

Chapter 18

Highways—Enforcing Vehicle Weight and Dimension Requirements

1.0 MAIN POINTS

Restricting vehicle weight and dimensions is one way the Ministry of Highways promotes public safety on provincial highways and protects the condition quality of highways.

By December 2020, the Ministry of Highways further improved its processes to enforce vehicle weight and dimension requirements on provincial highways.

The Ministry followed its established policy requiring highway officers to report the completed results of vehicle weight and dimension joint-enforcement activities. The implementation of a new records management IT system enabled the Ministry to sufficiently analyze commercial vehicle inspections and portable weigh scale activities.

Management actively monitored the completion of enforcement activities against planned by review of weekly reports. Such comparisons assist the Ministry in determining whether the Ministry's weight and dimension enforcement activities are sufficient and appropriate.

In addition, the Ministry consistently documented its response to inquiries received through its inquiry line related to vehicle weights and dimensions. Consistently documenting responses to inquiries helps show it handles inquiries sufficiently and appropriately, and considers whether adjustments to its activities are warranted.

2.0 INTRODUCTION

2.1 Background

Under *The Highways and Transportation Act, 1997*, the Ministry of Highways is responsible for ensuring transport law is followed within Saskatchewan.¹ The Act gives the Ministry the authority to restrict the gross weight or dimension of vehicles travelling on provincial highways, or prohibit their operation.²

The Vehicle Weight and Dimension Regulations, 2010, issued under the Act, set the allowable weights and dimensions vehicles must follow when travelling on provincial highways. It bases allowable weights primarily on maximum gross vehicle weight.³

The Ministry varies the maximum allowable weights based on its classification of the provincial highway. Provincial highway classification reflects the type of the provincial highway (e.g., pavement, thin membrane) and degree of service it is designed to provide (e.g., primary, secondary).

¹ *The Highways and Transportation Act, 1997*, s. 3(2)(d).

² *The Highways and Transportation Act, 1997*, s. 35.1.

³ Gross vehicle weight means the combined weight of a vehicle and the load carried on that vehicle, or the combined weight of two or more vehicles coupled together and the combined weight of the loads carried.



The Ministry has made its Saskatchewan Highway Patrol branch (Highway Patrol) responsible for the enforcement of commercial vehicle weight and dimension regulations on provincial highways.⁴ The Highway Patrol has staff in about 34 full-time equivalent positions, including 26 officers and 8 head office staff. Enforcement officers are organized into two regions, each enforcing southern and northern Saskatchewan. Each region has a manager and a supervisor.

Effective enforcement of vehicle weight and dimension regulations reduces traffic safety risks and costly damage to the provincial highway system.

2.2 Focus of Follow-Up Audit

This chapter describes our second follow-up of management's actions on two outstanding recommendations. These recommendations are related to the Ministry of Highways' processes to enforce vehicle weight and dimension requirements on provincial highways. The first was one of five recommendations we made in our original 2017 audit, and the second was made in our 2019 follow-up audit.^{5,6}

To conduct this audit engagement, we followed the standards for assurance engagements published in the *CPA Canada Handbook—Assurance* (CSAE 3001). To evaluate the Ministry's progress toward meeting our recommendations, we used the relevant criteria from the original audit. The Ministry agreed with the criteria in the original audit.

In this follow-up audit, we interviewed Ministry staff responsible for enforcing weight and dimension requirements. We examined supporting documentation and reviewed how the Highway Patrol uses its new IT system called PRISM to track and monitor its enforcement activities. We tested samples of weekly reports summarizing enforcement activities and inquiry line records related to vehicle weight and dimensions.

3.0 STATUS OF RECOMMENDATIONS

This section sets out each recommendation including the date on which the Standing Committee on Public Accounts agreed to the recommendation, the status of the recommendation at December 31, 2020, and the Ministry of Highway's actions up to that date.

3.1 Reporting on Joint Enforcement Activities Followed

We recommended the Ministry of Highways follow its established policy requiring Highway Officers to report the results of completed vehicle weight and dimension joint-enforcement activities (2017 Report – Volume 1, p. 95, Recommendation 3; Public Accounts Committee agreement June 12, 2018)

Status—Implemented

⁴ *The Highways and Transportation Act, 1997*, s. 2(p), defines a provincial highway as a public highway or a proposed public highway that is the subject of a departmental plan or is prescribed as a provincial highway, and includes a weighing and inspection facility.

