

Abnormal Loads Could Jam Up the Network, says AA Motoring Trust

New rules for moving abnormal loads could lead to rush hour jams, warns The AA Motoring Trust.

The Highways Agency has drafted a new code of practice in response to police moves to gradually give up their duties of escorting abnormal loads on roads and motorways in England and Wales.

However one crucial part the power to restrict the time of day the loads are moved is missing from the proposed guidelines.

Paul Watters, head of roads and transport policy for The AA Motoring Trust, says: We are concerned that the proposed code does not include any time restrictions. With over 1.5 million abnormal loads on English and Welsh roads each year, motorists do not want to be stuck behind them in rush-hour jams. They will want these types of loads transported when the roads are relatively free of traffic.

Some motorways can be reduced to a single lane in places when abnormal loads are being transported. If that is done during busy periods it could effectively shut the motorway by forcing the traffic to move as slowly as the load.

The proposed code of practice for the self-escorting of abnormal loads and vehicles has been drawn up by the Highways Agency after a consultation in the spring. The police have gradually withdrawn from escorting since 1 January this year.

The AA Motoring Trust accepts that the code will involve transferring some routine police traffic tasks, which is inevitable, but effective management of those who take over from the police is essential. Motorists must be reassured that safety is paramount when escorts are handled by civilians rather than highly trained and visible traffic police. The Trust wants companies that will now escort vehicles to be fully accredited and trained to high standards. If they fail to keep up to scratch they should lose the right to escort.

Paul Watters adds: Company standards should be monitored daily and if companies dont stick to the standards imposed by the industry they should be removed from the list of accredited firms.

We dont want to see shoddy operators assisting with transporting abnormal loads. There is a huge responsibility for the safety of the public and it is not acceptable for any company to enter the market and escort loads without proper training and ongoing assessment.

He adds: Part of the problem is that we dont really know where and when abnormal loads are moved and how much inconvenience and congestion they cause. We need more data and information recorded so new strategies can be devised to help the movement of loads and motorists.

NOTE TO EDITORS

The Highways Agency draft code of practice will set out minimum standards and contains specific guidance on the requirements for escort vehicles, the person specification for self-escort personnel and general operating practices.

The new code would see hauliers notifying the police and highway authority of abnormal load or vehicle movement.

In Scotland the police have continued to provide an escort if requested but will allow "self escorts" on certain roads e.g. motorways and linking dual carriageways.

An abnormal load fits any of these categories:

- A loads projecting more than 305mm (12in either side of the vehicle).
- A vehicle or load exceeding 2.9m (9ft 6in) in width.
- A vehicle or load exceeding 18.3m (60ft) rigid length.
- A motor vehicle, trailer and load together exceeding 25.9m (85ft) in length.
- A load projecting more than 3.05m (10ft) over the front or rear of the vehicle.
- A vehicle or vehicle and load exceeding 76,200kg (75 tons) gross weight.

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