



Florida Department of TRANSPORTATION

Office of Inspector General
Robert E. Clift, Inspector General

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Robert E. Clift".

Advisory Report No. 14P-1005
Overweight and Over-Dimensional Vehicle Permit Program

June 5, 2015

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Office of Inspector General (OIG) conducted a review of the automated permit application system (PAS). The purpose of this engagement was to evaluate the effectiveness of the automated PAS for issuing overweight and over-dimensional vehicle permits.

In an effort to determine the effectiveness of the automated PAS, we reviewed the information technology (IT) security of the system. We determined there was **one finding** regarding the IT security controls. The existing IT security controls are appropriate but insufficient; Department of Transportation's (department) employees and consultants (internal users) are not using the Automated Access Request Form (AARF) System to request access to the automated PAS. Internal users request access by contacting the Office of Maintenance. Section 2.2.6 of the Office of Information Systems' (OIS) *Information Technology Resource User's Manual (ITR Manual)* requires access requests for all enterprise applications be submitted through AARF.

We **recommend** the Director of the Office of Maintenance work with the Business Systems Support Office (BSSO) Manager to use the AARF System to grant internal users access to the automated PAS.

We determined all functions of the automated PAS are operational; however, there are opportunities to improve two of the functions that are not fully effective or user friendly. The following functions need improvement:

1. Route analysis provides the user with the most direct route even though the vehicle size may exceed the area dimensions on the route. PAS will indicate the route will not work and the user must manually place waypoints on the map to create a successful route;¹ and
2. The United States Postal Service (USPS) Verification function verifies the address using only the zip code, if the zip code was associated with a government organization. The function did not check the physical address to ensure it was correct. The function also automatically corrects and verifies the zip code and state for an address without notifying the user of the change.

¹ Waypoints are points placed on the map to identify a specific route requested by the user.

The Director of the Office of Maintenance should continue to work toward improving these functions of the automated PAS.

An additional opportunity for improvement exists regarding customer service. We were unable to determine if the department appropriately addressed complaints concerning the automated PAS because Brandt Information Services, Inc. (Brandt) does not track incoming technical support phone calls to the Permit Office. Brandt is only required to log all return phone calls made to customers. Since Brandt does not log incoming calls, the Office of Maintenance cannot perform data analysis and identify trends such as the most frequently asked questions (FAQ) or common technical issues.

The Director of the Office of Maintenance should consider performing a cost-benefit analysis to determine the feasibility of capturing incoming call data to ensure the department addresses the customers' concerns. A history of logged calls could provide improved call analysis reports and the creation of an FAQ webpage to assist customers in the application process.

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BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION

The Overweight and Over-Dimensional Vehicle Permit Program (Program), managed by the Permit Office within the Office of Maintenance, provides required permits for vehicles that exceed the weight and size maximums specified in Sections 316.515 and 316.535, Florida Statutes (F.S.).²

In 2011, the Office of Maintenance initiated efforts to enhance the manual functions of the Permit Application System by automating over 80 percent of the permit process, minimizing data entry by the Permit Office. The automated PAS is a web-based system that allows users to submit applications for overweight and over-dimensional vehicle permits and pay for the permits using the internet. The automated PAS allows users to self-issue most trip permits,³ while blanket permits are mailed.⁴ New features in the automated PAS include the creation of an account profile to store user data, automated permit delivery, vehicle analysis, route analysis, and payment processing.

The department released the new system internally in August 2013 and externally in December 2013. Since August 2013, the new system has issued over 80,000 permits and has over 5,000 internet subscriber account (ISA) users.⁵ Since the release of the automated PAS, the Office of Maintenance received high praises from customer organizations for their continued efforts to improve the permitting process for the trucking industry.

The department has a five-year contract with Brandt to administer the Program and operate the Permit Office until December 31, 2018. Based on the terms of the contract, the department pays Brandt \$1.2 million per year to administer the Program until the automated PAS is fully automated.⁶ Once the system is fully automated, the cost of the contract will decrease to \$988,293 per year.

² The Program is regulated by Section 316.550, F.S., and Rule 14-26, Florida Administrative Code (F.A.C.).

³ Trip permits allow for a single trip within seven days from the point of origin to the destination.

⁴ Blanket permits or annual permits allow for multiple trips during a 12-month period.

⁵ Internet subscriber account (ISA) is an account created by users through the web-based PAS. The typical user is a non-department employee.

⁶ Fully automated is defined as PAS auto-issuing 90 percent of the overweight and over-dimensional vehicle permits.

RESULTS OF REVIEW

Based on the review, we determined there was one finding regarding IT security controls for PAS and three opportunities for improvement concerning functionality and customer service.

Finding 1 – PAS Access Requests

We determined the Office of Maintenance does not use the AARF System to grant internal users access to the automated PAS. The existing IT security controls are appropriate but insufficient.

Section 2.2.6 of OIS's *ITR Manual* states, "all enterprise applications that require authentication shall be requested via the AARF System." The Office of Maintenance indicated they receive access requests for the automated PAS by telephone or email. The Office of Maintenance relies on District personnel to notify them when employees terminate employment or transfer to another functional area.

We **recommend** the Director of the Office of Maintenance work with the BSSO Manager to use the AARF System to grant internal users access to the automated PAS.

