Oversize/Overweight Corridors

Testimony of

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and

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to

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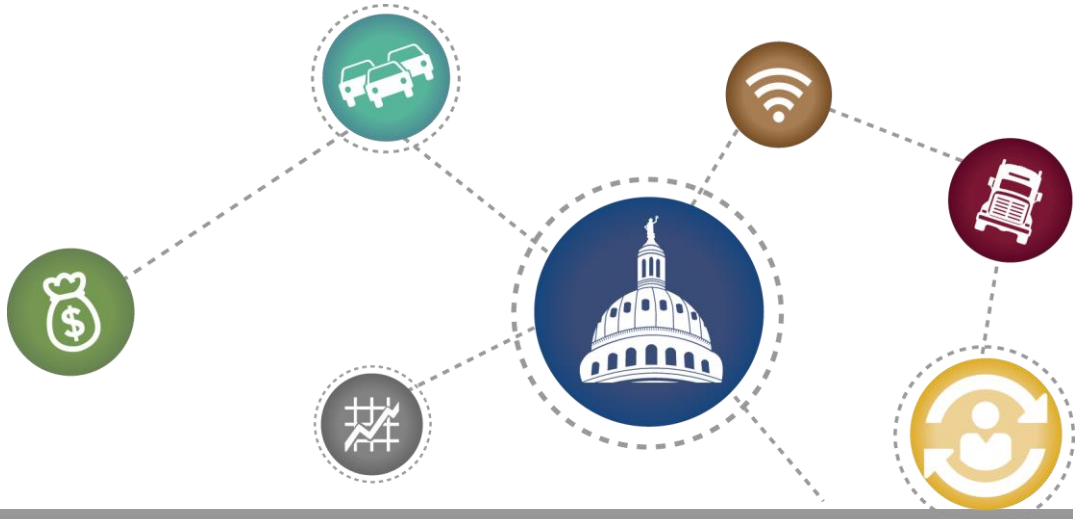

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Introduction

Good afternoon. I am Ginger Goodin, Director of the Texas A&M Transportation Institute Policy Research Center, and I am joined today by Jolanda Prozzi, Research Scientist in Environment and Planning and principal investigator on this topic.

You have asked us to testify on the topic "Review the areas currently designated as oversize or overweight corridors. Make recommendations to ensure that consistent measures are used to determine fee amounts, bond requirements, and gross weights allowable. Identify measures that may be taken to protect the quality of the roadway."

Note if you will that while the word "corridor" is in common usage in this discussion, it is not defined in statute. It is used to mean everything from a single path to a route to a network of roads between points.

Background

In 1997, SB 1276 authorized port authorities in border counties adjacent to Mexico and the Gulf of Mexico to collect a fee for issuing single-trip permits for oversize or overweight trucks on designated corridors. Subsequent to SB 1276, certain marine ports along the Texas coast, and counties adjacent to the Texas-Mexico border received similar but separate statutory authorization to issue single-trip oversize/overweight permits on designated corridors through legislation. Single-trip permits on designated corridors allow businesses to access ports or nearby foreign trade zones efficiently and to avoid the cost of repacking containers to meet the 80,000 pound gross vehicle weight or 20,000 pound single axle weight tolerance on non-interstate roads in Texas.

Each corridor is authorized by an individual piece of legislation, and unlike similarly authorized local infrastructure methods, such as utility districts, there are no minimum requirements for local notice before consideration of legislation, designation, assessment and collection of fees, or performance measurement. The result is wide variation among the various corridors.

TTI studied how these corridors are currently designated in Texas, the details of each implementation, and potential metrics that can be used for corridor designation and performance monitoring.

Designating Oversize/Overweight Corridors

Corridors designated to date have been created through passage of individual corridor-specific legislation. Legislation proposing to designate a corridor is typically analyzed by the Texas Department of Transportation for potential physical impacts associated with an assumed number of vehicles using the proposed corridor. Specifically, TxDOT estimates the portion of the amortized pavement and bridge costs attributable to the overweight loads. TxDOT also estimates the operation and maintenance costs imposed by the assumed number of oversize/overweight vehicles that will use the corridor. TxDOT is consistent in analyzing the different corridors in both the agency's traffic assumptions and the structural integrity of the pavements. TxDOT typically assumes a structural number of 3 -- fair quality -- for a flexible pavement and considers the thickness of the concrete in the case of concrete pavements. Based on this information, TxDOT estimates the percentage of the total loadings attributable to the overweight vehicles over the service life of the corridor. This percentage is then applied to the amortized cost to estimate the infrastructure impacts. This informal review is not mandated and does not consider safety or economic impacts. When legislation is passed, TxDOT updates the Texas Administrative Code to reflect the changes in law. As such, Texas Transportation Code Section 623 and 43 Texas Administrative Code Part 1 (Chapter 28) list all current oversize/overweight corridors in Texas.

TxDOT subsequently enters into an agreement with the entities interested in pursuing the issuance of permits on the designated corridors in accordance with the Texas Administrative Code and the Transportation Code. These agreements also state TxDOT's requirements in terms of the electronic transfer of fees collected, information on the number of permits sold, access to permit information, document retention policies, and agreement termination dates. Based on TxDOT's analysis of the anticipated pavement and bridge consumption impacts, the agency will also recommend a permit fee that supports the maintenance and preservation of the corridor on a cost neutral basis, considering only pavement amortization, maintenance and operations, and bridge consumption.

