



NPCC Abnormal Load Guidance.



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NPCC Abnormal Load Guidance 2025

Preface

This document has been produced recognising the complexity surrounding the movement of abnormal loads, the significant number of stakeholders, the impact the current inconsistency is having on all those involved, the associated risk, and current legislation.

Engagement has taken place over a period which has included formal and informal conversations, the use of established along with specifically convened meetings, and the creation of ongoing relationships to capture the knowledge and experience of those directly involved in this sector.

The previous 2010 ACPO guidance was used as the starting point for this review however as of the date of publication of this new NPCC document no further reference should be made to the previous document which has been superseded.

A draft of the new guidance was circulated to a wide range of stakeholders including police forces, industry, and key partners inviting their feedback to achieve the objective as set out below. Feedback was received, reviewed, and considered to produce a revised document that was subject to discussion at a symposium held in London where key stakeholders came together in person to review and agree the guidance.

Several key topics were discussed on the day, but the consensus was overall support for the new guidance with a few minor amendments which have been included in producing the final version.

It was agreed this document should be subject of ongoing review and amendment, so it remains fit for purpose and the recommendation was for a formal review to take place twelve months after publication.

I am conscious there is variance in legislation across England, Scotland, and Wales and there may also be different terminology, however the principles of this guidance should be applicable to all, and any points of clarification should be achievable through discussion.

Finally, I would like to express my thanks to all those who have supported the creation of this reviewed guidance.

Marc Clothier
Chief Superintendent

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1. Introduction

- 1.1. This guide is intended to assist police forces concerning the movement of abnormal indivisible loads from here on referred to as Abloads. The overriding factors in setting out these guidelines is the safety of the public and those involved in the movement and/or escorting of any Abloads.
- 1.2. It is not intended, nor would it be appropriate to reproduce all relevant legislation within this document and therefore it should be used in conjunction with the relevant information which can be found on the gov.uk website.
- 1.3. Changes in the construction and transport industry over recent years which include a shift to modular build and large projects such as HS2 have resulted in a significant increase in the movement of Abloads. It has also become apparent that the policing of Abloads is inconsistent across the Country creating significant challenge for the industry who frequently travel across force areas.
- 1.4. The need to ensure safety and compliance with legislation whilst supporting the industry and the UK economy is the balance that must be achieved to ensure our legitimacy in this area of business.
- 1.5. It is also recognised that policing is one of many key stakeholders involved who have a role. The road network is managed by National Highways and local authorities, road and bridge authorities own relevant structures, and the haulage and associated industries are responsible for the movement itself. As a result, this guidance has been produced in collaboration recognising the need to work together.
- 1.6. The overarching objective of this guidance is:
 - 1.6.1. To improve consistency in the policing of abnormal load movements across the UK, which includes the administration, use of embargoes, enforcement, and police escort in line with current legislation.
- 1.7. This will be achieved by providing relevant information along with national recommendations where appropriate in relation to:
 - 1.7.1. The procedure that police forces nationally should adopt in respect of the notified routes, time, and date of abnormal indivisible load movement.
 - 1.7.2. The proportionate use of embargoes, considering road safety, traffic flow, local issues, and the impact on the industry.
 - 1.7.3. Enforcement which is proportionate and supports delivery of the National Roads Policing Strategy.
 - 1.7.4. The provision of police escorts including requirements in relation to the training of those officers involved, criteria to be considered, and cost recovery.
 - 1.7.5. Committing to maintaining and building relationships so we can work effectively together with the relevant stakeholders involved to consistently review our practices and build a culture of continuous improvement.

Responsibility for safety and compliance with relevant legislation including managing the risk associated with the movement of Abloads is primarily that of the driver and haulier, recognising that others will have a role in certain circumstances such as when providing an escort.

