



What is the Coalition Against Bigger Trucks (CABT)?

According to its website, the Coalition Against Bigger Trucks' (CABT) members include public citizen organizations, state and local law enforcement agencies, senior citizens groups, highway safety advocates and environmental and business groups. What neither the website nor CABT written materials admit to are the group's true origins and motivations. CABT was actually founded by the freight railroad industry and is funded primarily by the railroads and their suppliers for the purpose of using government regulation to give the railroad industry something it cannot achieve in the free market – a competitive advantage over the trucking industry. Using deceptive and outright false information, CABT plays upon the emotions and fears of various organizations, the media and elected officials to con them into supporting their anti-truck campaign.

Here is what we have been able to find out about the connection between the railroad industry and CABT:

1. Go21, a self-described railroad organization, is linked to CABT. The physical addresses of their offices suggest they are located on the same floor in the same building in Alexandria, VA (901 N. Pitt Street). The only difference in their addresses is that one is located in Suite 310 and the other is in Suite 315. Here's a link to their website:

<http://www.go21.org/>

2. An article published on the web site of the United Transportation Union, the railroads' main union organization, states:

“The UTU has been working at the state and federal level with a railroad-industry funded group, Growth Options for the 21st Century. Go-21, as it is known, is the successor to another rail industry funded group, the Coalition Against Bigger Trucks.” Link to article:

http://www.utu.org/detail_news.cfm?ArticleID=20029

3. Posted on the web site of the American Shortline and Regional Railroad Association is an article written by Laura McNichol that praises the railroads for opposing higher weights. The byline of the article notes that Ms. McNichol is with the Coalition Against Bigger Trucks and lists her e-mail address as lmcnichol@cabt.org – the domain name for the CABT web site. On the Go21 web site, Ms. McNichol is listed as a member of their staff and as Director of GoRail. According to the GoRail web site, it “was formed in 2004 with the support of the nation's freight railroads to mobilize railroaders across the country in support of policies that will lead to a stronger freight rail industry and to defend against legislation that would harm railroads.” Link to the article:

http://www.aslrra.org/news_publications/Views_News/results.cfm?articleid=3549

Here are responses to typical statements made by CABT, including statements in support of the SHIPA bill, which is currently under consideration by Congress and which would further shift the authority to regulate truck size and weight limits from state governments to the federal government.

CABT:

Higher weights mean greater risk of fatality. One study showed that as weights go from 65,000 pounds to 80,000 pounds, the **risk of a crash being fatal goes up 50%**.

Response:

This is absolutely false. The University of Michigan study that CABT generally refers to when making these types of statements actually found that trucks above 80,000 pounds (which SHIPA seeks to restrict) have a lower fatal accident rate than trucks in higher weight classes. The study concluded that truck weight is not a contributing factor in fatal accidents involving trucks. In fact, the study found that the leading factor associated with an increase in truck-involved fatal accidents was the class of roadway, with Interstates having the lowest accident rate and undivided roads having the highest rate. Ironically, SHIPA would have the effect of increasing accident risk by forcing trucks onto lower-order roads.

CABT:

Heavier trucks have speed and acceleration issues, leading to speed differentials. A **speed differential of 15 miles-per-hour increases the risk of an accident 9 times**.

Response:

Acceleration is a function of power-to-weight ratio. While government standards do not address acceleration (with a few exceptions), the vast majority of trucks have sufficient power to merge safely and keep up with the flow of traffic. Federal regulations actually exacerbate this problem by restricting some trucks' access to Interstate highways, where merge and acceleration problems are least likely to occur.

CABT:

U.S. Department of Transportation estimated bridge costs of heavier trucks at **\$329 billion (\$65 billion in capital costs and \$264 billion in user delay costs.)**

Response:

The USDOT in its study cautioned that this scenario was only illustrative, and that these costs could only materialize under an extreme scenario, one that is highly unlikely to ever even come close to fruition. The analysis looked at the potential impacts on bridges given virtually unlimited and unchecked access by heavier trucks. In practice, if states were given the authority to allow heavier truck operations, they would limit these trucks to only those bridges designed to carry the additional weight. Therefore, the bridge costs would be minimal.

CABT:

One 40-ton single trailer truck does as much pavement damage to the road as **9,600 cars**. One 50-ton single trailer truck does as much pavement damage to the road as **27,000 cars**.

Response:

This is an old canard that anti-truck groups don't seem to want to let go. The 9,600:1 ratio is based on a misuse of tables used by highway engineers to determine the type and thickness of pavement needed for a new or resurfaced road. By using asphalt instead of concrete, for example, one could come up with a 5,900:1 ratio, or virtually any number

you want, depending on the assumed variables. The Transportation Research Board probably said it best in a 1979 report:

...when a highway is properly designed...it will not be damaged by the traffic it is designed to support. This is an important point because there are prevalent misconceptions that trucks damage pavements more than passenger cars. This is only true when (1) the pavements are underdesigned for the amount of truck traffic that is actually using them; (2) trucks, through overloading generally, are imposing heavier axle loads than anticipated; or (3) other factors not properly evaluated in design have affected the ability of pavements to support traffic.

To illustrate the point, allowing trucks to operate at 97,000 pounds would likely result in greater infrastructure damage than 80,000 pound trucks, but only if the heavier vehicles are allowed to operate on the same five axles. DOT research has shown that allowing the operation of six-axle, 97,000 pound trucks would reduce pavement costs substantially. Generally speaking, overall vehicle weight is not a factor in pavement damage so long as appropriate axle weights are applied.

CABT:

Proponents say that allowing bigger trucks on the roads will lead to fewer trucks on the road. They say it will not only reduce shipping costs, but also reduce highway congestion and so be better for the environment.

History shows that this is false, however. The number of trucks registered in the U.S. and the mileage traveled by trucks has gone up nearly every single year since Congress increased the federal weight limit in 1982. Bigger trucks end up diverting freight from other modes of transportation like railroads and causing even more highway congestion and pollution.

Response:

Both population and gross domestic product have increased since 1982, generating greater demand for freight. Without the increases in truck cargo capacity, there would be more trucks on the road.

There is no evidence to suggest that more productive trucks draw significant amounts of freight from the railroads. Studies show that the amount of truck traffic generated by the small amount of freight that is diverted from rail is eclipsed by the reduction in truck volumes that result from increased trucking productivity. For example, a U.S. Department of Transportation study which explored the potential impacts of expanded LCV use in 13 western states found that just 0.24% of rail carload miles and 0.10% of rail intermodal miles in those states would divert to trucks. After taking the rail diversion into account, the study predicted that truck miles in these states would be reduced by 25.5% as a result of the expanded use of LCVs. Even a study conducted by the railroads and cited by CABT found that under the most realistic scenario, truck traffic would drop if size and weight limits increased.