.30	7.8	9.9	9.5
Tumpike Double (nine-axle)	148,000	46,700	101,300	0.99	5.0	7.7	7.2
Triple (seven-axle)	114,000 (LTL operation)*	44,500	69,500	1.44	8.6	9.8	9.6
	132,000 (TL operation)**	44,500	87,500	1.14	11.6	11.8	9.0

*LTL= Less-than-truckload

**TL= Truckload

Bridge Considerations

However, GVW *is* a factor for the life of long-span bridges -- that is, bridge spans longer than the wheelbase of the truck. Bridge bending stress is more sensitive to the spread of axles than to the number of axles. The FBF takes into account both the number of axles and axle spreads in determining allowable GVW.



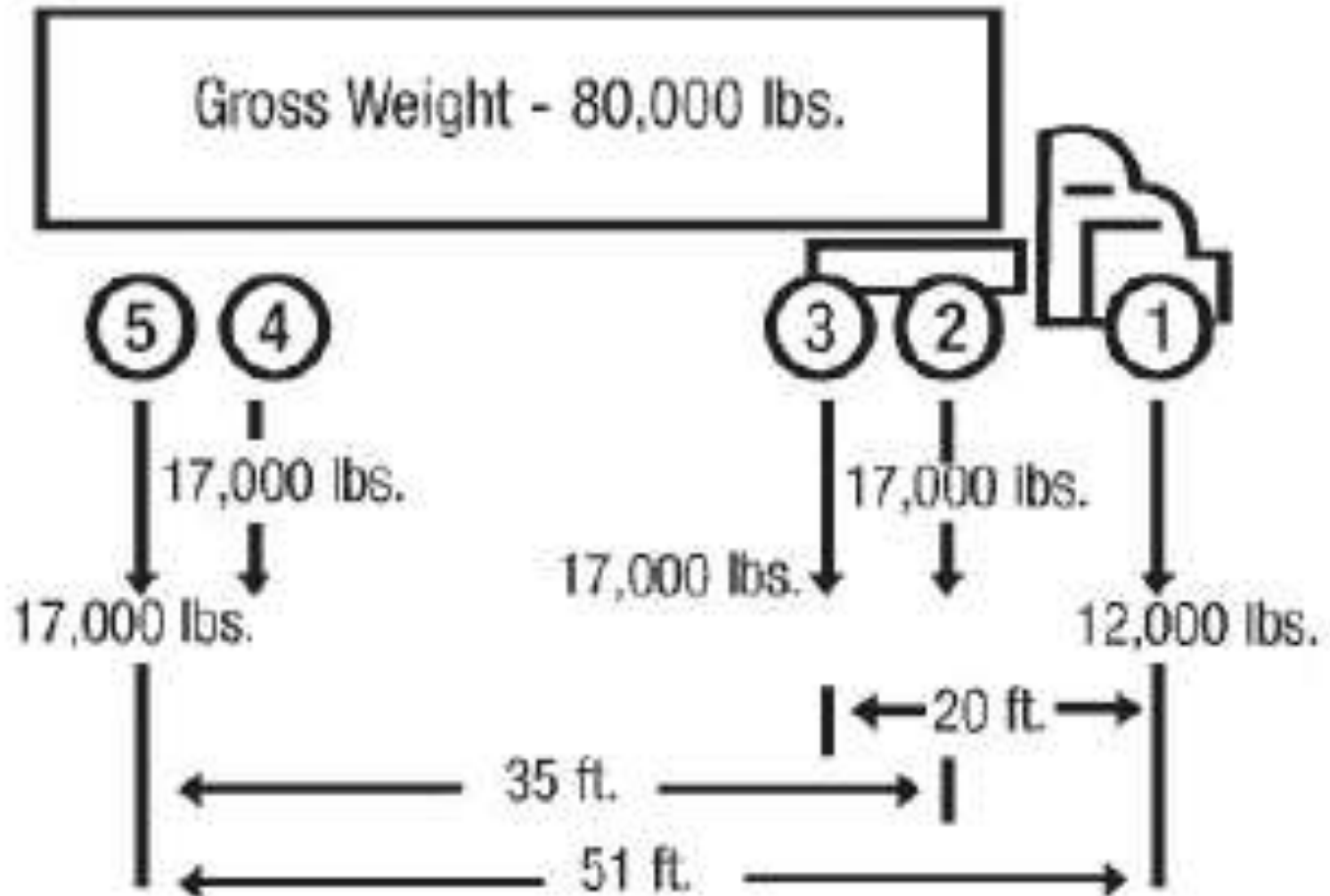
Is the Formula Necessary?