2. Legislation

2.1. The legislation that permits Abnormal Indivisible Load movements is:

2.1.1. The Road Vehicles (Construction and Use) Regulations (C&U) 1986 (SI 1986/1078).

2.1.2. The Road Vehicles (Authorisation of Special Types) (General) Order (STGO) 2003 (SI 2003/1998).

2.2. The Construction and Use Regulations (1986) are the primary legislation for the construction and maximum dimensions for all vehicles. Providing certain conditions are complied with, hauliers can transport loads up to 27.4m in length Reg 82(3) Con and Use Regs, and 4.3m in width Reg 82(1) Con and Use Regs. The vehicle combination must comply with the weights permitted under Construction and Use or The Road Vehicles (Authorised Weight) Regulations 1998.

2.3. Where a vehicle and load cannot comply with the maximum C&U dimensions or weight limits or cannot be without undue expense or risk of damage divided into smaller loads, it can then be moved under the STGO – again if certain conditions are complied with.

2.4. Compliance with all relevant aspects of the STGO protects a driver and operator from prosecution under the C&U regulations. A breach of a condition in the STGO is not an offence in itself – a breach causes the protection from prosecution to fall away, meaning the vehicle reverts to C&U construction, weight, dimensions etc. and prosecutions can then be brought for those offences.

2.5. The legislation is in the most part permissive, in that, providing the haulier complies with the requirements of notification procedures, an abnormal load can be moved without the need for any permit or authorisation. Exceptions are covered in the procedural notes which follow.

2.6. It is also worthy of note as this guide includes information of charging for police services, that the relevant legislation is:

2.6.1. The Police Regulations 2003.

2.6.2. The Police Act 1996.

3. Movement of Abnormal Indivisible Loads

3.1. An abnormal load can be moved without the need for any permit or authorisation, except:

3.1.1. Loads exceeding 5m (and up to 6.1m) in width require consent from National Highways on behalf of the Secretary of State. Operators must complete a VR1 form and then use the normal notification procedure, quoting the VR1 reference.

3.1.2. Loads exceeding 6.1m wide, 27.4m rigid length (C&U) 30m (STGO) or 150,000kg gross vehicle weight or an individual axle over 16500kg, require a Special Order from the Secretary of State. A Special Order ensures that the route is acceptable and may lay down certain conditions. It does not, however, replace the notification procedure.

3.2. A failure to give the proper notice can lead to the protections of the STGO and/or extended C&U dimensions to be lost and for the driver/operator to be liable to prosecution.

- 3.3. The method by which a haulier is required to make a notification of an Abnormal Load movement, is not defined in the legislation other than to notify the Chief Officer of Police for every area or county through which the load will pass, however the notice must be in a form acceptable to the recipient and should be agreed by both parties. In practice the use of the ESDAL or AbHaulier notification services or email are the most common methods of notification although conventional postal services are still used; in any case, best practice dictates that an accessible system capable of being archived must be adopted.
- 3.4. Guidance for Abnormal Loads Officers (administrators) on procedures to be followed on receipt of notification are contained at Appendix A.
- 3.5. Two clear working days are required for notification to the police. However, for certain load or vehicle sizes or weights, five-day notification to road and bridge authorities is required. The notice period allows the relevant authorities (police, local councils, road and bridge authorities) time to assess the route and any potential impact on traffic and road safety. With regards to notices given under the C&U Regulations, "working day" means a day which is not a Sunday, a bank holiday, Christmas Day or Good Friday. "Working Day" does though include a Saturday (unless the Saturday is Christmas Day). Under the STGO, working, or "clear" days excludes Saturday, Sunday, and bank holidays.
- 3.6. Bank holidays should only be considered if they are applicable in the country where the planned movement is taking place.
- 3.7. A police force (Chief Officer or ALO) may accept a shorter period of notice in any case; however, this is at the discretion of the force. Examples could include where a minor change has been made to a previously submitted notice where the initial risk assessment is unlikely to change, or where there is a short notice urgent need such as a risk to the environment or risk of disruption to the UK road network, or other critical national infrastructure.
- 3.8. It is worthy of note, that should Special Police Services be required; short notice periods may impact on the availability of officers and the cost to forces that will need recovering.
- 3.9. The minimum contents of a notice of intended movement are set out in the C&U Regulations and the STGO. These include the registration number of the motor vehicle to be used. Forces should consider allowing operators to specify a small number of substitute vehicles (maximum of 5) on a notification which share the same characteristics as the original vehicle (i.e. number of axles, weights etc). This will mitigate against short notice submissions being made for operational reasons.
- 3.10. Under the C&U Regulations, there is no requirement to provide a description of the load, however in certain circumstances there is a requirement to provide details of the projection. Under STGO, there is a requirement to provide particulars of the load (including description and profile).
- 3.11. There is no legislative guidance as to description and profile however we should obtain sufficient detail to ensure the load is in line with the notification whilst recognising specific plant or loads may be subject to last minute change and therefore requesting the exact model or specific dimensions may cause unnecessary bureaucracy.
- 3.12. C&U Regulations state that in relation to the advance notice to police the details should include the time, date, and route of the proposed journey. However, it is recognised that for a variety of reasons the exact date of a movement may be subject to change at short notice. As a result, to mitigate against the need for multiple notifications to be submitted and the associated impact on all parties the

