

MEMORANDUM

To: Route 236 Implementation Committee and Interested Parties

From: Josh Mack, Transportation Planner

Date: September 29, 2005

RE: Meeting Notes from 2nd Overlimit Commercial Vehicle Meeting on September 27, 2005

This was the 2nd meeting organized by the Route 236 Corridor Implementation Committee and Kittery Area Comprehensive Transportation Study MPO (KACTS Metropolitan Planning Organization) to resume talks between towns on Route 236/4, the Maine Bureau of Motor Vehicles-Motor Carrier Services, the Maine State Police and the Maine Turnpike Authority (MTA) regarding overdimension and overweight vehicles passing through the Route 236/4 corridor. Representatives from the manufactured housing and other overlimit hauling companies were invited to participate in this second meeting.

Those in attendance included Tim Bolton, Maine DOT-Office of Freight Transportation; Karen Brown-Mohr, Manufactured Housing Association of Maine (MHAM); Cathie Curtis, Maine Bureau of Motor Vehicles; Lauren Fleming, MTA/HNTB; Harland Goodwin, MTA Boardmember/Route 235 Corridor Committee; Jeff Grossman, South Berwick Town Manager; Garry Hinkley, Maine Bureau of Motor Vehicles; George Mueller, South Berwick; Marion Glomp-Mueller, South Berwick; Dana Lajoie, South Berwick Police Chief; Sally Lewin, Maine House of Representatives (Eliot, South Berwick); Josh Mack, Southern Maine Regional Planning Commission (SMRPC)/KACTS/Route 236 Committee; Terry Oliver, South Berwick Public Works/KACTS/Route 236 Committee; Kate Pelletier, Town of Eliot/Route 236 Committee; Tom Reinauer, SMRPC/KACTS/Route 236 Committee; John Rudolph, South Berwick Transportation Committee/Route 236 Committee; Theodor Short; Eliot Police Chief/Route 236 Committee; Harry Seidel, Schiavi Leasing Corporation; Conrad Welzel, Maine Turnpike Authority; Stephen Whitcomb, H.O. Bouchard, Inc. Trucking.

Update on Action Items Since May 25th Meeting

After introductions, the meeting began with Tom Reinauer updating the group on various activities that have occurred since the first May 25th meeting to discuss ways to resolve or improve issues relating to overlimit commercial vehicles on Route 236/Route 4:

- Staff performed some initial research on overlimit commercial vehicle standards and regulations with a focus on our New England peer states. A handout was made available to the group providing information about each state's and the Maine Turnpike Authority's maximum thresholds for width, height, length and weight for manufactured homes and other overlimit loads. The handout also provided information about hours of

operation standards in the New England area. Karen Brown-Mohr remarked that the MAHM has assembled a similar list, which is more detailed and could make the list available to staff. It was pointed out by Harland Goodwin, that the sheet incorrectly states that the Maine Turnpike maximum weight threshold is 100,000 lbs. He believed that the weight threshold is actually 140,000 lbs. Staff will verify the maximum amount allowed on the Turnpike and revise the handout accordingly.

- Staff has contacted police chiefs in Kittery, Eliot, South Berwick and North Berwick about conversations with Chris Grotton of the Maine State Police at the May 25th meeting. The chiefs were asked if they would be interested in developing an automatic advisory from state police to local police when weigh stations are opened on US 1 and Interstate 95. Chiefs were also asked if they were interested in training opportunities offered by the Maine State Police to familiarize local officers with commercial vehicle enforcement practices. All chiefs have expressed interest in enhanced communication, but cite problems that they believe police need “cause” to stop a commercial vehicle. At least two chiefs have expressed an interest in having a trained officer that could be shared by the communities with the commercial vehicle enforcement training. Police chiefs are also concerned that a half-day training from state police will not adequately prepare them for commercial vehicle enforcement. Local police and staff are looking into authority limitations and training opportunities for local police to perform federal motor carrier law enforcement.
- Maine Turnpike Authority’s long range planning subcommittee has made some initial steps to address dimensional adequacy of the Turnpike’s various bridges and toll booth plazas. Harland Goodwin announced that the subcommittee has charged the MTA staff to put together a comprehensive spreadsheet or report showing various dimensional limitations of infrastructure on the Turnpike. Information in the report will include, height, width, turning radii, and other limitations of various parts of the Turnpike. All of the bridges that were part of the widening have been raised to 16’6” (which will likely be posted at 15’6” according to Lauren Fleming of HNTB). However, after exit 44 for 295 in Portland, there are bridges that can only accommodate 13’6” high loads. Toll booths also have issues. EZ pass sensors, though a new technology adopted by the Turnpike recently, are staged on the same equipment as the Transpass staging above the toll booth lanes, maintaining height clearance limitations of only 13’6” at all toll booth plazas.

