

ACRS Submission – Pressures on Heavy Vehicle Drivers and their Impact in NSW



To:

Portfolio Committee No. 6
Transport and the Arts
NSW Legislative Council
Portfoliopcommittee6@parliament.nsw.gov.au

For further information please contact:

Prof Ann Williamson: President, Australasian College of Road Safety
Dr Ingrid Johnston: Chief Executive Officer, Australasian College of Road Safety
Australasian College of Road Safety
PO Box 198 Mawson ACT 2607
e: ceo@acrs.org.au
p: (02) 6290 2509
w: www.acrs.org.au

18 September 2023

Introduction

The Australasian College of Road Safety (ACRS) is the region's peak membership association for road safety with a vision of eliminating death and serious injury on the road. Our members include experts from all areas of road safety including policy makers, health and transport professionals, academics, community organisations, researchers, federal, state and local government agencies, private companies and members of the public. The purpose of the College is to support our members in their efforts to eliminate serious road trauma through knowledge sharing, professional development, networking and advocacy. Our objectives include the promotion of road safety as a critical organisational objective within government, business and the community; the promotion and advocacy of policies and practices that support harm elimination; the improvement of relative safety outcomes for vulnerable demographic and user groups within the community; the promotion of post-crash policies and practices; and the promotion of a collegiate climate amongst all those with responsibilities for and working in road safety.

The College believes that we should prevent all fatal and serious injuries on our roads; the road traffic system must be made safe for all road users; system designers should aim to prevent human error and mitigate its consequences; life and health are not exchangeable for other benefits in society; and that all College policy positions must be evidence based.

In this submission, ACRS states that:

- Over height vehicle instances will not be address by concentration solely on the driver but require a systems approach,
- *Staysafe* should inquire into heavy vehicle routes to ensure they are safe and align with the Movement and Place Framework,
- Any new or improved major rest areas needs to offer more than heavy vehicle parking and toilet facilities,
- Average speed cameras need to enforce speed limits for all vehicles.

Systems Thinking

Nationally in the 12-months to the end of June 2023, 180 people died in crashes involving heavy trucks. This represents 15% of road deaths in Australia(1).

Regardless of fault, the greater mass of these vehicles contributes a considerable amount of kinetic energy to a crash, with the other vehicle or vulnerable road user in the collision enduring the worst of the impact.

National Road Safety Strategy 2021-30, Heavy Vehicle Fact Sheet(2)

Both the National Road Safety Strategy 2021-2030 and the NSW Road Safety Action Plan contain the target of reducing road deaths by 50% and serious injuries by 30% by 2030. The safe management of the road freight task is critical to achieving these targets.

A systems thinking approach for road safety is required if we are to realise our ultimate safety goals. This approach recognises that:

- The road traffic system is a complex interaction of many interrelated components, involving many participants in different situations;
- Many road user errors and crashes are created by the interactions between road system components;
- The design and operation of a safe road traffic system must respond to the capacities as well as the limitations and vulnerabilities of the human user;
- Understanding the causes of road traffic crashes and injuries requires understanding interactions within the broader road traffic system and other aspects of society.

Australasian College of Road Safety, A New Systems Thinking Approach to Road Safety, Page 1(3)

The Chain of Responsibility lists the involved parties in the supply chain who influence safety. In the case of over height vehicle incidents, trucks and drivers who come under notice have left a yard or other premises, or even a rest area at some point in their journey(4).

Over height vehicle instances will not be addressed by concentration solely on the driver. Different participants (organisations or individuals) in the road system have different levels of authority, responsibility and power to influence road safety. They should apply systems thinking in developing countermeasures which reflect their control and influence within the road traffic system.

Technology

The Australasian New Car Assessment Program (ANCAP) crash tests cars, conducts performance assessments on safety features and technologies, and publish a star rating to indicate relative safety performance(5). Over several decades, increasingly safer passenger vehicles have been brought to market in Australia. There is no ANCAP-equivalent for heavy vehicles.

