

## **Testimony before VT Transportation Committee, RE: S.66**

**February 21, 2025**

My name is Mark Bevis. I'm a resident of Springfield, VT. I live about a third of a mile from I-91, as the crow flies. But we can see it from our yard.

Thanks for letting me share my testimony on S. 66.

Specifically, I want to testify about the noise from unmuffled truck engine brakes. You may have also heard them called Jake brakes, named after the Jacobs Cummins Co that invented them decades ago.

They are a great invention that helps big trucks and busses slow down by depending less on their brakes.

It's sort of like how you might use your transmission, shifting into low when coming down a steep mountain, or driving on ice. Except the jake brake uses a truck's engine, not its transmission, forcing compressed air through its exhaust.

The problem that this bill is trying to address is that some truckers illegally modify their mufflers to make that exhaust expulsion as loud as possible.

I'm not going to try to imitate the sound, but you can hear lots of examples online. Just google, "how do I make my jake brakes louder." There are many websites. My favorite description comes from my neighbor, who said it sounds like a Huey helicopter has landed on his roof.

### **The BIG Misconception**

Isn't this the noise of the brakes? Won't this bill make trucks unsafe?

One of my neighbors responded to my complaint about the noise by saying, "Sure it's loud, but it's quieter than a truck crash." Another fellow replied, "sure it's loud, but it's better than having the truck stop on your easy chair." Even our own Transportation Commissioner, Ms Minoli, didn't understand the problem. An email from her to Senator White implied that the noise was because the truck wanted to slow down.

And while it's true that a driver employs the engine brake to slow a truck down, the noise is not a necessary consequence. The truck's owner has modified the

mufflers to make the noise louder. The noise doesn't slow the truck any faster. All it does is remind people nearby that others can be incredibly inconsiderate at 3:30 on a Monday morning, or at dinner time on a summer evening.

### **More regulation? Really?**

Some of the opposition to this proposed legislation seems to be that VT does not need more regulation pushed by whiny, liberal, old Vermont hippies.

But if you look at the other states that have passed laws prohibiting this noise, Vermont would join not only our neighbors in Maine, New York, Connecticut and Rhode Island, but even some of those crazy leftist states like Idaho, Florida, Louisiana, Kentucky, Nebraska. Even next door in New Hampshire, where people are busy living free and dying, they have more strict truck noise regulations. In fact Vermont is in the tiniest minority of just three states with the least regulation. So we're not asking you to be a leader. We're asking that you help provide Vermonters the same protections as citizens of other states.

### **What about the truckers?**

Isn't it going to cost hard-working truckers to make this switch. Yes. It's going to cost them to switch their muffler system back to the way it was before they likely spent hundreds to make it as loud as they could. Any truck built since 1988, that's 37 years ago, is required to have a muffler system that meets EPA regulations for noise pollution. That regulation also prohibited tampering with the exhaust system.

In a VT Digger story from two years ago when similar legislation was proposed, Matt Cota with the Vermont Vehicle and Automotive Distributors Association was quoted as saying he supported the bill. He said most people probably don't know it's illegal, so a law like this would let them know not to do it.

### **Costs if we pass the bill.**

I'll be honest, I don't have a dollar figure.

But I think you need signs on the entrance ramps to the interstate, informing drivers that "unmuffled engine brakes are prohibited in VT with fines up to \$xyz". I think those signs would also be helpful on state highways in the mountains.

I think State Troopers on the side of the road with monitors will not do a lot. Truckers are in touch with each other and word will get out. Although maybe you could fake them out with a bogus patrol car and a sign saying noise monitor ahead. At least that would make them think twice.

I think having highway spot inspections, as they do at weigh stations, would be far more effective. Signs require a truck pulls in, an inspector does a quick check, sends it on its way. Any non-compliant truck gets a fine or a warning. Word will get out quickly.

### **Costs if we don't pass it**

The highways are only going to get busier. More noise.

Highways don't usually go through wealthy communities, and if they do, that property doesn't stay valuable for long. So the continued noise, especially from loud braking, will be a tax on the working and middle class people who live near the road. This is a quality of life issue, like any other kind of pollution.

Other places affected are campgrounds near the highway and other tourist spots. Who wants to visit rural, bucolic Vermont to hear truckers screaming down the hills.

And one more victim of not doing anything are towns themselves. We were emailing with a state trooper who said he completely sympathized with our problem. He said he used the truck brake noise on the state highway to successfully fight his increased property appraisal. So the town lost the increased taxes on his property and, we can only assume, those nearby.

In general, we live with the basic noise from I-91. Even at our distance, it's like a whooshing sound. We can usually ignore it, some days more than others. We like to think of it as kind of a gift so that our friends in Montpelier can buy oranges and that folks down south can buy our neighbors' maple syrup.

Plus, there's nothing we can really do about that general noise. We can however do something about the truckers who, at any hour of the day or night, like to remind us how completely inconsiderate people can be.

Thank you.