

THE POST-STANDARD

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Manlius supervisor: Bigger trucks would chew up local roads, bridges (Commentary)



In this July 27, 2016, photo, a tractor trailer passes over a section of Interstate 690 eat in downtown Syracuse that was under repair. A federal proposal to increase the weight of big trucks would damage local roads, according to the town of Manlius supervisor. (Michael Greenlar | mgreenlar@syracuse.com)

By [Special to syracuse.com](http://Special.to.syracuse.com)

Edmond Theobald is the supervisor for the town of Manlius, the third-largest suburb in metropolitan Syracuse, and is on the Executive Committee of the Association of Towns of the State of New York.

By Edmond Theobald | Special to Syracuse.com

A new proposal under consideration in Congress would allow heavier and longer trucks. As the Manlius town supervisor, I am adamantly opposed because it will end up costing town taxpayers -- and taxpayers around the state -- a lot more money to maintain and repair our roads and bridges that would be damaged by these bigger trucks.

This proposal would increase the weight of trucks from 80,000 pounds to 91,000 pounds. The proposal is described as a "pilot project" that would start in 10 states and run for 15 years. Calling something a pilot project that would be in 10 states for 15 years seems to me to be a misnomer. Any pilot project that extends over that many states and for that many years is not a "pilot project" at all -- it is a truck weight increase that will force surrounding states to also increase their truck weights. Local communities will be under intense pressure to do the same.

While we have many miles of state and county roads that run through Manlius, the town is financially responsible for the maintenance and repair of 111 miles of roads and owns one bridge. We also have several bridges in our town that are county- and state-owned that are heavily traveled by our residents every day to get to and from work and school. Like many of my colleagues across our state and our nation, I struggle to find the revenue to adequately preserve and replace our infrastructure. In this time of budget shortfalls and fiscal

challenges, it seems to me that it is poor public policy to consider allowing bigger trucks on our roads.

The [U.S. Department of Transportation Comprehensive Truck Size and Weight Limits study](#) released just last year clearly lays out the infrastructure damage and safety concerns posed by heavier trucks. In fact, based on those concerns, USDOT recommended to Congress that no increases in truck length or weight be made. In terms of infrastructure damage, USDOT examined mostly interstate highways. In contrast, our local roads and bridges are even more vulnerable to this increased damage, being generally older, built to lower specifications and not as well maintained as interstates.

Proponents for heavier weights claim that trucks are already operating at these heavier weights on local roads and a weight increase on the interstates will get these trucks off of our local infrastructure. That is not accurate. According to USDOT, nationwide, only 4 percent of trucks operating on local roads are over 80,000 pounds (the current weight limit on interstates). And most of those that are above 80,000 pounds are emergency vehicles, snowplows, municipal dump trucks and farming vehicles. Increasing weights on interstates will not take these trucks off of local roads -- they make local trips. Instead, as you increase the standard weight on interstates, all trucks will run at a weight that approaches the new, higher standard, thus putting many more of these heavier trucks on our local roads.

In Manlius, our approved budget for general road repair in 2015 was \$705,213 and that does not include a host of other costs such as drainage, paint, contractual costs and so on. Our adopted budget for general road repair for 2017 is \$744,010 -- a very small increase when you consider the dramatically rising costs of paving materials and labor. We are not keeping pace with our needed repairs now -- and bigger, heavier trucks, as they further punish our infrastructure, will put us even further behind.

The same is true for elsewhere in our state. Bigger and heavier trucks would decimate roads and bridges already in poor condition. The Syracuse urban area ranks 19th worst in the nation in 2015 among mid-sized urban areas in the percentage of major urban roads in poor condition, according to The Road Information Program. Over 64 percent of all bridges statewide -- 11,226 bridges -- are in either fair or poor condition, according to the Federal Highway Administration.

Roads and bridges that are deficient, congested or lack desirable safety features already cost New York motorists a total of \$24.9 billion statewide annually -- \$1,663 per driver in the Syracuse urban area -- due to higher vehicle operating costs, traffic crashes and congestion-related delays (TRIP 2016).

As taxpayers, we pay for infrastructure and if bigger trucks are allowed, we will pay far more. We simply cannot afford bigger trucks on our local roads and bridges.