

Operating Guidance | for Abnormal Load Escorting

To be read alongside Code of Practice Self-escorting
of Abnormal Loads and Abnormal Vehicles



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1 Introduction

- 1.1 The purpose of this document is to enhance the Code of Practice for the self-escorting of abnormal loads and abnormal vehicles¹ by providing more detailed, best practice operating guidance on how to safely escort abnormal loads.
- 1.2 This additional guidance has been produced in consultation with the haulage industry, the Police and other relevant stakeholders, including the Department for Transport and is endorsed by them. The Road Traffic Laws are clear and adherence to the guidance contained within this document does not exempt individuals or organisations from the law's requirements. Only Acts of Parliament and Statutory Instruments have the force of law and only the courts can authoritatively interpret the law. **The drivers of both the load and the escort vehicle are responsible for their own actions whilst on the road.**
- 1.3 Abnormal loads, by their very nature, vary in size and weight and when considered in relation to different types of road, it is recognised that moving them is often a complex operation. This document is therefore for guidance only. It is not possible to provide exhaustive procedures to cover every eventuality. The general requirements and some basic operating guidance are set out in the Code of Practice. The following paragraphs complement this existing guidance with more detailed information.

¹ Published by the Highways Agency in April 2005 (publication number HA74/05)

- 1.4 The main duties and responsibilities of an escort person, so that they act to warn other road users and pedestrians of the presence of an abnormal load, are outlined in the Code of Practice. Special attention should also be paid to assisting the driver of the abnormal load or vehicle and to vulnerable road users. If specific traffic management from the Police, including the need to stop or re-direct traffic is required (for example ensuring no other traffic is on a structure at the same time as the load or controlling traffic at a junction), prior arrangements should be made with the relevant Police Forces.
- 1.5 The Code requires that escorts are competent through training and/or experience. Local knowledge of roads is a big advantage and it is often advisable, if you are unaware of the locality, to survey the route in advance.

2 Before starting the journey

- 2.1 It is important that the designated escort knows exactly what is expected of them, either from their own company, or from their client before undertaking the job.

Escort Vehicle Check

- 2.2 In addition to familiarising themselves with the load and the proposed route (see below), the escort should ensure that the escort vehicle or vehicles are fit for purpose.

Pre-journey checks with abnormal load or abnormal vehicle personnel

- 2.3 It is vital that the escort and the driver of the abnormal load/abnormal vehicle liaise prior to the journey, either on the day or in advance. Before meeting up with the vehicle(s) to be escorted, familiarisation with the local road layout and of how to exit the departure point will be useful.
- 2.4 The notified route to be taken should be communicated to the escort (ideally in advance). Any disagreement or uncertainty must be resolved prior to departure. The route can only be the one notified to, and authorised by, the relevant authorities and may have specific instructions associated with it – e.g. regarding timings or negotiation of particular structures. Only the notified authorities can agree any changes to the route.
- 2.5 A route plan should be agreed, including a timetable for the journey and detailing changeover or lay-up points and how specific route cautions will be complied with for example. The start time should give due regard to peak-traffic levels and any local requirements.
- 2.6 If the Police are assisting with the escort for all, or part of the journey, follow any Police instructions given.

- 2.7 If the escort person is aware of any obvious problem(s) with the load or vehicle, then they should be made known to the driver of the load.
- 2.8 The relevant Police Force should be contacted at least 30 minutes before departure, informing them that the journey is about to commence, quoting any reference or authorisation numbers that apply. Any Police guidance relating to traffic or weather conditions should be followed.
- 2.9 The escort person should also check whether there are requests to inform journey details² to:
- National Traffic Control Centre (Tel: 0121 245 4688 - 24hrs) if using motorways and trunk roads in England;
 - Traffic Wales (Tel: 0845 602 6020 - 24hrs) if travelling on Welsh trunk roads;
 - Traffic Scotland (Tel: 0141 287 9283 – 24hrs) if using motorways and trunk roads in Scotland;

² In particular, this may apply for Special Order loads (loads in excess of 6.1m wide, 30m long (rigid), 150,000kgs gross weight and/or with one or more axles exceeding 16,500kg) and VR1 loads (loads in excess of 5m wide). There may also be a requirement to update such organisations whilst en route.

3 On the road

- 3.1 The escort vehicle's function is to warn other road users, including pedestrians of the presence of an abnormal load, as well as to maintain ongoing contact with the driver of the abnormal load or abnormal vehicle. The communications link³ between the escort vehicle and the load should not be broken.

Basic Principles on vehicle manoeuvres

- 3.2 The following are a number of general statements of best practice, but each load and route will dictate the best way to escort.

Manoeuvre to close a lane to the left

- a motorist may attempt to undertake the convoy, particularly near to entrance/exit slip roads;
- if this happens, the driver of the load should be warned that a vehicle is undertaking to the left;
- if an opportunity for undertaking presents itself to other traffic, the escort should safely move into the left adjacent lane⁴;
- the driver of the load should be told that the left lane has been secured;
- the distance between the escort vehicle and the load should be shortened;
- the normal escorting position and distance should be resumed when appropriate.