presumption is that under normal circumstance forces should accept a thirty-day window unless there are local reasons why this is not appropriate.

- 3.13. For both C&U and STGO movements, the police may accept fewer details than are set out in the legislation at their own discretion.
- 3.14. The relevant police force's Abnormal Loads Department, or agent instructed on behalf of the police, will receive all notifications, examine, and verify that the details provided are as required by the legislation.
- 3.15. A record of the notification will be entered into an accessible database to ensure there is an auditable record of the notification and any subsequent action that was required.
- 3.16. Upon receipt of the notice of intended movement, the power of police is limited to changing the date, time, or route of the journey. The relevant police force's Abnormal Loads Officer or other suitable nominated person will carry out a risk-assessment of the notified intended movement and decide whether any action is required regarding either the route or time of the movement, including the safety of other road users or congestion likely to be caused.
- 3.17. The operator may also be requested to carry out a risk assessment and route survey, but this will only relate to the ability of the Abnormal Load vehicle to negotiate the route which is primarily their responsibility. They are not expected to be aware of local road safety issues.
- 3.18. The risk assessment will be completed to ensure the use of the safest and most suitable roads, having regard to the weight, speed, type, and load of the vehicle, relative to the time & date of the proposed movement, including the movement at night-time if applicable.
- 3.19. In the event of the route being deemed unsuitable the relevant police force's Abloads Officer or another suitable nominated person will notify the operator so they can identify a suitable alternative. Consultation will be progressed with other interested parties and subject to those enquiries the haulier will be re-routed accordingly. A written confirmation of the re-route will be served, a copy of which will be stored in the event of the necessity to prove non-compliance by the haulier and a new notification will be required.
- 3.20. A copy of the police risk assessment requiring the changes should be retained and made available to the operator upon request.
- 3.21. Where agreement cannot be reached in relation to the proposed movement of a load which may relate to notification or the requirement for the provision of a police escort, forces should have a process in place which allows for review in a timely manner by a suitable officer within the relevant Senior Leadership team. This is not intended to replace or interfere with established force/police complaints processes but is suggested to demonstrate appropriate transparency and scrutiny in relation to decision making at a tactical level.

4. Embargoes

- 4.1. The decision to impose embargoes by a Chief Constable is based on the interests of road safety and to avoid undue traffic congestion and may be implemented in relation to specific events. As a result, due to the significant variance in the road network across the UK, local geography, and events it is expected there will be some local, and regional difference.
- 4.2. However, it is also recognised that movements regularly cross force borders and we should seek to achieve consistency wherever possible balancing the needs of local communities with that of the road haulage and associated industries.
- 4.3. It is recommended that an evidence-based approach in collaboration with key stakeholders should be adopted to understand traffic flow and movement which can then be used to justify any restrictions that are imposed, as opposed to a blanket approach.
- 4.4. Where, due to specific local geographical issues the Chief Officer of Police determines that embargoes on Abloads should be in place, the following principle is suggested:
 - 4.4.1. Category 1 STGO vehicles, Cat A mobile cranes and those moving wide or long loads under C&U Regulations should not be subject to any embargo save for congested urban roads, or where the width of the vehicle and load cannot reasonably remain within the width of the lane in which the vehicle is travelling unless there are specific local issues to be taken into consideration.
- 4.5. A pragmatic approach whereby only vehicles that are notifiable to the police and therefore likely to have an impact on traffic flow and safety should be subject to embargoes, unless there are specific local issues which justify the use of an embargo for non-notifiable loads under relevant legislation

