

Pilot/Escort Vehicle Operators

BEST PRACTICES GUIDELINES FOR
LAW ENFORCEMENT ESCORTS



U.S. Department of Transportation
Federal Highway Administration

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16. Abstract This report updates the 2004 Law Enforcement Escort Best Practices Guidelines. The guidelines describe the actions a law enforcement officer should complete prior to, during, and after escorting an over-dimensional permitted load to ensure the safe and efficient movement of the load. The safe movement of permitted oversize/overweight loads requires coordinated efforts among all stakeholders. It is recommended that these guidelines for law enforcement officers be coordinated with the <i>Pilot/Escort Vehicle Operator Best Practices Guidelines</i> when taken together to provide the overall guidance for the safe movement of permitted oversize/overweight loads.			
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1. BEST PRACTICES GUIDELINES

The movement of non-divisible, oversize, and/or overweight commodities is a small but highly specialized segment of the trucking industry. A study published by the Specialized Carriers & Rigging Association (SC&RA) and the Arizona Trucking Association estimated that in 2010 only 1.9 percent of heavy-duty class trucks in the United States were in the Class 8/8-13, 80,000 gross vehicle weight rating pounds and more category generally used to move these types of loads. However, the movement of oversize/overweight commodities is critical to the success of four key industry groups—construction, mining (including oil and gas extraction), energy and utilities, and manufacturing—and the movement of these commodities requires trucking companies to obtain special permits and operate over designated routes. Many jurisdictions also require that these loads be accompanied by a police escort vehicle and/or a private pilot car escort.¹

In 2000, two accidents involving the movement of oversize/overweight loads resulted in National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) investigations.² In both instances, NTSB found that the pilot car escort driver errors or lack of knowledge and training contributed to the accident, and the investigation reports included recommendations to develop training and best-practices guidelines for both law enforcement and the pilot car escort industry.

In 2004, the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) provided grant funds to the SC&RA, and SC&RA, with the support of the Commercial Vehicle Safety Alliance (CVSA), developed best practice guidelines for both stakeholder groups as well as a five part set of training materials for pilot car escort services and drivers. A number of States began to require that pilot car operators complete this training, and a dozen now require that pilot car drivers be certified. The pilot car industry has also made significant strides in providing training and certification services.

In 2013 an accident involving an oversize/overweight load contributed to the collapse of the Skagit River Bridge on I-5 in Washington State. A resulting NTSB investigation found that the pilot car escort driver failed to fulfill necessary duties, including failure to communicate properly and to maintain adequate lead distance. NTSB included the following recommendations in their final report, Safety Recommendation H-14-12, “Work together to revise the *Pilot Car Escort Best Practices Guidelines* and related training materials to ensure that they contain updated recommended practices for pilot/escort vehicle operations, and disseminate the revised documents to groups that provide pilot/escort vehicle driver training.”³

¹ Specialized Carrier & Rigging Association Foundation, Arizona Trucking Association and the Arizona Transportation Education Foundation, *Transporting a Global Economy – Moving 21st Century Oversize Loads*, 2012.

² See National Transportation Safety Board Highway Accident Report NTSB/HAR-01/02, “Collision Between Metrolink Train 901 and Mercury Transportation, Inc., Tractor-Combination Vehicle at Highway-Railroad Grade Crossing in Glendale, California, on January 28, 2000” (2001). See also National Transportation Safety Board, Highway Accident Report NTSB/HAR-02/02, “Collision Between Amtrak Train 97 and MolnarWorldwide Heavy Haul Company Tractor-Trailer Combination Vehicle at Highway-Rail Grade Crossing in Intercession City, Florida on November 17, 2000,” (2002).

³ National Transportation Safety Board, “Safety Recommendation H-14-012.” Available at: http://www.nts.gov/investigations/AccidentReports/_layouts/ntsb.recsearch/Recommendation.aspx?Rec=H-14-012.

The 2004 best practice guidelines have been updated in response to NTSB Accident Report NTSB/HAR-14/01 PB2014-10639: “Collapse of the Interstate 5 Skagit River Bridge Following a Strike by an Oversize Combination Vehicle Mount Vernon, WA” May 23, 2013, Recommendation H-14-12.

