

Local Permit Coordination Project

Stakeholder Briefing Webinar

presented to

**Minnesota Department of Transportation, and
County, Municipal, and Industry Stakeholders**



presented by

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What we are going to explain in the next 35-40 minutes

- ① Background
 - » What we were asked to study
 - » How we went about our analysis
- ② Ten common characteristics of MN local truck permitting
- ③ Information from benchmarking interviews with officials in other states
- ④ Six recommendations for how MN counties and municipalities can pilot innovation in local permitting
 - » At minimal cost
 - » As early as this summer

Background: Project scope

- ① Study the practicality of improving coordination in truck permitting across Minnesota
 - » Ease and efficiency for carriers to purchase permits
 - » Collaboration and coordination between agencies
 - MnDOT
 - Counties
 - Municipalities
 - » Consistency in process/workflow within business characteristics
 - » The role (if any) of new technologies

Background: Our approach

- ① Structured interviews with
 - » A broad set of representatives of local agencies, plus industry representatives and MnDOT staff
 - » Officials from statewide agencies elsewhere in the country, including perceived national leaders in local coordination as well as neighboring states
- ② Identify common trends and isolate key business requirements and thus issues and opportunities
- ③ Be technology-agnostic, focus on the most important collaboration processes, not technologies
- ④ Develop recommendations for improving operations

Background: Initial assumptions of what we expected to see

- ④ Wide variety of viewpoints about the difficulty of local permitting
- ④ Established positions amongst some stakeholders about 'the right way' to proceed
- ④ Variety of level of detail of available data
- ④ Inconsistent messages as carriers work their way across the state

Findings from Minnesota Stakeholder Interviews

Minnesota stakeholder interviews

- ④ Five days' worth of on-site interviews across Minnesota, both with individual stakeholders and in small groups
- ④ Structured interview guide distributed in advance to serve as a broad agenda (with wide meandering to topics of stakeholder interest)
- ④ Net result
 - » Officials from 25 county or municipal agencies
 - » Representatives from 6 motor carriers
 - » Mix of urban, suburban, and rural viewpoints
- ④ Strong albeit not unanimous consistency in message

Finding #1: Vast difference in size of problem between locals and MnDOT

- ① Common question asked: “What is a really busy day for you in terms of number of permits issued?”
- ① Most localities answered with a number in the 5-10 range
 - » One or two people approve permits (often one plus a backup)
 - » It takes up a fraction of their day
- ① MnDOT.... 200 permits is a slow day, 450 is typical in the summer
 - » Some counties do not get to 100 permit trips in a year
- ① **How do we keep the county/local official from being the bottleneck between the field conditions and the carrier demand?**

Finding #2: Most local permits are single-trip, but volume discounts/caps often apply

- ① Almost every agency interviewed had an “annual” multi-trip permit at a price equal to 5-10 single-trip permits, but
 - » In many cases the carrier still has to check with the agency on every move...
 - » So in essence, each trip is its own transaction today, even if it is the exact same trip and load as the week before
 - » Lower staffing levels mean that information about route issues are not proactively disseminated
 - » **Even with technology in some counties, the current county/local model is generally reactive, not proactive**

And agency road networks drive lack of automated pre-approval

- ④ When we dove deeper with stakeholders, we found that most agencies had three groups of roadways
 - » Roadways where any reasonably-sized vehicle could run if they were certain there was no construction, maintenance, or community activities going on that day
 - » Roadways where travel is ok much of the time, but there are more frequent issues, such as seasonal weather issues
 - » Roadways with problems where vehicles are really only allowed as a last resort, if at all
- ④ How do we develop a process to help carriers self-identify the least stressful routes to utilize? Today, it is generally just based on experience.