5. Nighttime movements

- 5.1. Police forces should consider permitting the movement of abnormal loads during the hours of darkness on motorways recognising the reduced traffic flow overnight, providing the abnormal load remains within the motorway network and having regard to lighting conditions and any specific local issues.
- 5.2. Consideration, using a risk-based approach for the movement in question, should also be given to the usage of dual carriageways, depending on whether such sections of road are illuminated with street lighting and variable factors such as weather conditions, anticipated traffic flows etc.
- 5.3. The movement of Abloads on all other roads should be based on the risk assessment of the proposed movement. Whilst they may not be permitted during the hours of darkness, except with the permission of the police force's Abnormal Loads Officer, such permission should not be unreasonably withheld.

6. Dispensations

- 6.1. **General Dispensation** – The consideration of any dispensations and the process involved is a local force decision, however, it is suggested that a police force should issue such Dispensations to move abnormal indivisible loads with dimensions up to 3.5m (11'6") wide to hauliers who can demonstrate the movement of loads of a like nature on a regular basis. The roads permitted will be limited to major motorways and selected A class roads. Where an operator requests such a dispensation any rejection should be supported by an appropriate rationale justifying the decision. (See appendix - B)
- 6.2. **Agricultural Dispensation**- It is suggested that a police force should issue a Dispensation to farmers and agricultural contractors for the movement of agricultural tractors, machines, trailers, and trailed appliances for agricultural purpose without the requirement to notify the movement of such equipment up to 4.1m wide without prior notification, or for reduced notification period for all other loads up to 4.3m wide. (See appendix C).
- 6.3. **Explosives & Military Convoys** – movements involving MOD vehicles relating to urgent times of conflict moves/operations and derogations applied by MOD under their codes of practice will be notified to police and reviewed as per paragraph 3.16.

7. Enforcement

- 7.1. Enforcement is a legitimate tactic and is academically accepted as one of the key components of a systematic approach to achieve compliance with road traffic legislation, designed first and foremost to protect all road users from harm.
- 7.2. Enforcement should be proportionate and based on the threat and risk posed to maintain trust and legitimacy in policing. There are a range of options available in relation to the use of road traffic and other legislation and this guide is not intended to cover that level of detail which is provided in other guidance such as sentencing guidelines or the DVSA Enforcement Sanction Policy (ESP)
- 7.3. An evidence-led approach working with partners is also key to ensuring we focus our efforts in the right place and against those who pose the greatest risk on the roads. We should strive for consistency in our approach across different organisations through sharing priorities and understanding the specific roles and responsibilities of different partners to be as efficient and effective as possible.
- 7.4. We should also work with the communities involved such as drivers, operators, transport managers and hauliers adopting a problem-solving approach to prevent incidents taking place through effective education and engagement.
- 7.5. Where there is a prosecution the operator would be under a duty to inform the OTC of a conviction. Where persistent offenders are identified police forces should consider referral to the DVSA intelligence unit and or referral to the Office of the Traffic Commissioner (OTC) who can consider operator or driver conduct
- 7.6. All enforcement activity should have a legitimate purpose, and this can be achieved through alignment with the [NPCC National Roads Policing Strategy](#).

