

§ 20-116. Size of vehicles and loads.

(a) The total outside width of any vehicle or the load thereon shall not exceed 102 inches, except as otherwise provided in this section. When hogsheads of tobacco are being transported, a tolerance of six inches is allowed. When sheet or bale tobacco is being transported the load must not exceed a width of 114 inches at the top of the load and the bottom of the load at the truck bed must not exceed the width of 102 inches inclusive of allowance for load shifting or settling. Vehicles (other than passenger buses) that do not exceed the overall width of 102 inches and otherwise provided in this section may be operated in accordance with G.S. 20-115.1(c), (f), and (g).

(b) No passenger-type vehicle or recreational vehicle shall be operated on any highway with any load carried thereon extending beyond the line of the fenders on the left side of such vehicle nor extending more than six inches beyond the line of the fenders on the right side thereof.

(c) No vehicle, unladen or with load, shall exceed a height of 14 feet. Provided, however, that neither the State of North Carolina nor any agency or subdivision thereof, nor any person, firm or corporation, shall be required to raise, alter, construct or reconstruct any underpass, wire, pole, trestle, or other structure to permit the passage of any vehicle having a height, unladen or with load, in excess of 12 feet, six inches. Provided further, that the operator or owner of any vehicle having an overall height, whether unladen or with load, in excess of 12 feet, six inches, shall be liable for damage to any structure caused by such vehicle having a height in excess of 12 feet, six inches.

(d) **Maximum Length.** – The following maximum lengths apply to vehicles. A truck-tractor and semitrailer shall be regarded as two vehicles for the purpose of determining lawful length and license taxes.

- (1) Except as otherwise provided in this subsection, a single vehicle having two or more axles shall not exceed 40 feet in length overall of dimensions inclusive of front and rear bumpers.
- (2) Trucks transporting unprocessed cotton from farm to gin, or unprocessed sage from farm to market shall not exceed 50 feet in length overall of dimensions inclusive of front and rear bumpers.
- (3) Recreational vehicles shall not exceed 45 feet in length overall, excluding bumpers and mirrors.
- (4) Vehicles owned or leased by State, local, or federal government, when used for official law enforcement or emergency management purposes, shall not exceed 45 feet in length overall, excluding bumpers and mirrors.

(e) **(Effective until July 1, 2025)** Except as provided by G.S. 20-115.1, no combination of vehicles coupled together shall consist of more than two units and no such combination of vehicles shall exceed a total length of 60 feet inclusive of front and rear bumpers, subject to the following exceptions: Motor vehicle combinations of one semitrailer of not more than 53 feet in length and a truck tractor (power unit) may exceed the 60-foot maximum length. Said maximum overall length limitation shall not apply to vehicles operated in the daytime when transporting poles, pipe, machinery or other objects of a structural nature which cannot readily be dismembered, nor to such vehicles transporting such objects operated at nighttime by a public utility when required for emergency repair of public service facilities or properties, provided the trailer length does not exceed 53 feet in length, but in respect to such night transportation every such vehicle and the load thereon shall be equipped with a sufficient number of clearance lamps on both sides and marker lamps upon the extreme ends of said projecting load to clearly mark the dimensions of such load: Provided that vehicles designed and used exclusively for the transportation of motor vehicles shall be permitted an overhang tolerance front or rear not to exceed five feet. Provided, that wreckers may tow a truck, combination tractor and trailer, trailer, or any other disabled vehicle or combination of vehicles to a place for repair, parking, or storage

within 50 miles of the point where the vehicle was disabled and may tow a truck, tractor, or other replacement vehicle to the site of the disabled vehicle. Provided further, that the said limitation that no combination of vehicles coupled together shall consist of more than two units shall not apply to trailers not exceeding three in number drawn by a motor vehicle used by municipalities for the removal of domestic and commercial refuse and street rubbish, but such combination of vehicles shall not exceed a total length of 50 feet inclusive of front and rear bumpers. Provided further, that the said limitation that no combination of vehicles coupled together shall consist of more than two units shall not apply to a combination of vehicles coupled together by a saddle mount device used to transport motor vehicles in a driveway service when no more than three saddle mounts are used and provided further, that equipment used in said combination is approved by the safety regulations of the Federal Highway Administration and the safety rules of the Department of Public Safety.

