

Steering through a world of **red tape**



Harmonisation of regulations is but a dream in the world of heavy haulage. Dealing with the bureaucracy, complexities, costs and staggering variations in rules relating to permits and escorts is not for the faint-hearted. Felicity Landon reports.

Most of us would like to think that we are, to an extent at least, in charge of our own destiny. There is little hope of that for anyone planning and organising the transport of heavy and out-of-gauge cargo by road.

It all starts, of course, with the customer – and that, in itself, can present difficulties. “The challenge is to convince the client about the rules related to exceptional transport,” said Pieter van der Weijden, director at Ryano Logistics & Projects, based in Moerdijk, the Netherlands. “Often clients do not really understand that it takes time to put a permit in place and they do not realise the effects on the permits if the shipper changes the dimensions to 3-5 cm wider or changes the weight by 1-2 tonnes.

“It is challenging to stay strong with a shipper when it is on time limits for delivery and two days before, or at the moment of loading, we find out that the dimensions have changed. Turning this to applying for permits – for each country it is a different process and also divided into different areas and different categories which we have to fit in for the whole project.”

Scheduling the truck, with the correct plate numbers as shown on the permits, is even more challenging, as clients expect flexibility regarding the loading day – for example, postponing loading just a day before the planned date, said van der Weijden. “That can lead to big operational problems when truck, permits and escorts are already scheduled.”

Border problems

What are the challenges out there on Europe’s roads? Border crossings, together with pilot cars, are difficult to manage but workable, he said.

“Pilot cars in Germany have different restrictions to pilot cars in France, for example. It is the same with time of arrival at the borders. In Germany you can only drive during the night and in France you can only drive during the day. Cooperation between countries could be improved.”

A good example, he said, is the border crossing between France and Spain at Le Perthus, en route to Barcelona. “You can only pass this border between 03:00 and 09:00. With the current regulations about

driving hours, it is always challenging to schedule the truck and driver to make sure he is within the regulations and still crossing the border during the permitted hours. It is losing a lot of time.”

Permits outlook

The challenges and bureaucracy of securing road permits are only getting worse, according to van der Weijden. “Each country is changing its rules and requirements and there are different rules on weights per axle. It is not one European Union when you start to investigate this.”

He suggested that some national governments are protecting business for local transport companies by making the rules very complicated. “Spain, for example, has changed the rules this year again and you cannot even change the truck or trailer any more during a trip, as all the numbers should be on the permit. When you have to apply for a permit, two to five weeks before the day of loading, it is really hard to define that this specific truck with this specific trailer will execute the transport. We lose the flexibility in our operations.”

As with so many countries, Spain’s rules vary from one region to another. “In one region the permit is valid for just four weeks and in another region it is for six months. One region expects you to write exactly on your permits that you are moving an excavator and the other region not. When you have ‘excavator’ on the permits and you have the chance to load a bulldozer back, then you have to apply for a new permit. This is frustrating.”

Ivan Rojnica, head of the road transport department at Zagrebrtrans, in Croatia, sees no prospect of any harmonisation across Europe for oversized permits. While no country’s system is ideal, he said, Austria could be held up as an example of how things should be: yearly permits with relatively liberal dimensions (25.0 x 3.5 x 4.3 m, 60 tonnes), with normal permits issued relatively quickly and valid for 30 days or longer if necessary. Additionally, the technical escort personnel in Austria are trained in authorised establishments so that a police escort is not necessary and can be replaced by an extra technical escort car.

“There are many other countries with some good things in the oversized transport

Zagrebrtrans, in Croatia, sees no prospect of any harmonisation across Europe for oversized transport permits.



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systems – for example, the yearly permit system in Poland with multiple permit categories and permits that are tied to the company, not truck or trailer plate numbers.”

However, he said, Croatia has the same unchanged permit system and oversized transport regulations that it had two decades ago, with extremely expensive permits. “Some permits can exceed EUR50,000 (USD55,800). For years we have been trying to push our government to change something, but without success.”

Croatia may be expensive, but permits are almost double the price in Bosnia, said Rojnica. “Bosnia is a very difficult country for oversized transport, with the most expensive permits in Europe – maybe the world, very old road infrastructure, with many bridges with questionable and low capacity, and mountain terrain with many tunnels on main roads, limiting the maximum cargo height.”

ESTA targets

President of the Polish Heavy Transport Association (OSPTN) and newly appointed transport officer at the European Association of Abnormal Road Transport and Mobile Cranes (ESTA), Lukasz Chwalczuk, will be focusing on expanding ESTA membership into Central and Eastern Europe.

