



Oversize and Overweight Commercial Vehicles

By Ryan Long

State and federal regulations set standards for the size and weight of commercial vehicles operated on public highways. A commercial vehicle is any vehicle used for commerce that has a gross vehicle weight rating of 10,000 pounds or more. Commercial vehicles that exceed the established weight standards can receive state permits to travel along certain routes. This *issue brief* discusses the regulation, permitting, and routing of oversize and overweight commercial vehicles.

Federal Regulation

Federal limits on commercial vehicle weight and size were first enacted in 1956 through the Federal-Aid Highway Act. States are required to enforce federal minimum and maximum size and weight standards where established, and to annually certify to the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) that they have an effective program in place for enforcing the standards.

National Network of Highways. The National Network of Highways (NNH) is approximately 200,000 miles and includes the interstate system and other highways subject to federal size standards that are certified by the states to the FHWA as being capable of handling larger commercial vehicles. Federal size standards apply to commercial vehicles operating on all roadways within the NNH. Federal limits on the height of commercial vehicles have not been established, and states may impose their own standards. In addition, the federal government does not set a limit on the overall vehicle length of tractor-semitrailer operations on the NNH, and

federal law prohibits states from setting an overall length limit for these types of operations.

Table 1 below provides the federal size and weight standards, and the Colorado standards where there is no federal standard in place.

Table 1. Federal and Colorado Legal Standards for Oversize and Overweight Vehicles

Vehicle Feature	Standard
Overall Vehicle Length	No federal limit is imposed, and states are prohibited from imposing a limit on overall vehicle length for truck-tractor-semitrailer combinations.
Trailer Length	Federal standards prohibit states from imposing a trailer length limit of less than 48 feet on trailers operating in a truck-tractor-semitrailer combination on the NNH. Colorado's standard is 57 feet, 4 inches for trailers; and 70 feet for vehicle combinations coupled together.
Vehicle Width	Federal and state limit of 8 feet, 6 inches.
Vehicle Height	No federal limit on vehicle height. State height limit is 13 feet, except where designated 14 feet, 6 inches by CDOT.
Vehicle Weight	Federal and state limit on interstate highways is 80,000 pounds combined gross vehicle weight (CGVW). State limit on non-interstate highways is 85,000 pounds CGVW.

Source: Colorado Department of Transportation.

Failure to enforce. Under federal law, if a state fails to adequately enforce the federal minimum or maximum weight standards on commercial vehicles, the state is in jeopardy of losing its entire National Highway System appropriation. If a state violates federal standards on commercial vehicle size, the state may be subject to civil action in

federal district court. Furthermore, if a state fails to annually certify to the FHWA that it has enforced the standards, it may result in a 10 percent reduction of all federal-aid highway funds to the state for the next fiscal year.

State Regulation

In Colorado, the legal dimensions and maximum weight limits for commercial vehicles are specified in statute. The Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT) is responsible for regulating the movement of oversize and overweight vehicles on the state's highways and interstates, and accomplishes this by issuing permits and providing route guidelines for commercial vehicles that exceed the normal size and weight limits allowed by law.

Permitting and routing. If a commercial vehicle exceeds the size or weight standards established in law, the vehicle's operator must obtain an oversize or overweight permit from CDOT, which will allow the vehicle to operate legally on designated highways. For oversize and overweight vehicles operating on city and county roads, the operator must also obtain permission or the appropriate permit from the local government to operate. More information on commercial vehicle permits can be found on [CDOT's website](#).

Western Regional Permit. The Western Regional Permit allows commercial vehicles to travel between 12 participating states with one permit. Each state has designated routes for use with the regional permit. More information on the permit can be found [here](#).

Permitting revenue. CDOT issues single-trip and annual permits to operate with extra-legal vehicles or loads. The cost of a permit varies based on the weight and dimensions of the vehicle, and if the vehicle will be traveling on interstate or non-interstate highways. For the five-year period between July 1, 2014, and June 30, 2018, CDOT issued a total of 280,740 permits, or 181,195 single trip permits and 99,545 annual permits. These

permits generated \$44.3 million in revenue. Revenue generated through the permitting process is credited to CDOT's construction and maintenance budget.

Ports of entry. Ports of entry enforce federal and state size and weight restrictions. Their role includes performing safety inspections, collecting fines and fees, and checking required permits and licenses. Colorado's ports of entry are regulated by the Colorado State Patrol (CSP) in the Department of Public Safety. Colorado law requires trucks and truck/trailer combinations with an empty weight exceeding 16,000 pounds, or a CGVW rating exceeding 26,000 pounds, to clear the state's ports. Colorado currently operates 10 fixed ports and 10 mobile ports in the state. Information on port of entry locations can be found at [CSP's website](#).

Chain law. Between September 1 and May 31 of each year, all commercial vehicles traveling on I-70 between Dotsero and Morrison must carry sufficient chains. Commercial vehicles with a CVGW of 26,001 pounds or more are required to have four or more drive wheels covered with chains when the chain law is in effect. Winter driving alerts and more information on Colorado's chain law can be found [here](#).