The Highland Council
Comhairle na Gàidhealtachd

Roads and Transport Guidelines for New Developments
Stiùiridhean Rathaidean is Còmhdhalach airson Leasachaidhean Ùra

Appendix 9
Eàrr-Ràdh 9
Abnormal loads
Luchdan neo-àbhaisteach

Abnormal loads

Legislation

Abnormal loads are defined as those laden dimensions that exceed one or more of the following criteria:

- 2.9 metre overall width
- 18.3 metre rigid length
- 44 tonne gross weight

The control of abnormal indivisible loads is regulated and controlled by legislation:

- Part II of the Road Traffic Act 1988
- Road Vehicles (Authorisation of Special types) (General) Order 2003
- Road Vehicles (Construction and Use) Regulations 1986
- Special Orders

The movement of certain types of abnormal load is illegal unless authorised by Scottish Ministers, who will grant "VR1" or "Special Order" approval. Some load types also require notice to be given to the Police, Road and Bridge Authorities.

In Scotland, the Transport Scotland Abnormal Routing Section co-ordinates the movement of abnormal loads on both the Trunk Road and non-Trunk Road networks and must be satisfied that the movement is justified and that alternative routes have been considered, in consultation with interested bodies, including the relevant Local Roads Authority. The Section can provide a routing advisory service as well as informing which proposed wide, high or heavy load movements will require Scottish Ministers' authorisation, as different dimensions require different approvals. Authorisation from all relevant authorities must be obtained before an abnormal load can be moved. Further information on abnormal loads can be obtained from the Transport Scotland website.

Where an abnormal load will use roads within the Highlands region, early discussions must be held with the Council.

Height of loads

There is no current legislation to restrict the height of vehicles, so there is no specific need to seek approval for high vehicles. The standard minimum headroom clearance is 5.03 metre, and it is the responsibility of the driver to ensure that the height of the vehicle can pass beneath all overbridges or any other obstacles that restrict height.

However, as a result of an increase in bridge strike incidents, Transport Scotland's website provides a list and map of all Trunk Road overbridges that have been hit by vehicles or have sub-standard heights, to help inform operators of potential route restrictions. For the local road network, the relevant Local Roads Authority should be contacted for information on low bridges.

Movement of abnormal loads

From 1 January 2004, self-escorting of abnormal loads was introduced and there is now no requirement to have a police escort, as was previously the case although for certain abnormal loads, there is a requirement to give advance notice to the Police. In addition, if specific traffic management is required, such as the need to stop or temporarily re-direct traffic, then prior arrangements must be made with the relevant Police Force, as they will undertake these tasks.

The Notified Route is authorised by the relevant authorities and this is the only route that will be allowed to be used and authorisation may include certain timetable restrictions. Prior to transferring an abnormal load, it is good practice to undertake a trial run and video the route, as this can aid the assessment of any likely improvements.

The Highways Agency has published Code of Practice for Self Escorting (HA74/05) and also Operating Guidance for Abnormal Load Escorting, which both provide relevant advice.

The code of practice requires a private escort person or firm to be competent, through training and/or experience. Having knowledge of the relevant local road network is an obvious advantage.

Guidelines for self escorting of abnormal loads have also been published by The Association of Chief Police Officers in Scotland (ACPOS). Whilst the guidelines mainly relate to motorways and dual carriageways, they also provide useful general information. Significant requirements are:

- Highlighting that haulier shall comply with the Highway Agency Code of Practice HA74/05;
- Haulier to provide written notice that personnel will not engage in the direction or control of general traffic; and
- Haulier must give assurance not to operate or move loads on urban motorways during peak traffic flows.

Route assessment

If the notified route includes minor or locally busy roads, it is recommended that a survey is undertaken beforehand, to identify any key issues. Some routes may also require swept path analysis to be undertaken in order to demonstrate that the abnormal load can negotiate the roads. In some cases, this may lead to a requirement for temporary realignments or alterations to be undertaken including but not restricted to:

- Carriageway widening
- Removal/widening of bends or corners
- New passing places
- Temporary removal of roundabouts
- Walls or fences to be taken down or relocated
- Bridge parapets removed or lowered
- Bridge/culvert strengthening
- Removal or relocation of street furniture
- Trees or vegetation to be removed or cut back

There may also be a requirement to co-ordinate local delivery times, in order to minimise impact on road users. For example, avoiding peak traffic times, school activities or other traffic-generating events would need to be taken into account and discussed with the Council.

Legal agreements

If the delivery of abnormal loads requires a developer to undertake improvements (either temporary or permanent) to some of the roads, the Council is likely to require the developer to enter into a legal agreement, usually in terms of Section 48 of the Roads (Scotland) Act 1984 or any other suitable legal agreement as approved by the Council.

If the development is likely to require a significant number of abnormal loads that could result in damage to existing public roads, the Council may require the developer to enter into a legal agreement, under the terms of Section 96 of the Roads (Scotland) Act 1984.

Indemnity

Operators should be aware that heavy abnormal loads need to indemnify the relevant Roads and Bridges Authorities for any resulting damage to roads and structures.