

# **PRECLEARANCE PROCESS FOR EMERGENCY RESPONSE AND RECOVERY CONVOYS**

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CN	Convoy Control Numbers
CMO	Convoy Movement Order
DMC	Defense Movement Coordinators
DOD	Department of Defense
DOT	Department of Transportation
DPS	Departments of Public Safety
EOC	Emergency Operations Center
ERWG	Emergency Route Working Group
FAST Act	Fixing America's Surface Transportation Act
FHWA	Federal Highway Administration
FMCSA	Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration
JECD	Joint Equipment Characteristic Database
MAP-21	Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century Act
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
NBI	National Bridge Inventory
OS/OW	Oversize/Overweight
PPP	Power Projection Platforms
SDDC	Surface Deployment and Distribution Command
SMCC	State Movement Coordination Center
STARC	State Area Command
TC-AIMS II	Transportation Coordinators' - Automated Information for Movements System II
TEA	Transportation Engineering Agency
TMC	Traffic Management Center
TRANSCOM	Transportation Command

## **CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION**

### **PURPOSE**

This report analyzes existing processes followed by the U.S. military to assess the feasibility of a preclearance process for emergency response and recovery vehicles. The report describes how military vehicles are precleared and infers how such a system could be applied to nonmilitary vehicles responding to an emergency.

The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) works closely with the Military Surface Deployment and Distribution Command (SDDC) Transportation Engineering Agency (TEA) to improve support of military mobilization and to provide States with adequate coordination procedures to support military deployments while managing civilian traffic during national security emergencies. The established procedures for the U.S. military and Federal, State, and local government agencies can inform potential preclearance processes for nonmilitary oversize and overweight (OS/OW) freight vehicles, including OS/OW utility vehicles, which might respond to local, statewide, and national emergencies.

### **PROGRAM BACKGROUND**

In December 2015, the U.S. Congress enacted the Fixing America's Surface Transportation (FAST) Act (Public Law 114-94). Section 5502 of the FAST Act requires the United States Department of Transportation (DOT) to create an Emergency Route Working Group (ERWG) to provide advice and recommendations to the Secretary of Transportation on best practices for expeditious State approval of special permits for vehicles involved in emergency response and recovery.

The ERWG was established on August 24, 2016. According to FAST Act section 5502(a)(2), ERWG members included representatives from State highway transportation departments or agencies; relevant modal agencies within DOT; emergency response or recovery experts; relevant safety groups; and entities affected by special permit restrictions during emergency response and recovery efforts. The ERWG charter provided that the ERWG would consist of no more than 25 members, eight of which were designated and appointed by the Administrator of the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) on behalf of the Secretary of Transportation. Other members were nominated through recommendations through the Federal Register and in coordination with relevant agencies.

As required in section 5502(c)(1) of the FAST Act, the ERWG provided the Secretary of Transportation advice and recommendations for implementing practices to expedite State approval of permits for vehicles involved in emergency response and recovery. In detail, the ERWG made seven recommendations that the Secretary of Transportation should:

1. Incentivize States to modernize their permitting systems to provide for auto-issue permitting so that permits are available 24/7.
2. Fund a study that examines a multi-State emergency route scenario for vehicles involved in emergency response and recovery.

3. Encourage the development of a preclearance process that pre-identifies a set of vehicles that are part of response and recovery.
4. Study the feasibility of setting up a nationwide alert system (like an America's Missing: Broadcast Emergency Response, or AMBER, Alert) to notify State and local authorities of emergency response convoy movements through their region.
5. Coordinate the development of an online resource with all relevant permitting and regulatory compliance information that can be accessed by those participating in emergency response and recovery operations (building on [transportation.gov/emergency](http://transportation.gov/emergency)).
6. Collaborate with external stakeholders to identify opportunities to reduce impediments to utility service-vehicle movements for emergency response and recovery efforts.
7. Inform Congress that expanding the coverage of the Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century Act (MAP-21), section 1511 provision to emergencies declared by a Governor of a State would positively impact emergency response and recovery efforts. Currently, MAP-21 Section 1511 extends the States' authority to issue Special Permits to vehicles with divisible loads that are delivering relief supplies only during a presidentially declared emergency or major disaster under the Stafford Act.

FHWA will work with States and the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA) on studying the feasibility of the recommendations in the final report. FHWA will also engage in external outreach to raise awareness of the ERWG report with the public, including targeting the same affected stakeholders represented on the ERWG and identified in the FAST Act.

