

# **CTPAC – PROPOSAL**

**SUBJECT: VARIANCE CHANGES**

**DATE: NOVEMBER 12, 2033**

**POLICY: CTPAC WG4-111203-001**

## **I. Objective**

To promotes efficiency and safety in the transportation of the larger oversized and overweight loads. Single width vehicle hauling configurations moving loads up to 17' wide and 17' high within allowable weights over routes, which do not require CHP involvement, would no longer be a variance move. Eliminate from the CHP escort table the height, the weight and create a more realistic speed difference.

## **II. Background**

The number of loads that are above 14' wide and 135' long have increased dramatically since this program was put into place in the late 60's & early 70's. For many years, the transporter safely handled this kind of move without any outside assistance. Then in the early 80's at the request of Caltrans the California Highway Patrol began accompanying the largest loads, helping to escort & control traffic. Generally, one or two officers accompanied the loads and it was acceptable to eliminate an industry pilot car to avoid duplication and keep costs and confusion to a minimum. The officers helped through their ability to control traffic to be able to keep the loads moving and were widely accepted as valuable. The permit manual states, "One unit unless cross or oncoming traffic requires additional units." It was also believed that involvement could be as little as having knowledge of the move. It was also acceptable, and some time

recommended not to have the CHP escort, if it was agreed by all parties that the move could be completed by industry pilot cars. During all this time, these moves enjoyed a perfect safety record.

Fall of 1998 the CHP load coordinators decided to lower the maximum width for accompanying a load from 17' to 16' without input from industry or Caltrans and without any justification on the basis of safety or any accident information to warrant the change.

Following the accident in Glendale at the train crossing that involved an out of state transporter and the CHP, the way variance loads are moved became even more difficult and really not any safer. There are now too many officers, much of the times with very little experience in this type of work, and often without sufficient rest to be able complete their section with out compromising safety. Many moves are delayed because of various areas' coordination and inability to supply officers. However, all this being considered the largest problems are loads that are unnecessary included in the variance program and too many being CHP escorted when not necessary.

At the February 2001 CAC meeting in San Bernardino, it was confirmed by officer Bob Healy and Caltran's Rich Williams that there was a mistake in changing the height category from no maximum xx to 17'. But during the last two and a half years, this error has not been corrected.

There was a meeting in January 2003 with industry and CHP at their Sacramento head quarters' to review the various problems. Discussed there were the height and width problems as well as the number of officers and escorting the load over portions of the route where they are not required. There has never been a response from CHP as to their comments' nor solutions for these problems.

### **III. Existing Documentation**

The TMP has the old information both in the book and on the Internet website, see attached copy. I do have a current Caltrans' memo on the variance program, if there is one. Also, there is CHP Annex A and multi page guide on their escort policy, which I do not have a current copy. This is not included in the California Vehicle Code.

#### **IV. Current Practices**

Everyone involved in the movement of variance loads agrees that the safety and convenience to the traveling public and those directly involved has suffered because of the way program is currently administered.

Title 21 of the CCR defines Variance Loads as any combination greater than 14 feet wide and 135 feet long. However, common loads such as Mobile Homes are exempt from the Variance Program, dozer blades and other construction equipment are authorized width up to 15' feet wide. Additionally many 7 and 9 axle configuration carrying long loads such as bridge griders, which are within allowable axle weight are also exempt from the Variance Program.

The current program varies depending upon the region, the permit writer, the load coordinator, the transporter, and the officers assigned to the move. Generally, the loads if they are within the current guidelines, the CHP will be notified and two or more officers will always be scheduled to accompany the load; some require four as a minimum. Many times, they want to accompany the load from origin to destination through areas where they would not normally be required. Beyond the overall size and weight of the load, and the rating of the road, it does not seem that neither the nature of the load nor the particularities of the road are taken into consideration. The number of industry cars is rarely reduced. Many times only one or two like loads can travel together, rather than grouping them more economically and which would be less obtrusive to all. Often the time of travel is changed from time requested and better time to one that is more convenient for the patrol and where they can more easily supply officers. Both Caltrans, and CHP have gone from "MAY" be required to "MUST" be required. Because of the cost and scheduling problems many loads go by lesser county and city routes, this usually means they travel farther but the shipper does not have the extra time required to accommodate the CHP. Also there have been occasions because all permits have to be ordered and received before scheduling can be done and the loading can be completed, that things have changed, requiring new permits and delays, further adding to overall costs, without improving safety. This work has had more problems, safety has been compromised, and the inconvenience to the public has increased under the current policies. Changes must be made.

## **I. New Proposed Changes**

- 1.** Increase the width on yellow routes with 3 or more lanes from 16' to 18' before it is a variance load or would require CHP.
- 2.** Increase the width on yellow routes with 2 lanes from 16' to 17', where the vehicle carrying the load is not more than 10' wide, before it is a variance load or would require CHP.
- 3.** Increase the width on green routes' from 15' to 16', where the vehicle carrying the load is not more than 10' wide, before it is a variance load or would require CHP.
- 4.** Eliminate weight (250,000 pounds) category from the CHP escort table.
- 5.** Change the speed category to read "CHP escort involvement only for those combinations that cannot maintain a speed of 20 MPH less than that of the routine truck speed for the route being used."
- 6.** Change the height category back to read "NO MAXIMUM \*\*\*" (Loads over 17' high or 135' long may require a current route review. Any fixed obstacle within 3" of the load height or vehicle that cannot avoid using on coming lanes may require CHP involvement.)
- 7.** Increase the length to "Unlimited \*\*\*" for all green routes.  
(See # 6 for \*\*)
- 8.** Caltrans' shall maintain a database of those routes developed for variance loads. This information shall be available for future applications and given freely to those requesting it. A disclaimer shall go with the data advising the requester that the data is out-dated and should be used for initial route review only.

9. CHP shall be open to do traffic control for a very short time and/or distance by using on-duty officers at their convince for no cost or for a hourly rate.

10. CHP escorts will only be required on the state portions of the route, which require them, unless by agreement between transporter and CHP that two or more such sections are in close proximity, and continuous escorting is preferred.

11. CHP, Industry, and Caltrans will enter into a partnership to help train the various individuals permitting moving and escorting these loads to insure safe, uniform, and efficient practices.

## **VI. Benefits / Impact / Justification**

These changes will benefit the safe movements of these larger loads by putting the correct number of pilot cars and CHP officers on those loads that truly require them. Thereby keeping the confusion to a minimum and increasing the knowledge and safety of all the parties involved.

The inconvenience to the traveling public will be greatly reduced while enhancing their safety. These changes will promote uniformity and will be more economical for each entity. It is not practical to utilize the number of officers and permit personal currently being required and let their other duties suffer as a result. Since 1998 it has been demonstrated that uniformity, costs, scheduling, and safety have all suffered. We cannot allow this to continue. These proposals will correct most of the problems.

### **Requestors' Names:**

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