

Maine DOT: A Mouth Piece of the Trucking Industry Rather than Proponents for Public Safety

The Close Relationship between Maine State Officials and the Private Trucking

Industry: The Maine Department of Transportation (Maine DOT) has a cozy relationship with the Maine Motor Transport Association (MMTA), the state lobbying arm of the national American Trucking Association (ATA). Maine DOT, the agency that is directed to regulate the safety of truck operations in Maine, is becoming a mouth piece of the industry.

Why is a National Trucking Organization So Interested in One Small State? It's very simple. Maine is part of the trucking industry's overall strategy to get bigger, heavier, longer and more dangerous trucks on every road throughout the United States. If the trucking industry is successful with getting a special interest exemption in Maine, it will use this as a stepping-stone for the spread of huge trucks across the U.S. map, endangering motorists throughout the country.

The Lobbying Junket Organized by the MMTA for Maine DOT Officials: In May 2006, the Maine DOT Commissioner and two additional officials flew down to Washington, D.C., at taxpayer expense, to lobby Congress arm in arm with the MMTA and the ATA. Their purpose was to convince Members of Congress from Maine that a "special interest exemption" to federal law that would allow overweight trucks to travel on all federal highways in Maine was necessary.

- **The Lobbying Team:** Three Maine DOT officials were part of the truck lobbying team and were listed by name as members of the lobbying delegation. Moreover, even though they were only blocks away while in D.C., they never even took the time to talk with the nonprofit, public interest, highway and truck safety organizations. In fact, they have never taken the time to contact one of the most important truck safety groups, Parents Against Tired Truckers (PATT), founded by Maine residents, Steve and Daphne Izer.
- **The Lobbying Plan:** The lobbying trip itinerary prepared by MMTA for Maine DOT officials included "wining and dining" at the ATA townhouse, steps from the U.S. Capitol; an ATA-sponsored breakfast meeting with the Maine congressional delegation; and, a dinner with business leaders hosted by the MMTA at a Washington, D.C. restaurant.
- **The Lobbying Materials:** The MMTA prepared the lobbying talking points and lobbying packets for Maine DOT employees to use in their visits, and Maine DOT contributed to the industry packet by providing a truck route graphic and preparing a two-page summary of a Maine DOT report.
- **Hotel Accommodations:** The MMTA negotiated room rates for the Maine DOT officials. However, these negotiated room rates still exceeded the permissible

room allowance for Maine DOT employees. In May the room allowance for a Maine DOT employee is \$180 before taxes; \$180 + Washington DC hotel tax rate 14.5% = \$206.10. The hotel room rate for two Maine DOT employees – Ms. Savoy and Mr. Cole -- was \$262.21 each and for Mr. Williams the room rate was \$393.88. Who footed the extra bill – Maine citizens or the trucking industry?

- The Cost to Taxpayers: The cost billed to Maine taxpayers for this lobbying junket by Maine DOT officials to lobby for the trucking industry's agenda, for expenses not paid for by the MMTA, came to over \$2,100 (not including per diem meal expenses) for a one-night lobbying trip.

Maine DOT + MMTA – Any Safety Input = Increased Danger: According to documents from the MMTA, “Maine DOT has and will continue to work very closely with the Delegation members and trucking industry representatives to influence changes to the applicable federal laws.” The important question is why is Maine DOT working so closely with the trucking industry, and not at all with the safety community? Maine citizens will pay the ultimate price -- less safety, more deaths, increased gasoline taxes, more damaged roads.