Transport Topics

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Week of May 19, 2014

Senate Panel Passes Road Bill With Focus on Freight Projects

By Michele Fuetsch
Staff Reporter

A $265 billion, six-year transportation reauthorization bill approved by a Senate committee last week would require states to spend some of their federal highway money on projects that improve freight mobility.

Under the plan approved May 15 by the Environment and Public Works Committee, freight would become a core element within the federal highway program, elevating its status to that of other key components such as highway safety,

bridge building and air quality.

Overall highway spending would be maintained at current levels, plus inflation, pegging the authorization at $41 billion in fiscal 2015 and rising to $45 billion by 2020. Over the life of the bill, $6 billion would go toward freight-related projects.

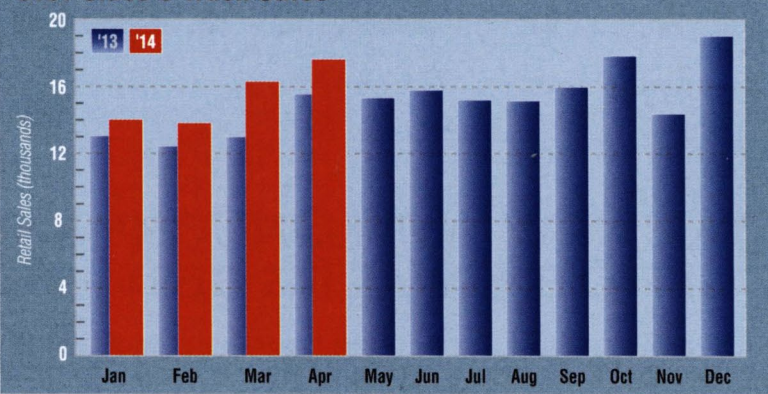The bill would not make any change to federal fuel taxes.

After EPW approved the bill, Committee Chairwoman Barbara Boxer (D-Calif.) said in a statement the unanimous committee vote sends a "powerful signal to our colleagues

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New Truck Sales Up 13.6%

April's Total of 17,776 Is Highest This Year

U.S. Class 8 Truck Sales

Source: WardsAuto.com

By Seth Clevenger
Staff Reporter

U.S. retail heavy-duty truck sales totaled 17,776 in April, the highest level thus far in 2014 and 13.6% above the same month a year earlier, WardsAuto.com reported.

April also marked the eighth consecutive month of year-over-year growth and was 8% higher than the March total of 16,452.

Last month's tally was the highest since 19,695 big trucks were sold in December, typically the busiest month of the year. Four-month cumulative sales were 62,323 units, a 14.5% increase over last year's pace.

"The truck market in 2014 is a pleasant, somewhat unexpected, surprise," Andy Douglas, Kenworth Truck Co.'s national sales manager for specialty markets, said at the Alternative Clean Transportation Expo in Long Beach, California, earlier this month.

The recent sales gains mirror the industry's higher intake of new truck orders, as tracked by ACT Research Co.

Year-to-date, incoming net Class 8 orders have surged 27.5% from the same period a year earlier, pointing to more sales in the months ahead and prompting truck makers to ramp up production rates in North America, ACT said.

Given the industry's current order backlog, which now represents

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Senator Urges Fuel-Tax Hike To Pay for Transport Spending

