



The patchwork of regulations and permitting processes across the USA increase carrier costs.

Lack of permit harmonisation has negative economic impact

A study from the American Transportation Research Institute and the Specialized Carriers & Rigging Foundation found that US laws and policies that govern permit allowances for oversized loads increase carrier costs by up to 82 percent. *Sophie Barnes reports.*

Road permit regulations in the USA fall exclusively into state jurisdiction. As a result, the policies, rules and regulations governing the transport of oversize and overweight (OS/OW) cargoes differ from state to state.

“This patchwork of regulations, permitting processes, and available information can result in inefficiencies in multi-state OS/OW transportation, which can lead to increased costs for carriers and shippers, as well as for society more broadly,” explained the American Transportation Research Institute (ATRI).

Commissioned by the Specialized Carriers & Rigging Association (SC&RA),

which wanted to understand and quantify whether the lack of permit harmonisation across the USA has resulted in unnecessary financial burdens being placed on carriers and their customers, the study compared the cost and operational impact of loads that must re-route due to state restrictions as well as loads that require the vehicle configuration to be altered to meet state requirements.

Supporting the association’s calls for harmonisation, the study found that the various state regulations governing the interstate movement of overweight vehicles can increase carriers’ costs by 45 to 82 percent, per move. The average financial increase to customers ranged from



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USD4,245 to USD5,440 in aggregate dollars.

The final report acknowledged “the maze of rules and regulations that specialised carriers face in making interstate movements”. It recognised that, in some states, these regulations are not only dated, but have no basis in any empirical data or evidence.

Significant negative impact

“We have long suspected that a lack of permit harmonisation has had a significant negative economic impact in general and has placed an onerous and problematic financial burden on businesses specifically,” said Steven Todd, SC&RA vice president of transportation. “Our objective in commissioning the ATRI study was to see if what we suspected was true.”

He added that these studies, as well as the US Department of Transportation’s Federal Highway Administration’s (FHWA) study, ‘Best practices in permitting in oversize and

overweight vehicles’, continue to support the association’s Uniform Permit Transport 2021 (UPT2021) initiative, which aims to establish permit harmonisation across all 50 states.

Two of the primary goals for UPT2021 are to encourage all states to allow minimum weight thresholds for the most common industry configurations, and to analyse and issue permits via automated permit systems. More than 30 states presently use systems that auto-issue permits, in some cases for loads greater than 16 ft (4.9 m) wide and high. The aim is to gain 100 percent compliance nationwide by 2021.

The FHWA published its study in February 2018. It found that with automated permitting, the average permit turnaround time decreased from several days and hours to just minutes for most routine and some OS/OW permits. It also found that the accuracy of permits dramatically improved,

as did roadway safety for all motorists. Further still, the FHWA said that, as a result of moving to automated permitting, states were able to achieve staff efficiencies and reduce costs.

Speed of change

“The lightning speed at which technology develops is creating new opportunities for the industry,” said FHWA. “Moving forward, specialised transportation will reap the benefits of accurate global positioning system (GPS) data, geo-fencing, and software integration strategies. Similarly, as the technology expands, the cost of using these applications should decrease. This will provide state and local authorities with a broader list of options to serve carriers.”

Todd added: “There is a consensus regarding the safety and efficiency of automated permitting systems and all of this research backs that conclusion.” **HLPFI**

ESTA receives MEP backing

Caroline Nagtegaal, a Dutch member of the European parliament (MEP), has penned a letter to the European Commission (EC) in support of calls from the European association of abnormal road transport and mobile cranes (ESTA) for the development of heavy transport corridors in Europe.

ESTA is also campaigning to harmonise the permit issuing process and to reduce the bureaucracy caused by the maze of different permits required by EU member states.

Nagtegaal’s action follows a meeting in March with ESTA director Ton Klijin, who detailed the

problems faced by exceptional transport companies operating across Europe.

The timing of the MEP’s intervention is significant, according to ESTA, as talks are currently under way in Brussels on the financing of key infrastructure networks from 2021 to 2027 as part of the Connecting Europe Facility.

Those discussions include a request from European armed forces and NATO to strengthen the continent’s road infrastructure to make it easier to move heavy military loads.

Nagtegaal asked the EC whether it has plans to

reduce bureaucracy and simplify licensing arrangements for exceptional transport. She called on the commission to focus on the digitalisation of permits for abnormal road transport operations, something that is already happening for normal truck transport within the European Union (EU).

She said: “I am optimistic that my and ESTA’s concerns will be taken seriously and acted upon because they fit into the EU’s Connecting Europe strategy, something that is high profile.

“I will also be raising this issue with colleagues active in the transport sector and with other countries within the European Parliament’s Liberal Group. ESTA’s concerns are a clear example of how the internal market needs to be developed and reformed,” Nagtegaal added.