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CHAPTER 4 – Variances

400 General Information

400.1 Purpose

The Department of Transportation (Caltrans) has established maximums to control the overall height, width, length, and axle group weight of standard hauling vehicles and/or loads permitted to use the State Highway System and bridges. Vehicles and/or loads exceeding the established maximums may be eligible for a variance permit. In the interest of safety to the traveling public, the movement and coordination of these variance loads require detailed attention.

400.2 When is a Variance Permit Required?

- A. The reduced load at its least size and weight still exceeds dimensional and weight maximums.
- B. The axle group weights exceeds maximum allowable loading when loaded on standard hauling vehicles.
- C. No other mode of transportation is reasonably available.

401 Description of a Variance Load

Variance permit processing is required if one or more of the following applies:

- A. Height exceeds 17'-0"
- B. Width exceeds 16'-0" on a yellow route class
- C. Width exceeds 15'-0" on a green, blue, or brown route class
- D. Vehicles requiring a Structure Review, as defined in Section 401.6.

401.1 Height

The lowest vertical clearance of any overhead structure along the permitted route governs the maximum allowable height for the vehicle and/or load. The vehicle and/or load must maintain a three-inch (3") minimum clearance of the lowest structure on the permitted route.

A written route survey is required from the permittee for load heights greater than 17'-0".

The route survey shall include the following:

- A. Origin and Destination
- B. Proposed route
- C. List of structures on State routes and city or county routes
- D. Fuel stops on State Highway System
- E. Turn out locations allowing traffic to pass or overnight parking
- F. Obstacles and their owners (i.e. cable television wires, telephone wires, etc.)
- G. Critical turn locations
- H. Approximate speed, in miles per hour, of move
- I. Identify problem areas where length, width, height or weight will cause a problem
- J. Time of move. List time of move through predicted problem areas
- K. Where city and/or county permits are required
- L. Steps taken to avoid obstacles
- M. Areas where special traffic control will be required
- N. Written certification from the transporter (not permittee) stating that the transporter arranged for removal of obstruction (i.e. signal heads, wires, signs, etc.)
- O. Locations requiring the use of wire guide boards for loads 18'-0" in height or greater
- P. Written traffic control procedures for users where indicated on route survey
- Q. Second or third power unit where determined necessary for traction, speed, braking, etc. Confer with transporter and California Highway Patrol (CHP)

- R. Turning radius and track width for use to determine ability to make questionable turns indicated in route survey

401.2 Width

Any vehicle combination and/or load greater than 16'-0" in width traveling on yellow routes and 15'-0" in width traveling on green, blue, or brown routes will require a variance permit. Chapter 2 discusses some equipment exceptions to the variance load policy (i.e. boats, specific construction equipment, implements of husbandry).

401.3 Length

Any vehicle combination and/or load greater than 135'-0" in length will require a variance permit.

401.4 Weight

Structure Maintenance & Investigations (SM&I) has assigned bridge permit designation to all bridges. The variance coordinator will evaluate the route to determine if any vehicle combination and/or load will exceed the purple weight chart (Plate 25-5) or bridge permit designation. Any loaded hauling combination that exceeds the purple weight chart or bridge permit designation will be subject to review and approval by SM&I.

401.5 Equipment Review

When hauling equipment falls outside the parameters of standard hauling vehicles or is of a specific design, an equipment review will be required. An equipment review will determine if the equipment is justified and qualified pursuant to all applicable extralegal transport permit requirements. The equipment review will take place prior to applying for a variance permit. Contact the Headquarters Transportation Permits Equipment Engineer (see Chapter 3, Section 304) to request an equipment review.

401.6 Structure Review

Variance permits with heavy haul equipment combinations may require a Structure Review by SM&I. These Structure Reviews are valid for 60 days, and after 60 days from initial review, a refreshed Structure Review is required. Criteria requiring a Structure Review for loaded/laden vehicle combinations are below.

- A. Exceeds chart weight or a bridge permit designation.

- B. Combinations exceeding 135'-0" in length, measured from centerlines of steer axle to rear axle, and exceeding chart weight or a bridge permit designation.
- C. Combinations normally routed as a 9-axle or 11-axle combination with a 40'-0" or greater trailer bridge (measured from centerlines of inner axles), with a pusher.
- D. All combinations normally routed as a 13-axle combination with a 40'-0" or greater trailer bridge.
- E. All double wide hauling equipment combinations.