FHWA is pursuing research and feasibility studies to enhance permit automation and emergency routing and to consider necessary standardization and communication in the following areas:

- A review of auto-issue permit systems in the United States.
- Additional fields for the National Bridge Inventory (NBI) to facilitate emergency route mapping.
- A preclearance processes that could pre-identify a set of vehicles for emergency response and recovery operations to expedite movement through weigh stations and inspections.
- A multi-State emergency route scenario study to estimate delays and their impacts on relief and recovery efforts.
- An emergency response and recovery vehicle nationwide alert system study to develop a concept of operations for a technology solution.
- An emergency response guidebook on Federal Regulations and requirements.
- A web map for emergency routing.

## **OVERVIEW**

The ERWG report included the recommendation that the Secretary should encourage the development of a preclearance process that pre-identifies a set of vehicles that are part of response and recovery activities. This process could allow for coordinated approval of a convoy of emergency response vehicles and provide the convoy of pre-identified vehicles with certain

privileges, including expedited inspection or passthrough permission at weigh stations. The ERWG report also included recommendations for States to designate emergency corridors that could accommodate certain widths and lengths of oversized vehicles (based on common dimensions of OS/OW vehicles used in emergency response) as well as corridors that size- and weight-conforming vehicles could use with standardized permits.

### **Military Convoy Deployment Processes**

There are three major phases of a typical military deployment, as outlined in the 2005 FHWA publication, *Coordinating Military Deployments on Roads and Highways a Guide for State and Local Agencies*,<sup>1</sup> which reflects current deployment procedures:

- **Convoy Communications Phase:** The first phase is a warning order, which is announced by the President and Secretary of Defense to alert the military to the possibility of military deployment.
- **Convoy Planning Phase:** The second phase is a notice to deploy, which specifies the types of units to be deployed, the destination of installation, and the time to be prepared to commence deployment.
- **Convey Movement Phase:** The third phase is convoy movements, or the actual travel of the military convoy.

This report addresses the components of these three phases that relate to the movement of OS/OW vehicles, which require special permission (i.e., permits) to travel on public roadways. These components could be applied to the movement of non-military OS/OW response and recovery vehicles.

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<sup>1</sup> FHWA. 2005. *Coordinating Military Deployments on Roads and Highways a Guide for State and Local Agencies*, Report No. FHWA-HOP-05-029. Washington, DC: FHWA. <https://ops.fhwa.dot.gov/publications/fhwahop05029>.



## CHAPTER 2. MILITARY CONVOY PROCEDURES

The expeditious movement of military equipment on the National Highway System (NHS) is central to the Department of Defense's (DOD's) enduring mission to provide military forces needed to deter war and to protect the security of the Nation.<sup>2</sup> These operations are executed through various modes of transportation, including shipment by rail, maritime, air, and onroad transportation. The military organizes equipment and personnel into convoys for travel on public roads and must communicate with States to protect public safety and minimize disruptions to civilian transportation while military convoys are in transit. Cooperation between the military and Federal, State, and local government agencies is essential for safe and successful military convoy deployments.

### CONVOY COMMUNICATIONS PHASE

Convoy vehicles with dimensions and weights that are within the legally allowed OS/OW thresholds do not need OS/OW permits to travel on public roadways and do not necessarily need permission from or coordination with States to travel on public roadways as part of a convoy. Because convoy movement can affect civilian travel, clear responsibilities within the military and Federal, State, and local government agencies provide channels of communication to share information, plan, and operate military convoy deployments.

#### State Defense Movement Coordinators

State Defense Movement Coordinators (DMCs) are appointed National Guard positions within the office of the State Area Command (STARC). DMCs are a vital link between the military and States because they are responsible for processing military vehicle convoys with the State. DMCs operate the State Movement Coordination Center (SMCC), which receives and approves convoy movements on public roadways and resolves any conflicts between different convoy requests. Once a convoy has been established, the DMC creates a route for the convoy, identifies OS/OW vehicles, and provides a Convoy Movement Order (CMO). DMCs communicate with each other when a CMO traverses multiple States. The DMC in the State (or installation) where the convoy was initially planned notifies the DMCs in all other States that the CMO travels through. The DMCs coordinate with their State permitting officer to obtain permits for OS/OW vehicles.