After a permit has been issued, potential major stakeholders in the safe movement of oversize/overweight loads include:

- Motor carrier.
- Commercial motor vehicle driver.
- Pilot car escort.
- Law enforcement escort.

The safe movement of permitted oversize/overweight loads requires coordinated efforts among all stakeholders. Using these guidelines for law enforcement officers in conjunction with the *Pilot/Escort Vehicle Operator Best Practices Guidelines* provide the overall guidance for the safe movement of permitted oversize/overweight loads.

This document incorporates the material found in the 2016 *Pilot/Escort Vehicle Operators Training Manual*. The 2016 *Pilot/Escort Vehicle Operators Training Manual* is the result of extensive research, review, and analysis of existing pilot/escort vehicle operator (P/EVO) training materials, laws, and rules relevant to P/EVOs as well as case studies and other information focused on the movement of oversize loads.

Contributors to this best practices guidelines document include the FHWA Office of Freight Management and Operations, the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials, SC&RA, and the CVSA. Other contributors include P/EVOs, the Owner Operator Independent Drivers Association, other professional associations, permitting officials, education professionals, transportation officials and engineers, insurance industry representatives, and enforcement officers.

2. LAW ENFORCEMENT ESCORTS

This section presents the details for some of the major tasks performed by law enforcement escorts involved in the safe movement of permitted oversize/overweight loads.

TASK #1: PLANNING FOR THE ESCORT

A. Obtain a Copy of All Permits

When law enforcement escorts are preparing to escort an oversize/overweight shipment, they should begin by reviewing all permits. Permitting agencies are responsible for setting the specific requirements regarding the movement, and permits are required when the vehicle exceeds the legal weight and/or size limits established under State and Federal law.

Multiple permits often accompany oversize/overweight movements, because permit and escort requirements vary based on the load and jurisdiction. Permits issued by a State department of transportation may not authorize travel on city streets. If required such authority must be obtained from the city or municipality prior to movement of the permitted load.

A consistent set of guidelines should be in place to determine when pilot car escorts and law enforcement escorts are required. To prepare for the escort, law enforcement officials must review a copy of all permits relating to that movement. A recommended practice is to have a designated official review all permits and make law enforcement escort assignments. This designated official is called the “coordinating officer” for that escort. The coordinating officer may suggest recommendations and special conditions for the permits.

B. Verify the Load is the Size and Weight Stated in the Permit

The coordinating officer should verify the size and weight of the oversize/overweight load when possible, ensuring that it matches the size and weight stated on the permit. A hardhat, safety vest and other safety equipment should be worn during all size and weight assessments. In addition, the ground clearance and wheel base measurements should be verified at this time. When possible, it is recommended that this be done when the permit is received by law enforcement personnel prior to other escort activities so that any measurement disputes may be resolved.

Any measurement of the height, width, or length of the vehicle or load must meet a standard of accuracy. The following procedures outline how to accomplish these measurements using methods that meet that standard.

MEASURING HEIGHT

Measure the height of a permitted load if it seems to be over the permitted height using the following procedure. Note that this requires two officers to be present:

1. Standing away at the side of the vehicle, an enforcement officer identifies the highest point of the vehicle or the load. If the ground is uneven, at this point the officer should ask the driver to move the vehicle.
2. The telescopic measuring pole is held against the side or end of the vehicle at the highest point of the vehicle or its lead.
3. When the second officer confirms that the pole is placed and extended correctly, the officer holding the pole reads the height indicated on the pole.

An officer who is working alone can tie the height pole to the tie rail at the side of the trailer. He or she will have to go back and forth checking for the top of the vehicle or load and making the necessary adjustments to the height of the pole.

MEASURING WIDTH

If it seems the width of the load is greater than that stated in the permit, then the width should be measured. Note that any method of assessing width must avoid tape sag as a potential source of error; this can be avoided by measuring along the ground or along the rail.

Two methods for measuring width are described below: the projection-vehicle-projection method and the single-measure method. The single-measure method is suitable when there is a projection from only one side of the vehicle or where the widest point of projection on each side is the same distance as the length of the vehicle.

