

STATEMENT OF REPRESENTATIVE JOHN M. MURPHY—16TH CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT
OF NEW YORK

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for the opportunity to testify in support of S. 2658, a bill to make certain increases in vehicle weight and width limitations on the Interstate Highway System.

The Federal responsibility in this area was recognized in the original Interstate Commerce Act, which authorized the Interstate Commerce Commission to study the need for Federal regulation of the sizes and weight of motor vehicles and combination of motor vehicles. The report resulting from that study, submitted in 1941, stated:

We conclude . . . as to the effects of certain existing state limitations and in the light of the broad public interest in securing of as economical and efficient a motor transport service as possible, as well as in the light of the requirements of the national defense, that there is need for Federal regulation of the sizes and weight of motor vehicles . . . while the states of given regions have shown a tendency to bring their regulations into closer accord and while this tendency has been marked in the recent past, the process is a slow one and there is no assurance that it will be carried to the extent the public interest requires.

No affirmative action was taken by the Congress until 1956, when, in the Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1956, the Congress established maximum permissible weights and widths for vehicles operating on the Interstate System. The basic standards adopted by the Congress were those which had been suggested by the American Association of State Highway Officials in the period 1944-46. Specifically, these standards are as follows:

Single Axle: 18,000 pounds
Tandem Axle: 32,000 pounds
Gross weight: 73,280 pounds
Width: 96 inches

These sizes and weights became a ceiling for State laws, unless the State had higher limits in effect at the time the law took effect, in which case the higher State law prevailed. Therefore, today, with a few exceptions, we are bound by size and weight standards adopted in 1946; this fact alone should indicate that Congressional reform in this area is vitally needed and long overdue.

More recent recommendations and studies also indicate a need for more liberal size and weight limitations. The Bureau of Public Roads, under authority granted in the 1956 Highway Act, conducted a study of the size and weight question and, with consideration given to the Illinois Road Test results, the Bureau submitted its recommended changes to the Congress. These changes were as follows:

Increase the single axle limit from 18,000 lbs. to 20,000 lbs.
Increase the tandem axle limit from 32,000 lbs. to 34,000 lbs.
Increase the width limit from 96 inches to 102 inches.

Change the maximum gross weight limit of 73,280 lbs. to one based on a formula which would permit higher gross weights depending on increases in length of the vehicles and the number of axles.

The legislation now before this committee is based on these recommendations.

The most cogent argument in support of this legislation is that it will result in economic gains which are commensurate with the cost of the highway; the present standards, because of their restrictive nature, make full economic gains impossible. With an investment of billions of dollars in the Interstate System it seems absurd to be prevented from taking full advantage of this resource.

Passage of this legislation would permit a larger payload capacity, thus facilitating much more productive, economic and efficient transportation. This, I think, is the most important issue. We are not taking full advantage of our highway system. In addition, many truck manufacturers and operators are being denied the opportunity to apply new technology and techniques which would result in more efficiency and economy, consistent with today's modern highway construction.

Many of the small towns across the nation will realize a particular benefit from this legislation. Formerly "railroad towns," these areas now depend almost entirely on trucking; because of the problem of small shipments and the diffi-