

SUBJECT: Higher truck-weight limit for Chambers County business park roads

COMMITTEE: Transportation — favorable, without amendment

VOTE: 6 ayes — Phillips, Callegari, Deshotel, Hamric, Hill, West
0 nays
3 absent — Krusee, Casteel, Flores

WITNESSES: For — Charles Iupe, Cedar Crossing Industrial Park and Chambers County Improvement District #2
Against — None
On — Amadeo Saenz, Texas Department of Transportation

BACKGROUND: The Cedar Crossing Business Park is an industrial park located in Chambers County that houses many distribution centers for major corporations, including the largest Wal-Mart distribution center in the world. This business park currently is the destination of approximately 10 percent of the goods shipped into the Port of Houston.

Transportation Code, sec. 621.001(b) prohibits heavy-haul trucks weighing more than 80,000 pounds from traveling on state highways in most instances. Companies that carry goods from the Port of Houston to distribution centers in Cedar Crossing Business Park often unpack containers when goods arrive at the port and divide the contents of each container into different trucks in order to comply with this weight restriction.

DIGEST: HB 1044 would allow heavy-haul trucks that weigh 100,000 pounds or less to travel on portions of three state highways in the Cedar Crossing Business Park in Chambers County. Heavy-haul trucks traveling on Farm-to-Market Road (FM) 1405, FM 2354, and the State Highway 99 frontage road would not be required to obtain a permit to carry loads of up to 100,000 pounds. The bill would not authorize operation on federal highways of vehicles exceeding federal weight limits.

The bill would take immediate effect if finally passed by a two-thirds record vote of the membership of each house. Otherwise, it would take effect September 1, 2005.

**SUPPORTERS
SAY:**

By increasing the weight limit for trucks to 100,000 pounds on certain roads inside Chambers County, HB 1044 substantially would reduce the distance traveled by heavy-haul trucks carrying goods into the Cedar Crossing Business Park. The route heavy-haul trucks currently take from the Port of Houston to the business park is more than 20 miles and travels through a number of residential neighborhoods. This bill would make it economical to transport goods instead by barge from the port to Cedar Bayou in Chambers County and then to load heavier containers directly onto trucks to travel the short distance to the business park. This would reduce the time and cost of transporting goods into the park while reducing truck traffic in several residential areas.

Cedar Crossing Business Park is a rapidly growing industrial park that has become a center of employment. The business park already has created 3,000 new jobs in the area and has the potential to provide many more as it grows. This bill would promote economic development in the region by making it a more desirable location for large companies to locate their distribution centers.

HB 1044 would reduce congestion on highways by providing alternate routes for heavy-haul trucks. If the weight limit on heavy-haul trucks were increased, the same quantity of goods could be shipped using fewer trucks. Additionally, heavy-haul truck traffic could be distributed between the three highways that travel directly into the business park.

Reducing the number of heavy-haul trucks and the distance they must travel would reduce air pollution in the area. The counties surrounding the Port of Houston currently are classified as non-attainment zones under the federal Clean Air Act. A reduction in heavy-haul truck traffic would help reduce pollution and bring the region closer to compliance with federal Environmental Protection Agency standards.

**OPPONENTS
SAY:**

Heavy-haul trucks cause more damage to roads, thereby increasing road maintenance costs. By increasing the weight limit for trucks on these highways, the amount of damage caused by the trucks traveling on the roads also would increase. The route that heavy-haul trucks use to transport goods to the business park is not long enough to merit

authorizing overweight trucks to travel on these three highways in Chambers County.

OTHER
OPPONENTS
SAY:

The bill should require heavy-haul trucks that exceed specified weight restrictions to pay a fee for traveling on state highways. This fee would offset the cost of spending taxpayer dollars on the maintenance of roads that have been damaged by heavy-haul truck traffic.