

Small policy change would yield big supply chain, transportation improvements

Twin 33s are the answer



FILE - A truck passes a container ship at the Port of Oakland on Tuesday, Oct. 19, 2021, in Oakland, Calif. California farmers say they are having trouble exporting their crops because of delays in the global supply chain. Intense ... [more >](#)

By Randy Mullett - - Thursday, January 6, 2022

OPINION:

Ongoing global and national supply chain issues could create some massive headaches, long delays and disappointed shoppers this winter. Fortunately, there are simple policy solutions that could help address these issues head-on, maximizing efficiencies and improving sustainability across the supply chain. However, getting the right policymakers onboard has been another ongoing challenge for the transportation industry.

Everyone is well aware of the ongoing congestion at our nation's ports. We must increase the resilience of our systems to work through this backlog and unload the hundreds of thousands of shipping containers currently sitting on cargo ships docked outside our ports of entry. However, once we do get that cargo unloaded, there is still a host of issues to address in our national transportation network that will only contribute to and extend the delays that Americans and businesses nationwide are already experiencing.

A national truck driver shortage, for example, means that even if we can resolve port congestion, there are still not enough truck drivers to deliver these goods to where they need to go. This situation has only

been made worse throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. The American Trucking Associations reporting the current driver shortage has risen to an all-time high of 80,000 — which could double by 2030.

This is why we must look beyond the port issue to what changes we can make in our transportation system to overcome this ongoing labor shortage and accommodate logistical needs now and in the future. Moreover, we need a solution that will work in the long term. Temporary solutions are just that — temporary — and they could end up creating their own problems, from heavier trucks that do more damage to our roads to overextended truckers working longer hours and posing safety threats to themselves and other drivers.

One of the simplest policy changes that would yield nearly immediate capacity and efficiency improvements in the U.S. supply chain would be to update an outdated federal rule to allow a modest, five-foot increase to twin 28-foot trailers — bringing them up to twin 33s. This additional five feet would provide a no-cost solution that will help ease congestion on our nation's highways, reduce fuel costs and lower emissions.

It's not as though twin 33s are a new concept. In fact, they are already permitted to operate in 20 states. However, without a change in this antiquated federal policy, they cannot connect to our national transportation network, undermining the potential positive impact these trucks would have. Standardizing truck lengths will make our transportation network more efficient, helping move goods, food items and produce, and medical supplies more easily and quickly than is currently possible.

Moreover, twin 33s will help increase the speed of shipping and delivering these items while improving safety and sustainability. Based on an analysis of 2018 data, adopting twin 33s nationwide would have saved 274 million gallons of fuel that year alone, reducing CO2 emissions by 3.12 million tons and cutting vehicle miles traveled by 3.36 billion. Twin 33s are not only a smart logistical solution; they are an environmentally friendly one.

Studies show they will help improve safety as well. According to research, twin 33s are safer on highways than current trucking configurations. Not only are they more dynamically stable than twin 28s, but they are also better at handling abrupt evasive maneuvers as well. They would also be equipped with advanced safety features like automatic braking and electronic stability control. Just by adopting twin 33s, we could reduce the number of truck accidents by 4,500 annually simply because we would be reducing the actual number of trucks traversing our highways.

Allowing twin 33s to operate nationwide would do more than just address our current supply chain and transportation challenges. This small shift in policy would also boost American businesses, as manufacturers would be needed to build and assemble these new trailers. That would help support and create local jobs while spurring economic growth across various industries.

The recent passage of the infrastructure bill is good news for America's transportation system, but it could be years before we see tangible results from these investments. We need a solution that will immediately help alleviate the strain on our supply chain and transportation infrastructure. Allowing twin 33s to operate nationwide is a simple, commonsense solution that policymakers are overlooking to the detriment of American businesses and consumers.

It's time to modernize outdated regulations holding us back and creating even more logistical challenges in the U.S. supply chain and our overall transportation system. Twin 33s will help increase efficiency, improve safety and reduce emissions, yielding benefits for consumers, businesses and our environment.

- *Randy Mullett is the executive director of Americans for Modern Transportation.*