

WIDTH OF LOGGING TRUCKS

Senate Bill 581 as passed by the Senate First Analysis (12-2-99)

Sponsor: Sen. Don Koivisto
House Committee: Transportation
**Senate Committee: Transportation and
Tourism**

THE APPARENT PROBLEM:

Pulpwood (logs whose diameter is less than 10 inches) and saw logs (logs larger than 10 inches in diameter) are transported from the forest to the mill by trucks and trailers. The logs are cut in 8 foot 4 inch lengths, or 100 inches, as specified by the mills. Under current law, the maximum load width for haulers of unprocessed logs and pulpwood is 108 inches, although customarily the maximum vehicle and load width is 96 inches. See *BACKGROUND INFORMATION* below.

Generally, when loads of unprocessed logs are transported to the mill, they are cross-hauled, or stacked in a way that the load runs lengthwise and perpendicular to the cab of the vehicle. The lengthwise stacks of logs, called decks, are bound by chain to the bed of the truck.

During the winter months when the logs and the chains that bind them to the truck-bed are ice-covered, a log can slip out of the deck as the ice melts while the product is being transported to the mill. Once out of the deck, a log can bounce off the truck, and create a serious safety hazard on the highway. In fact, last year and in similar circumstances, a mother and her two-year old son were killed when a log hauling truck lost its load on a roadway in the west end of the Upper Peninsula.

In order to haul logs more safely, timber industry representatives have suggested that the sides of a log-hauling truck could be staked every two feet, and that the logs could be stacked across the trailer instead of lengthwise, in order to keep the logs inside. In order to haul the unprocessed logs in this manner, some have argued that a wider vehicle must be allowed under the law, despite the fact that wider loads already are allowed.

Legislation has been proposed to increase the maximum vehicle width for log haulers.

THE CONTENT OF THE BILL:

The bill would amend the Michigan Vehicle Code to permit a truck and trailer or a tractor and semitrailer combination hauling pulpwood or unprocessed logs to be operated with a maximum width of up to 108 inches in accordance with a special use permit issued under the code.

MCL 257.717

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Under current law [MCL 257.717 (3) and (4)], if a vehicle that is equipped with pneumatic tires is operated on a highway, the maximum width from the outside of one wheel and tire to the outside of the opposite wheel and tire may not exceed 102 inches (8 feet 6 inches), and the outside width of the body of the vehicle or the load on it may not exceed 96 inches (8 feet). However, the law allows an outside load width of 108 inches (9 feet) when a vehicle hauls unprocessed logs and pulpwood (or loads of concrete pipe, agricultural products, or wood bolts). The bill would create an exception to these provisions so that a log hauler's vehicle width (not only its load width) could be 108 inches, with a special permit.

FISCAL IMPLICATIONS:

According to the House Fiscal Agency, the fiscal impact of this bill cannot be determined. Assuming that vehicles hauling pulpwood or unprocessed logs would not also be subject to additional overweight or overload restrictions, the special highway use permits would cost approximately \$15 for a single trip and \$30 for multiple trips or on an annual basis, payable to the Department Transportation, for trips on the state trunkline systems. The oversized vehicle permit fee charged by local units of government for trips on roads under local jurisdiction may not exceed the administrative costs incurred by that jurisdictional

authority issuing the permit. Additional fees would be paid to the state and/or local units of government if oversized vehicles were also subject to overweight or overload restrictions. (11-23-99)

ARGUMENTS:

For:

If the law is rewritten to allow wood hauling trucks to increase the width of their vehicles, the operators of the trucks could equip their trailers or the beds of the vehicles with more stakes, or bunks, so that their loads would stay more firmly in place during transport. With their loads more securely in place, the roadways would be safer.

Response:

Larger vehicles with wider loads also can make public thoroughfares less safe for automobile traffic on narrow two-lane roadways.

For:

This bill could increase revenue in the State Trunkline Fund. Assuming that vehicles hauling pulpwood or unprocessed logs would not also be subject to additional overweight or overload restrictions, the special highway use permits would cost approximately \$15 for a single trip and \$30 for multiple trips or on an annual basis, payable to the state transportation department, for all trips on the state trunkline system. These permit fees would be deposited in the State Trunkline Fund for use by the Department of Transportation.

POSITIONS:

The Michigan Trucking Association supports the bill. (12-1-99)

The Michigan Timbermen's Association supports the bill. (12-1-99)

The Department of Transportation does not oppose the bill. (12-1-99)

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■ This analysis was prepared by nonpartisan House staff for use by House members in their deliberations, and does not constitute an official statement of legislative intent.