

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly

FISCAL NOTE

Revised

House Bill 56 (Delegate D. Hughes)

Commerce and Government Matters

Vehicle Laws - Weight Tolerances - Agricultural Products

This bill allows three axle, single unit vehicles, vehicle/trailer combinations not less than 32 feet long, or semitrailers less than 45 feet long to carry certain farm products at harvest time with a 15% axle weight tolerance if the product is loaded at the harvest site. This bill extends current axle weight tolerances to apply to these vehicles when transporting vegetable crops from June 1 to October 31. The bill also extends the applicable harvest period for soybean transport by one month.

The bill is effective July 1, 1998.

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: Potential indeterminate increase in Transportation Trust Fund expenditures. Potential indeterminate decrease in general fund revenues.

Local Effect: Potential indeterminate increase in expenditures.

Small Business Effect: Meaningful.

Fiscal Analysis

State Revenues: Fines for weight violations vary according to how much a vehicle is in excess of the limit. The minimum fine for such violations is \$25. Increasing the weight tolerances as provided in the bill expands the legal weight limit per axle for vehicles carrying agricultural products and could therefore lead to fewer violations. General fund revenues could decrease as fewer citations are issued. However, any such decrease is assumed to be minimal.

State Expenditures: While the bill does not increase the overall gross weight of vehicles, it does expand the allowable weight tolerance per vehicle axle. Increasing the axle weight of vehicles will add pressure and accelerate wear on roadways. It is uncertain how many vehicles would carry increased weight on their axles or to what extent they will use State-owned roads and bridges. To the extent that the additional axle weight carried by vehicles causes excess damage to highways and bridges, Transportation Trust Fund expenditures could increase.

Local Expenditures: Local governments maintain approximately 82% of the roadways in the State. Expenditures could increase for those jurisdictions which experience accelerated road damage as a result of increased axle weight traveling on the roads. However, it is unclear to what extent vehicles will utilize the expanded axle weight tolerances.

Small Business Effect: There are an estimated 37,600 farms in the State. Under the provisions of the bill, all vegetable crops produced at these farms would be included in the expanded weight tolerances. These farms could experience significant savings in transportation and related costs. However, it is not clear what proportion of farms have access to the type of vehicle described in the bill.

Information Source(s): Department of Transportation (State Highway Administration, Motor Vehicle Administration), Department of Agriculture, Department of Legislative Services

Fiscal Note History: First Reader - January 26, 1998
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