

When it comes to the issue of permits governing oversize/overweight shipments in the USA, the case is being made for more government involvement, not less, as a study gets under way to analyse the situation.



# Permit problems: getting it together



**Perry Trunick,**  
our correspondent in the  
**USA**



**A** USD500,000 study under way into the issues facing oversize/overweight load movements on US highways was discussed by Donald Ludlow, managing director for CPCS Management Consulting – a global provider of strategic advisory services to transportation companies – at the SC&RA Specialized Transportation Symposium in Atlanta, Georgia.

The study is about six months into a 24-month process and input is still being sought from the industries concerned.

Ludlow pointed to the patchwork of state-level rules and regulations governing oversize/overweight shipments, offering a sample selection of the 72 maps already developed through the study which show the rule differences from state to state. Each of the maps he showed offers a view of the USA that is anything but unified. As Ludlow highlighted first one issue and then another, the maps appear to comprise randomly placed swatches of colour.

Among the answers the study hopes to provide is what information shippers, carriers, and brokers need to make fully informed routing decisions. One part of the government role is addressing opportunities for state departments of transportation to provide more information to improve the industry efficiency.

Though the study is designed to address US issues, it does take a look at best practice in Canada, Mexico, Australia and the EU. Ludlow offered an example from Australia, which had tried to roll out a one-stop permitting process. The government agencies had not properly vetted the

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processes with the industry, he suggested, and within a few weeks the permitting process reverted to its previous form. “I think it speaks to the engagement needed with the industry when you are changing government policy,” he said, adding that the Australia changes also empowered cities to take on a larger role in permitting when many did not have the capacity to do so.

## TRAVIS system

Ludlow also highlighted the multi-jurisdictional Transportation Routing and Vehicle Information System (TRAVIS) system in the Canadian province of Alberta as a model which the industry has acknowledged as effective. TRAVIS allows online permit applications. On April 1, 2014, this system implemented fee sharing with its municipal partners along with four new municipal permit types: Municipal Overweight/Overdimension for Drilling Rig, Single Trip, Municipal Single Trip Dimension, and Industrial Park Single Trip Overweight/Overdimension.

Beyond the basics of coordinating actual permitting, Ludlow observed that multi-jurisdictional communication is an institutionalised communication. “Whenever one of the provinces changes a

regulation, it is required to talk to the other provinces to ensure that regulation change does not hurt commerce between them. It is, I think, best practice for when you are going to be making regulatory changes.”

### Filling the gaps

Speaking to the industry, the researchers determined that there are two types of knowledge: fixed and variable. Fixed knowledge, as the term implies, is relatively static or slow to change and tends to be more regulatory in nature. Variable knowledge includes construction detours, thaw restrictions, bridge closures, and things of that nature, Ludlow explained.

As a rule, respondents so far have indicated they feel relatively informed on the fixed knowledge side but, Ludlow pointed out, they are generally industry veterans who are familiar with the issues.

When it comes to variable knowledge, there is room to develop some best practice for communicating with the industry, Ludlow concluded.

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jurisdictions that actually require a permit, said Ludlow.

The oversize/overweight study also looks at how shippers, carriers and brokers select routes on multi-state/multi-jurisdictional moves. Axle weight limits are the number one issue, said Ludlow. If carriers have the ability to route around a problem area, they will. The other top concerns are hours of operation, the timeliness of permits, escort requirements and the cost of permits.

Having mentioned MAP-21 (the US legislation entitled Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century) in the course of his talk, Ludlow was asked by HLPFI whether the project cargo debate could be separated from the more general size-and-weight discussion. The US Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) has a number of ongoing dialogues on size and weight, and MAP-21 mandates some studies on various issues.

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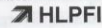
legal definition of size and weight, said Ludlow. But, he believes the oversize/overweight issue is separate from the hotly debated proposal to increase weight limits to 97,000 lb (44 tonnes) and the discussions about longer combination vehicles.

“Those studies may make it easier for some of you to run your loads,” he continued. The discussions are aimed at incremental changes in configurations that are more routine rather than specialised, added Alex Marach, consultant/analyst with CPCS.

### Weight rules

There are some states that have larger size and weight rules grandfathered into current federal limits, and some of those may apply to the more routine oversize/overweight moves, according to Marach, but they do not address super-loads.

Asked about industry participation, Ludlow noted the consultants have identified a group of carriers involved in the industry and they are encouraging anyone who is interested to contact them. “We want to make sure we are getting the full breadth both geographically and within the industry,” he said.



- Sponsored by the Transportation Research Board's National Cooperative Highway Research Program, the study is designated NCHRP 08-97, Using Oversize/ Overweight Data to Develop Multistate, Multimodal Alternative Freight Corridors.

**Cities and counties** are taking an increased role in permitting, but it is often difficult to determine the contact for jurisdictions that actually require a permit. — Donald Ludlow, CPCS Management Consulting

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