Opportunities for Improvement

Features and Functions

All functions of the automated PAS are operational; however, two functions are not fully effective or user friendly and need improvement:

1. The Functional Specifications indicate the route analysis function uses the graphical information system (GIS) to analyze the appropriate route based on the vehicle configurations entered by the user. During testing, the system provided the most direct route even though the vehicle size exceeded the area dimensions on the route and then indicated the route provided would not work. In order for the user to obtain a successful route, the user must manually place waypoints on the map. The Office of Maintenance has taken steps to improve the route analysis function since the release of the automated PAS.
2. The USPS Verification function verifies the mailing address entered in the application. This function verifies the address using only the zip code. If the zip code was associated with a government organization, the function did not check the physical address to ensure it was correct. This function also automatically corrects and verifies the zip code and state for an address without notifying the user of the change.

The Director of the Office of Maintenance should continue to work toward improving these functions of the automated PAS. The improvements could include, but not be limited to:

- configuring the route analysis function to provide the user with a viable route during the initial attempt; and
- providing the user with an alert message when the system automatically corrects an address.

Customer Inquiries

We were unable to determine if the department appropriately addressed complaints concerning the automated PAS because the department does not have a methodology to capture incoming call data. The Office of Maintenance outsources the handling of customer inquiries to Brandt, including complaints about the automated PAS. The contract does not require Brandt to track incoming phone calls, but does require them to maintain a customer service log for return calls made to a customer. For the four-month period, from February 14, 2014, to June 30, 2014, the Permit Office received an average of 4,669 monthly incoming phone calls. The nature of the calls varies from general permit questions to technical issues about the automated PAS. Because Brandt does not log incoming calls, the Office of Maintenance cannot perform data analysis and identify trends such as the FAQ or common technical issues.

The Director of the Office of Maintenance should consider performing a cost-benefit analysis to determine the feasibility of capturing incoming call data to ensure the department addresses customers' concerns. A history of logged calls could provide improved call analysis reports and the creation of an FAQ webpage to assist customers in the application process.

Other Items of Note

Permit Issue Times

We could not perform a valid comparison of the manual and automated processing times because the processes use different methods to track times and calculate referral applications.⁷ Prior to the automated PAS, the Office of Maintenance manually calculated the processing times by timeframe: e.g., less than three hours, between three and eight hours, less than three days. However, the automated PAS has the capability of calculating processing times in seconds, minutes, or hours. We created comparison times for the automated process to match the timeframes used during the manual process. When we compared the manual and automated methods, there was minimal change in the percentage of processed applications because of the differences in tracking.

⁷ Referral applications are non-routine applications that require referral to the department for further structural and/or route analysis by an engineer and/or override authority.

User Access and Accessibility of Information

The user access and accessibility of information is appropriate. The Security Plan identifies the automated PAS user roles, accessibility of information, annual certification of user access and permission level, and access request to the automated system. We tested a judgmental sample of 13 internal users' access using the Resource Access Control Facility (RACF) Identification (ID) and were able to verify the users were still employed by the department and in the same functional area.

APPENDIX A – Purpose, Scope, and Methodology

The **purpose** of this engagement was to evaluate the effectiveness of the automated PAS for issuing overweight and over-dimensional vehicle permits.

The **scope** of the advisory included data and documentation for 2013/2014 and 2014/2015 Fiscal Years.

The **methodology** included:

- reviewing applicable statutes, rules, and procedures;
- interviewing department and contract staff;
- reviewing the permit application data reports;
- reviewing the functions of the automated PAS; and
- identifying and evaluating IT security controls of the automated system.

APPENDIX B – Management Response

On May 22, 2015, Jeffrey Pouliotte, State Structures Maintenance Engineer, emailed the following response:

The Office of Maintenance has reviewed the subject report and offer the following written response in accordance with procedure 450-010-010-h:

Finding 1 – PAS Access Request – We concur with the finding and recommendation and we began utilizing the Automated Access Request Form (AARF) system for managing access to PAS on June 1, 2015.

Opportunities for Improvement

Features and Functions

1. We concur with the observation and recommendation and no action needs to be taken since this component was enhanced in 2014.
2. We concur with the observation and recommendation however; no action will be taken since PAS uses the United States Postal Service (USPS) web service to validate addresses and simply returns the information provided by USPS.

Customer Inquiries – We concur with the observation however, an alternative correction will be taken. The Office of Maintenance and the Permit Office will develop a Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) document and post it on the Permit Office webpage. We will also send out surveys to our customers to gain their perspective on the Permit Program, and take subsequent action as determined by the survey results. This effort commenced on June 1, 2015 and we will update and monitor as warranted by our customers' needs.

Other Items of Note

Permit Issue Times – We concur with the observation (there was no recommendation because this was only a notation) and no action needs to be taken. This particular portion of the permit program (referral applications) cannot be automated since these applications have vehicle weights which require engineering analysis for the bridges on route.

User Access and Accessibility of Information – We concur with the observation (there was no recommendation because this was only a notation) and no action needs to be taken.

The following are concerns raised by the Office of Maintenance which are not included in the attached report:

- PAS continues to be unstable with regard to outages (entire application or portions of the application) and permissions for external users.

**Office of Inspector General
Florida Department of Transportation**

DISTRIBUTION, PROJECT TEAM, AND STATEMENT OF ACCORDANCE

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Statement of Accordance

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to provide a safe transportation system that ensures the mobility of people and goods,
enhances economic prosperity, and preserves the quality of our environment and communities.*

*The mission of the Office of Inspector General is
to promote integrity, accountability, and process improvement in the Department of
Transportation by providing objective fact-based assessments to the DOT team.*

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