

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly

FISCAL NOTE

Senate Bill 798 (Senator Hafer)

Judicial Proceedings

Vehicle Laws - Weight Tolerances - Forest Products

This bill allows a combination of vehicles with a semitrailer length of 45 feet or less to carry forest products with a 5% axle weight tolerance if the product is loaded in forests or other similar off-highway locations. Single unit vehicles with at least three axles or a combination of vehicles with a trailer length of less than 32 feet that carry forest products are allowed an axle weight tolerance of 10% when loaded in forests or other similar off-highway locations.

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 forest products and could therefore lead to fewer violations. Any resulting decrease in general fund fine revenues 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 the increased axle weight traveling of the roads. However, it is unclear to what extent vehicles will utilize the expanded weight tolerances.

Small Business Effect: There are 147 logging companies and 69 sawmills in the State. It is not known how many of these companies are small businesses. Under the provisions of the bill, all forestry products produced by these companies would be included in the expanded weight tolerances. Such companies could experience significant savings in transportation and related costs. Additionally, businesses involved in transporting these products could experience increases in revenues as the larger loads permitted under the bill may allow increased utilization of existing equipment. However, it is not clear what proportion of forestry businesses or transport businesses have access to the type of vehicle described in the bill.

Information Source(s): Department of Transportation (State Highway Administration), Department of Natural Resources, Department of Legislative Services

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