

# State Government Efforts to Reduce Crashes Involving Large Trucks on Pennsylvania Highways

## Report Highlights

The Legislative Budget and Finance Committee (LB&FC) has had an ongoing interest in the state's truck weight enforcement activities and truck safety programs and issues. This report updates the Committee's previous work and examines current state programs and activities to improve truck safety and reduce the number and severity of accidents involving "large trucks" (i.e., trucks over 10,000 pounds gross vehicle weight rating).

### Summary of Conclusions:

- *Volume of Large Truck Traffic* – PA highways carry an extremely heavy volume of the nation's large truck traffic. Currently, large trucks travel about 10 billion miles a year in PA, and the Commonwealth's interstates carry an estimated 37 percent of all interstate truck traffic in the northeast.
- *Large Truck Crash Statistics* – In 1998, Pennsylvania ranked second in the nation in the number of large trucks involved in crashes. These crashes resulted in 192 being killed and 5,972 being injured in large truck crashes on Pennsylvania highways. During 1999, crashes involving large trucks in PA resulted in 234 fatalities, an increase of 22 percent over 1998, and the highest level since 1989.
- *Large Truck Fatal Crash Rates* – PA's large truck fatal crash involvement rate (i.e., number of large trucks involved in fatal crashes per 100 million vehicle miles traveled) declined from 4.3 in 1988 to 1.8 in 1998. Crash rates were not yet available for 1999.
- *Crash Causation* – Neither the federal government nor PennDOT is currently able to conclusively establish large truck crash causation or fault because existing databases do not contain sufficiently complete information on contributing factors, such as driver error and vehicle condition.
- *State Truck Safety Programs and Activities* – PA state government agencies have significantly expanded their truck safety programming and special initiatives over the past ten years. A number of the 25 separate programs and initiatives underway at the time of this study incorporate advanced technology and intelligent transportation systems (ITS) concepts. For example, through GIS mapping, PennDOT is targeting "high truck crash corridors" for comprehensive education, enforcement, and engineering initiatives and is installing automated truck rollover warning systems on selected ramps that have a history of truck rollovers.
- *The MCSAP Program* – The number of Motor Carrier Safety Assistance Program (MCSAP) truck inspections conducted in PA in FY 1998-99 (43,221) was down significantly from the recent

high of 58,056 in FY 1996-97. PA did not spend \$1.2 million of its available federal grant from MCSAP inspections in FFY 1998, and a substantial number of motor carriers failed to certify to PennDOT that they have corrected the deficiencies found during such inspections.

- *Other Program-Specific Findings/Observations* – The report also includes a number of findings/observations related to motor carrier safety fitness reviews and audits, the Waste Hauler Inspection Program, Commercial Driver Licensing Program, CVSA Decal Program, Second Generation Truck Smart Program, and the Motor Carrier Advisory Committee.

### Summary of Recommendations:

- PennDOT should take the lead in coordinating the development of a formal statewide strategy to reduce the number and severity of crashes involving large trucks. This strategy should be consistent with the federal Safety Action Plan and should coordinate the numerous individual truck safety-related planning documents and initiatives currently in effect within PennDOT, the State Police, and PUC. Copies of the strategy should be provided to the House and Senate Transportation Committees and made available to the media and general public. The Governor's Traffic Safety Council and the Motor Carrier Advisory Committee should monitor the implementation and results of the strategy.
- PennDOT should promote an increase in the number of Motor Carrier Safety Assistance Program (MCSAP) roadside safety inspections which are conducted annually in the Commonwealth to a level that fully utilizes the state's basic MCSAP grant. Other suggested actions relate to modifying certain MCSAP regulations, expanding targeted efforts on high crash corridors, and enhancing the "Truck Smart" public awareness campaign.
- Other recommendations propose that the PUC expand its staffing and operational capabilities to conduct motor carrier safety fitness reviews and audits; that the Governor's Motor Carrier Advisory Committee be continued; and that the Legislature consider certain statutory changes related to truck safety.