

Message from WisDOT Secretary Mark Gottlieb

Safely moving an oversize, overweight (OSOW) load on our highway system involves careful coordination between public and private sector partners. To preserve our infrastructure and protect the safety of all highway users, the Wisconsin Department of Transportation (WisDOT) oversees an OSOW permitting system.

Each year, WisDOT works with private motor carriers to issue about 50,000 single-trip OSOW permits. The permit process helps ensure OSOW loads follow routes that will safely accommodate the heavier, wider or taller loads, and in the process protect pavements, bridges and public utilities. Whenever you come upon one of these OSOW loads, be extra cautious, and keep in mind the significant economic impact and the many family-supporting jobs each load represents.

This issue of the WisDOT Connector provides a brief overview of the OSOW permitting process and how federal, state and local governments work cooperatively with the private sector to keep commerce moving and our economy growing.

OSOW vehicles move huge loads, generate equally large economic benefits

From their sheer size, to the flashing lights, flagging and escort vehicles that often accompany them, oversize, overweight (OSOW) loads make a powerful visual statement as they move down a highway. But each OSOW load also generates an equally large economic impact that ripples through the economy of the entire state. This includes the trucking firm and driver moving the load, the facility and employees where the equipment is manufactured, along with a host of jobs held by electricians, welders and other skilled workers whose combined talents are reflected in the final OSOW product.

While some OSOW loads originate elsewhere and pass through our state, Wisconsin is a national leader in the manufacture of a wide range of industrial-scale items that commonly move along OSOW routes. Some of the more common OSOW loads originating in Wisconsin and headed to markets across the nation and world include wind towers, rotary kilns and digesters, large steel beams, heating and air conditioning equipment.

Transporting these huge loads safely and efficiently requires a team of public and private professionals who help determine when, where and how to move them. It also requires the patience of motorists and cooperation from communities small and large across the state that routinely accommodate OSOW loads.



The roughly 50,000 single-trip OSOW permits WisDOT oversees each year can be grouped into four general categories:

- Permits issued via automated system. About 30 percent of single-trip OSOW permits are issued via an automated computer system and involve loads that only modestly exceed width, weight and/or length limits. Carriers or private permit services enter vehicle and load information and a proposed route. The computer evaluates and approves (or rejects) the proposed route.
- The second and largest category accounts for about 60 percent of WisDOT issued permits and represents the more common types of OSOW loads that motorists encounter moving along the roadway. Examples include bridge beams and girders, agricultural and construction equipment, generators and chillers.
- "Super loads" account for about 10 percent of the single-trip permits WisDOT issues annually. Moving a "super load" typically requires direct coordination with WisDOT bridge and traffic engineers, and sometimes - State Patrol escorts. Examples of "super loads" include wind tower components, metal and non-metallic holding tanks, HVAC units, luxury boats or yachts.
- The final category represents the smallest number of permits issued (about 55 each year), but safely coordinating and moving "mega loads" is time consuming and requires a substantial amount of public and private oversight. The biggest of the big, "mega loads" weigh over 350,000 pounds, are at least 22 feet wide and at least 17 feet tall and can be more than 220 feet long. Due to their extreme size, "mega loads" often require the entire width of a standard two-lane highway. Examples include mining equipment, giant dryers used in the paper-making industry, and sometimes - entire houses.

Getting closer to moving day

When a private motor carrier or permit service submits an OSOW application to WisDOT, the carrier supplies the desired route, any layover locations, schematics of vehicles, dates, start and end locations. The carrier is responsible for contacting all utilities along the way (cable TV, telephone, electric, etc.).

WisDOT OSOW staff review the application. Among the considerations:

- Will the load clear structures, surpass allowable weights on highways and bridges along the proposed route;
- Are there any construction projects/activities that might require WisDOT to modify the route;
- If the load is traveling to the state borders, WisDOT ensures the neighboring state allows the night or day

move that the permit requires.

- If the load needs to use local or county roads, the carrier contacts local officials to make sure the load will clear.



If the overall weight of an OSOW load is over 270,000 lbs., WisDOT traffic and bridge engineers review the application to make sure pavements and structures won't be damaged. Staff in WisDOT's five regional offices review OSOW loads over 16 feet wide and/or 160 feet long to help ensure the load can negotiate turns, roundabouts, traffic lights or signs along the route. WisDOT region staff will also determine if specific requirements will be required on the permit such as escorts and the specific time of move.

State Patrol role: inspections and escorts

With its decades of experience in providing escorts for the transportation of oversized and overweight loads, the Wisconsin State Patrol has a critical role in ensuring the safe and efficient movement of OSOW loads.

During the permitting process, WisDOT determines whether a State Patrol escort is required based on the dimensions and weight of the load as well as the route. The freight carrier reimburses the State Patrol for its escort expenses.



Before the escort detail hits the road, the State Patrol thoroughly inspects and weighs the transporting vehicle and

its load to ensure compliance with the permit and the reliability of all safety equipment.

In some instances, the carrier is required to supply a pole car that precedes the vehicle and its load. The pole car is equipped with a height sensor to ascertain sufficient clearance for the load. One of the main duties for the escorting State Patrol officer is to provide traffic control at intersections and ramps. A State Patrol escort helps warn other drivers about the need to share the road with the oversized load. The escort also ensures that the vehicle follows its assigned route and reduces its speed when required, such as bridge crossings. In 2015, a total of 589 State Patrol officers were assigned to 401 escort details. Of these, 136 of the details were for the shipment of wind towers.

According to Wisconsin State Patrol Captain Brian Ausloos of the Motor Carrier Enforcement Section, the experience gained in escorting wind tower shipments across the state has led to overall improvements in the travel routes for oversize/overweight loads. There was extensive construction mitigation done to major intersections along the freight corridor from Manitowoc to Dubuque, Iowa. The construction mitigation eliminated the need for State Patrol escorts, which in turn provides significant savings to the freight industry and relieves some of the strain on State Patrol staffing.

Who's who at WisDOT

Janice Meier, Permit Section, Bureau of Highway Maintenance

For 23 years now, Janice Meier has had a big role in moving big loads. Meier is part of the OSOW Permit Section within WisDOT's Division of Transportation System Development and specializes in moving mega-loads.

"I've had a passion for the big loads as soon as I got into the unit," Meier said. "I enjoy the challenge of putting all the pieces together and finding a safe route. Each day there is always something new and interesting - whether it be a challenge of a big load or a question about carrying a specific commodity."



Last year, WisDOT's OSOW "team of 10" approved 49,583 single-trip permits and 18,692 multiple-trip permits. Though everyone in the unit is trained to issue mega load permits, Meier has specialized in the area. In 2015, she oversaw nearly 1,000 "super load" or "mega load" permits, such as a house move.



The Wisconsin Department of Transportation's MAPSS Performance Improvement Program reviews performance measures for five key goal areas that guide us in achieving our mission - mobility, accountability, preservation, safety and service. To check out the latest online reports, simply click on the MAPSS logo.

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