



April 02, 2025

County Roads - Weight Limits

Dear Reader:

The following document was created from the CTAS website (ctas.tennessee.edu). This website is maintained by CTAS staff and seeks to represent the most current information regarding issues relative to Tennessee county government.

We hope this information will be useful to you; reference to it will assist you with many of the questions that will arise in your tenure with county government. However, the *Tennessee Code Annotated* and other relevant laws or regulations should always be consulted before any action is taken based upon the contents of this document.

Please feel free to contact us if you have questions or comments regarding this information or any other CTAS website material.

Sincerely,

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Reference Number: CTAS-1847

COUNTY OFFICIALS' AUTHORITY - OVERWEIGHT, OVERSIZE VEHICLES

Section 55-7-205(a)(8)(B) provides that the county legislative body shall have the same authority to lower weight limits as the commissioner of transportation as it relates to county roads:

The county legislative body shall have the same authority as to county roads; provided, however, that any proposed reduction below the weight limits set by the commissioner pursuant to this section shall require a two-thirds (2/3) vote of the county legislative body and shall be based upon the same criteria as used by the commissioner.

This is the authority to reduce the maximum gross weight of freight motor vehicles operating over lateral highways and secondary roads where through weakness of structure in either the surface of the road or of bridges, the maximum loads provided by law, injure or damage such roads or bridges. T.C.A.

55-7-205(a). Whereas the regular maximum weights for freight motor vehicles are set on a weight per axle basis, with the gross maximum weight limit being 80,000 lbs., the lower weight limits may be a certain gross amount per vehicle.

As lowering weight limits on county roads is done by county legislative body vote, violations of the weight limits could subject the offender to a civil monetary penalty of up to \$500 for violation of rules and regulations of the county if so specified by the resolution of the county legislative body. (Section 5-1-121). Subsequent court decisions probably place limits on this monetary penalty. See Chattanooga v. Davis, 54 S.W.3d 248 (Tenn. 2001). According to the Tennessee Supreme Court in that case, a punitive fine levied by a local government cannot exceed \$50 unless the defendant is allowed to have a jury trial. Higher fines could be enforced if they are remedial in nature rather than punitive, but this distinction is difficult to make. Therefore, a county should generally limit monetary penalties to \$50 or less per violation. Penalty provisions of any regulations should be carefully considered by the county attorney.

Furthermore, the weight limits that are set should be reasonable and based on the best information available regarding the weight that the road or bridge will withstand. The Department of Transportation can assist highway departments by conducting engineering studies that can be used to support the need for reduced weight limits.

Signs should be placed at appropriate places along the road or prior to entry upon a bridge to give the public reasonable notice of the lowered weight limits. In addition, appropriate county officials are also authorized to issue special permits for transporting oversize and/or overweight loads on county roads in conformity with rules and regulations prescribed by the commissioner of transportation.

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