

Bloomberg.com

Kraft, International Paper Push for Heavier Trucks (Update1)

[Share](#) | [Email](#) | [Print](#) | [A A A](#)

By Angela Greiling Keane and Jonathan D. Salant



July 9 (Bloomberg) -- **International Paper Co.** and Kraft Foods Inc., seeking to deliver more goods in fewer trips, are leading a push to allow heavier trucks on U.S. highways over the objections of road-safety groups.

The companies, part of a coalition of more than 100 shippers and trade associations, for the first time are joining the trucking industry in lobbying Congress for the vehicles. The truckers failed in previous efforts amid opposition from their railroad competitors, **Teamsters union** drivers and critics who say giant trucks are dangerous.

"Any time a lobbying group can shift the established coalitions decisively -- here, truckers combining forces with shippers -- it's a potential legislative game-changer," said **Rogan Kersh**, associate dean at New York University's Robert F. Wagner Graduate School of Public Service. "Large companies that ship widely are located in multiple states, and House districts."

Heavier rigs would cut highway congestion, fuel use and tailpipe emissions, said Beth Dozier, a spokeswoman for the Washington-based **Coalition for Transportation Productivity**. The change would save at least \$50 million a year in delivery costs for Memphis, Tennessee-based International Paper alone, she said.

Coalition members range from International Paper and Northfield, Illinois-based Kraft to Atlanta-based **Coca-Cola Co.**, the world's largest beverage company, and Moline, Illinois-based **Deere & Co.**, the biggest maker of agricultural equipment, according to the group's Web site. The organization supports an extra fee for the heaviest trucks, to be used to repair and upgrade bridges so they can handle the increased wear and tear, Dozier said.

Six Axles, 100,000 Pounds

Under legislation proposed by Representative **Michael Michaud**, a Maine Democrat, six-axle trucks weighing as much as 97,000 pounds would be allowed on interstate highways, up from the present limit of 80,000 pounds on five axles.

The measure may be considered as part of legislation to reauthorize highway funding. The six-year, \$286.5 billion surface-transportation law expires Sept. 30.

A 100,000-pound truck takes 25 percent longer to stop than an 80,000-pound truck, according to **Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety**, a Washington-based group that opposes raising the weight limit. The organization is funded partially by insurance companies.

'Defies Physics'

"To say a 100,000-pound truck is no less safe than an 80,000-pound truck defies all physics," said Jennifer Tierney, a board member of Arlington, Virginia-based Citizens for Reliable and Safe Highways. Her father was killed in a 1983 crash involving a truck.

Representative **Jim McGovern**, a Massachusetts Democrat, wants to tighten rather than loosen the restrictions. He proposes banning trucks weighing more than 80,000 pounds from all roads in the 160,000-mile National Highway System, not just on the 46,600 miles of interstates as under the current limit, set in 1991.

Larger trucks "threaten the safety and the well-being of the average driver," McGovern said.

Permitting trucks that can carry bigger loads would mean fewer rigs on the road, and would keep the larger ones off local streets because they could use the interstate system, proponents say.

That "will improve safety records for U.S. shippers, lower their environmental profile and save major companies tens of millions of dollars per year in shipping costs," said Harry Haney, Kraft's associate transportation director.

Teamsters, Railroads

Current law banning the biggest trucks from interstates forces them onto narrow, winding secondary roads, said Michaud of Maine. That's what happens with logging trucks in his state, he said.

The International Brotherhood of Teamsters, which represents drivers for [United Parcel Service Inc.](#) and [YRC Worldwide Inc.](#), the largest U.S. trucking company by sales, opposes allowing bigger trucks. The two companies aren't part of the shippers' coalition.

"We have some Teamsters who drive triples," said [Fred McLuckie](#), the union's legislative director, referring to trucks towing three trailers. "But they don't like it. They do it because they get extra pay."

Railroads, which compete with trucking companies for freight contracts and ally with them in shipping loaded tractor trailers, also oppose easing the limits.

Emissions Argument

About two-thirds of traffic carried by railroads could also be moved by truck, said [Edward Hamberger](#), chief executive officer of the Washington-based [Association of American Railroads](#). Among the group's members are Fort Worth, Texas-based [Burlington Northern Santa Fe Corp.](#), the largest U.S. railroad by sales, and Omaha, Nebraska-based [Union Pacific Corp.](#)

Railroads spent twice as much on lobbying as the trucking industry did last year, \$44 million to \$22 million. Those figures are in line with other big industries: Telephone companies spent \$45.7 million and broadcasters \$20.8 million.

For the 2008 election, railroads gave \$7.4 million and truckers gave \$5.4 million to federal candidates and the political parties, according to the [Center for Responsive Politics](#), a Washington-based research group.

Proponents of bigger trucks have found a new argument for increasing truck-weight limits: President [Barack Obama](#)'s call to reduce the emissions blamed for global warming.

Delivery Reductions

Kraft, the world's second-largest food maker, could reduce the number of trucks it uses by about 6 percent, equal to 60,000 fewer loads annually, said Haney, the associate transportation director. In doing so, Kraft could eliminate 73,000 tons of carbon dioxide a year, he said.

International Paper could reduce the number of weekly deliveries at one plant to 450 from 600 if it could load 97,000-pound vehicles, said John Runyan, chief lobbyist for the company, the world's largest maker of office paper and cardboard shipping boxes.

"We are confident we can rely on upgraded equipment that can carry more product to more locations in a safer manner," Runyan said.

To contact the reporters on this story: [Angela Greiling Keane](#) in Washington at agreilingkea@bloomberg.net; [Jonathan D. Salant](#) in Washington at jsalant@bloomberg.net.

Last Updated: July 9, 2009 10:54 EDT

