

Rules would allow truckers to stray from major roads

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TRENTON — A state task force formed in March delivered new regulations on Friday governing which roads the biggest rigs can safely travel on and which they need to avoid.

The proposed rules would require drivers of large trucks to use the national highway network unless they need food, fuel, rest, repairs or to reach a terminal by a more direct route.

When the trip is finished, the rules would require a large truck to return to the national network when possible to reach its next terminal.

The major difference between the old and proposed rules is that trucks traveling through New Jersey to out-of-state destinations and those traveling within the state are treated the same, said Kris Kolluri, state transportation commissioner.

Under the old rules, intrastate trucks had no road restrictions while interstate trucks had to stay on the national network of interstate highways and designated state highways.

"This doesn't place an undo burden on (interstate trucking) business by asking them to take an unnecessarily long route," Kolluri said. "They can take the most direct route."

The new rules could replace 1999 truck regulations, which were ruled unconstitutional in February by a three-judge panel of the Third Circuit U.S. Court of Appeals.

The panel overturned the state's seven-year-old truck ban, saying it violated the U.S. Constitution's commerce clause by discouraging interstate commerce.

That ruling upheld a 2004 decision against the ban by a federal judge in Newark after the American Truck Association and a trucking company sued, challenging the rules.

The proposed rules designate a New Jersey Access Network and keep intact bans on large trucks on some roads for safety reasons. They preserve the Garden State Parkway's ban on large trucks north of Exit 105.

"It balances law enforcement, safety and commerce, which is the objective the governor and I had when we formed the task force," Kolluri said.

There will be a public-comment period before the rules can become official. They are to be published in the New Jersey Register.

Kolluri said he's confident the new rules won't be challenged, because trucking industry representatives were on the task force.

"He (Kolluri) put us in a room and hammered out what are pretty good rules," said Damien Newton, New Jersey coordinator for the Tri-State Transportation Campaign, an advocacy group.

"The (state) motor truck association was involved. If it's rules they can live by, it's unlikely the out-of-state organization will have them overturned," he said.

