



December 3, 2009

## Ideas to clear up the mess

### All carry freight of drawbacks

The region's primary transportation planners soon will launch a yearlong study to measure local truck volume and propose transportation solutions for the future. Here are ways that other parts of the country have tried to mitigate growing truck traffic:

## Larger trucks

Several Western and Rocky Mountain states allow use of triple trailers to reduce the number of big trucks. So-called "road trains" or "Rocky Mountain doubles" were grandfathered in under the 1991 federal prohibition on longer or heavier trucks. Generally, they're allowed in less-populous states such as Idaho, Montana and Oregon. Michigan allows some triple trailers, which also make deliveries in Toledo, according to the Ohio Trucking Association. They also have been allowed on the Ohio Turnpike since the 1960s.

Internationally, triple trailers are widely used in Australia, Canada and parts of Europe.

Pros: Triple trailers can reduce the total number of trucks by consolidating several shipments into one.

"The United States has one of the most inefficient uses of trucks in the world," says John Woodroffe, director of safety analysis for the University of Michigan's Transportation Research Institute. "The amount carried per truck is artificially limited, primarily for political reasons and to allay people's fears."

Cons: Triple trailers take much longer to stop, creating safety concerns. In addition, heavier and longer trucks are harder on highways. A fully-loaded semi under the current 80,000-pound limit already does as much damage to a road or bridge as nearly 10,000 cars, according to many highway engineers.

## Truck bans

The only two regions to successfully impose truck bans on interstate highways in the past 20 years are Atlanta and Northern Kentucky. Locally, temporary bans were imposed twice: during reconstruction of Fort Washington Way in 1998-2000 and during the straightening of Interstate 71/75 in the 1980s.

Atlanta's ban is permanent and was imposed in 1978 to help the region meet clean-air standards and keep trucks from the city core. The ban allows heavy trucks inside the Interstate 285 bypass only if the driver can prove he is making a local delivery.

The possibility of a local truck ban has been raised several times since the temporary ban, usually discussed for I-75 inside the Interstate 275 loop, especially to save wear and tear on the Brent Spence Bridge.

Pros: A local truck ban would remove as many as 20,000 trucks a day from I-75 and I-71, relieving congestion and possibly cutting down on accidents.

Cons: It would shift truck traffic from the interstates onto some highways that are already near capacity. According to a 2004 study on alternatives for the Brent Spence Bridge, delays would increase by 1 percent throughout the region because traffic would be forced elsewhere.

Given the 83.7-mile circumference of I-275 around Cincinnati, a ban also would push trucks onto a longer route, costing shippers time and money.

## Truck-only lanes

The concept of keeping trucks in just one or two lanes away from other traffic has been discussed for several U.S. highways, including for Interstate 70. Georgia considered but rejected the concept for its interstate system. That state said it was too expensive and not an efficient use of highway funds.

Pros: The road interaction of trucks and cars causes most truck-related accidents. Truck-only lanes would keep cars and trucks apart.

Cons: Many experts argue that truck-only lanes don't work, simply because if one truck breaks down or crashes, it halts the entire truck system. In addition, passenger vehicles would be tempted to use the truck lanes if there were room. They're also expensive: A new lane of any interstate can cost \$1 million a mile or more.

## Shift to barges

Some have suggest expanding the city's maritime capacity to better handle containers on barges. They argue that a new facility could handle nearly 250,000 containers a year, many of which would normally ship by truck. The city is in talks to create a \$26 million public port on the Ohio River that would be near the interstates and have direct connections to two major railroads.

Pros: Transportation experts say that as highways fill up, it becomes more expensive to ship by truck, making other options more feasible. That means barges could be used more extensively in the future.

Cons: Containers can't be shipped inland on barges, and barge cargo almost always ends up on trucks at some point. Barges primarily move bulk products such as coal, metals and grains. Barges also are slow.

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