



TECHNICAL SUMMARY

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LRRB PROJECT COST:

\$80,000

TOTAL PROJECT COST:

\$123,000



Large, heavy construction equipment can only be hauled by trucks with special permits that are currently issued from each governing authority along the route.



DEPARTMENT OF
TRANSPORTATION

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MnDOT Explores the Use of a Unified Permitting Process for Oversize/Overweight Loads

What Was the Need?

Hauling oversize or overweight freight on Minnesota's roadway system—highways, county roads, township roads and city streets—requires approval by each governing authority along the route. Roadway managers must review hauler travel plans to make sure size and weight limits for vehicles and loads will not endanger roadway facilities, hauler equipment and personnel before issuing the oversize or overweight permit.

Any single hauling route may require permits from multiple roadway authorities, each with different application procedures and response times. Some governing bodies, MnDOT among them, issue these permits online and can turn them around in minutes. Other agencies issue permits by mail, fax or email, which can take several days to process.

Haulers, however, may not have time to wait for a permit. If equipment breaks down at a loading site, for example, replacement equipment is needed immediately to meet contract deadlines and avoid paying labor costs for idle workers. A construction emergency may also demand large equipment be towed to a site. In situations like these, haulers often make the trip without appropriate permitting, accepting the legal and safety risks.

What Was Our Goal?

To simplify the permitting process, Minnesota local agencies would like to develop an online permitting application process that would allow permit-seekers to determine routes based on their vehicle and load size, and secure all necessary permits at one time. This research, the first phase of a multiphase study, aimed to determine the feasibility of a one-stop, unified permitting process by studying its technological and operational needs and gathering input from various stakeholders.

What Did We Do?

Investigators worked with the Technical Advisory Panel (TAP) and a group of policy experts from county and state agencies, commercial haulers and consultants to identify audiences with a stake in a unified permitting process. Investigators and TAP members then held six meetings with stakeholders in northern Minnesota and the Twin Cities metro area from December 2016 through March 2017. Attending these meetings were haulers and representatives from industry organizations; seven MnDOT offices (including Freight and Commercial Vehicle Operations, Information Technology, Maintenance and Geospatial Information); Minnesota counties; the City of Duluth; the Duluth-Superior Metropolitan Interstate Council; Minnesota State Patrol; the State Patrol Commercial Vehicle Section; and a county sheriff's office.

From these meetings and follow-up conversations with attendees, the research team identified the challenges and needs of each stakeholder. The team analyzed these concerns; sorted them into functional categories of policy, process and technology to allow

Researchers found that a one-stop permitting process can be developed to allow commercial haulers to plan a travel route and secure all required permits from a single source. MnDOT is working to develop a first-of-its-kind, unified permitting process to consolidate the requirements of every jurisdiction in the state.

“From a hauler’s perspective, the permitting process can be very cumbersome. Each agency’s application is different as are the general provisions that haulers need to follow.”

—Rena Kuehl,
Senior Associate, SRF
Consulting Group, Inc.

“As carriers, we’re trying to do our due diligence in getting permits. But the current process can lead to significant safety and legal risks.”

—Richard Johnson,
Transportation Manager,
Tiller Corporation

Produced by CTC & Associates for:

Minnesota Department
of Transportation
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A large I-beam girder is unloaded from a truck with appropriate red flags and “Oversized Load” banner. Each governing authority that manages roadways along a hauling route may have a different permit application process and different signage and flagging requirements.

manageable problem-solving; and explored solutions that would allow the development of a one-stop permitting process.

What Did We Learn?

The TAP, policy group and investigators determined that a unified permitting process is feasible, both technologically and politically.

Policy issues include the need to standardize general provisions statewide, such as travel hours, insurance requirements and warning devices such as flagging needs. For example, currently the color of flags and lettering on banners vary from jurisdiction to jurisdiction; well-framed general provisions could make these requirements more uniform to serve multiple jurisdictions. The information required by each governing authority in its permit applications could also be normalized.

Process issues were about workflow. More than 80 percent of hauler requests are repeatable: A commercial haul may be run on the same route with the same-size load three times a month for four months and may not require a full reapplication each time. Some agencies rely on paper, fax or emails to receive permit requests; others purchase permitting software; still others build their own software. These systems could be made more uniform so they could interact and share information among agencies.

Technology issues called for an interoperable system that could bring together geographic information system (GIS) capabilities and regulatory data that could be both received and shared. Mapping data could identify each permit required along a route being developed, and a portal could allow agencies to share information as well as allow permit-seekers to enter information and retrieve permits themselves. A portal could also integrate different software packages while offering information like Minnesota’s Gopher State One Call digging hotline.

What’s Next?

Phase II of this project has already begun. In this phase, researchers will develop a pilot portal that allows users to create route plans, identify permits needed and apply for all permits in one action. Investigators will test the platform with a three-county group. If this effort is successful, researchers will build a unified permitting process for use within all jurisdictions in Minnesota.

This Technical Summary pertains to the LRRB-produced Report 2017-26, “Oversize/Overweight Vehicle Unified Permitting Process (UPP) Phase I,” published August 2017. The full report can be accessed at mndot.gov/research/reports/2017/201726.pdf.