“At present, our members are mainly companies from Western Europe and we want to make a connection with the Eastern countries; I have already made contacts with companies in Lithuania, Belarus, Ukraine, Bulgaria and Romania, among others, because they have the same issues as us all.

“As president of the Polish association, I can say that since we joined ESTA it has been much easier for me to speak with the Polish authorities and officials; they see me as someone from Europe who has connections with big companies, manufacturers and suppliers from Europe, so that is very helpful for me. I believe it works the same in each country. For many it is much easier to deal with the authorities if they are represented by a European organisation instead of standing by themselves.”

It helps at EU level too, he explained: “We want to get as many countries or associations from different countries to join ESTA because that will give us more strength to talk with the EU.”

ESTA will be lobbying to improve the harmonisation of rules and regulations governing heavy transport throughout Europe, Chwalczuk added.

He acknowledged that harmonisation of



permitting would be difficult, because each country has its different infrastructure, bridges, and load tolerances. “But I would like to start with escort rules, to unify what a pilot car should look like and a unified certificate for the pilot.”

In Poland, OSPTN has its own particular battles. Leading up to last year’s election, the association was working closely with the transport minister to put the contents of new legislation on transport and escorts in place. “We got everything ready; now we are starting to move forward again with the new government. The main issue in Poland is escort rules; new regulations were implemented five years ago but in the time since then there have been some misunderstandings and small errors which

we want to fix. We have had a lot of meetings with escort companies and officials.”

Another issue that should be addressed is the length of time it takes to register a new semi-trailer in Poland, said Chwalczuk. “You can have your new semi-trailer in Poland but it can be three or four months before it can be on the roads, because it sometimes takes that long to get your plates.”

Ailing infrastructure

The continued degradation of the infrastructure across Europe is making heavy transport operations increasingly difficult, according to David Collett, ESTA president.

“For example, in Germany the state of the bridges and routes for heavy transport causes great problems – a recent report said that 46 percent of the Germany’s bridges are in need of repair. And the problems in that country are hardly unique.”

As for permits, he said: “We are as far removed from harmonisation as we have ever been as an industry. We have been trying for years to get Europe’s road transport authorities to reduce the paperwork and bureaucracy faced by the heavy transport industry and adopt the Special European Registration for Trucks and Trailers (SERT).

“SERT was launched ten years ago with the support of the European Commission. However, to date only the Netherlands has fully adopted the SERT proposals and we feel that a great opportunity to boost efficiency and eliminate an obstacle to cross-border trade has been lost.”

SERT forms part of the European Best Practice Guidelines for Abnormal Road Transport, published by the European Commission’s Transport Directorate in 2005. It was intended to replace the different national documents faced by heavy transport firms, reducing paperwork while making sure the authorities have the detailed information they need.

In 2012, ESTA research concluded that



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– Ivan Rojnica, Zagrebtrans

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complying with different cross-border permit regulations costs the industry around EUR500 million (USD558 million) a year.

"We will keep plugging away, but unnecessary and wasteful bureaucracy remains a huge issue," said Collett.

The increasing use of automated permit systems is important in the battle to gain harmonisation across the USA, said Steven Todd, vice president of the Specialized Carriers & Rigging Association (SC&RA).

"Automation has really taken off technology-wise, particularly in the past couple of years; ten years ago, only a small number of states had such a system, and today close to 30 states have systems in place," he said. "Now that more and more states have implemented such automated permitting systems, we strongly advocate that they increase the threshold at which they will automatically issue permits."

Conservative approach

"Many states are very conservative with what they will automatically issue. We understand they need to be conservative but what we are stressing to them is: as you become more comfortable with the system and testing, get your money's worth from the system but

then look at raising the threshold on height, width and weight on what you issue."

A small but growing number of states have "really reached out and increased their threshold" and the SC&RA is holding them



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— David Collett, ESTA

up as examples for the others, said Todd.

Two "very positive things" happen as a result of reducing permit turnaround times, he emphasised.

"First, safety is enhanced because the quicker the carriers can obtain the permits, the more likely they are to go through the process of purchasing permits, checking the route, width, weight, etc. Second, automation can bring increased revenue for the state. What we are finding is that as states adopt automated permitting, and begin to increase the thresholds, they are seeing a moderate increase in the revenue they receive. It truly is a 'win-win' for the industry, government and manufacturers."

This move towards automation is attracting attention around the world, according to Todd – not that it is not happening elsewhere but it is not happening at the same rate as in the USA. "From a worldwide perspective, I think it is worth noting – the momentum is building in government and the industry for more forcefully advocating automated permitting systems."