(e) **(Effective July 1, 2025)** Except as provided by G.S. 20-115.1, no combination of vehicles coupled together shall consist of more than two units and no such combination of vehicles shall exceed a total length of 60 feet inclusive of front and rear bumpers, subject to the following exceptions: Motor vehicle combinations of one semitrailer of not more than 53 feet in length and a truck tractor (power unit) may exceed the 60-foot maximum length. Said maximum overall length limitation shall not apply to vehicles operated in the daytime when transporting poles, pipe, machinery or other objects of a structural nature which cannot readily be dismembered, nor to such vehicles transporting such objects operated at nighttime by a public utility when required for emergency repair of public service facilities or properties, provided the trailer length does not exceed 53 feet in length, but in respect to such night transportation every such vehicle and the load thereon shall be equipped with a sufficient number of clearance lamps on both sides and marker lamps upon the extreme ends of said projecting load to clearly mark the dimensions of such load: Provided that vehicles designed and used exclusively for the transportation of motor vehicles shall be permitted an overhang tolerance front or rear not to exceed five feet. Provided, that wreckers may tow a truck, combination tractor and trailer, trailer, or any other disabled vehicle or combination of vehicles to a place for repair, parking, or storage within 50 miles of the point where the vehicle was disabled and may tow a truck, tractor, or other replacement vehicle to the site of the disabled vehicle. Provided further, that the said limitation that no combination of vehicles coupled together shall consist of more than two units shall not apply to trailers not exceeding three in number drawn by a motor vehicle used by municipalities for the removal of domestic and commercial refuse and street rubbish, but such combination of vehicles shall not exceed a total length of 50 feet inclusive of front and rear bumpers. Provided further, that the said limitation that no combination of vehicles coupled together shall consist of more than two units shall not apply to a combination of vehicles coupled together by a saddle mount device used to transport motor vehicles in a driveway service when no more than three saddle mounts are used and provided further, that equipment used in said combination is approved by the safety regulations of the Federal Highway Administration and the safety rules of the State Highway Patrol.

(f) The load upon any vehicle operated alone, or the load upon the front vehicle of a combination of vehicles, shall not extend more than three feet beyond the foremost part of the vehicle. Under this subsection "load" shall include the boom on a self-propelled vehicle.

A utility pole carried by a self-propelled pole carrier may extend beyond the front overhang limit set in this subsection if the pole cannot be dismembered, the pole is less than 80 feet in length and does not extend more than 10 feet beyond the front bumper of the vehicle, and either of the following circumstances apply:

- (1) It is daytime and the front of the extending load of poles is marked by a flag of the type required by G.S. 20-117 for certain rear overhangs.

- (2) It is nighttime, operation of the vehicle is required to make emergency repairs to utility service, and the front of the extending load of poles is marked by a light of the type required by G.S. 20-117 for certain rear overhangs.

As used in this subsection, a "self-propelled pole carrier" is a vehicle designed to carry a pole on the side of the vehicle at a height of at least five feet when measured from the bottom of the brace used to carry the pole. A self-propelled pole carrier may not tow another vehicle when carrying a pole that extends beyond the front overhang limit set in this subsection.

(g)(1) No vehicle shall be driven or moved on any highway unless the vehicle is constructed and loaded to prevent any of its load from falling, blowing, dropping, sifting, leaking, or otherwise escaping therefrom, and the vehicle shall not contain any holes, cracks, or openings through which any of its load may escape. However, sand may be dropped for the purpose of securing traction, or water or other substance may be sprinkled, dumped, or spread on a roadway in cleaning or maintaining the roadway. For purposes of this subsection, the terms "load" and "leaking" do not include water accumulated from precipitation.

