

Date of Hearing: April 18, 2016

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION

Jim Frazier, Chair

AB 2023 (Gray) – As Introduced February 16, 2016

**SUBJECT:** Vehicles: length

**SUMMARY:** Extends the vehicle length limit for cotton module movers by 5 feet, from 48 feet to 53 feet.

**EXISTING LAW:**

- 1) Generally prohibits any vehicle from exceeding a length of 40 feet.
- 2) Provides over a dozen exceptions to the vehicle length limit, including an exception for motortrucks up to 48 feet in length that are used solely as cotton module movers.

**FISCAL EFFECT:** Unknown, this bill was keyed non-fiscal by the Legislative Counsel.

**COMMENTS:** According to the author, the need to extend the allowable vehicle length for cotton module movers is predicated on changes in law and regulations promulgated by the Air Resources Board (ARB) over the past two decades that have resulted in truck manufacturers having to redesign engine compartments to meet clean air standards. The author asserts that these changes effectively prohibit the "once popular cab-over style tractor" and, as a result, require the tractor used as the foundation of a cotton module mover to be longer than allowed by law.

Vehicle length limits are necessary for safety reasons. The longer the truck, the more room it needs to safely negotiate turns. If the truck length exceeds the geometric design of a road, it can lead to "off-tracking," whereby a portion of the truck strays into the oncoming lane of traffic. The current vehicle length limit is 40 feet. Some exceptions are provided for, for example, buses with bicycle racks, motorhomes, or fifth-wheel travel trailers. Cotton module movers are also exempted from the 40-foot vehicle limit. In fact, aside from articulated busses, cotton module movers enjoy the longest exception (48 feet) currently allowed, 3 feet longer than the next-longest vehicle and 8 feet longer than the general vehicle length limit.

*Committee comments and concerns:* California's air quality improvement and greenhouse gas emission reduction laws, regulations, and policies have dramatically improved the environment. They have also significantly influenced regulated industries, driving to change business practices, equipment technology, and processes to meet stringent new standards, sometimes at great cost and financial loss to the industry.

The sponsor of AB 2023, the California Cotton Ginners and Growers Association, suggests that California cotton farmers are in a pickle—unable to procure a cotton module mover that meets California's ARB regulations and that is no longer than 48 feet. They suggest that the state should offset the ramifications of regulatory impacts by some other means, such as loosening vehicle length limits, so that the industry can continue to be viable even while conforming to environmental regulations.

According to an industry website, the conventional practice in the United States is to form cotton modules at the edge of the field using a module builder that creates 16-foot or 32-foot-long modules with a trapezoidal cross-section. These modules are typically moved one at a time with the use of self-loading trucks especially designed for this single purpose.

An emerging trend in the cotton industry is to create round modules that are fully enclosed on the circumference by a specially engineered polyethylene film that protects the cotton while also providing a compressive force to maintain the module density. One of the many benefits of this approach is that the rolls can be transported on multi-purpose, flat-bed trucks. Industry data indicate 8 rolls of cotton can be transported on a 53-foot long truck. Four rolls weigh about as much as one traditional 32-foot long module. Therefore, a truck with 8 rolls can haul about twice as much as one conventional cotton module mover. According to at least one truck manufacturer, the industry is moving to larger trucks, not as a result of ARB regulations but because customers are seeking heavier, more powerful trucks, presumably to transport the heavier weight associated with the cotton rolls.

Whether or not vehicle length limits need to change as a direct result of ARB regulations or because of advancing technologies, if the cotton industry can move twice as much product in half as many trips and do it safely, it would behoove the state to take a serious look at accommodating the change. However, the state should not unduly jeopardize the safety of the highways or the integrity of the pavement. Extending the length of cotton module movers by three feet, will, in fact, affect the turning radius of these vehicles and lead to greater off-tracking, particularly on narrow conventional highways. These safety implications should be thoroughly vetted before extra vehicle lengths are allowed.

*Author's proposed amendment:* The author proposes to take an amendment in committee to reduce from 53 feet to 51 feet the proposed vehicle length limit for cotton module movers.

#### **REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:**

##### **Support**

California Cotton Ginners and Growers Association

##### **Opposition**

Sierra Club

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