Carper tells transportation leaders a gradual increase in federal fuel taxes would restore purchasing power for infrastructure.
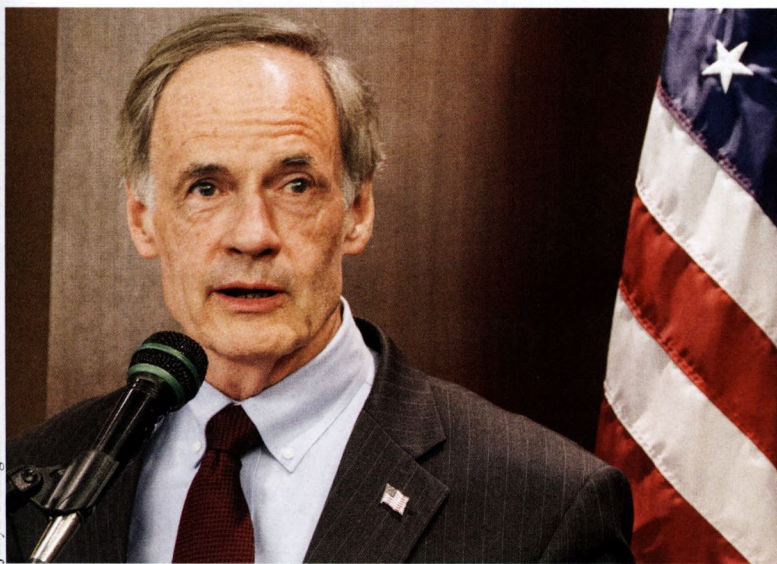
By Eugene Mulero
Staff Reporter

WASHINGTON — Sen. Tom Carper (D-Del.) said Congress should approve modest increases to the federal fuel taxes as a way to finance the six-year transportation reauthorization bill and raise revenue for the Highway Trust Fund, which is quickly running out of money.

"Don't do it overnight, but for the next, maybe, four years, raise the gas tax," Carper said here at American Trucking Associations' Capitol Hill office May 13 during Infrastructure Week. "We're all going to

pay for it, but we have to figure out a smart way to pay for it."

Carper is chairman of the Senate Environment and Public Works Transportation and Infrastructure subcommittee. For several weeks, he's been addressing industry groups and colleagues to promote an increase of 3 to 4 cents annually in fuel taxes to "restore the purchasing power." He also said the taxes should be indexed to inflation.

The 24.4-cents-a-gallon tax on diesel and 18.4-cents-a-gallon tax on gasoline have not been raised since 1993. Carper noted that the

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Low-Cost Mobile Devices Help Small Carriers Access Critical Operating Data, Executives Say

By Seth Clevenger
Staff Reporter

Smart phones and tablets are transforming the way trucking companies manage their operations, with increasing numbers of drivers, fleet managers and their shipper customers using them for work purposes, carriers and analysts said.

Land Air Express of New England, a regional less-than-truckload carrier in Williston, Vermont, has issued tablets to all of its drivers to

enhance communication with dispatch, mainly via text message, while providing GPS tracking, document processing and camera functionality for freight claims.

TECHNOLOGY

"The data flow between drivers and the dispatch office has been great," said Dave Bush, director of business processes at Land Air.

He said the phone call volume at dispatch has been cut at least in half because there is no longer a need to

call drivers for estimated time of arrival; that information is readily available. Or a text can simply be sent to the driver.

These devices, although mostly aimed at the consumer market, also are enabling fleets to improve communications with their drivers and gain instant access to critical information, while lowering the cost of mobile technology.

According to technology research firm Gartner Inc., worldwide sales of smart phones jumped 42.3% to

A fleet manager uses a tablet to access exception-based reporting.

INSIDE

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■ **DELAYS** — Truckers transporting new vehicles have been stymied by a slowdown in railroad service. — P. 5.

■ **BRIDGE** — The NTSB is nearing completion of its report on how the I-5 span over the Skagit River in Washington collapsed a year ago. — P. 5.

■ **ROADCHECK** — North American safety inspectors will scrutinize commercial vehicles during the annual event June 3-5. — P. 4.

Diesel Prices
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-1.6¢

Self-serve
May 12 $3.948
May 5 $3.964
Source: Department of Energy

A Path to ELD Compliance

By Seth Clevenger
Staff Reporter

Some technology suppliers are turning to mobile devices as a way to reach first-time adopters of in-cab technology expected to enter the market to comply with the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration's proposed electronic logging device mandate.