⁵ We reported the original audit work in *2017 Report – Volume 1*, Chapter 7, pp. 81–98.

auditor.sk.ca/pub/publications/public_reports/2017/Volume_1/07_Highways_Vehicle_Dimension.pdf.

⁶ In *2019 Report – Volume 1*, Chapter 28, pp. 285–292. auditor.sk.ca/pub/publications/public_reports/2019/Volume_1/28_Highways_and_Infrastructure_Enforcing_Vehicle_Weight_and_Dimension_Requirements.pdf.

The Highway Patrol appropriately entered results of vehicle weight and dimension enforcement activities, including joint-enforcement activities with other policing services, into its IT system. It monitored completed enforcement activities by weekly summarizing and comparing them to its expectations.

The Ministry of Highways uses its annual planning process to set and communicate its expectations about the nature and extent of enforcement activities related to vehicle weight and dimension. We found its *Plan for 2020–21* includes performance measures and targets related to its enforcement activities. It aims to complete 7,000 commercial vehicle inspections and 1,000 portable scale usages in 2020–21.⁷

In April 2019, the Highway Patrol implemented a new Records Management System called PRISM. PRISM can track enforcement activities completed, including joint enforcement activities.

The Ministry required officers to enter into PRISM key information about enforcement activities (e.g., radar in a certain location, blitzes, vehicle inspections, weighing a vehicle, etc.) they complete, and joint enforcement activities they undertake with other policing services (e.g., the RCMP).⁸ Supervisors review the officer's entries in PRISM (e.g., check officer entered sufficient documentation).

Each week, Highway Patrol management monitors completed enforcement activities by summarizing and comparing them to its expectations (i.e., performance targets).

For each of 30 joint enforcement records in PRISM that included considering vehicle weights and dimensions we tested, the record contained sufficient information on the enforcement activity completed (e.g., officers involved, date of activity, violations identified).

For each of the five weekly reports we tested, the Highway Patrol management appropriately prepared the report, and gave it to the Highway Patrol Deputy Chief. We found reports contained sufficient detail about enforcement activities completed, whether targets were achieved, and if not, why not. For example, one report we tested explained the weekly target was not achieved because of a snow storm reducing officers' ability to complete activities (e.g., weigh vehicles using portable weigh scale).

Compiling and analyzing completed enforcement activities provided management with insight on the sufficiency of the nature and extent of its weight and dimension enforcement activities.

3.2 Inquiries Logged with Consistent Documentation for Actions Taken

We recommended the Ministry of Highways consistently document its response to calls received through its inquiry line and actions taken to address each call. (2019 Report – Volume 1, p. 292, Recommendation 1; Public Accounts Committee agreement February 8, 2021)

Status—Implemented

⁷ pubsaskdev.blob.core.windows.net/pubsask-prod/116293/HighwaysandInfrastructurePlan2021.pdf (16 February 2021).

⁸ The Ministry participates in similar joint enforcement activities each year. From November 1, 2019 to December 31, 2020, none of them were specifically related to vehicle weight and dimensions, but vehicle weight and dimensions were assessed and enforced as necessary.



By December 2020, the Ministry of Highways consistently documented responses to calls about vehicle weight and dimension. It received these calls from the public through its inquiry line.

The Ministry maintains a log (spreadsheet) to record all inquiries received through its inquiry line—a public phone line staffed by the Ministry’s Transportation Policy and Programs branch. The log sufficiently documents the date of the call, caller details, and a description of the inquiry along with actions taken to address each call.

When possible, the inquiry line staff respond directly to inquiries and documents their response. If the response requires more information, the Transportation Policy and Programs branch forwards the inquiry to the appropriate division manager at the Ministry to address it. It may direct some calls about vehicle weight and dimension to the Highway Patrol.

Between November 1, 2019 and December 30, 2020, the Ministry received six inquiries related to vehicle weight and dimension. We found the Transportation Policy and Programs branch properly logged the inquiries and documented the responses.

The Transportation Policy and Programs branch forwarded one inquiry about a potentially overweight vehicle to the Highway Patrol. We found the Highway Patrol appropriately addressed and sufficiently documented its actions to respond to the inquiry. In this instance, the action the Highway Patrol took resulted in an enforcement file created in PRISM.

Consistent documentation and follow-up on responses enabled better monitoring of the work done by the Ministry to address inquiries from the public.