- (2) A truck, trailer, or other vehicle licensed for more than 7,500 pounds gross vehicle weight that is loaded with rock, gravel, stone, or any other similar substance, other than sand, that could fall, blow, leak, sift, or drop shall not be driven or moved on any highway unless:
- a. The height of the load against all four walls does not extend above a horizontal line six inches below their tops when loaded at the loading point; and
 - b. The load is securely covered by tarpaulin or some other suitable covering to prevent any of its load from falling, dropping, sifting, leaking, blowing, or otherwise escaping therefrom.
- (3) A truck, trailer, or other vehicle licensed for 7,500 pounds or less gross vehicle weight and loaded with rock, gravel, stone, or any other similar substance that could fall, blow, leak, or sift, or licensed for any gross vehicle weight and loaded with sand, shall not be driven or moved on any highway unless:
- a. The height of the load against all four walls does not extend above a horizontal line six inches below the top when loaded at the loading point;
 - b. The load is securely covered by tarpaulin or some other suitable covering; or
 - c. The vehicle is constructed to prevent any of its load from falling, dropping, sifting, leaking, blowing, or otherwise escaping therefrom.
- (4) This section shall not be applicable to or in any manner restrict the transportation of seed cotton, poultry or livestock, or silage or other feed grain used in the feeding of poultry or livestock.

(h) Whenever there exist two highways of the State highway system of approximately the same distance between two or more points, the Department of Transportation may, when in the opinion of the Department of Transportation, based upon engineering and traffic investigation, safety will be promoted or the public interest will be served, designate one of the highways the "truck route" between those points, and to prohibit the use of the other highway by heavy trucks or other vehicles of a gross vehicle weight or axle load limit in excess of a designated maximum. In such instances the highways selected for heavy vehicle traffic shall be designated as "truck routes" by signs conspicuously posted, and the highways upon which heavy vehicle traffic is prohibited shall likewise be designated by signs conspicuously posted showing the maximum gross vehicle weight or axle load limits authorized for those highways. The operation of any vehicle whose gross vehicle weight or axle load exceeds the maximum limits shown on signs over the posted highway shall constitute a Class 2 misdemeanor: Provided, that nothing in this

subsection shall prohibit a truck or other motor vehicle whose gross vehicle weight or axle load exceeds that prescribed for those highways from using them when its destination is located solely upon that highway, road or street: Provided, further, that nothing in this subsection shall prohibit passenger vehicles or other light vehicles from using any highways designated for heavy truck traffic.

(i) Repealed by Session Laws 1973, c. 1330, s. 39.

(j) Nothing in this section shall be construed to prevent the operation of self-propelled grain combines or other self-propelled farm equipment with or without implements, not exceeding 25 feet in width on any highway, unless the operation violates a provision of this subsection. Farm equipment includes a vehicle that is designed exclusively to transport compressed seed cotton from a farm to a gin and has a self-loading bed. Combines or equipment which exceed 10 feet in width may be operated only if they meet all of the conditions listed in this subsection. A violation of one or more of these conditions does not constitute negligence per se.

- (1) The equipment may only be operated during daylight hours.
- (2) The equipment must display a red flag on front and rear ends or a flashing warning light. The flags or lights shall be attached to the equipment as to be visible from both directions at all times while being operated on the public highway for not less than 300 feet.
- (3) Equipment covered by this section, which by necessity must travel more than 10 miles or where by nature of the terrain or obstacles the flags or lights referred to in subdivision (2) of this subsection are not visible from both directions for 300 feet at any point along the proposed route, must be preceded at a distance of 300 feet and followed at a distance of 300 feet by a flagman in a vehicle having mounted thereon an appropriate warning light or flag. No flagman in a vehicle shall be required pursuant to this subdivision if the equipment is being moved under its own power or on a trailer from any field to another field, or from the normal place of storage of the vehicle to any field, for no more than ten miles and if visible from both directions for 300 feet at any point along the proposed route.
- (4) Every piece of equipment so operated shall operate to the right of the center line unless the combined width of the traveling lane and the accessible shoulder is less than the width of the equipment.
- (5) Repealed by Session Laws 2008-221, s. 6, effective September 1, 2008.
- (6) When the equipment is causing a delay in traffic, the operator of the equipment shall move the equipment off the paved portion of the highway at the nearest practical location until the vehicles following the equipment have passed.
- (7) The equipment shall be operated in the designed transport position that minimizes equipment width. No removal of equipment or appurtenances is required under this subdivision.
- (8) Equipment covered by this subsection shall not be operated on a highway or section of highway that is a fully controlled access highway or is a part of the National System of Interstate and Defense Highways without authorization from the North Carolina Department of Transportation. The Department shall develop an authorization process and approve routes under the following conditions:
 - a. Persons shall submit an application to the Department requesting authorization to operate equipment covered by this subsection on a particular route that is part of a highway or section of highway that is a

