

Permits Ensure Shippers Pull Their Weight

Caltrans Closely Monitors Oversize/Overweight Loads for Safety, Road Impacts

Caltrans issued more than 115,000 permits for certain oversized and overweight loads in the last fiscal year, and processed more than nine out of 10 of them in two hours or less, a measure of efficiency highlighted in the Department's Strategic Management Plan.

Big loads or vehicles on the state highway system require special consideration. Caltrans' [transportation permit system](#) ensures such loads move only on roads and bridges that can accommodate their unusual weight or dimensions.

Caltrans responds to a variety of permit requests. Each is handled with the same three goals in mind: 1) find the quickest, safest route for the hauler, 2) protect the public that will be traveling on the same highways as a particular extra-legal load, and 3) prevent damage to highway infrastructure.

The integrity of the permit system depends on the vigilance of about 40 Caltrans employees in Sacramento. They monitor ever-changing conditions, including restrictions from construction work, lane closures, weight and/or height detours, or other limitations that could determine whether a particular road can accommodate a special load.

A single-trip application is the most common kind of permit issued to allow for oversize/overweight loads. A permit applicant must submit to Caltrans a description of the load, the dimensions, what kind of hauling equipment is being used, as well as the origin and destination. These key pieces of information are reviewed to determine whether the permit can be issued.

The route is then checked in a Caltrans database to ensure all road and structure conditions are satisfactory for the travel of a particular load. This database is maintained daily to ensure all highway vertical and horizontal clearances, and weight ratings, are accurate for safe routing.

Based on that information, a specific route is



Photo courtesy of NASA/Bill Ingalls

The space shuttle Endeavor was transported via Interstate 405 and local roads to its home at the California Science Center in Los Angeles in 2012. Permits to haul the massive load were obtained.

plotted between a shipper's trip origin and destination, ensuring that a particular load can travel on roads with the proper carrying capacity and free of certain physical restrictions. Other travel limits, such as forbidding night driving or requiring pilot cars, can be added to a permit.

Because of road conditions can change quickly, the single-trip permit is only valid for seven days.

For organizations familiar with the California Vehicle Code and routes where goods can be shipped legally, Caltrans offers an online version of the single-trip permit — STARS (Single-Trip Application and Routing System). STARS allows trucking companies, construction firms, manufactured home builders, the military and other frequent shippers a fast, easy way to complete the permit process — in under two hours for most online applications.

STARS is very popular and comprised about 73 percent of all 158,324 transportation permits processed in 2016-17.

[Caltrans' Office of Commercial Vehicle Operations](#) also gives details on [legal truck access](#), over-length bus and motorhome restrictions, pilot car use, motorsports trailer hauling restrictions, and other overweight/oversize topics on its web pages. **MM**

It's that two-hour window that serves as a performance measure of how well Caltrans is performing in this permit area. That goal was met almost 95 percent of the time in 2017, reaching the target set in the updated 2015-2020 Strategic Management Plan.

Sources: Kien Le, Chief, Office of Commercial Vehicle Operations, Division of Traffic Operations; John F. Holzhauser, Branch Chief, Transportation Permits Policies and Compliance Branch

STARS is very popular and comprised about 73 percent of all 158,324 transportation permits processed in 2016-17. However, those seeking a permit can apply manually and submit documents via fax machine, or call the permits office during regular business hours for help. Those applications typically take slightly longer to process, usually four to six hours if sent by fax.



Caltrans photo by Ed Andersen

In addition to the single-trip permit, Caltrans also issues annual, repetitive and variance-type permits.

Before hauling special-sized loads, truckers must carry and follow a Caltrans-approved permit that gives route directions that avoid restricted roads and bridges en route to their destination.

To discuss new ideas on permit-related issues, Caltrans and the California Highway Patrol meet quarterly with industry representatives such as the California Trucking Association as members of the [California Transportation Permit Advisory Council](#).

Permit Applications