#### State Departments of Transportation

During convoy deployments, States are responsible for highway operations to meet military needs while serving the public through maintenance plans and policies that are informed by FHWA and SDDC TEA. States work with the military to help confirm that the desired routes are passable for the type and amount of equipment to be moved as part of the convoy. Individual States issue overweight/oversize permits to the military for vehicles using the public roadway

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<sup>2</sup> U.S. Department of Defense. 2018. *Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy of the United States of America: Sharpening the American Military's Competitive Edge*. Washington, DC: USDOD. <https://dod.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/2018-National-Defense-Strategy-Summary.pdf>

system, and a State permitting officer is designated to coordinate with the DMC to confirm that height and weight clearance information is accurate and current for the areas that a military vehicle plans to pass through (or might alternately pass through) as part of a contingency route. If new or revised permits must be issued for passage along a contingency route, the permitting officer (or designee) is available to re-assign and approve permits. Depending on the jurisdictional responsibilities for public roads, the military may also need to coordinate with cities or other local transportation agencies.

### **Traffic Management Centers**

The primary responsibility of Traffic Management Centers (TMCs) is to monitor traffic operations and freeway conditions. TMCs are typically aware of planned special events and receive early notification of unplanned special events, such as military convoys and their implications for travel conditions. After the DMC notifies a State about a military convoy, the State will typically notify the TMC. This process will vary depending on the TMC model (e.g., how centralized the TMC is). The goal is that, during convoy movement, the TMC is aware of the convoy's preferred route and which vehicles are part of the convoy. As TMC operators monitor traffic, they communicate with the DMC about traffic patterns and anticipated delays based on slowing traffic. Convoy movement typically does not change TMC operations, but TMC information is valuable to convoy leaders, and this information can help the DMC and other convoy planners to determine whether the route should be changed under certain traffic circumstances.

### **Emergency Operations Centers**

Emergency Operations Centers (EOCs) are physical or virtual locations that support emergency responses by convening decisionmakers and providing them with consistent and current information to support the development of a coordinated response. Federal, military, and civilian agencies all use EOCs to control aspects of emergencies and to communicate with each other. Plans and contacts for EOCs should be established and maintained routinely in order for the responsible parties to be prepared and capable of responding to an emergency. EOCs may be operated by the military, a State, a region, a county, or a local government. They may be operated jointly or separately, depending on the demands of the emergency, but they are all staffed to coordinate operations, intelligence (information collection), logistics (response), and administration.

### **Other Stakeholders**

A State's direct contact with the military is primarily through the DMC, but in special cases, the following four additional Department of Defense (DOD) offices may support Federal, State, and local agencies:

- The Directorate of Logistics coordinates military resources at the deploying military installation in preparation for convoy deployment and plans and establishes convoy support along the planned and contingent routes, such as rest areas, refueling, and lodging areas.
- The Provost Marshal coordinates local law enforcement (e.g. police departments and sheriffs' offices) when congestion or outside threats warrant their support.

- The Convoy Commander directs and leads the convoy during movement.
- Public Affairs manages media and information that is to be publicly available.

## **CONVOY PLANNING PHASE**

The United States military maintains an internal computer system, the Transportation Coordinators' – Automated Information for Movements System II (TC-AIMS II) to manage military convoy movements. DMCs use TC-AIMS II to receive and approve convoy movement requests, route convoys, and issue CMOs. CMOs are required by DMCs to include requests for special hauling permits for OS/OW vehicles included in the convoy. Vehicles that are OS/OW may significantly influence the convoy's route and impact on public roadways, including safety for civilian travelers along the public roadways. Identifying OS/OW vehicles and determining the convoy route is important for determining how the existing process operates and how it could be improved.

### **Identifying OS/OW Convoy Vehicles**

Length, width, and weight of the largest or heaviest vehicles in each convoy is used to determine the need for special routing instructions for convoy vehicles and to ensure that vertical and horizontal clearance of potential obstacles and roadway weight limitations on the planned route are met. TC-AIMS II includes a catalog of sizes and weights of military vehicles. The large inventory of vehicles in the Joint Equipment Characteristic Database (JECD) includes different variations of a single vehicle type (size and weight of an unarmed versus an armed vehicle of the same class/model). Some military bases have weigh-in-motion scales and scanners that can determine vehicle height and width, but this technology is limited in deployment and is not currently used for any preclearance process for OS/OW vehicles.

### **Determining Convoy Route**

TC-AIMS II contains a routing tool that automatically plans convoy movements. Once a convoy has been identified by the DMC for deployment, the DMC enters the convoy into TC-AIMS II. The TC-AIMS II can plan a route (and contingency routes) based on its catalog of the size and weights of the military vehicles in the convoy. If the convoy includes any OS/OW vehicles and traverses multiple States, the other DMCs in those States that the convey is passing through are notified automatically by the TC-AIMS II system so that those DMCs can obtain the appropriate permits for the convoy.