Criteria requiring a Structure Review for unladen vehicle combinations are below.

- A. Trailer axle weights exceed Orange chart weight or a bridge permit designation.
- B. The unladen trailer combination weight exceeds 350,000 pounds and/or exceeds 240'-0".

At the discretion of the permit writer, the permit writer may submit any variance permit for a Structure Review.

402 Application Submittal Process

402.1 When to Apply

Permittees shall submit variance requests to the variance coordinator no later than 30 days in advance of proposed move date. The variance coordinator reviews variance permit applications for completeness and processes them in the order received. Verbal approval of variance moves are not available or granted.

402.2 Where to Apply

Submit all variance permit applications in writing to the variance coordinator.

Transportation Permits Issuance Branch	
Location:	1823 14th Street Sacramento, CA 95811
	OR
Mailing Address:	P.O. Box 942874, MS #41 Sacramento, CA 94274-0001
Phone Number:	(916) 322-1297
Fax Number:	(916) 322-1505

402.3 Denial and Reapplication

The variance coordinator handles each variance permit application individually, and some permits require extensive route evaluation, structure review, equipment review, and escort coordination. Due to the nature of a variance permit, there is limited flexibility for any changes to the permit application, routing, or hauling equipment after final processing of a variance permit.

Minor changes to the permit application or hauling vehicles may delay the requested start date. Therefore, the permittee is responsible for notifying the variance coordinator by telephone, fax, or email, of any changes as soon as possible. The permittee can also contact the variance coordinator for a ‘status check’ of the submitted application.

Major changes to the permit application that requires the complete reprocessing of the permit will restart the permit application process. Therefore, reapplying may be necessary when:

- A. During the application process period:
 1. If there is any incomplete required data or missing information such as inspection reports, route survey, load or equipment dimensions, the permit application will be denied by the variance coordinator.
 2. The variance coordinator will inform the permittee to reapply with additional information needed to complete the processing.

3. The variance coordinator will place the new permit application at the back of the queue.

B. During the Structure Review period:

1. After the variance coordinator reviews the routing and vehicle combination, and there are structures along the proposed route that are unable to accommodate the requested move, the permit application will be denied and the permittee will need to reapply with either a revised route and/or equipment configuration.
2. The variance coordinator will inform the permittee to reapply with additional information needed to complete the processing.
3. The variance coordinator will place the new permit application at the back of the queue.

C. During the CHP escort scheduling period:

1. After the variance coordinator reviews and approves the proposed route, the variance coordinator will send the permit application to the CHP variance load coordinator to schedule the law enforcement escort.
2. The variance coordinator will deny any changes to the permit application requiring rerouting or structures review.
3. The variance coordinator will inform the permittee to reapply with additional information needed to complete the processing.
4. The variance coordinator will place the new permit application at the back of the queue.
5. Any changes to the application not requiring rerouting or a Structure Review will not restart the permit application process, and the variance coordinator will continue the permit application process.

D. After the permit has been issued or during move:

1. Any changes requiring rerouting or a Structure Review may void the issued permit.

2. If the changes to the permit application will not require rerouting or structures review, then the variance coordinator will continue the permit application process.

403 Roles/Responsibilities/Coordination of the Load

403.1 Permittee

The variance coordinator processes the information provided on the permit application at the initial submittal and handles each variance permit application individually. Some permits require extensive route evaluation, Structure Review, equipment review, and escort coordination.

The permittee will do the following:

- A. Submit the variance permit application a minimum of 30 days prior to the proposed move.
- B. Provide an accurate and complete permit application.
- C. Provide the name and telephone number for the responsible person or the permit service requesting the variance permit.
- D. The permittee shall keep in contact with the variance coordinator and the CHP variance load coordinator during the processing period.
- E. Provide engineering justification or proof that no other mode of transportation is reasonably available.
- F. Provide certification by the manufacturer/designer that the critical nature, technical or structural requirements prohibit field fabrication of small component pieces. Economics or fabrication ease is insufficient justification without a bona fide economic comparison furnished by the manufacturer/designer indicating the range of total costs for the various options of fabricating and transportations.
- G. Provide scale drawings, diagrams, and/or photographs of the vehicle combination and load to verify the transported load is in the most reduced configuration.
- H. Provide inspection reports.

- I. Provide a route survey for loads or equipment greater than 17'-0" high.
- J. Provide encroachment permit(s). (when required)
- K. Provide other information requested by the variance coordinator.

