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MEMORANDUM

TO: Skamania County Transportation Policy Committee
FROM: Dale Robins
DATE: May 27, 2015
SUBJECT: SR-14 Truck Movements

BACKGROUND

Over the years there has been concern about trucks using SR-14 on the Washington side of the Columbia River instead of I-84 on the Oregon side to avoid the Oregon weight mile tax. As a result of concerns expressed by residents along SR-14, a Truck Survey was conducted in 1997 to understand truck movement within the Columbia River Gorge region. Although the survey was conducted many years ago, it does provide insight into truck movements within the Columbia River Gorge Region and the potential percentage of avoidance.

For the Truck survey, surveyors recorded partial truck license plate numbers for a two day period on Bridge of the Gods, Hood River Bridge, The Dalles Bridge, west of Bridge of Gods, west of Hood River Bridge, and east of the Dalles Bridge. On Tuesday, April 29, 1997, data was collected with the I-84 eastbound Port of Entry open (normal operating condition). On Wednesday, April 30, 1997, data was collected with the I-84 eastbound Port of Entry, I-84 westbound Wyeth Scale, and SR-14 Home Valley Scale all open.

Attached is an analysis of the truck movement issue in the Columbia River Gorge area, based on the 1997 Truck Survey.

Oregon/Washington Truck Movements

Background

Interstate 84 (I-84) and State Route 14 (SR-14) are parallel east/west highways traveling through the Columbia River Gorge. I-84 is a 4-lane Interstate facility located in Oregon and SR-14 is a 2-lane State Highway located in Washington. Both routes are part of the National Highway System (NHS). I-84 carries approximately 5,600 -5,700 trucks and SR-14 carries approximately 650-700 trucks through the Columbia River Gorge area. The number of trucks increases in urban areas along both highways. Both routes are public routes that are open to all legal trucks.

An Interstate Highway is the highest road classification and provides the highest level of mobility, at the highest speed, for a long uninterrupted distance. As such, I-84 should provide a faster route for the majority of trucks passing through the Columbia River Gorge region. SR-14 has height restriction due to a number of tunnels, steeper grades and sharp curves. However, for a percentage of trucks, SR-14 would provide the faster route, because of the need to conduct business on the Washington side of the Columbia River.

There has been considerable speculation and concern expressed by Washington residents about trucks using SR-14 on the Washington side of the Columbia River instead of I-84 on the Oregon side in order to avoid the weight mile tax in Oregon.

Taxing Method

Truck transportation user fees in Oregon and Washington are quite different. Washington has a diesel tax and Oregon has a weight mile tax. In addition, both states have different licensing and other fees.

The Washington Diesel Fuel Tax is a flat 61.9 cents per gallon. This is a pay as you drive tax system. Trucks that have lower fuel efficiency pay a higher fuel tax. Interstate truckers are not likely to estimate the number of miles driven in Washington State and remit the State fuel tax that should have been paid in Washington State.

The Oregon Weight Mile Tax is based on weights and distances traveled. Truckers are required to keep a log of miles traveled. The tax increases as the weight of the vehicle increases, and varies between 4 cents per mile to 16.4 cents per mile.

Reason For Evasion

Given the tax structure of the two states, trucks can evade the day-to-day taxes through buying diesel in Oregon and driving on Washington Highways. The evasion of the Oregon Weight Mile Tax and Washington Diesel Fuel Tax are criminal offences, but can be difficult to enforce.

Example: The following example is based on a 50,000 pound truck that makes a regular round trip between Portland, Oregon and Yakima, Washington at 6.5 miles per gallon (Average semi-truck miles per gallon).

**Approximate WA Gas Tax and Oregon Weight Fees
50,000 Pound Truck (Round Trip)**

Travel/Tax Method	Daily Cost	Monthly Cost (21 trips)	Annual Cost (250 trips)	Distance (miles)	Travel Time
Fuel WA & Drive SR-14	\$19.10	\$401	\$4,775	188	7 h 40 min
Fuel OR & Drive I-84	\$18.15	\$381	\$4,537	194	7 h 10 min
Fuel in OR & Drive SR-14	\$1.20	\$25	\$300	188	7 h 40 min

1997 SR-14 Truck Survey Findings

- A major portion (83-84%) of the SR-14 truck trips stop in the section between the Bridge of the Gods and The Dalles Bridge.
- Approximately 3%-4% of the truck trips appear to be avoiding the weigh stations on I-84, by crossing back and forth at The Bridge of the Gods and The Dalles Bridge without stopping along SR-14.
- A maximum of 16%-17% of the truck trips could be avoiding the Oregon Weight Mile Tax. There are a number of reasons for a truck to be using SR-14 and the percentage that are purposely avoiding Oregon Weight Mile Tax is probably between 8%-13%.
- Another observation from the 1997 survey is that the large trucking firms mainly use I 84, while small independent operators were more common on SR-14.

This would indicate that approximately 50-80 trucks per day are using SR-14 to avoid the Oregon Weight Mile Tax. The remaining trucks have business on the Washington side of the Columbia River.

Conclusion

SR-14 is a public facility and trucks cannot just be banned from the highway. None the less, legislation has the greatest potential for changing truck movement within the Columbia River Gorge region. Washington or Oregon State Legislature would need to pass legislation to make the trucking taxes similar between the two states. Oregon is not likely to change. The Washington State Transportation Commission is studying a motor vehicle road usage fee (mileage tax for all motor vehicles). This would be a paradigm shift from the fuel tax and if successful would likely take many years to implement.

Enforcement of the Washington Diesel Fuel tax and Oregon Weight Mile Tax, beyond what is already being done, would not be cost effective and would have little impact. Opening the SR-14 Home Valley weigh station would only catch vehicle violations, such

as over-weight vehicles or bad brakes. Inspection would not enforce Washington or Oregon trucking taxes.

This is a complicated issue associated with two states that have different tax structures and small business owners who are trying to minimize cost. The issue is similar to the Washington Sales Tax. By law Washington State residents and businesses are required to pay a use tax (equal to sales tax rate) for items purchased in Oregon that are used in Washington. Other than vehicle purchases, the Washington Department of Revenue does not have a good mechanism for enforcing the use tax law.