



## Safe Routes – Round 13



Back in 1997, while serving on the American Loggers Council (ALC) Congressional Relations Committee representing the Texas Logging Council, I was asked to spearhead a change in law to allow state legal weight tolerance on the Federal Interstate Highway System. That was 24 years ago, or in Congressional time, 12 sessions ago. We have seen leadership change hands in Washington several times since 1997, and during that time, we have stayed the course in our attempt to make delivery of unrefined forest products to the mills and wood yards as safe as possible.

Originally introduced as the “Right to Haul Act” and several edits defining and refining later, what is really a very commonsense piece of legislation, was recently reintroduced as the Safe Routes Act of 2021 H.R. 2213 by Congressman Mike Gallagher (R-WI). Since its reintroduction, it has gained bipartisan support with the addition of Congressman Jared Golden (D-ME) as a cosponsor.

So here we are in round 13 of what has turned out to be the longest attempt in the history of the American Loggers Council to get a piece of legislation across the finish line. Along the way ALC has garnered support and allies from organizations within our industry including the Forest Resources Association, the American Forest and Paper Association, the Southeastern Lumber Manufacturers Association and several State and Regional logging associations which are members of ALC. We have also walked the halls of Congress with many of our sponsors representing the Insurance Industry and OEM’s who consider this legislation an important step forward to improve safety by decreasing the likelihood of incidents while transporting unrefined forest products from the woods to consuming mills.

I would be remiss if I did not point out that ALC members have worked diligently over the years securing support from Republicans and Democrats in both the House and Senate. The issue remains that despite all the work Transportation Committee Chairs have yet to allow this legislation due process with a fair hearing and a vote for passage.

ALC’s position has been and continues to be one that involves safety for the general public and those drivers hauling the loads. Arguably more efficient routes to mills creates the benefit of fewer CO2 emissions which should be of interest to the Biden administration. In addition, when state legal weight limits are utilized on shorter Interstate routes when available, less hours of service and fewer drivers are needed in an industry challenged to recruit new drivers.

What was not anticipated is the opposition encountered from the railroad industry which apparently views this legislation as a threat to their commerce. I cannot remember the last time I saw a load of logs being loaded on a railcar in the woods and being taken to a mill or collection yard, an everyday occurrence before rail service to rural areas became insufficient and modern infrastructure became available. In order to become more profitable, short line rail companies were acquired by larger rail lines. Tracks in rural areas which once served the timber and other rural industries were pulled up and the right of ways became trails for recreation forcing truck

transportation become more efficient. This begs the question then as to why rail is opposed to the narrowly crafted “Safe Routes Act of 2019.”

It is hard for a Congressman or Senator to argue against safety and protecting lives, but what continues to amaze all of us is the unwillingness of the T & I Committee to move this simple legislation out of Committee and give it the hearing it deserves. Safe Routes is not about revenue, or interfering with another industry’s commerce, it is about safety. **Safe Routes Save Lives.** Let’s hope that as we fight through Round 13, both the Chairs of the Senate and House Transportation Committees and their members will give this legislation the opportunity it deserves.

*The American Loggers Council is a 501(c)(6) trade association representing the interests of timber harvesting and timber hauling businesses across the United States. For more information visit our website at [www.amloggers.com](http://www.amloggers.com).*