Projection-vehicle-projection method:

1. By line of sight, or by using a plumb bob, measuring pole, or tape if necessary, identify the widest point of the vehicle or load.
2. If the projection is flat and accessible, e.g. a pallet that extends over the side of the vehicle, hold the tape against the edge of the projection and measure to the side of the vehicle.
3. If the widest point is out of easy reach, e.g., a piece of mining equipment high off the ground, hold the telescopic pole against the projection and mark the wider point to the ground. The pole should be held parallel to the side of the vehicle (as practical) to avoid distortion on a sloping site. Similarly, mark the ground at the side of the vehicle and measure between two points on the ground.
4. The widest point and the side of the vehicle can be marked on the ground using a plumb bob if there is no significant slope on the inspection site.
5. Measure and record the width of the vehicle itself.
6. Measure and record the width of the projection on the other side of the vehicle in the same way that the projection on the first side was measured.
7. Add the measured widths to the first projection, the vehicle and the second projection.

Single measure method:

1. By line of sight, or by using a plumb bob, measuring pole or tape if necessary, identify the widest point of the vehicle or load.
2. Hold a pole or plumb bob against the vehicle at the widest point on the side, parallel to the side of the vehicle, and mark that point on the ground.
3. Similarly mark the widest point on the other side of the vehicle. A line between the two points should be perpendicular to the centerline of the vehicle.
4. Measure the distance between the two points using either the telescopic pole or a tape held taut along the ground.

MEASURING LENGTH

Any method of assessing length must avoid tape sag or a potential source of error, e.g., by measuring along the ground or along the rail. Common methods for measuring length are described below:

Wheels aligned in a substantially straight line –

1. By line of sight, or using a plumb bob or measuring pole if necessary, identify the extreme front point of the vehicle. Mark the point on the ground and extend a straight line from there past the side of the vehicle. As far as practical, the line should be perpendicular to the centerline of the vehicle.
2. Similarly mark the extreme rear point of the vehicle and extend a line from there to the side of the vehicle.
3. Measure the distance between the front and rear lines using a tape held taut along the ground.

Vehicle at an angle, extended lines method –

1. On the ground, mark lines to the side of the vehicle at the extreme front and rear of the vehicle. As far as practical, the extreme front line should be perpendicular to the centerline of the prime mover and the extreme rear line should be perpendicular to the centerline of the last component in the combination.
2. Measure the distance from the extreme front line to the extreme rear line along the short side of the vehicle.
3. Measure the distance from the extreme front line to the extreme rear line along the long side of the vehicle.
4. Add the measured length of the short side and the measured length of the long side then divide the result by two to determine the overall measured length of the combination.

MEASURING GROUND CLEARANCE TO DETERMINE MAXIMUM ALLOWABLE GRADE CROSSING

The officer should verify the ground clearance is as stated in the permit. The ground clearance of the transport vehicle must be sufficient to clear the maximum expected railroad grade crossing for the entire route. The maximum expected railroad grade crossings for the entire route should be stated in the route survey. The officer must also gauge the wheel base to verify the measurement if it is included in the permit details.

CAUTION: Pay particular attention to all railroad crossings en route. The danger of the vehicle becoming wedged on any railroad crossing always persists. Emergency railroad contact numbers should be identified along with the person designated to immediately initiate the call.

C. Review the Route Plan

The coordinating officer should be familiar with the route and have driven it. The route plan shall be analyzed for potential traffic flow issues, bridges, necessary en-route assistance, etc. The route plan should be shared with transportation authorities to ensure road clearances (e.g., construction zones, road closures, detours, etc.).

D. Determine the Number of Law Enforcement Escort Vehicles Needed Based on the Permit and Jurisdictional Requirements

The coordinating officer should make escort assignments for law enforcement escorts and distribute copies of the permit, route plan, and measurement verifications.

E. Compile a List of Contacts

The list of contacts should include State and/or local Departments of Transportation, power companies, utility companies, railroad companies, tow truck companies, etc. The list should accompany the escort and be distributed to all participants.

