

‘Scotland's wind rollout slowed by police escort bottleneck’

Onshore wind projects are facing significant delays because of a constitutional quirk that means Scotland is the only part of the UK where abnormal loads need to be escorted by specialist road traffic police officers.

In England and Wales, the UK Government's National Highways agency performs the role.

For that to happen north of the border, there would need to be an amendment to the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984.

In practice, escorting these loads, including wind turbine blades, which can only travel at around three miles an hour and can take up to six hours to move on a single job, is treated as secondary, overtime work for Police Scotland.

It is usually carried out at weekends or in the evening when roads are quieter. It has also become commonplace for officers to work rest days to cover abnormal load escorts.

With escorts booked well in advance and liable to be cancelled at short notice if police need to respond to something more pressing, the delays are becoming a significant cost on projects that have often already taken years to get through planning.

Firms are increasingly being quoted six to eight month waiting times for escorts.

New analysis from BVG Associates, prepared for Scottish Renewables, shows that Scotland has historically been able to support around 2,700 abnormal load movements a year.

Under the industry's "medium growth" scenario for reaching 20GW of installed onshore wind capacity by 2030, the average annual requirement rises to 4,060 abnormal loads, with a peak of 7,323 in 2029, almost three times current capacity.

Under an accelerated scenario, the pace needed if the sector's own commitments on speeding up development are delivered, the peak rises further still, to almost 11,500 loads in 2029, more than four times what Police Scotland can currently support.

The Scottish Onshore Wind Sector Deal, signed by the Scottish Government and the sector in September 2023, explicitly recognised the problem.

It committed Police Scotland, Transport Scotland, the sector and the Government to "agree plans to ensure timely and properly-resourced processes for wind turbine component transportation" by the second quarter of 2024.

There are also fears over safety. An inspection of road policing by HM Inspectorate of Constabulary in Scotland, published in November 2024, found that "the demand from escorting abnormal loads is affecting the ability of Police Scotland to keep people safe on Scotland's roads".

The report said: "At a time when all Scottish policing resources have been significantly reduced, alongside an increase in deaths and serious injuries on Scotland's roads, continuing to dedicate highly-trained and equipped police officers to routinely support the private haulage industry is untenable."

The inspectorate also disclosed that a 2016 business case for an electronic system to manage abnormal load information more efficiently was never progressed, meaning the process remains, in HMICS's words, "both inefficient and administratively burdensome".

The UK Government's Onshore Wind Taskforce Strategy, published in July 2025, confirms that DESNZ, Police Scotland, the Scottish Government and Scottish Renewables are "working collaboratively to address the issue", with options including increasing police resources for escorting under consideration.

Police Scotland is said to favour a legislative fix, while Transport Scotland has raised concerns about how any accredited third-party scheme would work in practice and who would be responsible for maintaining safety standards.

The issue was raised at Holyrood this week when Green MSP Kristopher Leask asked ministers what progress had been made.

In a written answer, energy minister Stephen Gethins said the Scottish Government recognised "the continued pressures facing Police Scotland's ability to support abnormal load movement requirements for the energy industry" and said it "continues to meet regularly with Police Scotland and industry".

Mr Gethins confirmed that escorting abnormal loads "often requires traffic to be stopped and directed and in Scotland such action can only be undertaken by police officers", and that the legislation underpinning the requirement "is reserved to the UK Government".

"The Scottish Government is working closely with the UK Government to identify workable solutions," he said. "However, any legislative change in this area would require action by Westminster."

Colin Palmer, Director of Policy, Onshore & Offshore Delivery at Scottish Renewables, said: "The movement of large components as abnormal loads is essential for the construction of onshore wind projects that will help strengthen our energy security.

"Ensuring these movements are carried out safely is the sector's highest priority, and finding a sustainable, timely approach to managing abnormal load escorts will benefit both local communities and the efficient delivery of onshore wind projects.

"Responsibility for escorting these loads currently sits with Police Scotland, and we welcome the progress being made by the Scottish and UK governments, alongside Police Scotland, Transport Scotland and industry, to develop a long-term solution that eases existing constraints.

"To better support police resources, minimise disruption and avoid unnecessary project delays, we need to maintain the pace of progress so the necessary legislative and operational changes can be introduced as quickly as possible."

Superintendent Andy Barclay, Deputy Head of Road Policing said: "Police Scotland has responsibility for the safe escorting of abnormal loads. Officers undergo specialist training to deliver this work with these duties being carried out in addition to their core role.

"We constantly review our approach to providing escorts to be as efficient as possible with our available resources. This must be proportionate to our core policing duties and we continue to engage with a range of partner agencies in relation to these arrangements."

Transport Scotland told The Herald that officials would continue to work closely with Police Scotland, hauliers and the renewables industry to ensure the safe and timely movement of large objects, including wind turbine components.

When The Herald approached DESNZ they passed our request for a comment to the Department for Transport who said any decisions on escorting arrangements in Scotland were a matter for Police Scotland and the Scottish Government.