Public Hearing – March 8, 2016
Public Safety and Security Committee

Testimony Submitted by Commissioner James Redeker
Department of Transportation

HB 5548 – AA Repealing Restrictions on the Transport of Mobile and Modular Homes

This proposal would repeal statutes related to the transport of mobile homes, modular homes, house trailers or sectional houses. This is a concern for the Department of Transportation (CTDOT), which is committed to providing a safe and efficient intermodal transportation network that improves the quality of life and promotes economic vitality for the State and the region.

Modular housing units are considered divisible loads, since they can be built to specific dimensions and it takes multiple units to complete a building. During the building boom of the 1990s, the modular industry petitioned the state to increase the allowable width from 12 feet to 14 feet. Once approved, they pushed to have the width increased to 16 feet. There were a number of incidences of accidents involving modular homes, over height, hitting the bridge girders and too wide hitting bridge piers and parapets. These loads create dangerous situations due to the overhanging width, motorists have a tendency to shy away from large, vertical objects such as concrete barriers and these types of loads, which appear intimidating and cause motorists to drift away. As a compromise, the Department developed a pilot program in 2005 to allow transport of modular units at night for the safest passage at times of low traffic flow. Additionally, two state troopers are required – one to follow and one to lead. Both are necessary, the lead trooper moves motorists over and the follow car keeps motorists from speeding by. These are functions a civilian escort car could not perform. Over 240 modular units are shipped through the state at night each year with minimal traffic impacts.

The Department allows the daytime shipment of non-divisible loads up to 16 feet wide, such as prefabricated swimming pools and water craft. There are approximately 40 of these shipments per year. By removing the restrictions on the modular housing, the number of shipments through the state will increase dramatically. Interstate 84 is the primary route through the state and into New England. Modular housing is not permitted on the Mass Pike.

A typical travel lane is 12’ wide whereas the proposed maximum width is 16’. Research shows that motorists tend to shy away from large objects when operating vehicles. The 16’ wide load will essentially take up two travel lanes. In many areas, the expressways are two lanes wide for a total of 24 feet, leaving a lane width of 8’ for vehicles to pass. Tractor trailer units would not be able to safely pass one of these units. As such, these loads will create rolling roadblocks and potential hazards to motorists. Reduced speeds are anticipated on inclines and areas with substandard bridge widths and urban areas. Once these units slow down, it also takes an extended period of time to return to highway speeds.
On secondary roadways, pedestrian and bicycle traffic are impacted, particularly in rural areas. The overhang width of these loads extends into roadway shoulders which pedestrians and cyclists depend upon.

At the request of the industry in the fall of 2015, CTDOT worked with the Department of Emergency Services and Public Protection to conduct a trial run with a 16’ wide modular during day time hours. The results showed that the wide loads had too great of a safety impact and the night time moves were preferable.

Currently, the DOT is working with NASTO (Northeast Association of State Transportation Officials) on standardizing size, weight, length, hours of operation, and escort requirements. The effort has been branded HARMONIZATION and will result in consistent regulations and permitting of oversized loads shipped throughout the northeastern United States. Any changes to the current statutes may have a negative impact on this effort.

For further information or questions, please contact Pam Sucato (pamela.sucato@ct.gov) or CJ Strand (carl.strand@ct.gov) at the Department of Transportation, (860) 594-3013.