

# Memorandum

**Date:** October 25, 2018

**To:** Mayor and City Council

**Subject:** Oversized Truck Traffic



Since the beginning of the year, the City has experienced a significant increase in large trucks carrying oversized loads, primarily through Downtown Elgin on Main Street or Loop 109. In even the best of situations, these trucks create a disruption of traffic; and in worse cases, have caused extensive damage to public facilities and private property.

In response to the current environment, the TxDOT (Texas Department of Transportation) - Bastrop Area Office has issued a temporary “no permits” restriction on Loop 109, which means for the time being, trucks will only be routed on Loop 109 if their origin or destination is on that road - and only with TxDOT approval.

## *Adverse Incidents*

As supported by the data provided herein, there has been a steady increase in oversized truck traffic through Elgin in recent years. Within the last two months alone, there have been (4) four significant incidents that generated Elgin Police Department (EPD) response due to oversized trucks pulling down power and/or cable lines (September 11, September 17, October 2 and October 20).

The most recent of these occurred last Saturday morning, when two large trucks with oversized loads were traveling a permitted route down Main Street/Loop 109. The first truck carried a load weighing 33,000 lbs.; the second, a load more than 70,000 lbs. (apparently transporting equipment destined for oil fields near Midland).

Both vehicles were northbound on Main Street, having travelled from Houston via Hwy71, ultimately entering Elgin on FM1704. The trucks were escorted by pilot vehicles with height indicators to show when limbs and/or wires are too low.

As the first truck passed Cleveland Street, it diverted to the wrong side of the road to avoid elevated wires across the road, but unfortunately snagged a different utility line. Then, according to the EPD Report:

“The truck pulled the wire causing five (5) utility poles to be snapped at their bases or broken into multiple pieces. The pieces of poles broken at their mid-point became projectiles as the pieces were catapulted across resident’s properties by the high-tension wires that anchored the poles to the ground. A 6’ piece of utility pole hit (a neighboring) house . . . causing significant damage to the structure’s roof, eaves, and siding. Numerous items of additional residents’ personal property were damaged: fences, trees, garbage carts, lawn ornaments, etc.

In addition, a transformer attached to one of the downed utility poles cracked open when it hit the pavement and spilled its contents across Main Street and into an adjacent parking area. Although the first EPD officer on scene was exposed to the contents, they were later determined to be hazardous, but non-toxic. An Oncor HazMat team ultimately cleaned up the spill; including the excavation of contaminated soil in the parking lot.

Safety issues aside, this incident also resulted in a significant adverse impact on both area residents and businesses, as all were without power or cable services for essentially the entire day. Oncor re-established service to their customers by 6:00PM; Spectrum re-established their services at 8:00PM. Main Street was reopened at 9:00PM when all crews were off the roadway.

### ***General Information***

As background for further review of this situation, the following information was developed through research and discussion with various TxDOT representatives:

- The US290 bridge in Elgin (the bridge over the railroad tracks and Central Avenue, located near HEB and the 11<sup>th</sup> street intersection) does **not** have a load limit, per se.  
*This is an important clarification in that city staff had been told previously and was under the understanding that there was indeed a load limit on the bridge, which necessitated the re-routing of trucks with oversized loads through downtown.*
- The only load limit is that which applies to all traffic traveling US290 and all state highways – **80,000 lbs.** – which means there is a de facto load limit on the bridge, but only in the sense that if a load exceeds 80,000 lbs., it is not allowed to be on the either the highway or bridge.
- Even with this limit, however, a vehicle can still exceed 80,000 lbs., if it obtains the appropriate oversized load permit.
- The Texas Department of Motor Vehicles – Motor Carrier Division (TxDMV) – not TxDOT - issues permits for the purpose of routing trucks with oversize/overweight loads.
- The TxDMV issues approximately 800,000 oversize/overweight load permits statewide per year; and they issued 108,000 more such permits in 2018 than in 2017.
- From 2015 to 2017, the average number of such permits issued to travel over US290 on FM1704 was 148 per year:
  - 2015 – **179**
  - 2016 – **30**
  - 2017 – **133**
  - 2018 – **253** ( *90% increase over last year*)
- There is no limit on on the number of such permits issued in any one year or month.
- Oversize/overweight load permits are issued with the general expectation that overhead lines are maintained at required clearance. However, where there are locations when clearance is known to be low and, when TxDMV has been properly notified, height restrictions are implemented to prevent routing under those lines.
- Even with a properly issued permit, however, the truck/truck driver still assumes primary responsibility for traveling the route without causing damage. Every permit issued by TxDMV includes the following statement: *“It is the responsibility of the permittee to clear any overhead obstructions or utility lines. In addition, all utility companies or other entities must be contacted in advance, as required by the utility or entity, to assist in clearing the obstruction.”*

### **Truck Route**

While the City has taken action to address similar problems with truck traffic in the recent past (most notably on Fisher Street), continuing to consider streets or neighborhoods one at a time based on incidents or complaints from residents is not an effective long-term approach. A more comprehensive method, and the best opportunity for a permanent solution to this problem, is through the formal establishment of a **Truck Route**.

Under current TxDOT guidelines, the City has the ability “to restrict truck traffic on a state highway through the establishment of a Truck Route as described in the *TxDOT Signs Guidelines and Application Manual*”. Through the passage of appropriate legislation, the City “may reroute trucks from a certain highway route within their corporate limits to an alternate highway route within their city limits”.

It would be the City’s responsibility to develop a compliant Truck Route plan, assembling all the necessary data and analysis. Various items must be considered and evaluated through this process, including assessment of the structural adequacy of any roads and bridges within the truck route plan.

Initially, the City would prepare a preliminary Truck Route plan for TxDOT’s review. TxDOT will then coordinate with their Traffic Operations Division (TRF) on the proposed truck route; and after it is approved by TRF, the City Council would then adopt an Ordinance formally designating said Truck Route. The City would be responsible for purchasing and installing all necessary signage designating the route.

As stated in the *TxDOT Signs Guidelines and Application Manual*, the basic guidelines for establishing a truck route are:

- *Weight and size carrying capability of the alternate route should be reasonably comparable*
- *The (new) route should not be unreasonably longer than the original route*
- *The route should not be confusing to follow & should be selected so as not to jeopardize public safety*
- *All truck routes should be on the state highway system*

If the objective is to simply require trucks with oversized loads to stay on US290, establishing a Truck Route would appear to be the easiest and most effective option – particularly in light of the fact that such an alternate route would clearly comply with TxDOT’s guidelines as stated above.

Please let me know if you have any questions or a request for additional information in this regard.



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City Manager

cc: Patrick South, Chief of Police  
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