But lack of harmonisation from state to state continues, with regards to the amount of weight permitted per single axle, tandem,

Over-regulation: the alternative

When Ryano Logistics moved an entire factory from the Netherlands to Medellin in Colombia last year, it experienced the opposite of having too many rules.

"This was a very nice project which included dismantling, packaging, securing, loading on truck,

going to the port, loading as out-of-gauge cargo for Colombia, taking it off at the Port of Santa Martha and then, with local exceptional transport, going towards the final destination of Medellin," said Pieter van der Weijden, director.

"They provide you with a permit in Colombia for 4.8 m height for a specific route but that does not confirm that the route is clear to drive. So, we met the challenge of trees and cables on the road – pushing them up or cutting back the tree to move forward. It is a distance of just 450 km but took six days' driving."

quad, dual lane trailers, and so on. That, said Todd, will probably be the next major push for SC&RA. "The lack of harmonisation between states in terms of what they will and will not allow weight-wise is causing our industry major expense. There are different rules for every configuration.

"We are, however, making great headway on allowable weight on a two-axle tandem; not long ago, most states only allowed 40,000 lbs (18.14 tonnes). Now we are down to just four states that still restrict to that and of these four we believe two are proposing legislation to raise it to 46,000 lbs (20.87 tonnes)."

Africa: working with authorities

Gerben Langstraat, director, Middle East - East Africa at Steder Group, noted that countries across Africa have very specific regulations when it comes to permits for the haulage of oversize goods.

Operating mostly in Ethiopia, Steder is well-versed in the processes involved in obtaining permits and organising escorts.

"We know that before we apply for a permit concerning difficult transports, we must execute our own road study and provide that to the authorities, explaining why we wish to take a certain route. This definitely speeds up the process for us."

Langstraat added that the basic application process, which is a manual system, can be "simple and straightforward" as long as the transport provider cooperates. "We play a very active role and get it done within a maximum of two weeks."

Roel Derudder, general manager of Kenfreight, added: "In East Africa the permit systems are not harmonised although the axle load limits are generally the same.

"Kenya has a fairly straightforward system which you can apply for in advance. Uganda is only now developing a very basic system so we have to see which shape it will take. Tanzania is the most stringent and bureaucratic - permits can take many weeks



ESTA will launch its new best practice guide for the use of SPMTs at its spring meeting in Munich.

and application only starts after the loading of the truck. Rwanda and Burundi currently have no system in place."

The use of escorts depends on the goods transported, said Langstraat. "Authorities might decide that a police escort or even military escort is required. This is provided for a fair price and it is all a matter of having contacts and good relations."



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— Steven Todd, SC&RA

Derudder feels that real efforts are being made to improve Africa's road infrastructure. "The new road network around Nairobi is impressive and Tanzania might be strict on permits, but it does have well surfaced roads to protect."

However, he believes that smoother and wider roads would facilitate deliveries. "One huge step forward in our view would be to make the main Mombasa-Nairobi-Kampala highway a two-lane highway to massively improve safety."

In general, road infrastructure in Ethiopia is improving, added Langstraat, but such development can also cause problems.

"When a new bridge is under construction, a temporary bridge is laid down, which generally does not have the capacity to carry our equipment. When a railway is constructed new obstacles (like viaducts) appear and of course solutions have to be found.

"So yes - sometimes it is becoming more difficult, but by working together with the authorities, solutions are easy to achieve."

Qatari regulations

Over in the Middle East, the Cabinet of Qatar has reviewed recommendations from the heavy transport committee in its first quarterly report to improve the regulation of heavy transport in the country.

The recommendations proposed included: the establishment of a database for all those involved in heavy transport, from individuals to companies and commercial institutions; the registration of transport vehicles, heavy machinery and equipment owned by citizens; and the development of a unified model for contracts to hire heavy transport equipment.

The committee was formed in 2014 to examine all matters relating to heavy transport in Qatar, in particular to study the ways in which heavy transport can be organised and propose practical mechanisms for this management.

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SPMT best practice guide

The European Association of Abnormal Road Transport and Mobile Cranes (ESTA) will launch a new best practice guide for the use of self-propelled modular transporters (SPMT) at its spring meeting at Bauma in Munich.

"Currently there are no formal regulations anywhere in the world with regards to the use of SPMTs. The guide has been put together to create a 'baseline starting point' when considering use of SPMTs," said Dave Collett, ESTA president.

"The new guidelines will help address the problem of trailers tipping over, which has happened on some occasions even though the existing operating rules and stability calculations were being precisely followed.

"Clients asked what the industry was going to do about the problem. In response, we created a working group that included representatives from several of our leading members, plus manufacturers and clients."