

## **Mexican truckers to hit U.S. roadways next year**

Transportation secretary vows to release 1-year, NAFTA pilot plan by December

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WASHINGTON – Transportation Secretary Maria Cino promises to release plans within months for a one-year, NAFTA pilot program permitting Mexican truckers beyond the limited commercial zone to which they are currently restricted.

The program will likely involve about 100 Mexican trucking companies, the Department of Transportation says.

Under the North American Free Trade Agreement – NAFTA – the borders were to open partially to truckers from both countries in 1995. Full access was promised by 2000. Because of the restrictions on Mexican trucks, the Mexican government has imposed limits on U.S. truckers.

The U.S. restrictions were placed by the Clinton administration in response to demands from the Teamsters union, which said Mexican trucks posed safety and environmental risks. Currently, the U.S. permits Mexican truckers only in commercial zones close to the border that extend no further than 20 miles from Mexico.

While the American Trucking Association supports opening the border, other unions have joined in opposition with the Teamsters. The Owner-Operator Independent Drivers Association came out this month in

opposition to any Mexican truck pilot program.

Todd Spencer, the association's executive vice president, said the program would jeopardize safety on U.S. roads and would lead to an influx of cheap Mexican labor.

"A move by the U.S. Department of Transportation to open U.S. roadways to Mexican trucks puts the interest of foreign trade and cheap labor ahead of everything else, including highway safety, homeland security and the well being of hardworking Americans," Spencer said.

In a letter to the Interstate Trade Commission, Spencer wrote: "The net effect of admission of Mexican trucks into the U.S. marketplace would undoubtedly be negative. The supposed benefits to consumers from speculative reductions in shipping rates would be offset by the societal costs that are difficult to measure, but are easy to identify."

Spencer told the commission that Mexican trucks are not up to U.S. safety standards, and if U.S. drivers earn less as a result of labor competition, they would have less money to invest in vehicle maintenance – leading to even more less safe trucks.

The Teamsters have led opposition to the plan, saying the so-called "NAFTA superhighway," a north-south interstate trade corridor linking Mexico, Canada and the U.S., would mean U.S. truckers replaced by Mexicans, more unsafe rigs on American roads and more drivers relying on drugs for their long hauls.

The August issue of Teamster magazine features a cover story on the plan for an enlarged I-35 that will reach north from the drug capital border town of Nuevo Laredo, Mexico, 1,600 miles to Canada through San Antonio, Austin, Dallas, Kansas City, Minneapolis and Duluth, while I-69 originating at the same crossing will shoot north to Michigan and across the Canadian border.

Public proposals for the superhighway call for each corridor to be 1,200 feet wide with six lanes devoted to cars, four to trucks, with a rail line and utilities in the middle. Most of the goods will come from new Mexican ports being built on the Pacific Coast – ports being run by Chinese state-controlled shipping companies.