**Abstract**

The Heavy Vehicle National Law (HVNL) prescribes standards that must be met by a heavy vehicle before it can be used on the road. The HVNL also makes it an offence to use on a road, or permit to be used, a heavy vehicle that is unsafe. Despite this, there have been a number of recent serious road crashes in which an unsafe or unroadworthy heavy vehicle was involved. This paper will describe the findings of work undertaken by the National Transport Commission (NTC) and the National Heavy Vehicle Regulator (NHVR) to identify potential improvements to the way in which heavy vehicle roadworthiness can be assured. These will include both regulatory and non-regulatory approaches, as well as measures that could improve the effectiveness of accreditation schemes designed to ensure good maintenance practices.

The challenges faced in obtaining relevant data to define the scope of the safety issues associated with Heavy Vehicles that have not been maintained in a safe condition, and to determine the effectiveness of proposed safety interventions will also be discussed.

**Introduction**

Recent data shows that a significant proportion of the fleet of heavy vehicles carry a defect — for example the majority of vehicle combinations (prime movers and any trailers) carry a defect (NTC, 2015) and, of these, 13 per cent carry a major defect. Across the whole heavy vehicle fleet, 0.5 to 10 per cent of inspected vehicles have a major defect, depending on vehicle type.

Unroadworthy heavy vehicles impose significant costs on Australian society. They compromise the safety of drivers and other road users and impede productivity.

In addition to the human suffering related to crashes involving heavy vehicles, the economic costs of heavy vehicle road crashes associated with vehicle defects and traffic congestion caused by breakdowns that are attributed to poor maintenance are significant.

The NTC, together with the NHVR, have been undertaking a program of work to identify ways by which the level of roadworthiness of the Australian heavy vehicle fleet can be improved, with consequent improvements to their safety and efficiency.

**Discussion**

Examination of the current situation identified several areas which needed to be addressed. In particular, roadworthiness procedures were not being consistently applied across Australia. Some operators were not meeting acceptable standards of roadworthiness. Fleet-related data collected by authorities on roadworthiness was variable and incompatible. Insufficient market incentives existed for heavy vehicle maintenance to be conducted to the standard required. The NHVAS maintenance module suffered from limitations in governance and process.
Measures to improve the situation can be classified into four key areas:

**National standardisation & consistency**

Better and nationally agreed criteria for the uniform application of roadworthiness standards and procedures and criteria for assessing heavy vehicle roadworthiness, classifying defects, conduct of standardised inspections and procedures and consistent, transparent compliance requirements.

**Improved compliance**

Providing the NHVR with better tools for proactive and cost-effective interventions has the potential to deliver effective and long-lasting action to raise levels of compliance.

**Inspection of vehicles**

Providing greater consistency in the approach to vehicle inspections, including the targeting of resources to areas of greatest risk has the potential to raise standards of roadworthiness across Australia.

**Strengthening the National Heavy Vehicle Accreditation Scheme (NHVAS)**

The introduction of new business rules relating to auditor qualifications and oversight arrangements by NHVR have been agreed and are now being implemented by the NHVR.

**Future actions**

Specific measures relating to these four areas will be considered by relevant Ministers in late 2015.

**References**