Manoeuvre to close a lane to the right

- the driver of load may inform the escort that they wish to move out (e.g. because of an obstruction on the hard shoulder);
- the escort driver should mirror, signal, manoeuvre into the right adjacent lane when there is sufficient space and with regard to the speed of other traffic;

³ Please refer to 'Communication Equipment' in the 'Code of Practice for Self Escorting of Abnormal Loads and Abnormal Vehicles for communication equipment specifications.

⁴ Unless the left adjacent lane is the hard shoulder.

- the escort driver should inform the driver of the load that the right lane is secured;
- the distance between the escort vehicle and the load should be shortened;
- once clear of the obstruction, the escort should indicate left and resume normal escort position;
- the driver of the load should be told it is safe to move back into the left lane.

Procedure for entering a motorway (principally for slow wide loads)

- the escort vehicle should enter the motorway in front of the load;
- from the slip road, the escort should ensure that the hard shoulder is clear – special care should be taken when entering from short slip roads;
- the escort vehicle should be positioned in the right hand lane, with the load in left hand lane;
- the escort vehicle should enter lane 1 before the load enters the motorway, ensuring that no vehicles can get between the escort vehicle and the load;
- the driver of the load should be advised that lane 1 is secured;
- if, due to the width of the load, lane 2 also needs to be secured, procedure (b) above should be followed;
- normal escort position should be resumed. If it is not possible to carry out this action safely an additional escort vehicle should be employed.

Procedure for leaving a motorway

- from the agreed route, the escort vehicle should prepare for the convoy to leave at the next junction;
- the escort should indicate left in good time, but not move left straight away;
- the distance between the escort vehicle and the load should be shortened;
- the driver of the load should be advised to enter the slip-road, and warned if vehicles are attempting to undertake;
- once the load begins to progress up the slip-road, the indicator should be cancelled and the distance between the escort vehicle and the abnormal load increased;
- if transferring to a single-carriageway road, traffic island or road junction, the escort vehicle should be prepared to move to the front prior to entering the slip road if necessary.

Basic principles – escorting from the rear

3.3 The following are a number of general statements of best practice, but each load and route will dictate the best way to escort.

- Maintain communication with driver of the load, and agree how manoeuvres will be communicated – e.g. what will be said when the load wishes the escort to secure a second lane;
- Contact Police/highway control rooms 30 minutes in advance, as necessary, as route progresses;
- When on dual carriageways and motorways, position the vehicle at a suitable distance behind the load (c50-75m);

- This distance could be varied depending on road, traffic and/or weather conditions.
- The positioning of the escort vehicle on the road should be guided by the width of the load:
 - if the load only takes lane 1, position the escort in lane 1 behind, ensuring as far as possible, that the escort vehicle does not obscure beacons on the load;
 - if the load encroaches into lane 2, it may be appropriate to position the escort vehicle in lane 2, so the escort vehicle protects the full width of the load at all times.
- Give other motorists the maximum warning of any manoeuvre, which should always be gradual and smooth;
- Monitor traffic build-up behind, particularly if there is no room for overtaking, and arrange for load to pull over in a suitable location, pre-arranged where possible, to allow traffic to pass.

Basic principles – escorting from the front

3.4 The following are a number of general statements of best practice, but each load and route will dictate the best way to escort. Escorts must always position themselves at the front of the load at the start of an escort and on single carriageway 2-way roads. The primary purpose when leading the load is to warn other road users and pedestrians of the presence and potential danger of the oncoming abnormal load, as well as alerting the load to potential hazards both on the road and overhead.

- The escort vehicle should be at an appropriate distance ahead of the load to give on-coming traffic the maximum amount of warning. If possible, visual contact should be maintained with the load but this will not be the case when the escort has negotiated one or a number of bends ahead of the load;
- Contact Police/highway control rooms 30 minutes in advance, as necessary, as route progresses;
- The driver of the vehicle being escorted should be alerted to parked vehicles, pedestrians, obstructions and vehicles that may have pulled out behind the escort vehicle;
- The escort vehicle should be positioned as far to the right as possible without straddling the centre line, with dipped headlights on. Other vehicles should be signalled to slow down or move over to their nearside as necessary. Any hand actions⁵ need to be slow and deliberate and reflective jackets should be worn to improve visibility.
- When escorting, considerable traffic build-up can occur behind the load. Opportunities to safely pull the load over and let the traffic pass should be taken at suitable intervals.

In the event of a breakdown of the abnormal load/ vehicle

- 3.5 The nature of the breakdown should be quickly established from the driver of the load, and whether they are able to continue, at least to a suitable stopping area without deviating from the agreed route. If not, any deviation from the route **must** be cleared with the relevant authorities (this includes, for example, passing over structures to get to Motorway Service Areas).