8. Escorting abnormal indivisible loads

- 8.1. An escort or escort vehicle is not defined in legislation and there is no legal requirement for any abnormal loads to be escorted, although the police can make sure an escort vehicle is used when necessary. There is however a requirement for loads of certain dimensions to have an attendant under both C&U and STGO regulations.
- 8.2. STGO 2003 permits the attendant to be in an accompanying vehicle, which may, for practical purposes, be considered as an 'Escort Vehicle', providing that it remains with the Abnormal Load throughout the whole journey and the same approach should be considered in respect of C&U regulations.
- 8.3. In addition to the requirement for an attendant there are also conditions that must be complied with if they are in a separate vehicle.
- 8.4. An attendant or private escort is for the purposes of giving warning to the driver of that vehicle or combination, and to any other person, of any danger likely to be caused by the presence on the road of that vehicle or combination. Subject to the provisions of the CSAS scheme (see below), an escort driver or any other person or attendant to the abnormal load does not have any legislative powers to stop and control other road users or contravene road traffic legislation, such as causing an obstruction by blocking a highway.
- 8.5. Self or private escorts should comply with the [National Highways guidance](#), although this is a voluntary code and can only be used for evidential purposes in the event of an incident occurring, it is evidence of good practice and a standard to which the Haulage Associations subscribe.
- 8.6. The self / private escort will always comply with any instructions issued by a police force, local authority or road and bridge authorities.
- 8.7. There is no power in either the C&U Regulations or the STGO for the police to mandate to an operator the use of a police escort. Police escorts should only be provided in the following circumstances:
 - 8.7.1. When the operator is unable to provide their own attendant and requests the police to provide this service for vehicles that meet the criteria as detailed in the relevant legislation.
 - 8.7.2. When the vehicle due to its size or the nature of the route will contravene road traffic legislation, such as negotiating a roundabout contraflow, or there are other specific local issues which require the police to control or direct other traffic/pedestrians etc, and where no person employed by the operator is accredited to undertake such functions under the Community Safety Accreditation Scheme (CSAS).
 - 8.7.3. When following its own risk assessment of the notice of intended movement, the police force's Abnormal Loads Department determines that for reasons of public safety, even though the vehicle will not perform any unlawful manoeuvre, a police presence is still required for some or all of the journey.
- 8.8. In circumstances 8.7.1 and 8.7.2 above, when the police presence is requested or required by the operator, the provision of police support will be classed as a Special Policing Service (SPS) and be chargeable in the normal way. With regards to circumstance 8.7.3 above, this should be considered an operational matter and is not chargeable to the operator.

- 8.9. In cases where a load is required to negotiate a single identified issue on a route that would otherwise not be deemed to require an escort, police assistance may be provided without charge, subject to availability. However, the demands on policing are significant and therefore any support provided in this manner will be subject of competing operational demands and may result in delays.
- 8.10. To overcome the above, police forces could also consider the provision of an officer(s) not as an escort, but purely to stop and direct traffic to allow the successful negotiation of a single point. An officer to be specifically deployed would need to be requested by the haulier and have their costs recovered in line with the prevailing NPCC approved SPS rates. The charging period should comprise of whole hours and be the time the officer(s) were deployed on the activity (i.e. not available for other duties).
- 8.11. Alternatively, hauliers can also consider applying to the local authority for a TTRO to facilitate the movement if appropriate.
- 8.12. The police and National Highways encourage hauliers to use self or private escorts. As stated above, police escorts should only be supplied if specifically requested and payment for their services will be required.
- 8.13. An operator who cannot supply such an escort, and / or requests the provision of a police escort, should give as much notice as possible but at least eight days' notice of any proposed movement, and be required to pay for such services in accordance with the scale of charges applied.

