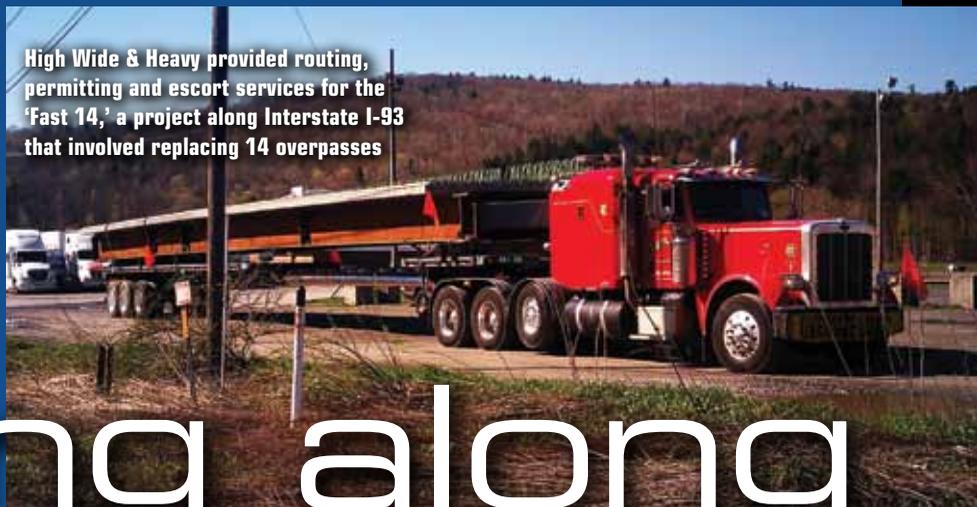


Success in the permitting and pilot car sector is all about information, relationships and know-how.

D. Ann Shiffler reports

Rolling along

High Wide & Heavy provided routing, permitting and escort services for the 'Fast 14,' a project along Interstate I-93 that involved replacing 14 overpasses



When John Incontrera of High Wide & Heavy Oversize Escorts thinks about the challenges of running a permitting and pilot car business over the past year, he thinks back to the Fast 14.

The Fast 14 was a project along Interstate I-93 that involved replacing 14 overpasses from South New Jersey to Medford, MA, about 500 miles from the first to the last overpass. High Wide & Heavy provided routing, permitting and escorts services for hauling pre-cast sections of the road base.

"We coordinated between three states, municipalities and at least a dozen escorts a day," he says. "There were 350 loads in 12 weeks."

The job would start with the demolition of the overpass at the beginning of the weekend and having it replaced and ready for traffic by the following Monday morning, Incontrera explains.

Like clockwork

"The challenge was to complete the job and do all our regular business as well," he says. "We did it all on time with no complications, no delays, no tickets and no problems."

He admits the project was "a good chunk of business." The client was JPC Logistics, one of his company's long-time customers. The largest loads measured 110-feet long and 10.5 feet wide and weighed 125,000 to 160,000 pounds.

The greatest thing about the job was the cooperation of all the entities involved, Incontrera says. "The Massachusetts State Police who escorted us across the turnpike were always on time and a pleasure to deal with," he says.

Incontrera and his wife Kim Incontrera are partners with Paul Pantina in the business. He says the key to success in this business is coordination and keeping up

with the different municipalities, states and their permitting requirements.

"What we do is pretty much different than what everyone else does," he says. "We provide everything, not just permits. We don't farm out our routing. We are one-stop shopping. But because of this, it's imperative we stay on top of the regulations. We are always updating our updates. We have to make sure our escorts are compliant and that our routing is 100 percent. Nothing can be off the cuff."

The good news is states have streamlined the permitting process. "There isn't an easier state to work with and there isn't a hard one," he says. "It's about the knowledge you and the carrier have. It's about the load and how it's processed."

While states have invested in automating the permitting process, many small cities and counties still have not. "Some of the small counties and cities, you still have to go pick up the permits," he says.

In terms of cargo trends, Incontrera says his company has moved a lot of structural steel and precast concrete road sections.

"There's a lot of infrastructure work going on in Northeast," he says. "We don't see as many toys as in the past, such as boats or mobile homes."

Like many in his profession, Incontrera is on the certification bandwagon. "I am in favor of a pilot car certification program because it keeps the business on a level playing field," he says. "There are some bandits and outsiders who will work for almost nothing because they give nothing.

Mary and Jim Simpson are president and CEO, respectively, of Permit America. The company recently developed an internal program that allows customers to store all truck, trailer and common load information, much like a fleet management tool

I'd like to see more enforcement of standards and certification."

During the economic downturn, a problem for permitting and escort services companies was when heavy haul contractors began using their own employees to do this work, in an effort to save money. "We see a little bit of that and I don't agree it saves them any money," he says. "There are pitfalls to that mentality."

As the economy has improved, this practice has dwindled as companies realize the benefits of working with a company that specializes in this type of work and understands best practices.

Continuous change

Scott Boehm of West Chester Permit says the biggest challenge his company has faces is keeping customers educated about changing and varying rules and regulations. He says states have improved their ability to turnaround permits.

"Naturally in the states that an individual is familiar with the rules, regulations and ordering process are going to be the easiest, and the states that they are not as familiar with will be more difficult," he says. "Northeastern states tend to have more roadways and lower legal heights, so there are more bridges to be considered with each movement. Combine this with the





High Wide & Heavy's team includes John Incontrera, Valerie Incontrera, Kim Incontrera and Paul Pantina

proximity of states to one another makes the Northeastern states more difficult."

However, he says most states have an efficient, effective permit process. "Due to the time-sensitive nature of the transportation industry, there is always room for improvement," he says. "Most states do a decent job at continuously evolving and improving their permit process."

For West Chester Permit, the most prevalent cargo has been construction equipment. "Windmill components and oilfield rigs have had their spurts, but construction equipment remained steady into the abnormally mild winter," says Boehm.

To stay competitive in the challenging economy, Boehm says his company seeks out ways to maximize efficiency and by

focusing on relationships with customers, with governing agencies and with employees.

Tedious tasks

"The biggest challenge for Permit America is simply keeping up with the construction restrictions that change on a daily basis," says Sean Rodgers, director of business development for Permit America. "We currently monitor all the construction changes daily throughout the U.S. for our customers, which is a tedious and never-ending job. We then take that information and compile it into a reference guide of detours that our consultants utilize to prevent state rejections, thus reducing turnaround time."

Rodgers says his company has stayed busy with machinery, farm equipment,

military vehicles and manufacturing plants. Permit America has been fortunate to be able to grow during the down economy.

"We attribute this growth to our strong focus in providing an industry leading level of customer service," he says. "Our staff has nearly doubled from last year alone, and the financial growth has allowed the company to invest back into advanced technology."

Permit America has created a new internal program for customers. "Features include the customer's ability to store all truck, trailer and common load information, thus acting as a fleet management tool," Rodgers says. "This allows our customers to quickly select a combination of units instead of transcribing or verbally relaying the information on every order. Also, the program displays the status of the ordered permit, which is sure to be a customer favorite. Once permits have been obtained, all documents are then stored and made available for our customers to download or print straight from their computers." ■

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