fully controlled access highway or is a part of the National System of Interstate and Defense Highways.

- b. The Department shall have a period of 30 days from receipt of a complete application to approve or reject the application. A complete application shall be deemed approved if the Department does not take action within 30 days of receipt by the Department; such a route may then be used by the original applicant.
- c. The Department shall approve an application upon a showing that the route is necessary to accomplish one or more of the following:
 - 1. Prevent farming operations from traveling more than five miles longer than the requested route during the normal course of business.
 - 2. Prevent excess traffic delays on local or secondary roads.
 - 3. Allow farm equipment access due to dimension restrictions on local or secondary roads.
- d. For applications that do not meet the requirements of sub-subdivision c. of this subdivision, the Department may also approve an application upon review of relevant safety factors.
- e. The Department may consult with the North Carolina State Highway Patrol, the North Carolina Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, or other parties concerning an application.
- f. Any approved route may be subject to any of the following additional conditions:
 - 1. A requirement that the subject equipment be followed by a flag vehicle with flashing lights that shall be operated at all times on the route so as to be visible from a distance of at least 300 feet.
 - 2. Restrictions on maximum and minimum speeds of the equipment.
 - 3. Restrictions on the maximum dimensions of the equipment.
 - 4. Restrictions on the time of day that the equipment may be operated on the approved route.
- g. The Department shall publish all approved routes, including any conditions on the routes' use, and shall notify appropriate State and local law enforcement officers of any approved route.
- h. Once approved for use and published by the Department, a route may be used by any person who adheres to the route, including any conditions on the route's use imposed by the Department.
- i. The Department may revise published routes as road conditions on the routes change.

(k) Nothing in this section shall be construed to prevent the operation of passenger buses having an overall width of 102 inches, exclusive of safety equipment, upon the highways of this State which are 20 feet or wider and that are designated as the State primary system, or as municipal streets, when, and not until, the federal law and regulations thereunder permit the operation of passenger buses having a width of 102 inches or wider on the National System of Interstate and Defense Highways.

(l) Nothing in this section shall be construed to prevent the operation of passenger buses that are owned and operated by units of local government, operated as a single vehicle and having an overall length of 45 feet or less or as an articulated vehicle and having an overall length of 65 feet or less, on public streets or highways. The Department of Transportation may prevent the

operation of buses that are authorized under this subsection if the operation of such buses on a street or highway presents a hazard to passengers of the buses or to the motoring public.

(m) Notwithstanding subsection (a) of this section, a boat or boat trailer with an outside width of less than 120 inches may be towed without a permit. The towing of a boat or boat trailer 102 inches to 114 inches in width may take place on any day of the week, including weekends and holidays, and may take place at night. The towing of a boat or boat trailer 114 inches to 120 inches in width may take place on any day of the week, including weekends and holidays from sun up to sun down. A boat or boat trailer in excess of 102 inches but less than 120 inches must be equipped with a minimum of two operable amber lamps on the widest point of the boat and the boat trailer such that the dimensions of the boat and the boat trailer are clearly marked and visible.