Finding #3: Spotty county/local enforcement yields an honor system for carriers

- Wide agreement that county and municipal law enforcement does not prioritize size and weight enforcement, except as an add-on to other traffic stops
- Understood that responsible carriers will try to get a permit, but business demands (e.g. “have to move now, or lose the business”) may sometimes cause a lack of compliance
 - » Sometimes a carrier starts buying county permits only when their trips start to require moving on MnDOT roads
- **A business process for local permitting should proactively help the responsible carriers to always be in compliance**

Finding #4: A substantial amount of local permit volume never uses MnDOT highways

- ④ This might have been the single finding which surprised us the most...
- ④ Of course, there are carriers just moving within one county, but those carriers don't really have a "coordination" issue!
- ④ But even for carriers moving across two or more counties, stakeholders in many parts of the state reported that anywhere from a third to a half of carriers actively avoided MnDOT roads (and buying a MnDOT permit)
- ④ An improved coordination process cannot easily assume MnDOT as the hub, since many carriers are not even using MnDOT roads

Finding #5: Select numbers of carriers or industries in most rural counties

- ① It was frequently reported that one or two industries were the key drivers of local permits in their county
 - » Manufacturers
 - » Distributors
 - » Construction
 - » Key heavy-haul carriers (either statewide or national)
- ① In many of these situations, trips were relatively standardized already, and often annual permits were in place

Finding #6: Timeliness within an honor system

- Common refrain was that carriers were being evaluated by their customers based on timeliness
- Regret expressed privately by several carriers that they could not always be in compliance due to turnaround times for review
- The reactive nature of today's typical county/local permitting negatively affects timeliness... need to evolve to a proactive model

Finding #7: Overweight permit issuance is inconsistent across agencies

- ① We heard more than once that...
 - » “We don’t issue permits for overweight vehicles, just overdimensional”
 - » “We never issue permits for anything other than 10-ton limits”
- ① Meanwhile, we know anecdotally from MnDOT that carriers are ending state permits with higher weights within counties...
 - » Is this a compliance issue? A misunderstanding?
 - » Is this happening with local carriers, or out of state carriers?
- ① **Counties and MnDOT need to quantify this problem more than we had resources to do within this project**

Finding #8: Local Agency Data is Inconsistent

- ① This is not a surprise, because in many state agencies around the country, basic coordination between permitting, traffic operations, emergency response, maintenance, and construction is lacking
- ② At a local level, the relative lack of staff makes it even harder to maintain structured data in a timely manner
- ③ Conversely, most local permit transactions do not need the same level of data detail as a statewide transaction
- ④ When we would explain a typical level of state data needs, several local agency officials said that was not realistic to expect from them

Finding #9: Permitting Technology is variable

- Some county/local agencies have technology for accepting permit applications and coordinating approvals
- Few if any agencies have technologies for real-time route management – construction, maintenance, weather, emergencies
- In many cases, fees are just sent in by the carrier after issuance
- Not everybody was thrilled with the technology that currently exists at the county/local market
 - » Typical complaint was that it was too cumbersome

Finding #10: Fees tend to be a secondary issue to most county/local agencies

- ◎ Only one county interviewed had an annual permit fee greater than \$500 or a trip permit fee greater than \$100
 - » In Illinois, by comparison, one municipality charges over \$300 for a one mile trip to connect between two state highways.
- ◎ In several cases, the annual permit was in place to reduce the burden on fee collection

Findings from Other States

Interviewing other states' permit officials

- ① What is going on elsewhere in the country?
 - » More and more talk about coordination
 - » Some states are including coordination approaches as they are overhauling their state network permit systems
- ① We conducted a mix of e-mail and telephone interviews with statewide permitting officials in ten states, a mix of
 - » States with recent innovations in local permit coordination
 - » States with general innovation/leadership in permit issues
 - » Additional neighboring states

Interviews with other states

General trends

- ③ States with older technology for statewide permitting are not pursuing any types of coordination with local agencies
- ③ Very little known coordination by groups of counties/locals without interfacing with the state (one ND example with mixed feedback from industry)
- ③ Differing approaches to review/approval workflows
- ③ Local agencies are generally responsible for data acquisition, quality, and upkeep for their road networks

Three notable examples

Iowa

- New system recently implemented
- Local agencies can “opt-in” to have their permits issued via the system
- Limitations on permit type, only valid at this point for overdimensional permits, not overweight permits

Illinois

- New system allows local agencies to add and manage their data within the IDOT system
- IDOT not issuing the local permits at this point, only noting need
- Chicagoland MPO starting a year-long project later this spring to look at coordination issues and strategies for the 284 municipalities and 7 counties in the region

