



National Transportation Safety Board

Washington, D.C. 20594

Safety Recommendation

Date: September 8, 2000

In reply refer to: H-00-20

Governor of States
(list attached)

The National Transportation Safety Board is an independent Federal agency charged by Congress with investigating transportation accidents, determining their probable cause, and making recommendations to prevent similar accidents from occurring. We are providing the following information to urge your State to take action on the safety recommendation in this letter. The Safety Board is vitally interested in this recommendation because it is designed to prevent accidents and save lives.

This recommendation addresses the lack of safe available commercial vehicle parking on or near interstates for truckdrivers who want or need to use it and State-enforced parking time limits at public rest areas. The recommendation is derived from the Safety Board's special investigation of truck parking areas. As a result of this investigation, the Safety Board has issued 10 safety recommendations, one of which is addressed to Governors of States. Information supporting the recommendation is discussed below. The Safety Board would appreciate a response from you within 90 days addressing the actions you have taken or intend to take to implement our recommendation.

In April 1999, the Safety Board began a Truck/Bus Safety Initiative and to date has held four public hearings¹ to obtain information from a variety of sources about the relevant safety issues regarding trucks and buses and on how to address them. Participating in these hearings were representatives from the truck and bus industries, vehicle and equipment manufacturers, labor unions, safety advocacy groups, and various State and Federal agencies.

One issue, emerging from hearing testimony, was the insufficient number of parking spaces² for truckdrivers who want or need to use them. By current law, truckdrivers may drive for no more than 10 consecutive hours. The availability of adequate parking is important if truckdrivers are to obtain the rest needed to operate their vehicles safely. A 1995 Safety Board

¹ Held between April 14 and 16, 1999, the first hearing focused on motor carrier oversight. Held between August 31 and September 2, 1999, the second hearing examined advanced technology applications that may reduce the number of accidents involving trucks and buses. Held between October 20 and 22, 1999, the third hearing reviewed the highway transportation safety aspects of the North American Free Trade Agreement. Held on January 20 and 21, 2000, the fourth hearing examined commercial driver licensing and medical certification issues.

² Parking spaces refer to all authorized nonemergency parking areas, both public and private.

study³ has shown that the most important factors in predicting a fatigue-related accident are the duration of the last sleep period, the time slept in the past 24 hours, and the split sleep periods. The availability of parking for truckdrivers can have an impact on all three of these factors.

Complicating the parking availability issue is that some States enforce time restrictions on parking at public rest areas that are less than the time for sleep required under the hours-of-service regulations. When time limits that do not allow for adequate sleep are enforced at public rest areas, drivers parked there may not be able to get enough sleep, which may lead to fatigue-related accidents.

In contrast to the typical motorist, a truckdriver often has the opportunity to rest in the truck's sleeper berth⁴ rather than stay at a motel at night. Besides incurring a monetary expense, staying at a motel may involve a logistical problem; a motel may not be convenient when a driver wants or needs, because of the hours-of-service regulations, to rest. In addition, many motels do not have parking available to accommodate a large truck tractor-semitrailer. Given the nature of trucking and the financial and logistical pressures to operate efficiently, truckers have come to rely primarily on parking facilities on or along their route. Regardless of the amount of route planning truckdrivers may do, whether they can arrive at a particular place by a particular time is very much out of their control and dependent on traffic, weather, or other factors such as pickup and delivery delays.

According to a 1999 survey conducted by the Commercial Vehicle Safety Alliance (CVSA) and contacts made by the Safety Board, 19 States⁵ were found to have laws limiting the amount of time that a vehicle can park at a public rest area. The 1996 Federal Highway Administration-funded study *Commercial Driver Rest and Parking Requirements: Making Space for Safety*,⁶ conducted by the Trucking Research Institute,⁷ found that approximately 42 percent of all public rest areas were subject to parking restrictions. Only 10 percent of public rest areas have time limits strictly enforced; many State departments of transportation are reluctant to enforce the time limits because they recognize that truckdrivers should rest when tired rather than continue to drive.