9. Police escort

- 9.1. Only police officers that have had the relevant approved training regarding police driving and escort should be utilised.
- 9.2. Every effort will be made to utilise officers performing overtime on their rest days if that duty is requested as a Special Police Service, however, it is the decision of the police force as to how resources are allocated; the hourly rate will be at the approved NPCC rates.
- 9.3. An escort should not be commenced until the vehicle and load have been examined and the national Abload check form completed confirming it is safe to move. This will require the officers to be in possession of, or have access to, the content of the relevant paperwork.
- 9.4. Where a journey passes through several police forces, and the vehicle and paperwork has been considered in detail previously either at the start of the journey or during it, officers are not so required to undertake a full examination provided this can be confirmed at point of handover. However, it is the decision of the attending officers.
- 9.5. Alternatively, if an escort is crossing several police force areas, consideration should be given to the option for one police force taking primacy for the entire escort.
- 9.6. Officers will ensure that they have a copy or detailed knowledge of the route prior to commencing movement. It is best practice for the escorting officer(s) to have carried out a 'recce' of the route if it is anticipated difficulties will occur enroute.
- 9.7. The relevant police force's Control/Communications Centre will be provided with advanced details of the movement and programme prior to the movement commencing and these should also be shared with other emergency services if the movement will impact their response to incidents.

- 9.8. Special Police Service (SPS) rates for a minimum of six hours, and for every part of an hour thereafter will be charged.
- 9.9. Standard SPS rates take into account overtime working and compensation for rest day working. Where the duty is on a public holiday, there are enhanced rates for with the national guidelines. There is a third set of rates for public holiday duties where less than eight days' notice is given. It is highly recommended that hauliers give a minimum of eight days' notice to
- 9.10. Both prevent high costs and to lessen the impact of duty moves and days off in lieu to police forces.
- 9.11. Charges are to be paid in full in the event of any cancellation or amendment, by the operator, to the travel date that occurs within eight days of the movement date first indicated.

10. Community safety accreditation scheme (CSAS)

- 10.1. CSAS is a voluntary scheme under which Chief Constables can choose to accredit employed people already working in roles that contribute to maintaining and improving community safety, with limited, but targeted powers. These include the power to direct traffic for the purposes of escorting abnormal loads, including the power of a Constable engaged in the regulation of traffic in a road, for the purpose of escorting a vehicle or trailer carrying a load of exceptional circumstances (vehicle or trailer the use of which is authorised by an order made under section 44(1) and 44(2)(d) of the Road Traffic Act 1988) either to, or from, the relevant police area, to direct a vehicle to stop, to proceed in, or keep to, a particular line of traffic, and to direct pedestrians to stop.
- 10.2. Forces are encouraged to work with operators and private escort companies to consider the possibility of accrediting attendants and vehicle escort drivers under the CSAS scheme to reduce potential burdens upon the police, especially when dealing with single pinch points or other simple interventions.

11. Roles and responsibilities

- 11.1. The Abnormal Loads Officer
 - 11.1.1. Should have in-depth knowledge of the legislation relating to the movement of Abnormal Loads.
 - 11.1.2. Should be trained in conducting risk assessments of proposed movements.
 - 11.1.3. Should have a good working knowledge of their own police force area roads and the surrounding local networks.
 - 11.1.4. Should be able to visit locations or survey routes of proposed movements if practicable.
 - 11.1.5. Should risk assess proposed movements where appropriate.
 - 11.1.6. Should co-ordinate requests for escorting loads through the county with the appropriate line manager or supervisor.

11.1.7. Should be aware of roadworks or events that may interfere with abnormal load movement and share with neighbouring forces when relevant such as loads being escorted across several force areas.

11.1.8. Should where possible use a consistent email format such as abloads@aforce.police.uk

11.2. Roads Policing Officer

11.2.1. Should receive instruction on relevant legislation.

11.2.2. Should be pro-active in regulating and enforcing Abload movements.

11.2.3. Should conduct checks in line with the national Abloads check form.

11.2.4. Should only commence an escort when fully conversant with the proposed route including an appropriate briefing with those involved.

11.2.5. Should only commence an escort when the load, vehicle and route have been fully risk-assessed.

11.2.6. Should work with the police force's Abnormal Loads officer and road and bridge authorities if there is any requirement to divert from the notified route or, if not available, a TMO for the police force or local authority to ensure the alternative route is suitable.

11.3. Force Control Room staff

11.3.1. Should be aware of local force processes and have access to relevant force policy and national guidance for the movement of Abloads.

12. Appendices

12.1. Appendices will be retained as separate documents to this guidance, so they can be updated and amended as necessary independently of the main guidance document.