(n) Vehicle combinations used in connection with motorsports competition events that include a cab or other motorized vehicle unit with living quarters, and an attached enclosed specialty trailer, the combination of which does not exceed 90 feet in length, may be operated on the highways of this State, provided that such operation takes place for one or more of the following purposes:

- (1) Driving to or from a motorsports competition event.
- (2) For trips conducted for the purpose of purchasing fuel or conducting repairs or other maintenance on the competition vehicle.
- (3) For other activities related to motorsports purposes, including, but not limited to, performance testing of the competition vehicle.

The Department of Transportation may prohibit combinations authorized by this subsection from specific routes, pursuant to G.S. 20-115.1(b).

(o) Any vehicle carrying baled hay from place to place on the same farm, from one farm to another, from farm to market, or from market to farm that does not exceed 12 feet in width may be operated on the highways of this State. Vehicles carrying baled hay that exceed 10 feet in width may only be operated under the following conditions:

- (1) The vehicle may only be operated during daylight hours.
- (2) The vehicle shall display a red flag or a flashing warning light on both the rear and front ends. The flags or lights shall be attached to the equipment as to be visible from both directions at all times while being operated on the public highway for not less than 300 feet.

(p) Notwithstanding any provision of this section to the contrary, the following may operate on the highways of this State without an oversize permit for the purpose of Department snow removal and snow removal training operations:

- (1) Truck supporting snow plows with blades not exceeding 12 feet in width. A truck operated pursuant to this subdivision shall have adequate illumination when the plow is in the up and the down positions; visible signal lights; and a plow that is angled so that the minimum width is exposed to oncoming traffic during periods of travel between assignments.
- (2) Motor graders not exceeding 102 inches in width, measured from the outside edge of the tires. A motor grader operated pursuant to this subdivision shall have adequate illumination when the moldboard is in the up and down positions; visible signal lights; and a moldboard that is angled not to exceed 102 inches during periods of travel between assignments. (1937, c. 246; c. 407, s. 80; 1943, c. 213, s. 1; 1945, c. 242, s. 1; 1947, c. 844; 1951, c. 495, s. 1; c. 733; 1953, cc. 682, 1107; 1955, c. 296, s. 2; c. 729; 1957, c. 65, s. 11; cc. 493, 1183, 1190; 1959, c. 559; 1963, c. 356, s. 1; c. 610, ss. 1, 2; c. 702, s. 4; c. 1027, s. 1; 1965, c. 471; 1967, c. 24, s. 4; c. 710; 1969, cc. 128, 880; 1971, cc. 128, 680, 688, 1079; 1973, c. 507, s. 5; c. 546; c. 1330, s. 39; 1975, c. 148, ss. 1-5; c. 716, s. 5; 1977, c. 464, s. 34; 1979, cc. 21, 218; 1981, c. 169, s. 1; 1983,

c. 724, s. 2; 1985, c. 587; 1987, c. 272; 1989, c. 277, s. 1; c. 790, s. 2; 1991, c. 112, s. 1; c. 449, ss. 1, 2.1; 1993, c. 539, s. 355; 1994, Ex. Sess., c. 24, s. 14(c); 1995 (Reg. Sess., 1996), c. 573, s. 1; c. 756, s. 14; 1998-149, s. 7; 1999-438, s. 28; 2000-185, s. 2; 2001-341, ss. 3, 4; 2001-512, s. 2; 2002-72, s. 19(c); 2002-159, s. 31.5(b); 2002-190, s. 2; 2003-383, s. 8; 2005-248, s. 2; 2007-77, s. 1; 2007-194, ss. 2, 3; 2007-484, s. 5; 2007-499, s. 1; 2008-221, ss. 5, 6; 2008-229, s. 1; 2009-7, s. 1; 2009-127, s. 1; 2009-128, s. 1; 2011-145, s. 19.1(g); 2012-33, s. 1; 2012-78, s. 5; 2013-413, s. 59.2(f); 2014-115, s. 17; 2015-263, ss. 5, 6(a); 2015-264, s. 41; 2015-286, s. 1.8(a); 2021-185, s. 14; 2023-137, s. 52(a); 2024-57, s. 3E.2(i).)