Because of their concern over time limitations on parking at public rest areas, in 1998 the CVSA and the American Trucking Associations, Inc., (ATA) wrote to the 50 States, asking for information on time restrictions for trucks and public rest area closures. The CVSA and the ATA also requested the States to eliminate or minimize time restrictions for parking at public rest areas.

³ National Transportation Safety Board. 1995. *Factors that Affect Fatigue in Heavy Truck Accidents*. Safety Study NTSB/SS-95/01. Washington, DC.

⁴ According to the Truck Manufacturers Association, the number of trucks manufactured with sleeper berths has been growing in the past 4 to 5 years, and about 70 percent of new trucks are manufactured with sleeper berths.

⁵ Alabama, Arkansas, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Kentucky, Louisiana, Minnesota, Nebraska, Nevada, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, South Dakota, Tennessee, Virginia, and Washington.

⁶ FHWA-MC-96-0010. May 1996.

⁷ The research component of the American Trucking Associations Foundation, Inc., an affiliate of the American Trucking Associations, Inc.

According to the responses received, some States did not consider that providing parking for truckdrivers was their responsibility. Because of the limited response it received from the States, the CVSA recognized that its letters were an ineffective means to get States to change time limit policies. The CVSA found that public rest area parking was not a priority for most States. The CVSA would like Congress to require all States to set aside a minimum number of spaces in which commercial vehicle drivers can rest overnight and continues to make its position known to the State and Federal governments.

A policy of waking up truckdrivers while they are sleeping at public rest areas that have parking time limits can pose significant safety problems for these drivers and others on the roadways. The time limits for drivers to park can substantially reduce the amount of needed sleep that drivers receive. Although individual sleep needs differ, on average, people need about 8 hours of sleep per night. Sleep loss can result in significantly depressed performance, alertness, and mood. As little as 2 hours of sleep loss can impair performance.

When truckdrivers are tired or are out of hours-of-service time for driving, they need to depart the roadway as quickly as possible. Ideally, drivers should try to plan their trips so that they stop at private truck stops, but the stopover is not always possible because of location, full parking lots, cost, or delays due to weather or the ever-increasing traffic congestion on our highways. Sometimes the nearest available parking is at a public rest area. Drivers need to be allowed to obtain adequate rest so they can continue driving safely. Time limits for parking are incompatible with the Federal hours-of-service regulations and can encourage drivers to continue driving while fatigued, making our roadways less safe for all drivers.

The Safety Board recognizes the unsafe conditions that can be caused by strict enforcement of time limits, yet some States continue to mandate and enforce strict parking time limits at public rest areas. The Safety Board concludes that parking time limits for public rest areas can result in drivers returning to the roadway without obtaining adequate rest or parking unsafely on shoulders or ramps.

Some parking areas, such as those at State welcome centers, were not designed to provide extended parking. Welcome center parking was generally intended for a brief stop to obtain information about the State. In some specific locations, truckdrivers occasionally face the issue of personal security, and time limits have been imposed at a rest area in an attempt to control crime; the imposition of time limits may be the prudent action in this case. However, drivers still need areas in which they can park to take a long-term break. Posting signs in these areas that indicate where long-term parking would be available may help resolve these parking and time limit problems.

The Safety Board acknowledges that time limits can help increase the availability of short-term parking. However, parking that is only short-term does not allow drivers to obtain extended rest when necessary.

Therefore, the National Transportation Safety Board recommends that Governors of States:

Once your State has ensured that adequate parking is available, eliminate or modify those time limits at public rest areas that can prevent truckdrivers from obtaining adequate rest or redirect drivers to nearby parking facilities where they can obtain adequate rest. (H-00-20)

The Safety Board also issued safety recommendations to the Federal Highway Administration; Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration; American Trucking Associations, Inc.; Owner-Operator Independent Drivers Association; National Private Truck Council; National Association of Truck Stop Operators, and National Industrial Transportation League. In your response to the recommendation in this letter, please refer to Safety Recommendation H-00-20. If you need additional information, you may call (202) 314-6170.

Chairman HALL and Members HAMMERSCHMIDT, GOGLIA, and BLACK concurred in this recommendation.

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