Virginia

- Older statewide system – first concerted effort to coordinate with local agencies
- Currently approximately 75 agencies have their data in the system
- **Carriers must still contact the local agency prior to the move to ensure that there are no maintenance or construction issues**

Implications of other states' experiences

- ③ Opportunities to streamline local permitting will likely exist the next time MnDOT is able to overhaul its permit system
 - » Other opportunities exist then as well, such as better overall integration with traveler information systems
- ③ But there is still a steep labor cost to local agencies
 - » Defining and maintaining data at a greater level of specificity than today
 - » Responding to notifications about upcoming moves from carriers
- ③ Not a panacea, and since so many MN local carriers do not even buy MnDOT permits, a bit of a contradiction

Six Recommendations

What are the most important concepts to improve upon?

- ① Proactive notification of travel restrictions
 - » Switch the process from one where the local official is under time pressure to respond, to one where the local official enables carriers to make correct decisions with better information
- ② Agreement on data elements for both
 - » Carrier data entry (uniform permit application)
 - » Data used to review permit applications
- ③ Prioritization of potential route segments
 - » Not necessarily an “envelope route” network but understanding which segments are least likely to cause issues
 - » Focus on being proactive for carriers and improving compliance

Six Recommendations

- ① Establish two regional ‘testbed’ zones for innovation
- ① Pilot a proactive multi-jurisdictional travel restriction notification process
- ① Investigate issues around MnDOT-local trips and compliance
- ① Build proactive process around MnDOT construction and maintenance projects and necessary route adjustments
- ① Review consistency of permit travel restrictions
- ① Improve information dissemination to (and outreach with) industry

Regional testbeds – Where?

- We recommended setting up two testbeds for experimentation, from this set of four
 - » Northeast: Radiating from Duluth along I-35, US2, MN210, MN61, and US53
 - » Northwest: Between US71 and ND along I-94 and US10
 - » Southwest: Between US169 and SD along I-90 and US14
 - » Metro/Southeast: Roughly between Bloomington and Rochester, extending east to the Mississippi River
- Borders given are as examples, will depend on participating agencies
- We recommend 7-10 agencies per testbed

Regional testbeds – Why?

- ① The number of counties and major cities are too many to simultaneously participate in a pilot of a process
 - » Need to find situations with 7-10 agencies to get a reasonable critical mass to collaborate
 - » Allows participation of key regional carriers and shippers
- ① Best practice – USDOT for example focuses research on various topics to regional testbeds, including in Ann Arbor MI and outside of Knoxville TN
- ① Allows different groups to focus on different issues, or on different approaches to the same issue

Travel restrictions pilot

- Evolution of “the most challenging technical problem in permitting” over the years
 - » Late 1990s: Moving from fax machines and telephones to the Internet and carriers entering their own permit requests
 - » Late 2000s: Identifying reasonable base maps for automated route identification (turning movements, ramps, etc.)
 - » Late 2010s: Integrating information about other agency operations into permit review and issuance
 - Maintenance
 - Construction
 - Congestion
 - Emergencies
 - Special events

The challenge of proactive travel restrictions

- ① A pilot should look at three concepts
 - » What are the events which change the viability of routes?
 - » How do local officials involved with permitting find out about those events in a timely and consistent basis?
 - » How to disseminate that information to carriers to enable them to proactively reroute, especially on annual multi-trip permits?
- ② We recommend focusing on process and information first, then determine which technologies are really necessary

Summary

Technology is not the current opportunity

- ① The ongoing opportunity is developing a more proactive defining
 - » The building blocks which agencies and carriers care about
 - » The processes which connect those building blocks with each other
 - » The information and desired outcomes of each step
- ① When those items are defined, technology will help you implement something fantastic
 - » But until then, simpler technologies can generate strong benefits

Piloting processes can be very fast

- ③ We think that two or three meaningful pilots of process components can begin by Memorial Day
- ③ Three months of observations about pilots will be extremely beneficial about fleshing out the stakeholders' assumptions about what is critical
- ③ The testbed approach allows for multiple champions from within both local government and industry