Bridges on the Interstate System highways are designed to support a wide variety of vehicles and their expected loads. As trucks grew heavier in the 1950s and 1960, something had to be done to protect bridges. The solution was to link allowable weights to the number and spacing of axles. Axle spacing is as important as axle weight in designing bridges. In Figure A, the stress on bridge members as a longer truck rolls across is much less than that caused by a short vehicle as shown in Figure B, even though both trucks have the same total weight and individual axle weights. The weight of the longer vehicle is spread out, while the shorter vehicle is concentrated on a smaller area.

Increases in truck weight limits can affect bridges in several ways. Should the legally allowable limits change, and the limits exceed the design criteria for a bridge, the bridge must be posted (signed for restricted use) to prevent those heavy vehicles from using it. Changing allowable limits may increase agency costs for inspecting and rating bridges and for posting signs. The number, spacing, and weight of individual axles, as well as the GVW carried on a truck, are important considerations for bridges.

The formula is: $W = 500 \left[\frac{LN}{N - 1} + 12N + 36 \right]$ where W is the maximum weight of the axle group, L is the distance from the first to last axle in feet, and N is the number of axles. The Federal Highway Administration's brochure Bridge Formula Weights is available at:

http://www.ops.fhwa.dot.gov/freight/publications/bridge_frm_wts/index.htm



Based on weight formula $W = 500 \left[\frac{LN}{N-1} + 12N + 36 \right]$

Distance in feet (L) between the centers of any group of 2 or more consecutive axles

L	No.	Maximum load in pounds carried on any group of 2 or more consecutive axles*								
		2 AXLES	3 AXLES	4 AXLES	5 AXLES	6 AXLES	7 AXLES	8 AXLES	9 AXLES	
4	34,000	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....
5	34,000	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....
6	34,000	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....
7	34,000	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....
8	34,000	34,000	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....
More than 8 less than 9	36,000	42,000	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....
9	39,000	42,500	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....
10	40,000	43,500	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....
11	44,000	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....
12	45,000	50,000	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....
13	45,500	50,500	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....
14	46,500	51,500	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....
15	47,000	52,000	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....
16	48,000*	52,500	58,000	.....	.....	.....	.....
17	48,500	53,500	58,500	.....	.....	.....	.....
18	49,500	54,000	59,000	.....	.....	.....	.....
19	50,000	54,500	60,000	.....	.....	.....	.....
20	51,000	55,000	60,500	66,000	.....	.....	.....
21	51,500	56,000	61,000	66,500	.....	.....	.....
22	52,500	56,500	61,500	67,000	.....	.....	.....
23	53,000	57,500	62,500	68,000	.....	.....	.....
24	54,000	58,000	63,000	68,500	74,000	.....	.....
25	54,500	58,500	63,500	69,000	74,500	.....	.....
26	55,500	59,500	64,000	69,500	75,000	.....	.....
27	56,000	60,000	65,000	70,000	75,500	.....	.....
28	57,000	60,500	65,500	71,000	76,000	82,000	.....
29	57,500	61,500	66,000	71,500	77,000	82,500	.....
30	58,500	62,000	66,500	72,000	77,500	83,000	.....
31	59,000	62,500	67,500	72,500	78,000	83,500	.....
32	60,000	63,500	68,000	73,000	78,500	84,500	90,000	
33	64,000	68,500	74,000	79,000	85,000	90,500	90,500	
34	64,500	69,000	74,500	80,000	85,500	91,000	.....
35	65,500	70,000	75,000	80,500	86,000	91,500	.....
36	66,000	70,500	75,500	81,000	86,500	92,000	.....
37	66,500	71,000	76,000	81,500	87,000	93,000	.....
38	67,500	71,500	77,000	82,000	87,500	93,500	.....
39	68,000	72,000	77,500	82,500	88,500	94,000	.....
40	68,500	73,000	78,000	83,500	89,000	94,500	.....
41	69,500	73,500	78,500	84,000	89,500	95,000	.....
42	70,000	74,000	79,000	84,500	90,000	95,500	.....
43	70,500	75,000	80,000	85,000	90,500	96,000	.....
44	71,500	75,500	80,500	85,500	91,000	96,500	.....
45	72,000	76,000	81,000	86,000	91,500	97,500	.....
46	72,500	76,500	81,500	87,000	92,500	98,000	.....
47	73,500	77,500	82,000	87,500	93,000	98,500	.....
48	74,000	78,000	83,000	88,000	93,500	99,000	.....
49	74,500	78,500	83,500	88,500	94,000	99,500	.....
50	75,500	79,000	84,000	89,000	94,500	100,000	.....
51	76,000	80,000	84,500	89,500	95,000	100,500	.....
52	76,500	80,500	85,000	90,500	95,500	101,000	.....
53	77,500	81,000	86,000	91,000	96,000	101,500	.....
54	78,000	81,500	86,500	91,500	97,000	102,000	.....
55	78,500	82,500	87,000	92,000	97,500	102,500	.....
56	79,500	83,000	87,500	92,500	98,000	103,000	.....
57	80,000	83,500	88,000	93,000	98,500	104,000	.....
58	84,000	84,000	89,000	94,000	99,000	104,500	.....
59	85,000	85,000	89,500	94,500	99,500	105,000	.....
60	85,500	85,500	90,000	95,000	100,500	105,500	.....