The proposal, issued in March, would require truckers to electronically log hours of service when enacted.

The impetus for smaller fleets to adopt in-cab technology will be government rules, Gartner Inc. analyst Dwight Klappich said.

"With these [mobile] alternatives, I think it will be much easier for some of these companies to comply," he said.

J.J. Keller & Associates is delivering its Keller Mobile electronic logging application through its dedicated compli-

TND720 GPS product to provide electronic HOS logging.

Jim Rodi, the company's senior vice president of mobile communications, said many fleets and owner-operators are going to look for a "clear and easy path" to meeting proposed ELD regulations.

"If they've already got a smart phone or a tablet or a TND720, our HD 100 is going to be a logical solution for them to pursue. It's a minimal investment to become compliant on E-logs," he said.

Rodi said truckers who have invested in embedded or tethered platforms in the cab will continue running them for several years, but more buyers will be looking for a more flexible and scalable platform available through mobile devices.

However, mobile platforms will continue to need at least some in-vehicle component to tie in with the truck's ECM to ensure the integrity of HOS logs, said Clem Driscoll, principal of

Omnitracs launched its Extended Productivity Suite last year. The software can be added to smart devices and includes proof-of-delivery features, such as signature capture.

Rand McNally's HD 100 turns mobile devices into electronic logs, which will help drivers meet proposed ELD regulations.

ance tablet and through truckers' Android and Apple tablets and smart phones.

Chief Operating Officer Rustin Keller said J.J. Keller decided to provide its compliance technology through mobile devices because that approach is convenient and cost-effective for customers.

"Tablets and mobile computers are getting deployed more and more every day for business use, and for us to be able to tap into them and help customers comply with hours of service without the need to reinvest in new hardware and new infrastructure is a huge savings to them," Keller said. "For us to load another app on there is so much more convenient than having to implement an entire new infrastructure."

Rand McNally has made mobile devices an important part of its strategy by launching the HD 100 in-cab device, which can be paired with smart phones, tablets and its IntelliRoute

C.J. Driscoll & Associates.

The company conducted a survey of more than 500 fleet operators in the summer of 2013 that included questions on mobile device usage.

The firm's 2013-2014 Survey of Fleet Operator Interest in MRM Systems and Services included responses from 69 truckload carriers, of which 46% reported that their drivers use smart phones as the primary method, or one of their methods, to communicate, and 13% said their drivers use laptops or tablets.

The results were similar for the 76 private fleet operators in the survey, with 42% saying their drivers use smart phones and 15% saying they use laptops or tablets.

The survey also included 22 local common-carrier fleets, of which 50% reported that their drivers use smart phones and 15% said they use laptops or tablets.

Mobile Options Increase
Suppliers Deliver Software on Smart Devices

967.8 million units in 2013, compared with 680.1 million in 2012.

Omnitracs is using smart phones and tablets to add capabilities outside the cab as a supplement to its onboard Mobile Computing Platforms.

In September, Omnitracs launched its Extended Productivity Suite, which uses Android smart devices to provide signature capture, bar code scanning, document imaging and photo capture.

The mobile proof-of-delivery application wirelessly syncs with the MCP onboard computers so they act as one seamless platform, said Vikas Jain, vice president of product management at Omnitracs.

"We have taken the best of both worlds," Jain said. "You get the reliability of the fixed-mount MCP so you have performance monitoring and critical applications like hours of service and others in a very reliable, ruggedized form factor, and you also have the benefit of a portable solution connected wirelessly to the MCP and synchronization of data and applications between the two."

Reliability is the main reason Omnitracs continues to build its platform around its MCP units rather than offering a system that runs solely on mobile devices.

Omnitracs' customers rely on their MCP systems to run "mission-critical" applications such as hours of service and vehicle performance, Jain said.

If core functions were running on a mobile device, fleets could lose access to them if the device is lost or broken or runs out of battery power, he said, adding that data security is another consideration.