Power projection platforms (PPP) are key military installations with the ability to apply some or all elements of military force, either by deploying equipment or troops. Certain military bases are designated PPPs. Routes from these PPPs to seaports are considered especially vital to military readiness and response. The United States Transportation Command (USTRANSCOM), the functional combatant commander responsible for coordinating transportation for all modes, conducts PPP route studies with support from FHWA to analyze the routes of 18 military installations around the country from the military base to specific, designated seaports to load personnel and equipment onto ships.

These studies identify three tiers of vehicle types: (1) vehicles that meet OS/OW requirements and do not need additional permits to travel on the public roadway immediately; (2) vehicles that do not meet OS/OW requirements but are only slightly outside the requirements and could obtain a permit, although they would need to wait to travel on the public roadway pending permit approval; and (3) vehicles that do not meet OS/OW requirements and would not be eligible for a permit because they could not be transported on the public roadway without damaging infrastructure.

The goal of these studies is to identify vehicles in the second tier that would require OS/OW permits from States and coordinate with States to maintain an updated list of those vehicles. That list would support the development of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with States so that, under certain conditions and special events, those vehicles on the list would not need permits to use the roadway. Prior studies identified PPP routes but did not go through the process of negotiating with States about preclearance agreements for certain OS/OW vehicles.

### **Identifying Facilities Requiring Preclearance**

The State coordinates with the DMC and regional and district State offices to confirm that the needs of the convoy can be met by the public roadway system, especially for OS/OW vehicles. The DMCs work with the State permitting officer to identify whether a route is passable (regarding height and weight clearance requirements) and whether the planned or contingency routes would require OS/OW permits. It is the DMCs' responsibility to work with the State permitting officer to obtain these permits.

### **Convoy Planning Factors**

Some of the other factors that influence how the convoy will be planned, operated, and controlled by DMCs and DOD offices include:

- Possible routes—Primary and alternate routes for use by convoys based upon network capacity and restrictions applicable to bridges, tunnels, and highways for the types and volumes of vehicles.
- Route conditions—Updated information on work zones, incidents, abnormal delays, lane closures, and toll facilities.
- Traffic congestion—Identification of high-traffic congestion areas and their peak periods to allow effective scheduling to avoid congestion.
- Weather conditions—Identification of areas subject weather problems such as fog, high winds, flooding, heavy snow, and ice will impact convoy operations.
- Rest/refuel stop locations—Identification of rest/refuel stops that can accommodate convoys.
- Communications—Identification of protocols for communication among military commanders, convoy commanders, defense movement coordinators, law enforcement and other State officials.

For toll highway, bridges, and tunnels, DMCs coordinate with the toll authority, and a convoy representative is assigned to clear the convoy at toll facilities. When possible, toll tickets or electronic passes are obtained before the convoy departs from its point of origin. When this is not

feasible, the convoy representative arrives at the toll facility in advance to coordinate passage and arrange for the uninterrupted movement of the convoy through the toll facility. Certain toll authorities, especially at tunnels, may provide an escort through the toll facility.

## **CONVOY MOVEMENT PHASE**

By the time the convoy leaves the installation, the DMCs typically have obtained all OS/OW permits and attached them to the CMO. Only in cases of great urgency should convoy movements begin without prior written permits from the State and local authorities. Even in urgent cases, all requests should be confirmed in writing at a later time, typically within 30 days. Military convoy movement tries to minimize traffic disruption to the public, often by separating multiple convoy departures by 30 minutes or more and limiting the size of convoys to 20-30 vehicles when possible. Convoys deploying from the same installation might take different routes depending on vehicle sizes and weights and roadway restrictions. Once on public roadways, military convoys must follow the same traffic rules as the public.

### **Organizing Convoy Vehicles for Movement**

Vehicles in a convoy are organized into groups to manage command and control of the convoy, which may, in total, range from a 6-vehicle march unit to a 300-vehicle column. The organizational elements of a convoy are as follows:

- March unit, the smallest unit, which has a march unit commander that directly controls the subgroup, which can be as small as 3 vehicles but usually does not exceed 20 vehicles.
- Serial, the middle unit, is made up of march units and is directed by the serial commander. The elements of a serial move over one area at the same time.
- March column, the largest unit, encompassing all the serials, usually between two to five serials, and led by a commander.