*The values in this table reflect FHWA's policy of rounding down when calculated weights fall exactly halfway between 100-pound increments. Because the Bridge Formula is designed to protect Highway Interlockwork, FHWA determined that this conservative policy is consistent with the statutory mandate.

*The following loaded vehicles must not operate over HS-44 bridges: 3-52 (3-axle tractor

semitrailer with a wheelbase of less than 38 feet); 2-51-2 (2-axle semitrailer combination with a wheelbase of less than 45 feet); 3-3 (3-axle truck with a wheelbase with a wheelbase less than 45 feet); and any truck with 7 or more axles. HS-44 bridges are designed for a specific vehicle load; HS-44 refers to a 15-ton 2-axle truck; 44 refers to the year AASHTO published the loading information. See AASHTO Standard Specifications for Highway Bridges.

Highway Safety Considerations

Changes in TS&W regulations can affect highway safety by:

- 1) increasing or decreasing the amount of truck traffic;
- 2) causing or requiring changes in vehicle design and vehicle performance that may affect crash rates and severity;
- 3) causing trucks to shift to highways with higher or lower crash rates.

Crash rates per vehicle-mile increase slightly with gross weight primarily because loading a truck heavier raises its center of gravity and thereby increases the possibility of rollover. However, crash rates per payload ton-mile decrease with a gross weight increase because fewer truck trips are required to haul a given amount of freight.

Key Findings

- There needs to be increased flexibility of weight limits and vehicle configurations to allow greater payloads.
- There are concerns about the infrastructure impacts of increased weight limits, particularly on local roads and bridges.
- There are safety concerns about proposed increases in truck weight or length.

The key finding of the technical analyses was that four heavier truck configurations were found feasible and generated net statewide benefits. A set of changes to spring load restrictions and other related TS&W regulations were also developed and found to offer net benefits. The evaluation considered transport savings, pavement costs, bridge inspection costs, rating and posting impacts, bridge fatigue and deck wear effects, increased bridge design load requirements, safety, and congestion.

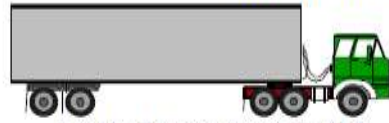
Table 3 shows the ESAL values for flexible pavements for the configurations being considered in this study. All the configurations under consideration in this study are better for pavements than the current five-axle tractor-semitrailer at 80,000 pounds based on ESAL factors.

Table 3. Equivalent Single-Axle Load Values for Flexible Pavements

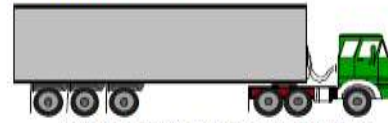
Configuration	Total ESALs
Current 5-axle tractor-semitrailer at 80,000 lbs.	2.4
6-axle tractor-semitrailer at 90,000 lbs.	2.0
7-axle tractor-semitrailer at 97,000 lbs.	1.5
8-axle double at 108,000 lbs.	1.8
Single unit 6- and 7-axle respectively	0.7 and 0.9

Figure III-10. Comparison of Longer Combination Vehicles With Conventional Trucks

Conventional Combination Vehicles



5-Axle Tractor Semi-Trailer



6-Axle Tractor Semi-Trailer



STAA or "Western" Double

Longer Combination Vehicles (LCVs)



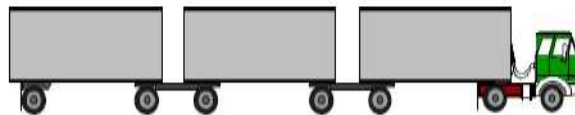
Rocky Mountain Double



Tumpike Double



8-Axle B-Train Double Trailer Combination



Triple Trailer Combination

Impacts of Proposed Vehicle Configurations

- Increased payloads and fewer truck trips will lower transport costs significantly.
- Additional axles and fewer truck trips will result in less pavement wear and possible safety increase.
- A modest increase in bridge postings and future design costs will be necessary.

Summary

- Challenge is to find balance in truck size and weight versus impacts.
- Additional axles and fewer truck trips will result in less pavement wear and possible increase in safety.
- Higher GVW roadways can theoretically require less pavement thicknesses than lower GVW roadways.