Jain said Omnitracs offers a "hybrid approach" pairing the MCP with a mobile device: "We believe that's the

best solution for where technology is today in terms of meeting market needs, but over time, I'm sure this will also evolve, and we'll evolve our platform along with it."

He also said future Omnitracs products could use a mobile device as the predominant component — but only when the company is satisfied with the reliability and security of those devices.

Onboard computer provider PeopleNet Communications Corp. is offering its software on high-end rugged handhelds from Motorola Solutions and Intermec as an alternative to its fixed-mount and tablet in-cab displays.

Company President Brian McLaughlin said PeopleNet customers using those options are typically less-than-truckload and food-service fleets.

Using a consumer-grade device as the primary system "just doesn't hold up" due to the reliability concerns, McLaughlin said.

PeopleNet does offer mobile apps that enable safety managers and dispatchers to receive exception-based alerts on their Android and Apple smart phones and tablets.

The company's EventAlerter provides real-time e-mail or text notifi-

A driver for Land Air Express of New England stopped by the side of the road to use a tablet to access the company's software system.

Drivers Adapt to Devices

cations to the carrier's office when a driver passes a speed threshold or is approaching an on-duty time violation. The app also can alert managers when an accident occurs, when a driver is out of route or behind schedule and when a truck has been idling too long, among other preset exceptions.

"If you're a safety manager, now you have all of that right at your fingertips on your mobile device," McLaughlin said.

PeopleNet is part of Trimble Navigation Ltd.'s transportation and logistics division.

XRS' new telematics platform runs exclusively on mobile devices. The success of its mobile Turnpike platform, which it acquired through its 2009 purchase of Turnpike Global Technologies, prompted the decision, CEO Jay Coughlan said.

PeopleNet offers software for Intermec rugged devices.

He predicted that all the classic enterprise systems eventually will move to mobile devices: "As you go along, there's no way the people who are manufacturing their own hardware for the truck are going to be able to keep up with the advancements of someone like a Samsung."

Talking durability, Ken Weinberg, vice president of Carrier Logistics Inc., said, "Drivers don't abuse the tablet because it makes their job better. . . . [Good drivers] don't care if you're watching what they're doing because they're working hard. And if you can help them work smarter, it makes their job better and they're going to take care of the unit."

Bush of Land Air said drivers have been quick to adapt to the devices since they were issued last year.

"It's probably tied to people having their own smart phones for their personal use and not being afraid to use a touch screen anymore versus a three-character flip phone."

Land Air looked at rugged tablets when examining which devices to use but decided instead to invest in less expensive consumer tablets. The durability of those devices "hasn't been an issue at all," Bush said.

The tablets are powered by software from Acordex Imaging Systems and integrate with Land Air's back-office FACTS software from CLI.

Roadrunners Autotransport Inc. started off with the tablets but decided to deploy smart phones as well to ensure that they could always reach their drivers.

"When we wanted to get ahold of the driver right away when there was a change in delivery, it was tough," said Sal Giovingo, Roadrunners president. "The phone piece really eliminated that problem for us."

The larger tablets are easy to work on, but drivers didn't always have them when they left the truck. They always have the smart phones on hand, he said.

Giovingo said the fuel-tax reporting simplified work that previously was complex and time-consuming.

The data collected by the onboard system also helped the company save fuel by reducing idling.

Randy Guidry, digital communications leader at Averitt Express, said the carrier saw that some companies were creating slimmed-down versions of their normal sites for mobile users, but Averitt decided it was important to make everything available on mobile devices.

"This is an industry that's time-sensitive," Guidry said. "We didn't want customers getting frustrated using our site."

Mobile usage currently represents a relatively small portion of the total activity on Averitt's site, but that figure is "growing exponentially," he said.

About 5% of total traffic comes from smart phones and another 1.5% is from tablets, but Guidry said he expects that number to rise significantly. In March, mobile usage was up 494% from the same month last year, he said.