⁵ Use the signals set out in the Highway Code

- 3.6 The escort vehicles should be placed at an appropriate distance and in the most advantageous position to protect the load and its personnel, using the lights and markings to give the maximum warning to other traffic. There is no definitive guide to an escort vehicle's orientation in such circumstances⁶, however the escort vehicle should be left with its front wheels steered in-line, and in the case of an automatic gearbox, with the gear selector in park. The handbrake must also be set.
- 3.7 The Police and/or highway control room should be contacted without delay, especially if the broken down vehicle is causing an obstruction. All instructions given should be followed.
- 3.8 If the escort vehicle breaks down, the driver of the abnormal load/vehicle should be informed immediately. Both the escort vehicle and the abnormal load vehicle should be parked in, or moved to, a safe place. The escort driver should make arrangements for repairs or a replacement as soon as possible, and the Police informed if necessary.
- 3.9 Cones should only be placed to warn others of an obstruction if the driver of the load and the escort agree that it is safe to do so, having taken account of the circumstances of the breakdown and the risks posed to themselves and other road users.

⁶ the nature and position of the breakdown will dictate , but advice on the pros and cons of each is at Annex 1

4 Job Completed

- 4.1 If the layout of the destination is unfamiliar to the escort, or is served by minor or locally busy roads, it is recommended that the load is parked at a suitable stopping point before a survey is undertaken of approach roads. Any specific access requirements should be agreed with site managers.
- 4.2 On the approach to the destination, the escort vehicle should be positioned in front of the load to warn any vehicle or person leaving the site of the presence of the load.

Annex 1

Escort Vehicle Orientation when abnormal load is stationary in live traffic

There is no definitive guide to the recommended orientation of an escort vehicle when the abnormal load is stationary in a live traffic situation. This annex describes the 3 main choices and the pros and cons of each. The escort driver should decide which is most appropriate for the circumstances.

Vehicle parked “In line”

The escort vehicle is positioned behind the abnormal load or vehicle facing forwards

Advantages

- Rear facing amber bar lights and red brake lights are most visible;
- Rear vehicle markings most visible;
- Driver of vehicle is not exposed to direct impact on exiting vehicle;
- Can prevent obstructing the live carriageway if the hard shoulder or lay-by is particularly narrow.

Disadvantages

- May appear to approaching drivers that that the vehicle is moving;
- Does not fill the lane, therefore offering only a limited line of defence;
- If the vehicle is struck it will travel forward and may strike the load.

Vehicle parked in “Fend Off” position

The escort vehicle is positioned behind the abnormal load or vehicle facing forwards and to the right

Advantages

- Fills the lane and therefore provides a line of defence;
- Approaching drivers tend to want to pass by driving around the front;
- Provides a forewarning that the vehicle is stationary;
- Visually the vehicle tends to get larger as approaching vehicles draw nearer;
- When parked on a Motorway Hard Shoulder, the vehicle tends to encourage people away from it, since it appears as though it could be emerging from the Hard Shoulder and is more likely to arouse caution from an approaching motorist;
- Provides the escort with a better view of approaching traffic when looking to exit the vehicle;
- Provides a better view of approaching traffic over the escort vehicle’s bonnet, and enables the escort to be better aware of approaching traffic.

Disadvantages

- Rear lights aimed towards the Hard Shoulder;
- When parked on a Hard Shoulder approaching motorists may be inclined to react by slowing or changing lanes having wrongly assumed that the escort vehicle is emerging from the Hard Shoulder. Driver is exposed to a direct impact from an errant vehicle;
- When on the Hard Shoulder, if struck, the vehicle is more likely to be projected into live lanes; an errant vehicle having struck the escort vehicle may then breach the zone between escort vehicle and load.

Vehicle parked in “Fend In” position

The escort vehicle is positioned behind the abnormal load or vehicle facing forwards and to the left

Advantages

- Fills the lane and therefore provides a line of defence;
- Provides a forewarning that the vehicle is stationary;
- Driver not exposed to direct impact on exiting vehicle;
- When parked on the Hard Shoulder, if struck, it will minimise the likelihood of the vehicle being projected into the live carriageway.

Disadvantages

- Rear lights are aimed towards the central reservation;
- When “fend in” is used whilst parked on the Hard Shoulder, and a nearside barrier or wall is present, if the vehicle is struck it is more likely to collide with the barrier and then continue to travel along the Hard Shoulder alongside the barrier and towards the load;
- Visually the vehicle tends to get smaller as approaching vehicles draw nearer;
- With the vehicle in the “fend in” position it tends to obstruct the escort view of approaching traffic when returning to the vehicle;
- Approaching drivers tend to want to pass by driving around the front.

Reference Organisation

Self Escorting of Abnormal Loads and Abnormal Vehicles Code of Practice: Highways Agency

Escorting Method Statement: Abnormal Load Escort Network

Escorting Manual: Heavy Transport Association

Highway Code: Department for Transport

Highways Agency Traffic Officer Manual: Highways Agency