States should publish a concise directory driven by the geography of the state. The directory should include at a minimum:

- Local power companies.
- Transmission line companies.
- Railroad companies.
- Cable companies.

- Telephone companies.
- Municipal department of public works.
- Emergency responders (police, hazmat, fire, rescue, emergency medical services (EMS), etc.).
- Tow truck companies.
- Local law enforcement and EMS contacts.
- Municipal Governments for municipalities along the route.

The directory should be available to all law enforcement escorts. Law enforcement escorts should identify the contact information relevant to the route before departure.

F. Ensure a Reliable Means of Communication is Available

It is the responsibility of the carrier to ensure a reliable means of communication exists for the duration of the movement.

G. Ensure a Plan for En Route Assistance is Established as Called for in the Permits

En route assistance may be articulated in the permit. The law enforcement escort should coordinate with the pilot car escort to plan for en route assistance that is articulated in the permit.

H. Develop a Contingency Plan

Ensure a contingency plan has been developed that includes safest stopping places and 24-hour emergency contact numbers. The contingency plan should address at a minimum:

- Vehicle breakdowns.
- Inclement weather.
- Illness of team members.
- Highway conditions.
- Safety stopping spots.
- A 24-hour contact number for carrier.
- Back-up and reserve vehicles and drivers.
- Off-route contingency.

TASK #2: MAKE THE INITIAL ON-SITE CONTACT

A. Introduce Yourself

Upon arrival at the dispatch point, law enforcement escorts should introduce themselves to all others involved with the movement.

B. Perform an Inspection of the Transport Vehicle(s) and Driver(s)

The law enforcement escort may perform an inspection of the transport vehicle(s) and driver(s) if necessary and consistent with the requirements of the issuing permit agency. The following are the inspections recommendations to be conducted by certified personnel only:

- North American Standard Level I Inspection.
- North American Standard Level II Inspection.
- North American Standard Level III Inspection.

C. Check the Pilot Car Driver(s) and Escort Vehicle(s) for Required Equipment and Certifications

Pilot car escorts are required to carry specific items of equipment at all times when escorting an oversize/overweight vehicle or load. The law enforcement escort should ensure the drivers of pilot car escort(s) produce the following valid documentation:

- Driver's license or commercial driver's license.
- Vehicle registration.
- Vehicle insurance.
- Pilot car certification (if applicable).

In addition, the law enforcement escort should be aware of symptoms of fatigue demonstrated by pilot car escorts. The escort should consider stopping the movement if symptoms of fatigue appear to be a safety concern.

The law enforcement escort should ensure the pilot car escort is equipped with all required equipment, which may include the following:

- Flags.
- Mirrors.
- Radio.
- Fire extinguisher.
- Flares or reflectors.
- Signs.
- Warning lights.
- Measuring pole.

- Traffic control sign.⁴
- Safety clothing.
- Flashlight.
- Spare tire.

The law enforcement escort must measure the height pole on the pilot car if a height pole is required by the permit. The law enforcement escort should also ensure the pilot escort is not carrying items restricted by jurisdictional statute and that it is not towing a trailer or another vehicle. During escort, top lights should be used to help ensure visibility and awareness.

D. Review All Permits to Ensure that They Are Appropriate for the Load.

Once on-site, the law enforcement escort should again review the permit(s) and ensure it is appropriate for the vehicle and load. The vehicle and load should be physically measured to ensure they match the permit.

E. Review the Route Plan

After ensuring the permit matches the vehicle and the load, the law enforcement escort should review the permitted route and route plan.

TASK #3: PLAN EN-ROUTE COMMUNICATIONS AND VEHICLE POSITIONING

A. Discuss the Roles and Responsibilities of Everyone Involved in the Movement of the Load

A safety briefing should be held to discuss routing and special conditions identified on the permit(s) before the movement begins. The law enforcement escort should discuss the roles and responsibilities of everyone involved in the movement. Occasionally, an oversize load may require a law enforcement escort for only part of a trip. For example, additional traffic control officers may be required to assist temporarily at a specific intersection or location. This may necessitate a “pick-up on the move,” or the process of adding or exchanging escorts while in motion. If this is necessary, the law enforcement escort will “fall-in” at a prearranged point and assist the load until it is no longer needed. While this maneuver is performed without the benefit of a pre-trip meeting or any first-hand knowledge of the load, it must still be coordinated prior to the movement.

