



## The Capitol Report March 10th, 2005

Provided by The Georgia Railroad Association

P.O. Box 2363

Woodstock, GA 30188

770-516-4636

*The General Assembly is back in session today for the 29th legislative day after being in recess Monday through Wednesday. Although the lawmakers have been in recess, they have not been idle. Committees have been meeting and reporting bills.*

### **Committee adds truck length increase to weight bill.**

Senate Transportation Chairman Tommie Williams yesterday offered an amendment to HB 279 that will allow 57-foot trailers on Georgia highways. The Committee voted 6 – 5 in favor of the amendment, and then approved the amended bill with only two opposing votes. Already approved by the House, HB 279 is now in the Senate Rules Committee, and could be on the Senate floor as early as Saturday.

GRA and the Association of County Commissioners testified against both the amendment and the weight variance in the original bill. DOT testified against the weight variance, but had little to say against the length increase because the amendment limits trucks with 57-foot trailers to 50,000 pounds gross weight. Senators voting against the amendment for 57-foot trailers were Jeff Chapman, Greg Goggins, Mitch Seabaugh, Jim Whitehead, and Sam Zamarripa. Only Senators Zamarripa and Steve Thompson voted against the amended bill.

Rep. Johnny Floyd of Cordele, the sponsor of HB 279, said the amendment was intended to benefit Frito-Lay, which has a facility in his district. His original bill would have provided a 10% weight variance for trucks hauling farm or forest products from the field. An amendment added in the House reduced the variance to 5%.

**GRA members are urged to call their Senators in opposition to HB 279.** For telephone numbers and other contact information on your Senators, go to [www.legis.state.ga.us](http://www.legis.state.ga.us) and click on "picture book." This directory provides both the capitol and home telephone numbers for Senators and Representatives.

*This fight is not over yet.* Adding the trailer length increase may also increase opposition to the bill. The American Automobile Association was silent at the Committee hearing, but their representative said later AAA would urge their membership to make contacts in opposition to the bill. The Georgia Motor Truckers Association reportedly voted 55 – 1 (the lone supporting vote coming from Frito-Lay) against longer trailers, but they too were silent at the hearing. We trust their members will not remain silent. There is also a chance the press will pick up this issue, as longer trailers are not popular with the traveling public. Please let us know what responses you get from your Senators. This will help us target our efforts in the Capitol. Your contacts can make all the difference whether this bill fails or passes.

### **Key points to make in your contacts with Senators.**

HB 279 would increase the maximum trailer length from 53 feet to 57 feet, and would allow trucks hauling farm and forest products to exceed the 80,000 pound weight limit by five percent. A few key points to keep in mind when considering this bill –

- Bigger trucks divert freight currently moving by rail to roads and highways. HB 279 would put more and bigger trucks on Georgia's already congested roads.
- Since railroads are three or four times more fuel efficient than trucks, diverting traffic from railroads to trucks will dramatically increase fuel consumption.
- Diversion of freight from rails to trucks will also increase pollution, since trucks emit substantially more pollution per ton-mile than railroads.
- Public safety would be adversely affected, as trucks have higher fatality and injury rates than railroads. Fatal accident rates for any given truck configuration increase with heavier weight.
- Poll after poll has shown that Americans overwhelmingly oppose allowing bigger and heavier trucks to operate on our highways.
- According to the U.S. Department of Transportation Highway Cost Allocation Study, trucks weighing over 80,000 pounds pay just 50 percent of the cost of the damage they cause to roads and bridges. In effect, a substantial portion of the cost of building and maintaining the trucking industry's infrastructure is subsidized through fuel and other taxes paid by others.
- Rail-competitive trucks already underpay their cost responsibility, creating an enormous competitive imbalance that railroads must overcome. Increasing truck size and weight limits will significantly exacerbate the existing inequity.
- A 1999 U.S. DOT study found that, depending on the scenario, increased truck sizes and weights would result in a decline in rail car-miles of 4 to 20 percent.
- As rail car-miles decline, less funding will be available for current and future rail investments, leading directly to reduced capacity, degraded service, and eventually, further disinvestment. Remaining rail customers would face higher rates, reduced service, or both.

## **2005 Associate Members**

*Thanks to the following companies, GRA associate members for 2005.*

Adams Warnock, Inc.  
 A&K Railroad Materials, Inc.  
 APAC – Southeast, Inc.  
 Atlantic Track & Turnout  
 Atlas Railroad Construction  
 Boatright Enterprises  
 Casey Gilson Leibel, P.C.  
 Century Group  
 Crouch Engineering  
 Dixie Precast  
 GE Capital Railcar  
 Georgia Ports Authority  
 Georgia Rail Consultants  
 Koppers, Inc  
 Lanier Steel Products, Inc.

L. B. Foster  
 MBA of Maryland  
 McCord Tie & Timber, Inc.  
 Midway Railroad Construction Co.  
 Neel-Schaffer, Inc.  
 Palmer & Cay of Georgia, Inc.  
 Performance Railway Services  
 Progress Rail Service  
 Railcar Management  
 Rail Training & Consulting  
 Railworks Wood Products, Inc.  
 R. J. Corman Derailment  
 Southern Rail Leasing  
 Walden's Railroad Repair  
 Zurich North America

**GRA Directory: New Members, Services and Categories!**

Remember to use the GRA website when shopping for goods and services. It's fast and easy! Just go to [www.georgiarailroad.org](http://www.georgiarailroad.org) and click on "DIRECTORY" on the upper left navigation bar on the home page. Then click on "services" at the top of the directory page for a list of service providers from "bridges" to "welding."