Oversize/Overweight Corridors in Texas

Table 1 summarizes the information on corridors as detailed in the Texas Transportation Code, as well as the current operations of these corridors as implemented by the permit issuing entities. Only the Port of Brownsville, Port Freeport, and Hidalgo County Regional Mobility Authority are currently issuing oversize/overweight permits. The Port of Harlingen and Chambers County are currently working with TxDOT on the agreements that will allow them to issue permits.

Table 1: Oversize/Overweight Corridors in Texas

	Port Authority Permits	Victoria County Navigation District	Chambers County	Port of Corpus Christi Authority	Regional Mobility Authority	Webb County
Authority Under Texas Transportation Code						
Permit Fees	Not to exceed $80 per trip	Not to exceed $100 per trip	Not to exceed $80 per trip	Not to exceed $80 per trip	Not to exceed $80 per trip effective 09/01/2013	Not to exceed $200 per trip
Administrative Costs	Not to exceed 15% of permit fee	Not to exceed 15% of permit fee	Not to exceed 15% of permit	Not to exceed 15% of permit fee	Not to exceed 15% of permit fee	Not to exceed 15% of permit fee
Gross Vehicle Weight	Cannot exceed 125,000 lbs	Not to exceed 140,000 lbs	Cannot exceed 100,000 lbs	Cannot exceed 125,000 lbs	Cannot exceed 125,000 lbs	Cannot exceed 125,000 lbs
Permit Revenue	Must be used for maintaining and improving state highways used	Must be used for maintaining state highways used	Must be used for maintaining state highways used	Must be used for maintaining state highways used	Must be used for maintaining roads used	Must be used for operation and maintenance of roads used

	Port Authority Permits	Victoria County Navigation District	Chambers County	Port of Corpus Christi Authority	Regional Mobility Authority	Webb County
Permit Revenue Minus Administrative Cost	Deposited in State Highway Fund	Deposited in State Highway Fund	Deposited in State Highway Fund		Must make payments to TxDOT. Must file a bond payable to TxDOT to cover the annual cost (in excess of payments received) to repair any damage to roads and highways imposed by permitted OS/OW vehicles	Must be distributed between TxDOT and the City of Laredo based on the on and off system lane miles calculated on a binannual basis. TxDOT's share must be deposited in State Highway Fund. City of Laredo may also be required to file surety bond payable to TxDOT in an amount of no less than $500,000

Port Authority Permits				Victoria County Navigation District	Chambers County	Port of Corpus Christi Authority	Regional Mobility Authority	Webb County
Pavement Management Plan								TxDOT required to develop pavement management plan for impacted roads
Operational Status								
Permit Issuing Entity	Port of Brownsville	Port Freeport	Port of Harlingen Authority	Victoria County Navigation District	Chambers County	Port of Corpus Christi	Hidalgo County Regional Mobility Authority	City of Laredo
Permits Issued Since	1997	2013	Not operational	Not operational	Not operational	Not operational	2014	Not operational
Permit Fee	$30	$30					$80	
Current Route Miles	22.5	66.5					47	
Number of Bridges	14	33					12	

Potential Metrics for Designating and Monitoring Corridors

There are potentially four metrics that can inform the designation of oversize/overweight corridors and three metrics that can be used for monitoring the performance of designated corridors.

The four potential metrics to inform the designation of corridors in Texas are:

1. the estimated/expected **economic impacts** of the corridor. Although economic benefits are typically cited by the promoters/proponents of corridors, these tend to be qualitative or anecdotal statements of economic development. The proponents of a corridor could be required to identify potential users and obtain information about the expected usage of the corridor to allow for the estimation of the economic impacts of the proposed corridor. Failing a formal cost benefit analysis or economic impact study, support letters from industry expressing their commitment to the use of the corridor could be provided;

2. the **safety** of the corridor, measured using available crash statistics. If high crash rates are experienced, safety improvements may be required before the corridor can be designated;

3. the estimated **infrastructure impacts** (both pavements and bridges) associated with vehicles using the proposed corridor. Pavement and bridge models are available for estimating pavement and bridge consumption, as well as the improvements required that will allow potential corridors to handle the anticipated heavier loads, and

4. the **local support** for the proposed corridor. It is possible that local entities and individuals could be provided an opportunity to comment on proposed corridors prior to designation.

The permit data currently collected are adequate to estimate the economic and infrastructure impacts of designated corridors post implementation. Periodic quantification of the economic impacts of the designated corridors could provide information about the return on investment. Similarly, periodic quantifying of the infrastructure impacts of the designated corridors and comparing the infrastructure costs imposed with the revenues generated from the permit fees would allow for the determination of whether the permit fees cover the pavement and bridge costs imposed by trucks using the corridor. In terms of safety impacts, available crash rates can be monitored to provide insight into the safety of the corridors once designated.

Conclusion

Oversize/overweight corridors have been created through the passage of individual corridor specific legislation and without a formal requirement for quantification or evaluation of the economic, safety, and infrastructure impacts associated with the designation of these corridors. TxDOT may not be consulted by those seeking corridor designation and there is no formal monitoring of the performance of corridors once designated.

Four metrics -- the economic, safety, and infrastructure (pavement and bridge) impacts, as well as local support for the corridor – have been identified as potential metrics that can be considered when designating a corridor.

Finally, it is believed that a more informed decision can be made in the designation of corridors if TxDOT is involved early in the process. This pertains specifically to the safety and infrastructure impacts of the proposed corridors. Alternatively, language could be included in the authorizing legislation that states that the corridor would only become effective once TxDOT determined that the corridor is capable of handling the estimated number of permitted vehicles.

This concludes our prepared testimony. We will be happy to take any questions you may have.