A Transport for NSW publication, *Safety Features and Technologies for Heavy Vehicles 2020*, discusses a range of vehicle safety features that could prevent crashes and save lives if fitted to all heavy vehicles (Table 1 below)(6).

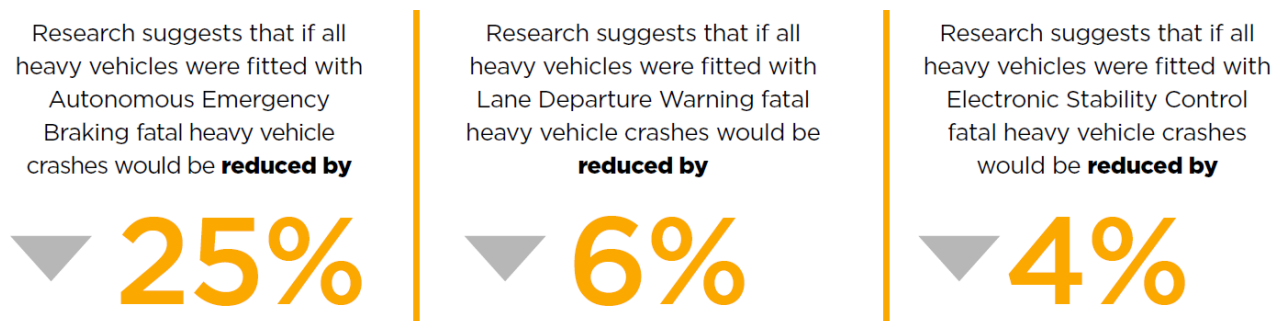


Table 1: How modern safety features could reduce heavy vehicle crashes (TfNSW)

Throughout Australia, fatalities in crashes involving heavy rigid trucks have increased by an average of 23.8% per year over the three years to June 2023 (1). This may suggest that these vehicles are lagging in their vehicle safety features, and the heavy vehicle industry as a whole cannot meet community expectations that it too acts to reduce road trauma.

Until now, there has not been a government requirement for such safety features to be included on heavy vehicles sold in Australia. Autonomous Emergency Braking (AEB) and Electronic Stability Control (ESC) must be fitted to all new models sold after 1 November 2023. However, existing models can continue to be sold in Australia without this potentially life-saving technology until 1 February 2025(7).

This Inquiry should leverage support from heavy vehicle operators and peak bodies and announce that preference will be given to manufacturers who can bring AEB and ESC trucks to market prior to the government-mandated deadlines.

The National Heavy Vehicle Regulator has approved a range of electronic work diaries to replace written logbooks. Systems which include route planning and as part of overall journey management should reduce the likelihood of heavy vehicle drivers straying from approved routes and alert drivers of potential hazards such as road tunnels and level crossings.

As developments occur, these systems could incorporate connected vehicle technology to warn of traffic incidents and offer alternative (approved) routes. A decision would then have to be made to mandate the use of electronic work diaries and journey management for all heavy vehicles and journeys.

Movement and Place

In our submission to the NSW Tolling Review, ACRS explains the concept of movement and place, where roads such as motorways and regional highways are designed for the movement of vehicles and goods, whereas city, suburban, and country town main streets, are places for people(8).

Recently a B-double driver was detected “off-route” after allegedly avoiding the main street of Boorowa.

The town’s main centre...being home to an IGA supermarket, chemist, coffee shop and various other businesses. With nose to kerb angle parking...decorative rose bushes running through the centre of the road and high pedestrian traffic, including people unloading trolleys behind their parked cars, (the driver) thought he was doing the right thing by avoiding it while travelling in his B-double. Interestingly though, this section of road is approved for B-double use.

Truck driver fined \$711 after trying to avoid busy town centre, Big Rigs Magazine Online Article(9)

The NSW Government has published comprehensive guidance regarding movement and place(10).

