

# Heavy Duty Trucking

## Bill Would Allow States To Raise Truck Weights

*By Deborah Lockridge, Senior Editor*

May. 7 — Legislation introduced in the U.S. House of Representatives this week would allow states to increase maximum truck weights to as much as 97,000 pounds.

The bill calls for adding a third axle to trailers to spread out the extra weight and keep the equipment in compliance with bridge formulas. It also requires the rigs to be five years old or newer with antilock brakes. It would not permit states to make changes in vehicle length or trailer configuration, such as the wider use of triple trailers.

Reps. Merrill Cook (R-UT) and Collin Peterson (D-MN) are sponsoring the bill, the first legislative initiative to increase truck weight since the early 1990s, when they were frozen.

The bill is being pushed by Americans for Safe and Efficient Transportation, a coalition of motor carrier and shipper groups. Members include the American Trucking Assns., numerous state trucking associations, carriers such as Dart Transit and Schneider, and shipper groups such as the American Iron & Steel Institute, the National Industrial Transportation League and the Idaho Shippers Alliance.

Not all trucking groups are likely to favor the bill. The Arkansas Motor Carriers Assn. and the Owner-Operator Independent Drivers Assn. in the past have been strongly against truck size and weight increases.

ASET says nationwide use of 97,000-pound rigs could reduce vehicle miles traveled by 11% and produce a \$15 billion savings for shippers. Rep. Cook said the legislation would reduce the number of trucks on the road while helping struggling industries such as agriculture, forest products and steel.

There's a good chance the bill will mean a renewed battle between trucking and railroad interests. The Assn. of American Railroads has said it will oppose any truck size and weight increases.

"I think once people understand this will help to reduce the amount of truck traffic on our roads, they'll be for it," says Ken Merritt, legislative assistant to Rep. Cook. "This bill by no means mandates that states increase truck weights. It simply allows states the right to make that determination. We consider this a states' rights issue."