Discussion with Private Companies

Tom Reinauer asked that private companies comment on their respective industries, and the issues that they face hauling overlimit loads through towns such as South Berwick. A brief summary of their comments is provided on the following pages:

Karen Brown-Mohr, Manufactured Housing Association of Maine

- Typically, manufactured housing haulers have one day in which to get a load from point A to point B and off of a truck. This needs to be done in the daylight hours, so trips are more difficult depending on the season as the day gets shorter.

- Manufactured housing is one of the few “growth industries” in the State of Maine. While other industries experience growth and losses, manufactured housing has had consistent growth and is therefore an important job creator for Maine.
- MHAM is working with federal, state, private companies and others to bring some more consistency in hauling regulations in the top 11 states. The permitting process is very burdensome from state to state. One of the goals in this 11 state initiative is to also get acceptance for pre-approved routes. As part of process, New Hampshire is making changes to statutes, which will help streamline the regulations in northern New England.

Stephen Whitcomb, H.O. Bouchard, Inc. Trucking

- Getting oversize loads through multiple states is tricky. States have their own permitting processes, and even in some states municipalities have their own hauling restrictions and schedules (It was pointed out later in the meeting by Garry Hinkley that Maine municipalities do not have this authority).
- Oversize hauling is often a “just in time” business. Companies are waiting on the destination end of the product to do something with the product. Companies need to be assured that the product will be delivered when they expect it. Multiple tiers of permitting regulations makes it difficult for overlimit hauling companies to meet the schedules of their clients as it is, without further regulations. Karen Mohr-Brown pointed out that as an example, a crane waiting on the other end for a manufactured home typically charges around \$300/hour. This does not include workers the company has hired to wait for and assemble the product.
- If a town such as South Berwick wants to keep overlimit trucks from passing through a town during certain hours, there needs to be a staging area for the vehicle to safely wait before passing through the restricted area. However, overlimit trucks often run very smoothly and safely when traffic is slow if there are traffic police to keep vehicles from cueing in areas that may prevent trucks from passing through an area.

Harry Seidel, Schiavi Leasing Corporation

- In Vermont, hauling companies are required to call local town police forces before passing through the towns. Hauling companies can call while on the road before approaching towns. Towns then have an opportunity to prepare for an overlimit load passing through the area if a detail is needed. Dana Lajoie responded that a police force would probably need more adequate notice to prepare for the overlimit load. Dana remarked that it was helpful when a company called well ahead of time when a steel span traversed through downtown South Berwick. The entire Main Street had to be closed off in order to accommodate the load which spanned almost the entire downtown area. This load was much larger than normal oversized loads.

