

MOTORCOACH AXLE WEIGHT REGULATIONS

ISSUE

Over-the-road buses (OTRBs), like traditional transit buses, have been carrying progressively more weight on each axle due to government mandates, the latest being the wheelchair lifts required by the Americans with Disabilities Act and market driven amenities. As a consequence, fully loaded OTRBs approach, and sometimes may exceed, the federal axle weight restrictions of 34,000 lbs. on the tandem axle (with no single axle allowed to carry more than 20,000 lbs.).

BACKGROUND

Since 1982, federal law has prohibited (with certain exceptions) any vehicle that exceeds 80,000-lbs. gross vehicle weight from using the interstate highway system. The law also prohibits any one axle from carrying a load in excess of 20,000 lbs., and tandem axles cannot exceed 34,000-lbs. gross weight.

Intercity motorcoaches and trucks are both defined as “commercial motor vehicles” under federal law, and are regulated the same with respect to size, weight, and length regulations. However, motorcoaches and trucks are significantly different: there are approximately 40,000 motorcoaches currently operating on our highways, compared with nearly 1.5 million trucks; the gross weight of a fully loaded motorcoach rarely exceeds 55,000 lbs., while a truck may weigh as much as 80,000 lbs. fully loaded; motorcoaches have inherent design restrictions that limit them to a maximum of three axles, while a tractor-trailer combination may have five or more axles; and unlike trucks, the TAG (non-drive) axle of a motorcoach has only two tires, and is not designed to carry the same load as the drive axle, which has four tires.

For several years ABA endeavored to have the private bus industry subject to the same axle weight exemption as the transit buses. A provision in SAFETEA-LU granted us this exemption. The fiscal year 2006 transportation appropriations legislation included a provision that prevents individual States from imposing lower axle weight limits on their portions of the interstate highway system, which a few States used as a reason to levy fines against private bus operators.

ABA POSITION

ABA supports continued exemption of the private motorcoach industry from state axle weight limits.

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