



MIKE CHALMERS reports on the need for uniformity in weight and dimension permitting for specialized transports in the USA

A complex path for high, wide and heavy

The establishment and maintenance of “High/Wide/Heavy” (HWH) corridors by states and provinces around the world is a high priority for SC&RA. There is one thing that member companies worldwide will typically agree on: it’s complicated.

Governments have different rules on different continents as to how high, wide and heavy companies can go with their vehicles. Details like permitting and route development add to the complexity both for local organisations and those moving cargo on foreign soil.

Rafael de los Santos, Tradelossa CEO, knows a thing or two about HWH corridors in Mexico. His country is one of contrasts. “In terms of maximum height, weight and width, it all depends on what part of the country you’re in,” he explained. “The closer we get to the US, and in the northern part of the country, the better infrastructure we have. When you go south, it gets more complicated.”

Hector Torres, corporate sales director at Mexican member company Riggers, echoes de los Santos, adding that there is a rule (NOM-012-SCT) that regulates the weight and maximum dimensions for motor carriers transiting on general roads

of federal jurisdiction in Mexico.

He said, “The maximum width is 2.6 metres and the maximum height allowed is 4.25 metres. The maximum length allowed depends on the type of road you travel. If it’s an ET type, the maximum length is 23 metres. If it’s type B, then it’s 20.8 metres. Weight also depends on the type of road. An ET or A type is 46.5 tons, and a type B is 38 tons.”

Research needed

Torres emphasised that these measures are legal and do not require any special permission to travel. De los Santos pointed out that a transport company moving cargo through Mexico is wise to do its homework. “If you don’t do your homework in Mexico, you can run into trouble. One example is that the carrier proposes a main route for a move, as well as an alternate route. The government then evaluates and authorises the request. But I think we’re in much better shape than the USA, personally, because our permit system is federal, not state.”

Ray Morgan, vice president of sales at Perkins STC (Northfield, MN – USA), and a member of both the SC&RA Board of Directors and Transportation Governing

Group, agrees that the US system certainly has its snags.

“My assessment of the government’s participation in the success of the transportation industry in regards to HWH is that it’s ongoing,” he said. “Unfortunately, there is no one answer that will speak to all of the states across the USA. At present, there is no uniformity for weight and dimension permitting – meaning there is no standard. Each state has its own rules and regulation/restrictions that dictate maximum dimension and weight. This is an issue where SC&RA has been actively advocating for change for thirty years.”

Jimmy Sutton and Sarah Wolfinbarger work in transportation safety and



“Government is collaborative and open to solutions, but in some cases we have to fight against the local authorities in small towns,” said Rudy Corbetta at Fagioli



Mexico has been described as a “country of contrasts” regarding high, wide and heavy transport corridors by Tradelossa CEO Rafael de los Santos

"Hundreds of roundabouts have been built in recent years in Italy," said Rudy Corbetta, Fagioli's publicity officer



permitting, respectively, at Mammoet USA. They sympathise with Morgan in relation to the complexity of the U.S. system, and draw parallels with Canada.

"It would certainly be great to have more harmonisation with HWH corridors in Canada," said Wolfenbarger. "I know that at least western Canada does a good job, but I don't know how extensive it is in the eastern provinces. The western provinces have heavy haul corridors that make things so much easier for them. It's a shame we don't have them yet in the east.

"In my opinion – in terms of a more harmonized standard – if you're going to go up to 350,000 pounds [159 tonnes] for example, it's important that large loads can ramp around bridges if they're not going to

get up to at least sixteen high."

Sutton sees harmonisation as the biggest barrier in Canada right now. "I've heard the idea of a 'truck only' corridor for over-dimensional loads getting tossed around in certain conversations," he affirmed. "It would certainly streamline a lot of issues right now and it would be great to think that as long as you stayed on a particular corridor, everything was pre-cleared."

In Europe, David Collett is the managing director of UK-based heavy lift and transport company Collett & Sons. His assessment of governmental participation in the success of specialized transportation across Europe? "Very poor, all across Europe. Governments don't provide companies with alternative routes when needed for abnormal loads that I know of.

"ESTA [European Association of Abnormal Road Transport and Mobile Cranes], in association with the European Commission, produced a best practice guide for the transport of abnormal loads across Europe – which included vehicle markings, dimensions, harmonised permitting and proposed 'corridors' up to certain dimensions. Sadly, very few of these recommendations have been adopted up to this point – though ESTA is pursuing some of these challenges. The problem is that each country is only concerned with their own territory, and very little 'cross-border' consideration is being made."

Permit issues

As far as HWH numbers on main transportation corridors across Europe are concerned, Collett admitted that it's a complex issue, but in the UK, "...it's thirty metres long by five metres wide by five metres high – 150 tons [GVW]. Between two and five days' notice is required to obtain the movement orders and make the abnormal load permits. Above these dimensions, additional special permits are

required from the government's Highways department, which could take anywhere from one week to six months to get approval and produce the permits.

"Across Europe, every country is different. There is no harmonised thinking. Axle loading is also different. Therefore, to cross borders, the 'lowest common denominator' is required for the vehicle combination. For example, Spain is just changing their regulations – which makes it impossible for non-Spanish (non-domestic) operators to obtain 'long-term' permits. Bridge heights also differ across the European countries, which affects trailer choice. Pilot car or escort vehicle specifications are different in all European countries, as well. For instance, Germany is just now introducing a 'new' category escort vehicle, the BF4, which has different markings and a different illumination board. France introduced the new 'Guider' motorbike system a couple of years ago, and also has a huge problem with permit authorisation both for national and international operators."

Rudy Corbetta, publicity officer at Fagioli in Italy recognises Collett's frustration. "Bureaucracy has always been a problem in Italy, considering that for a permit for heavy transport, you need to wait thirty to thirty-five days."

Corbetta added that there is also an issue in Italy surrounding infrastructure – with mountains that cut the country in two longitudinally. "Landscape architecture and urban design has changed profoundly over the last few years. The natural increasing development density has taken to a continuous evolution in Italian urban environment scenery. But the changes of this scenery has increased the road limitations while items are getting bigger and bigger. Government isn't helping much in terms of internal infrastructure. Hundreds of roundabouts have been built in recent years – which creates problems for HWH passage."

Currently, HWH numbers in Italy look like this: Truck – 12 m long by 2.55 m wide by 4 m high (maximum capacity: 25 tons, 3 axle lines); Tractor Trailer – 16.5 m long by 2.55 m wide by 4 m high (maximum capacity: 40 tons, 4 axle lines or 44 tons, 5 axle lines or more); Lorry trailer – 18.75 m long by 2.55 m wide by 4 m high (maximum capacity: 40 tons, 4 axle lines or 44 tons, 5 axle lines).

"The Government is collaborative and open to solutions, but in some cases we have to fight against the local authorities in small towns," Corbetta underlined. "It can be difficult and very stressful at times." ■