After the comments from the three overlimit representatives, there was a period of comments, questions and answers primarily based on the following two themes:

Manufactured Housing Dimension Standards

- Harland Goodwin explained that it would be in the Maine Turnpike's interest to have the manufactured housing industry and possibly other industries to standardize a maximum envelope size of a load, so that the Turnpike can better prepare for the future. The Turnpike would like to be assured that any investments that they make to increase heights or widths of their facilities will meet most of the needs of the overlimit vehicles passing through their facilities. If, for example, manufactured housing sizes continue to expand, the Turnpike's investment to help truckers more conveniently reach their destinations and avoid state highways will be ineffective.
- Karen Brown-Mohr responded that a group has been formed to address this issue for the top 11 states, and a standard is being created. This information can be made available to the group.
- Tim Bolton remarked that manufactured housing in Pennsylvania is being constructed at widths of 18 feet.
- Stephen Whitcomb commented that most of the state highways off of the Turnpike have 11 foot lanes, so the environment on which haulers drive already limit the possibilities for expanding the dimensions of loads. An 18 foot load would not be easy to transport in Maine. He also stated that there is a certain point at which it no longer makes economic sense to haul an extremely oversized load if it could be constructed in pieces at a destination site.

Maine Turnpike Authority vs. State Highway Overlimit Hauling

- Harland Goodwin asked if there is data available that breaks down the number of vehicles that pass through the Maine Turnpike versus on state highways like Route 236, and if this can also breakdown the dimensions of the loads and the types of loads.
- Garry Hinkley responded that he did have access to that information (He will work with staff to gather breakdown data on overlimit trucks). He noted that roughly half of the 35,000 permits issued in 2004 are for manufactured/modular homes, and that all of the overlimit loads that can be routed up Interstate 95 are routed that way. The only times when loads are not sent up the Turnpike are when they exceed 13'6" in height, or if the truck is passing through on Friday afternoons.
- Stephen Whitcomb suggested that the Maine Turnpike Authority's "inclement weather" policy be reevaluated. The Turnpike may be overly cautious and aggressive with this policy.
- Garry noted that one of the things he, Maine DOT and the Maine Turnpike hope to work on is incorporating the overlimit routing road advisories into the new 511 system (a phone-based, traffic and weather advisory system).
- Conrad Welzel explained that the Turnpike is very long and weather patterns can vary throughout the system.

- Harland Goodwin asked if the trucks needed to stay in place and wait till a Turnpike weather advisory was lifted. Stephen responded that route change requests can be done over the phone.
- John Rudolph mentioned that at the last meeting there was a discussion with the Maine Turnpike Authority about restricting overlimit trucks to specific exits on the system, and that the Turnpike responded that they cannot take the risk of a driver missing a designated exit and then hitting a bridge. He asked for input from the group including the private companies on weather signage, driver training, advisories, and other strategies would work in making drivers stay on a designated route.
- Stephen Whitcomb remarked that for Maine-based companies it could work, but outside states may be more difficult. He noted that truckers need to stop at the York toll booth and speak with an attendant to get a overlimit permit, and part of that process could include a strong advisory that truckers may not pass beyond the mile “x” marker. Also signs could be utilized on the highway to note route restrictions.
- Conrad Welzel noted that in dealing with driver behavior, sometimes all of the advisories and signage in the world will not prevent that one accident that debilitates the system. He mentioned the recent crash into Hackett Road and an earlier crash on the Route 35 bridge in Kennebunk.
- Harland Goodwin asked if the Overlimit Permitting Office has changed its permitting routes since the Maine Turnpike Widening Project which involved bridge height increases throughout the corridor up to the I-295 exit. Garry responded that his office has not, because the Turnpike has not officially changed its height from 13’6”. It was noted that heights haven’t changed because EZ Pass staging only provides clearance for 13’6” loads at toll booth plazas. Harland stated that the Turnpike is looking at opening up southbound trucking movements (once the toll issues are taken care of) from I-295 to I-95 South, where trucks will not face the possibility of missing an exit and hitting a bridge.
- Ted Short asked the Turnpike if they have considered opening up the Biddeford exit and Route 111 for more overlimit loads. He remarked that this may be a quicker solution to traffic diverting through 236 and the Biddeford exit is well ahead of the shorter bridges after Exit 44. Conrad noted that the Turnpike is looking at that idea.