403.2 Variance Coordinator

The variance coordinator shall be familiar with Caltrans policies as they relate to variance loads and is responsible for the accurate information provided to the customers and law enforcement agencies. The variance coordinator is also responsible for receiving and reviewing the application, assigning a tracking number, approving the route, contacting and coordinating with other entities, and issuing the variance permit.

The variance coordinator will process the applications as efficiently as possible in the received order within 30 days and will make every effort to process these applications by the requested start date. The variance coordinator will advise the permittee if the requested date is not available or delayed.

The variance coordinator will do the following:

- A. Ensure the application is complete with all pertinent information attached.
- B. Verify the application requires variance processing.
- C. Review the application for the following:
 - 1. Hauling configuration.
 - 2. Reducibility of the load.
 - 3. Sufficient route survey provided by the permittee.
 - 4. Escort requirements and restrictions for the requested route.
 - 5. Validity of inspection reports for the equipment used.
 - 6. Vehicle diagrams or drawings when applicable.
 - 7. Encroachment permits (if applicable).
- D. Process and issue the permit in a timely manner.

- E. Notify the permittee if there will be a delay with the requested start date and the reason for the delay.
- F. Log in the permit application into Caltrans' variance database to establish a tracking number. The permittee's name, contact information, load description, load dimensions, and date the application was received will be entered into the database as well.
- G. During the processing period, the variance coordinator will send a copy of the permit application with the tracking number to the permittee for reference.
- H. Request Structure Review from Structure Maintenance and Investigations and incorporate the restrictions and instructions into the variance permit.
- I. Notify the District Traffic Manager of the impending move through their district and request any route restrictions that may affect travel of the vehicle and/or load.
- J. Complete and forward the CHP escort request form, permit application, and attachments to the appropriate CHP division office where the move originates. Confirms the date, time of move, and updates the variance permit.
- K. Address any concerns and send the variance permit with attachments to the permittee and CHP variance load coordinator. The variance permit will state the CHP escort requirement.
- L. Periodically review all pending permit applications and verify that the requests are still valid.

403.3 Structure Maintenance & Investigation (SM&I)

SM&I will receive the request for a Structure Review from the variance coordinator. The request will include the application, inspection reports, diagrams or drawings of the vehicle combination, and bridge structure listings along the proposed route.

The SM&I variance Structure Review process is required as detailed in Section 401.6. The Structure Review process involves review of all bridges to be crossed on the proposed route(s), as submitted, and all bridges specifically identified to be crossed. SM&I will provide Structure Review of variances on a first come first serve basis,

and the reviews can take up to two weeks to complete. SM&I will notify the variance coordinator if additional time is required to complete the review.

SM&I will send a summary of the review results in the form of a memorandum addressed to the variance coordinator. The memorandum will give specific travel instructions and restrictions on how the load will move across each bridge, if needed. The total hours expended by SM&I for each Structure Review will be within the email sent with the attached memorandum (See Section 405, Fees).

During the general Structure Review, bridges may be identified to not have the capacity to accommodate the proposed weight of the hauling combination. At that time SM&I recommends a route change and/or a specific analysis of the bridge for the proposed hauling combination. The permittee must resubmit the route change and/or request for SM&I to perform a specific analysis.

403.4 District Traffic Managers (DTM)

The DTM reviews the route through their respective district of the impending move, notifies the variance coordinator and CHP variance load coordinator of any route restrictions that may interfere with travel. The DTM may be required to assist in the coordination of the variance move. The DTM may change or postpone any construction restrictions along the route or recommend an alternative route and time of travel if necessary.

403.5 DTM Contacts

District	Address	City	Zip Code	Phone Number	Fax Number
1	1656 Union St.	Eureka	95501	(707) 445-6377	(707) 441-3914
2	1657 Riverside Dr.	Redding	96001	(530) 225-3245	(530) 225-3271
3	3165 Gold Valley Dr.	Rancho Cordova	95670	(916) 859-7966	(916) 859-7996
4	111 Grand Ave.	Oakland	94623	(510) 286-6911	(510) 286-4515
5	50 Higuera St.	San Luis Obispo	93401	(805) 549-3409	(805) 549-3298
6	1352 W. Olive Ave.	Fresno	93778	(559) 349-0444	(559) 445-6389
7	2901 W. Broadway	Los Angeles	90041	(323) 259-1920	(323) 259-1894
8	464 W. 4th St.	San Bernardino	92401	(909) 383-4917	(909) 383-1068
9	500 So. Main St.	Bishop	93514	(760) 872-0650	(760) 872-5215
10	1976 E. Dr. Martin Luther King Blvd.	Stockton	95201	(209) 948-3968	(209) 948-7890
11	7183 Opportunity Rd.	San Diego	92111	(858) 467-4333	(858) 467-4265
12	6681 Marine Way	Irvine	92618	(949) 936-3413	(949) 936-3538

The variance coordinator may need to verify the contact information above by using the district intranet prior to sending faxes.

