



Owner-Operator's Business
Association of Canada

Association professionnelle des
routiers autonomes du Canada

*...from the
director's chair*

Get up to speed, ministers

Despite what proponents of government-mandated speed limiters would have us believe, there aren't many people in this industry – or in the regulatory and enforcement communities – who don't "get it." Mandating speed limiters for heavy trucks – while ignoring the real threats to safety and the environment – would be a very dumb thing for governments to do.

Even the politicians – at least most of them – are astute enough to realize the foolhardiness of forging ahead with legislation before considering the issue from every angle. When provincial and territorial ministers of transportation, along with the federal minister, examined the evidence brought before them at a Council of Ministers meeting last Fall, they concluded there simply wasn't enough information for them to make an informed decision on what government's role should be in the matter. As a result of questions raised by ministers and concerns brought forward by organizations like OBAC, OOIDA and the PMTC, Transport Canada has embarked on a number of comprehensive studies to examine not only the safety and environmental claims of speed limiter proponents, but also questions surrounding enforcement, tampering, trade implications, and competitiveness.

The results of those studies won't be available until next Spring, so you've got to wonder why Ontario's transportation minister Donna Cansfield and her Quebec counterpart, Julie Boulet, are hell-bent on introducing speed limiter legislation this Fall – months before there is adequate information on which to base their decisions.

I can understand the appeal to a politician of being told that by simply changing a setting on the computer in a heavy truck engine you can activate a device that will reduce death and destruction on our highways, and save the environment at the same time. That's an attention grabber for anyone.

And while some safety and environmental advocates, along with a large part of the general motoring public, might not look beyond the mainstream media for the "facts," we deserve better than knee-jerk politics. Perhaps ministers Cansfield and Boulet should get themselves up to speed on this issue – they're both woefully misinformed.

Minister Cansfield just doesn't "get it." She thinks this is a "mandated speed limiter" vs. "speeding" issue. In other words, if you object to government mandating a governed engine in your truck, you're pro speeding. Duh. According to statistics from her own department, trucks are the least likely vehicles to be speeding on Ontario's highways. There is much handwringing over how to deal with the real offenders, but when I asked officials the obvious question – why not enforce the laws we already have – I was told it's "impossible." So where does that leave Ontario's tough new law on street racing and drunk driving?

In Minister Boulet's case, in an announcement last month outlining Quebec's priority actions to make the roads safer, she tacked on "requiring speed limiters in heavy vehicles" as an afterthought.

She rationalized this by referring to recommendations made last year in Quebec's Action Plan for Climate Change. Mandating speed limiters was an add-on to those recommendations as well, a token comment on cost savings for governed trucks based on numbers pulled out of thin air by the OTA. What's that got to do with safety?

We support any government initiatives that would make our highways safer and our air cleaner – but as a taxpayer, I want my government to consider all the options and put my tax dollar to work where it's going to be most effective.

Tougher penalties for chronic speeders and drunk



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drivers would help; focusing resources on public education to modify dangerous behaviour is also an appropriate role for government. And if governments are really serious about reducing GHG emissions in the transportation sector, they should look at where the real growth is: from 1990 to 2005, heavy-duty gasoline engines – minivans, SUVs, and small pickup trucks – accounted for over 55% of increased GHG emissions from on-road vehicles during that period.

What puzzles me is why government would consider forcing a solution on this industry when it's clear the problem lies elsewhere.

Many carriers have speed management programs – including governed engines. And owner/operators can ill-afford to speed. Trucks are already slowing down for safety and economic reasons, and unless government starts enforcing existing laws to get reckless drivers off the road, they're shirking their responsibility, and actually increasing the risk of crashes on our highways.

Embracing sound environmental practices and investing in new technologies to make trucks safer comes with a hefty price tag, one that's often beyond the financial reach of owner/operators and small fleets. If government is looking for a way to help the industry, incentives and weight allowances for trucks equipped with anti-idle devices, wide-base single tires, and other green technologies and safety equipment would be a good place to start. Reward is always better – and gets more votes – than punishment.

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