

# The NCSL Blog

## State DOTs Helping Truckers Address Supply Chain Disruptions Amidst COVID-19



**By Jonathon Bates**

Since the outbreak of the novel coronavirus, truck drivers have gone into overdrive to ensure the safe and speedy shipment of essential items such as food, medicine, and medical supplies.

The urgently needed services performed by these unsung heroes are being supported by state departments of transportation (DOTs), as well as the U.S. Department of Transportation, especially to address critical challenges faced by the trucking industry, including temporarily waiving hours-of-service restrictions, relaxing truck size and weight limits and creating temporary safety rest areas for drivers.



PrePass, a national trucking services provider, reported data showing the industry remains in high demand, with nearly 13.3 million trucks traveling in March, slightly outpacing truck traffic from March 2019. And data by the American Transportation Research Institute reported an “unprecedented level of truck movement” for March.

A snapshot of state DOTs shows every state has kept at least some of its rest areas open, while at least 22 states have temporarily relaxed truck size and weight limits and at least 19 states have temporarily waived hours-of-service restrictions, which govern how long a driver can operate behind the wheel for without taking a break.

These temporary measures only apply to commercial vehicles providing direct assistance to coronavirus relief efforts. Federal hours-of-service waivers are authorized in every state under the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration’s nationwide emergency declaration and some states have issued their own state waivers for intrastate trucking. Further, some states have adopted additional temporary measures to help drivers safely arrive at their destinations.

Arizona’s DOT (ADOT) opened two temporary rest areas along corridors in the northern area of the state solely for commercial drivers. This allows truck drivers a chance to get some rest and relaxation before returning to the road and take advantage of the portable toilets, handwashing stations and trash bins. ADOT also announced other rest areas in the state will continue to be available for all drivers and that staff is following enhanced sanitation protocols such as regularly wiping down frequently touched surfaces.

Missouri and Virginia are supporting drivers by temporarily permitting truck parking at weigh stations, including overnight parking. In Virginia, the commonwealth ordered its 13 weigh stations to shutter until at least April 23. However, due to higher truck traffic, the Department of Motor Vehicles announced it was turning 10 of the 13 stations into temporary parking spaces for

commercial vehicles. By doing so, 246 trucks will be able to park at such locations on a 24/7 basis until the weigh stations are reopened.

It is worth highlighting that safe truck parking is an issue even without the current pandemic exacerbating the situation. According to the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), truck parking shortages are a national safety concern. The federal Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21 Century (MAP-21) Act of 2012 established “Jason’s Law” to address parking shortages, starting with a parking survey on the capability of states to provide parking and rest facilities.

The Minnesota DOT completed a study last year which confirmed a shortage of truck parking in the state. In the meantime, however, the state is working to keep its rest areas open during the pandemic while it reviews plans to expand truck parking availability.

Indiana’s DOT (IDOT) is allowing food trucks to open shop at rest areas throughout the state, giving drivers a chance to not only rest, but to also enjoy delicious grub prepared by the local food industry. This idea was brought forward by states and capitalized on by FHWA to help ensure truck drivers have access to food services. As of April 15, at least eight states—Arizona, Arkansas, Connecticut, Idaho, Indiana, New Mexico, Ohio and West Virginia—allow food trucks to vend at rest areas.

States will continue to play a role in safely facilitating the delivery of freight and keeping the nation’s economy revving. The consequences of the coronavirus pandemic will inevitably create challenges for the foreseeable future.

As states begin to chart what is being dubbed “a new normal,” the role of state DOTs will be as crucial as ever for the economy, people and the safe movement of goods, services and people. For additional information on coronavirus, states can access ongoing resources from NCSL including daily updates across federal agencies.

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<https://www.ncsl.org/blog/2020/04/17/state-dots-helping-truckers-address-supply-chain-disruptions-amidst-covid-19.aspx>