403.6 California Highway Patrol (CHP)

Each CHP field division has a designated CHP variance load coordinator whose primary responsibility is to coordinate all CHP escorted variance loads in their respective division. By reviewing the application and route survey sent by Caltrans, each CHP variance load coordinator will ensure escorted loads move safely, efficiently and within policy. If there are any questions or concerns about the pending variance move, the CHP variance load coordinator can contact the variance coordinator. Such instances include:

- A. If there are any issues with the permittee and/or the hauling equipment.
- B. The customer cancels the move.

- C. Scheduled escort dates are changed.
- D. If there is insufficient time to coordinate the escort(s).

The CHP variance load coordinator will contact the permittee to advise them of policies or conditions of the pending move. They will also send a copy of the contract to the permittee for signature. Upon a signed contract with the permittee, the CHP variance load coordinator will notify the variance coordinator of the impending move by providing the escort date and time by email or fax.

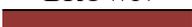
Note: The permittee’s final route can change due to roadway restriction changes. Therefore, CHP should wait for Caltrans’ approved route before confirming any escort dates. If the permittee contacts the CHP office to reserve an escort date before receiving an approved route, the CHP variance load coordinator will refer the permittee back to the variance coordinator.

403.7 CHP Division Contacts

Division	Address	City	Zip Code	Phone Number	Fax Number
Border	1744 W. Katella Ave., Ste. 230	Orange	92867	(714) 288-8259	(714) 288-8259
Central	1352 W. Olive Ave.	Fresno	93728	(559) 445-6100	(559) 445-6101
Coastal	4115 Broad St., Ste. B-10	San Luis Obispo	93401	(805) 549-3261	(805) 549-3667
Golden Gate	1551 Benicia Rd.	Vallejo	94591	(707) 648-4180	(707) 649-4812
Inland	847 E. Brier Dr.	San Bernardino	92408	(909) 806-2438	(909) 885-0382
Northern	2485 Sonoma St.	Redding	96001	(530) 225-2097	(530) 246-1264
Southern	437 N. Vermont Ave.	Los Angeles	90004	(323) 644-9557	(323) 644-9575
Valley	11336 Trade Center Dr.	Rancho Cordova	95742	(916) 464-0678	(916) 464-3860

The variance coordinator will assign the required CHP escorts as indicated on the pilot car map and the table below.

CHP ESCORT TABLE

Route Class	Width	Length	Height	Speed
 YELLOW	> 16'0"	*	*	CHP Escort may be required when it is necessary to slow while crossing structure(s).
 GREEN	> 15'0"	*	*	
 BLUE	> 15'0"	> 135'0"	> 17'0"	
 BROWN	> 15'0"	> 135'0"	> 17'0"	
 RED	Operational Restriction – See “Red Route Summary Table” for details.			

* CHP escort shall be required anytime opposing lanes are used.

404 Special Travel Conditions

404.1 Travel Times and Restrictions

Normal time restrictions such as night movement, curfews, weekend movement, etc., may be temporarily waived if it is determined that the movement of the variance load and/or vehicle during those times would benefit the safety of the traveling public.

405 Fees

The total cost to Caltrans for issuing a variance permit controls the permit fee, as stated in Section 35795 of the California Vehicle Code.

Additional fees may apply when a permit requires an extensive route review, engineering investigation, and coordination of the load by SM&I and/or CHP. An additional fee may also apply when the processing time exceeds the normal processing time of a standard permit as determined by Caltrans.

For a copy of the latest published fee schedule, please see the California Code of Regulations, Title 21, Division 2, Chapter 7, §1411.3. Permit Fees.

406 Department of Defense

Military moves are subject to the current reducibility load policy and the variance permit process. The movement of military vehicles exceeding the established maximums shall comply with Caltrans' requirements and California statutes. An equipment review may be required to determine if the equipment qualifies under Caltrans policy.