When the escorted vehicle stops, the law enforcement escort is to direct other traffic past the escorted load as necessary until the escorted load can reenter the roadway and continue moving without presenting a safety risk or unreasonably interfering with the efficient movement of other traffic.

⁴ See FHWA *Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices*, Chapter 6F. The FHWA has incorporated by reference the *Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices for Streets and Highways* (MUTCD, pursuant to 23 CFR 655.601(d)(2)).

B. Identify a Lead Contact for the Entire Escort

The law enforcement escort should designate the lead contact for the movement. All drivers involved in the oversize/overweight movement must agree on the lead contact person for the duration of the movement.

C. Coordinate and Test All Communications Equipment

All communications equipment should be coordinated and tested.

D. Identify Who Will Make Notifications When Necessary

The pilot car escort is usually designated as the person responsible for making en route notifications. The pilot car escort should notify all drivers after the notifications have been made. Likewise, the law enforcement escort should ensure all notifications have been made.

E. Determine Where Vehicles Will Be Located and When They Will Be There

The permit will mandate the number, type and positioning of escort vehicles. The law enforcement escort should review vehicle positioning. The review should include a discussion of drop-in vehicles and others who might be involved in the movement but are not at the initial dispatch site.

SAFETY CONCERN: The law enforcement escort should designate everyone as a safety officer to stop the movement of the load immediate if an unsafe condition is found.

CHANGE IN JURISDICTION: When there is a change in jurisdiction, repeat Tasks 2 and 3 at a safe and appropriate location before the permitted movement continues.

TASK#4: SAFELY ESCORT THE OVERSIZE/OVERWEIGHT MOVEMENT

A. Monitor Communications with All Other Vehicles in the Convoy

All drivers are required to maintain radio communication. The lead pilot car escort is responsible for advising the load operator of any conditions that may require precautionary action such as reducing speed or pulling off the roadway. Lead pilot car escorts should use the radio to inform other drivers of traffic congestion, overhead clearances, hazards, flat tires, obstructions, pedestrians, and other objects or potential safety or mobility problems that require advance warning.

Appropriate communications procedures should be followed during all transmissions. Special attention should be given while traveling in mountainous areas. While maintaining radio contact may be difficult, it may be necessary to increase vehicle spacing to allow for adequate braking distance.

B. Ensure the Movement Is Proceeding Lawfully at All Times

The escort vehicles must comply with all traffic laws in effect during the movement. All pilot car and law enforcement escorts as well as the load operator should act as a team to ensure the safety of the traveling public. This includes following all safety laws.

C. Ensure All Procedures and Special Conditions Mandated by Permit(s) are Followed

Often there are special conditions set forth in the permit that must be followed to ensure the safe movement of the oversize/overweight load.

D. Maintain and Facilitate Traffic Control

The primary responsibility of the law enforcement escort is to protect the traveling public. In the performance of duties as the operator of an escort vehicle, the pilot car escort is authorized to direct traffic to stop, slow down, or proceed in situations where such directing is necessary to allow traffic or the escorted vehicle or load to continue moving safely. When necessary, the law enforcement escort should assist the pilot car escort in maintaining and facilitating traffic control.

E. Activate the Contingency Plan if Necessary, Including Safe Stopping Points

The law enforcement escort should require the driver of the oversize/overweight load to stop and move as far off the roadway as practical and allow traffic to pass, under the following conditions:

- When the oversize/overweight load has become disabled.
- When the movement of the escorted load on a particular section presents a safety risk or unreasonably interferes with the efficient movement of other traffic. This determination should be made based upon such factors as width of the load, roadway, volume of traffic, limited visibility, or mountainous terrain.
- When the escorted vehicle stops, the law enforcement escort should direct other traffic past the escorted load as necessary until the escorted load can reenter the roadway and continue moving without presenting a safety risk or unreasonably interfering with the efficient movement of other traffic.