Each element of the convoy has three parts: the head, the main body, and the trail. The head is the first vehicle of the column, serial, or march unit and carries the pacesetter, who keeps track of time and speed, and the officer who directs the convoy along the proper route. The main body refers to most vehicles in the convoy element that travel between the head and the tail. The tail is comprised of the last vehicles of the march column, serial, or march unit that are responsible for recovery, maintenance, and medical support.

### **Identifying Convoy Vehicles**

Convoys are identified by convoy control numbers (CCN), which are assigned where the convoy originates and identifies the convoy throughout its movement. The CCN is displayed on both sides of each vehicle in the convoy, as well as on the hood of the first and last vehicle of each march element. The digits of the CCN signify the location of origin, the date of travel, a sequence number, and digit designating the type of movement (e.g., OS/OW vehicles [S], explosives [E], hazardous cargo [H], or all other convoys [C]). The convoy is clearly marked with “Convoy Follows” and “Convoy Ahead” signs on the first and last vehicle of each convoy element, respectively.

Convoy formation is dependent on the route of travel, distance to be traveled, vehicle and equipment size and type, and travel conditions, including weather and time of day. Three basic types of formations are used to organize convoys in motion, including: close column, with vehicle intervals of 25-50 meters and speeds less than 25 mph; open column, with vehicle intervals of 100 meters or more and speeds greater than 25 mph; and infiltration, with no definition. Open column formations are preferred for convoy movement and are normally used on roads with good visibility and open travel. Infiltration formations are only used as a last resort in congested areas where other vehicles may travel close to and between vehicles of the convoy.

## **CHAPTER 3. RELEVANCE OF MILITARY PROCEDURES TO NON-MILITARY EMERGENCY RESPONSE VEHICLES**

Military convoys must be prepared for possible deployments with minimal advance notice. A number of the procedures used by military convoys can be applied to non-military emergency response and recovery vehicle movement. Understanding the responsibilities and communication channels for military convoy deployment provides a strong foundation for analyzing the feasibility of a preclearance process for non-military emergency response and recovery vehicles.

### **COORDINATED COMMUNICATION PROCESS**

Communication, coordination, and infrastructure requirements are challenges that FHWA, State Departments of Transportation (DOTs), and the relevant emergency responders should address when analyzing the feasibility of a preclearance process. The diffuse responsibilities and numerous, separate parties involved in non-military emergency response create additional challenges and barriers for a potential preclearance process. Military convoy deployment movement and the offices and personnel associated with them have established procedures and defined structures that support communication between the military and States. Any preclearance process for non-military emergency vehicle response should try to replicate the streamlined, coordinated communication process and clear responsibility of vehicle coordinators, vehicle operators, and State and local transportation agency officials.

### **EMERGENCY RESPONDER POINT OF CONTACT**

The United States military is a large, established, and well-organized entity that is represented with the State by the DMC. The various organizations that might respond to an emergency will probably not be organized as a single entity when approaching the State. Many different utility companies might be separately responding to an emergency, and other commercial freight vehicles that are aiding in that emergency response might be operating under different organizational structures, which could make it difficult for all operators to efficiently and clearly communicate with a State in advance. Identifying a representative that could coordinate emergency vehicle OS/OW permits with the State, similar to the DMC during military convoy movements, could support non-military emergency vehicles.

### **STATE POINT OF CONTACT**

Emergency response and recovery vehicles might not be able to plan their response to comply with State designated time frames for permit approval, even for States with automated OS/OW permitting processes. Identifying a representative at the State as a point of contact for OS/OW permits, similar to the designated State permitting officer that is available during military convoy movements, could support non-military emergency vehicles. This individual could be automatically notified when any OS/OW vehicle with a permit would be planning to travel through their State.

## **PRECLEARANCE REGISTRY OF STANDARD EMERGENCY RESPONSE AND RECOVERY VEHICLES**

Elements of military procedures that are applicable to civilian emergency convoys could be useful to States in streamlining their OS/OW permitting procedures and possibly developing preclearance processes. It could be possible to maintain a registry or catalog of OS/OW vehicles used during emergencies to support permitting procedures. Emergency response and recovery vehicle owners and operators could register for the preclearance process, with standard size and weight dimensions of the vehicle. Emergency response vehicles that are registered for preclearance could request an expedited emergency permit along pre-designated routes that meet specific vehicle envelope size. This registry could be supported by funds from a vehicle pre-registration fee. The FHWA could further investigate the feasibility of a national database of standard vehicle types for preclearance by States.



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