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Infrastructure News Trucking Regulation

Truck stops join owner-operators in rejecting Dems' highway bill

NATSO withdraws support after electric vehicle charging provision gets approved

John Gallagher, Washington Correspondent • Friday, June 19, 2020 528

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NATSO's Mullings: Lawmakers "incredibly short-sighted." Photo: Jim Allen/FreightWaves)



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Travel plaza and truck stop operators are no longer backing U.S. House Democrats' federal infrastructure proposal after a provision was included to allow [electric vehicle charging stations at interstate rest areas](#).

“It is incredibly shortsighted for lawmakers to focus on installing electric vehicle charging at rest areas with taxpayer dollars ... rather than to partner with the thousands of exit businesses already investing in electric fuel,” Lisa Mullings, president and CEO of NATSO, the trade group for travel plaza and truck stop operators, told FreightWaves in a statement on Friday regarding the INVEST in America Act.

“The House reauthorization bill passed last night endangers the goals that our industry established in our collaboration with one of the nation’s largest electric vehicle charging vendors. We simply cannot support a bill that prioritizes state monopolies and utilities at the expense of private businesses.”

NATSO, as with the Owner-Operator Independent Drivers Association (OOIDA), had initially supported the bill – a five year, \$494 billion reauthorization of the FAST Act – when it was [unveiled earlier this month](#). OOIDA withdrew its support for the legislation this week when Democrats added a provision to [increase the minimum insurance requirements](#) for trucks from \$750,000 to \$4 million.

The markup of the bill this week turned into a 24-hour marathon in which lawmakers on the House Transportation & Infrastructure Committee considered 177 amendments from both sides of the aisle.

Republicans had attempted to remove from the bill a provision by Democrats to delay the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration’s final hours-of-service (HOS) rule, but the Democrat-controlled committee rejected that effort. They also rejected an amendment by Rep. Greg Pence, R-Indiana, that would have effectively been a blanket exemption from key parts of the HOS rule and the electronic logging device mandate.

In addition to the electric vehicle and insurance provisions, the Democrats passed a [“dry bulk weight tolerance”](#) provision allowing dry bulk haulers to add

10% more weight than allowed per axle to account for shifting cargo loads.

More changes await as the bill moves through the legislative process. Now that it has passed committee it goes to the floor of the House, where it will be reassembled with infrastructure-related bills from other committees before being voted on by the full chamber, likely during the last week of June.

From there it must be reconciled with the Senate's version, a [\\$287 billion bill introduced last summer](#), along with the Trump administration's own recommendation, part of a \$1 trillion package that President Trump outlined in a [budget proposal earlier this year](#) and expected to be formally unveiled next week.

Jeff Davis, a senior fellow with the Eno Center for Transportation, told FreightWaves that he does not see the Democrats' version of the bill making it through without major revisions, particularly regarding sections that attempt to address climate change.

"The legislation was assembled that way only because the Democrats realized they were never going to get a climate change agreement with Republicans conceptually, and therefore they just built the whole bill on their own."

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