F. Monitor Progress of the Movement, Paying Attention to Time Constraints

Most permits allow movement 24 hours per day. It is important for law enforcement escorts to:

- Be alert at all times. One of the keys to accident prevention is being aware of what is going on around you. Be observant of others. Drivers do not always pay attention so be attentive to their actions.

- Keep a high profile. Always wear your safety clothing when working traffic. Stand where you are highly visible and can be seen from the greatest distance.
- Hope for the best but expect the worst. Whether driving or flagging, always have an escape route in mind. Be aware of traffic around you at all times.

TASK #5: DEBRIEF AND DEPART

A. Conduct Debrief

After the trip is completed, the law enforcement escort should complete a post-inspection report documenting the move. The report should communicate areas of improvement and all incidents to all stakeholders, including the law enforcement officials, motor carrier, pilot car company, and permitting office. The document should be provided to stakeholders.

The law enforcement escort may ensure the pilot car escort does the following:

- Remove all flagging.
- Turn off all exterior flashing lights, amber lights.
- Remove or cover the “OVERSIZE LOAD” sign.

SUMMARY

It is our recommendation that these best practices guidelines be followed by all jurisdictions involved in the movement of oversize/overweight loads. Further it is recommended that these best practices guidelines be presented to law enforcement escorts in a structured manner, such as a shift briefing topic or staff development presentation. This will allow for discussion on the roles and responsibilities of all stakeholders involved in the movement, including law enforcement officers, pilot car escorts, carriers and CMV drivers.

3. ESCORT CHECKLIST

PREPARE FOR THE ESCORT

1. Obtain a copy of the permit(s).
2. Verify the load is the size and weight specified in the permit(s).
3. Review the route plan.
4. Determine the number of law enforcement escorts needed based on the permit(s) and the jurisdictional requirements.
5. Ensure a list of telephone contacts has been compiled (i.e., power companies, utility companies, railroad companies, tow truck companies, etc.) to accompany the escort and is distributed to all participants.
6. Ensure a list of contact phone numbers for municipalities along the route has been compiled to call when appropriate and is distributed to all participants.
7. Ensure a reliable means of communications is available.
8. Ensure a plan for en route assistance is established as called for in the permit.
9. Ensure a contingency plan has been developed that includes safe stopping places and 24-hour emergency contact numbers.

MAKE THE INITIAL ON-SITE CONTACT

1. Introduce yourself to everyone involved.
2. Perform an inspection of the transport vehicle(s) and driver(s).
3. Check the pilot car driver(s) and escort vehicle(s) for required equipment and certifications.
4. Review all permits to ensure they are appropriate for the load. Physically measure the load and ensure it matches the permit.
5. Review the route plan and ensure copies are distributed to all participants.

☑ PLAN EN-ROUTE COMMUNICATIONS AND VEHICLE POSITIONING

1. Discuss roles and responsibilities of everyone involved in the movement of this load (including drop-ins, bucket trucks, etc.).
2. Identify the lead contact for the entire escort.
3. Coordinate and test all communications equipment.
4. Identify who will make notifications when necessary.
5. Discuss where vehicles will be located and when they will be there (including drop-ins, etc.).

SAFETY CONCERNS: Designate everyone as a safety officer to stop the movement of the load immediately if an unsafe condition is found.

CHANGE IN JURISDICTION: When there is a change in jurisdiction, repeat steps 2 and 3 at a safe and appropriate location before the permitted movement continues.

☑ SAFELY ESCORT THE OVERSIZE/OVERWEIGHT MOVEMENT

1. Monitor communications with all other vehicles in the convoy.
2. Ensure the movement is proceeding lawfully at all times.
3. Ensure all procedures and special conditions mandated by permit(s) are followed.
4. Maintain and facilitate traffic control.
5. Activate contingency plan if necessary, including safe stopping points.
6. Monitor progress of the movement, paying attention to all time constraints.

☑ DEBRIEF AND DEPART

1. Review the movement with all participants, note areas of improvement, and then report all incidents to the motor carrier, pilot car company and permitting office.



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