



## The Capitol Report March 17th, 2005

Provided by The Georgia Railroad Association

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*Today marks the 34th day of the 40-day Georgia legislative session. Legislative leaders have tentatively scheduled the session to end March 31, but sine die could come as early as March 24 if the budget is completed by that date. The new Republican majority would like to adjourn before the 40th day, a feat not accomplished in modern times. A March 24 adjournment would fall on the 38th legislative day. After today's session, the legislature will be in recess until Monday.*

### **Truck length/weight bill still awaiting action.**

Legislation that would allow 57-foot trailers on Georgia highways will not be considered on the Senate floor today, but remains in the Senate Rules Committee. The Rules Committee, meeting later today, could schedule HB 279 for a floor vote as early as Monday.

As introduced by Rep. Johnny Floyd, the bill would have provided for a 10% weight variance for trucks hauling forest and farm products from the field for up to 150 miles. A House amendment reduced the weight variance to 5% and the travel radius to 100 miles. Subsequently, the Senate Transportation Committee amended the bill to allow 57-foot trailers on trucks with a maximum gross weight of 50,000 pounds.

GRA, DOT, and the Association of County Commissioners testified against both the amendment and the weight variance in the Senate committee. With encouragement from GRA, the American Automobile Association, the Coalition Against Bigger Trucks, and the Georgia Motor Truckers Association have become actively opposed to the bill. Nevertheless, Rep. Floyd, Senate Transportation Chairman Tommie Williams, and others remain intent on passing HB 279.

GRA members are encouraged to continue contacting their Senators and House members in opposition to HB 279. Our message is simple. HB 279 would put more and bigger trucks on the road. If 57-foot trailers are allowed, they will eventually end inter-modal transportation, and the trucks that are now carried on railroad cars will be on the road. The result will be more and bigger trucks leading to:

- Increased highway congestion.
- Increased air pollution.
- Diminished safety for motorists who must share the road with more and bigger trucks.

If you've already contacted your Senator, please do it one more time while he or she is home for the weekend. Most will be back in their districts tomorrow. Just ask them for an update on the bill's status and repeat your concerns.

While the bill is now in the Senate, if passed in amended form, it would be sent back to the House for a vote to "agree" to the Senate amendments. There is also a chance that there

will be an attempt in the House to amend the provisions of HB 279 onto some other Senate-passed transportation bill. Ask your House members to vote against any bill that puts bigger trucks on the road.

For telephone numbers and other contact information on your Senators and Representatives, 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.

### **Other bills of interest.**

SB 274 dealing with the State's "Call Before You Dig" law will be amended to ensure that railroads can continue to carry out operations and maintenance on their rights of way without being subject to the provisions of the act. The railroad exemption in this code section was eliminated in 2000, so GRA worked with Senator Mitch Seabaugh to ensure that his amendments to this code section recognized that railroads are uniquely qualified to oversee any excavations that might affect utility easements on their rights of way.

HB 714 to mandate placement of lights, bells, and automated gates at railroad grade crossings used by school buses is dead for this year. The bill was referred to the Railroad Subcommittee chaired by Rep. Barry Fleming, and remained in that subcommittee through the cross-over deadline on the 30th legislative day. All bills still in their house of origin after the 30th legislative day are ineligible for further action this year, but will carry over to the 2006 legislative session.

HB 436, to provide for funding of infrastructure improvements, remained in the House Ways & Means Committee, and will not be considered until the 2006 legislative session. This bill would create the Georgia Environment and Infrastructure Financing Authority to provide grants, loans, bonds, and other forms of financial and technical assistance to local governments for economic development projects. The bill specifically lists rail sidings and spurs among the types of infrastructure eligible for funding.

SB 285 would repeal antiquated portions of the Georgia code relating to railroads as well as provisions that have been pre-empted by federal law. The bill passed the Senate and is now in the Georgia House where it should pass without opposition. However, elements of the Georgia trial bar have objected to the bill out of ignorance. They apparently fear that somehow the elimination of laws dealing with steam engines and telegraph poles will somehow diminish their ability to bring lawsuits.

### **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."