ACRS supports Local Government in aligning with the Movement and Place Framework. Safety improvements can best be delivered where collaboration across all levels of government and community/stakeholder engagement exists.

The Boorowa report suggests a disconnect between the application of the Movement and Place Framework and the determination of restricted access vehicle routes in NSW which could affect the heavy vehicle industry and community road safety.

The ACRS recommends, from this Inquiry, that Staysafe (the NSW Joint Parliamentary Committee on Road Safety) examines heavy vehicle routes to ensure they are safe and align with the Movement and Place Framework.

It is noted that the South Australian Transport Minister recently announced that the government will prohibit non-local heavy vehicles from using the Hahndorf's historic main street(11). Rutherglen in north-east Victoria has also experienced on-going traffic management issues regarding heavy vehicles through the town's main street, also the Murray Valley Highway(12).

Rest areas

As a well-rested driver is a safer driver, ACRS supports the provision of clean and safe rest areas for all truck drivers. Inappropriate rest areas give rise to illegal activity and present a danger to drivers(13) as well as cargo(14).

The formation of groups such as Women in Trucking Australia highlights the need for such rest areas to provide equitable treatment for all drivers(15).

The recent announcement of a Western Sydney truck rest area is welcome albeit many years away. Any new or improved rest areas needs to offer more than heavy vehicle parking and toilet facilities.

Heavy vehicle rest areas should offer a choice of healthy meals, exercise equipment, showers, laundry facilities, secure internet connection, electric heavy vehicle charging points/hydrogen filling stations and other facilities requested by drivers. A Western Sydney truck rest area is likely to be near an existing motorway which would enable CCTV monitoring from the nearest motorway control room.

Finally, as trucks using rest areas in and around the Sydney metropolitan area could be planning to use a road tunnel, the technology employed to detect over height trucks could be installed at the entrance to the new rest area as a proactive measure to address the over-height issue.

Use of point-to-point (average speed) cameras

Finally, first announced in 2009, heavy vehicle speeds are monitored by average speed cameras. Also referred to as point-to-point cameras, these systems measure the average speed of a vehicle between two points.

In the 25 regional locations where average speed cameras are currently operating, there has been a 44% reduction in deaths from crashes involving heavy vehicles(16).

Each year, speeding contributes to about 41% of road fatalities and 24% of serious injuries(17). Almost 135 lives are lost and 1141 people are seriously injured. As of 6 September 2023, just under 250 people have been killed in road crashes in NSW, an increase of 50 lives lost over the same period last year. The state has fallen behind its NSW Road Safety Plan 2026 targets.

By only enforcing heavy vehicle speeds, successive governments have created inequity and inefficiency in the system by ignoring the majority of highway traffic.

ACRS is therefore calling for average speed cameras to immediately enforce speed limits for all vehicles.

Further relevant information

Reference is drawn to the ACRS Submission regarding the Austroads National Heavy Vehicle Driver Competency Framework Consultation Regulatory Impact Statement, 28 October 2022. The document can be downloaded at: <https://acrs.org.au/wp-content/uploads/ACRS-submission-on-heavy-vehicle-driver-competency-RIS.pdf>.

Conclusion and recommendations

The ACRS appreciates the opportunity to make this submission and contribute to improving road safety. We are particularly keen to highlight that:

- Over height vehicle instances will not be address by concentration solely on the driver but require a systems approach,
- *Staysafe* should inquire into heavy vehicle routes to ensure they are safe align with the Movement and Place Framework,
- Any new or improved major rest areas needs to offer more than heavy vehicle parking and toilet facilities,
- Average speed cameras need to enforce speed limits for all vehicles.

Please do not hesitate to contact us should you need any further information.



Dr Prasannah Prabhakaran
NSW Chapter Chair
Australasian College of Road Safety



Dr Ingrid Johnston
Chief Executive Officer
Australasian College of Road Safety

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