Review of Action Items Needing Further Discussion

The final part of the meeting focused on 6 items left over from the previous overlimit commercial vehicle meeting on May 25. Tom Reinauer introduced each action item to review if it has already been discussed and whether the action item should be kept, modified, or deleted:

Action Item 1: Post Advisories to Truckers on DMV Website and Permits

- John Rudolph asked for private company comments on this idea. Overlimit representatives reiterated that they have only daylight hours to work with, and often have companies waiting for “just in time” service at the destination site.
- Garry Hinkley noted that the “overlimit conflict in urban area” issue is occurring in other parts of Maine as well, such as in Gray, and that vehicles need to pass through urban

areas to reach their destinations. He questioned whether a written advisory on the website would be noticed or even matter given the truck hauling delivery needs.

- Karen Brown Mohr offered to send a notice to her Manufactured Housing members
- **There was consensus among the group that this action item would probably not be very effective, but staff will work with Karen to notify them of South Berwick's concern.**

Action Item 2: Assess which interstate exits are heavily used by overlimit vehicles

- Tom Reinauer noted that this item was developed to have a better picture of overlimit hauling routes in the state as they relate to Route 236, and can help for general and capital investment planning. He said that the Maine Turnpike Authority is assembling information on the dimensional capacity of its infrastructure, which will help this research. He also noted that the Maine DMV has agreed to share routing information with staff, which will help address this action item.
- **There was consensus in the group to pursue this action item.**

Action Item 3: Examine how signage can be used on Turnpike for routing purposes

- Stephen Whitcomb remarked that large vehicles would benefit if the Maine Turnpike posted bridge heights throughout the system. At the moment, there is currently just a sign that indicates that maximum clearance is 13'6" system-wide even if a bridge clearance is much higher.
- Conrad Welzel noted that the Turnpike needs to be careful with sign pollution. Too many signs can distract drivers and cause safety problems. He reiterated that driver behavior that signs aren't a perfect solution to prevent drivers from missing exits.
- Tim Bolton noted that Maine DOT is looking into height detection systems for its weigh station facilities in York. Conrad Welzel stated that he does not have the latest information on this technology.
- **There was consensus to have Tim Bolton provide staff with information about the height detection technology as it becomes available.**

Action Item 4: Examine how to create dimensional standards for manufactured homes

- Tom Reinauer noted that staff would follow up with Karen Brown-Mohr to acquire the Manufactured Home Associations proposed envelope size.
- It was noted that the dimensional capacity of Maine's current infrastructure currently restricts dimensional standards for manufactured housing movement at this time.
- **There was consensus to have staff proceed getting the MHAM proposed dimensional standards to follow up on this action item.**

Action Item 5: Evaluate whether a special vehicle dimension standard is required for 236

- Tim Bolton noted that the issues at hand seem to be more about the number of overlimit vehicles passing through 236 and not about egregious incidents of extra large vehicles. Tim said his safety office could assemble some data on truck accidents and get that

information to staff. **There was consensus to have staff follow up with Tim Bolton and the Maine DOT Safety Office to assemble crash pattern data, and suspend a proposal to petition for a special vehicle dimension standard.**

Action Item 6: Categorize trucking routes based on danger

- This action item was folded into action item 5. **There was consensus to have staff follow up with Maine DOT to assemble crash pattern data with respect to commercial vehicles and overlimit commercial vehicles.**

Other Business

- John Rudolph made three requests relating to the meeting. His first request was to have staff elaborate at a future meeting on the handout describing overlimit commercial vehicle regulations and standards in New England. His second request was to have Karen Mohr-Brown provide information on ways for the public to provide input on the 11 state manufactured housing envelope standards that will be proposed. Karen responded that she will look for a contact person to which public input can be forwarded. John's third request was that the local police provide some input on whether local police intend on taking State Police's offer for training on commercial vehicle law enforcement. Dana Lajoie and Ted Short answered that they were interested, but questioned as to whether a half-day training would be useful. Ted Short noted that he and a former state police officer he has on staff are looking into a more intensive training opportunity on commercial vehicle law enforcement.
- A third overlimit commercial vehicle meeting was scheduled for Wednesday, November 30th at the South Berwick Town Hall Auditorium at 10 AM.