Road Type	Lane Mileage	Sq. Ft. of Pavement	Replacement Cost per sq. ft.	Total Replacement Cost	Design Life in ESALS
State Highway	1000	63,660	\$4.75	\$302,385	200,000

A typical 80,000 pound 5-axle TST has a payload of 49,500 pounds and generates 2.4 ESAL per trip.

A 5-axle TST at 90,000 pounds has a payload of 59,500 pounds and generates 4.1 ESAL per trip.

If the annual agricultural harvest generates 100,000,000 pounds of produce, how many trips will each vehicle make to move the products to market?

_____ trips by 5-axle 80,000 lb TST

_____ trips by 5-axle 90,000 lb TST

How many ESALs will each vehicle generate?

_____ ESALs by the 5-axle 80,000 lb TST

_____ ESALs by the 5-axle 90,000 lb TST

How many years will the highway pavement last under use by each vehicle type?

_____ years with the 5-axle 80,000 lb TST

_____ years with the 5-axle 90,000 lb TST

What is the annual cost for replacing the highway pavement for each vehicle type?

_____ per year for the 5-axle 80,000 lb TST

_____ per year for the 5-axle 90,000 lb TST

Road Type	Lane Mileage	Sq. Ft. of Pavement	Replacement Cost per sq. ft.	Total Replacement Cost	Design Life in ESALS
State Highway	1000	63,660	\$4.75	\$302,385	200,000

A typical 80,000 pound 5-axle TST has a payload of 49,500 pounds and generates 2.4 ESAL per trip.

A 5-axle TST at 90,000 pounds has a payload of 59,500 pounds and generates 4.1 ESAL per trip.

If the annual agricultural harvest generates 100,000,000 pounds of produce, how many trips will each vehicle make to move the products to market?

2020 trips by 5-axle 80,000 lb TST

1681 trips by 5-axle 90,000 lb TST

How many ESALs will each vehicle generate?

4848 ESALs by the 5-axle 80,000 lb TST

6892 ESALs by the 5-axle 90,000 lb TST

How many years will the highway pavement last under use by each vehicle type?

41.3 years with the 5-axle 80,000 lb TST

29.0 years with the 5-axle 90,000 lb TST

What is the annual cost for replacing the highway pavement for each vehicle type?

\$7322 per year for the 5-axle 80,000 lb TST

\$10,427 per year for the 5-axle 90,000 lb TST

Road Type	Lane Mileage	Sq. Ft. of Pavement	Replacement Cost per sq. ft.	Total Replacement Cost	Design Life in ESALS
State Highway	1000	63,660	\$4.75	\$302,385	200,000

A typical 80,000 pound 5-axle TST has a payload of 49,500 pounds and generates 2.4 ESAL per trip.

A 6-axle TST at 90,000 pounds has a payload of 58,500 pounds and generates 2.0 ESAL per trip.

If the annual agricultural harvest generates 100,000,000 pounds of produce, how many trips will each vehicle make to move the products to market?

_____ trips by 5-axle 80,000 lb TST

_____ trips by 6-axle 90,000 lb TST

How many ESALs will each vehicle generate?

_____ ESALs by the 5-axle 80,000 lb TST

_____ ESALs by the 6-axle 90,000 lb TST

How many years will the highway pavement last under use by each vehicle type?

_____ years with the 5-axle 80,000 lb TST

_____ years with the 6-axle 90,000 lb TST

What is the annual cost for replacing the highway pavement for each vehicle type?

_____ per year for the 5-axle 80,000 lb TST

_____ per year for the 6-axle 90,000 lb TST

Road Type	Lane Mileage	Sq. Ft. of Pavement	Replacement Cost per sq. ft.	Total Replacement Cost	Design Life in ESALS
State Highway	1000	63,660	\$4.75	\$302,385	200,000

A typical 80,000 pound 5-axle TST has a payload of 49,500 pounds and generates 2.4 ESAL per trip.

A 6-axle TST at 90,000 pounds has a payload of 58,500 pounds and generates 2.0 ESAL per trip.

If the annual agricultural harvest generates 100,000,000 pounds of produce, how many trips will each vehicle make to move the products to market?

2020 trips by 5-axle 80,000 lb TST

1710 trips by 6-axle 90,000 lb TST

How many ESALs will each vehicle generate?

4848 ESALs by the 5-axle 80,000 lb TST

3420 ESALs by the 6-axle 90,000 lb TST

How many years will the highway pavement last under use by each vehicle type?

41.3 years with the 5-axle 80,000 lb TST

58.5 years with the 6-axle 90,000 lb TST

What is the annual cost for replacing the highway pavement for each vehicle type?

\$7322 per year for the 5-axle 80,000 lb TST

\$5169 per year for the 6-axle 90,000 lb TST

**Thank
You!**