

INQUIRY INTO HEAVY VEHICLE SAFETY

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30 March 2009

The Committee Manager
Staysafe Committee
Parliament House
Macquarie Street
SYDNEY NSW 2000

Dear Sir/Madam

Re: NSW Staysafe Committee - Inquiry into Heavy Vehicle Safety

NRMA Motoring & Services (NRMA) comprises more than 2 million Members in NSW and the ACT. For more than 85 years NRMA has represented the interests of motorists in relation to road funding, road safety and other relevant public policy issues.

Throughout the years, NRMA has advocated for safety improvements for road users focussing on the three key themes of safer vehicles, safer drivers and safer roads.

NRMA also works closely with a range of heavy vehicle industry bodies such as the Australian Trucking Association and NatRoads and NRMA Director Alan Evans is a member of the NSW Government's Road Freight Advisory Committee along with other prominent industry stakeholders.


NRMA also has a NRMA Mobile Members Centre (MMC). A partnership between NRMA, Volvo trucks and Subaru, the MMC is a 23 metre semi-trailer that travels throughout regional and rural NSW and the ACT with the aim of increasing community focus on road safety issues.

NRMA's submission addresses this Inquiry's Third Term of Reference:

c) The adequacy of the Government's provision of infrastructure to support the implementation of heavy vehicle driver fatigue management and safe driving plans.

Heavy vehicles are an essential part of our economy and contribute extensively to many NSW industries and communities. The Bureau of Infrastructure, Transport and Regional Economics (BITRE) has stated that the number of trucks on NSW roads will double by 2020¹. This means that NSW roads are increasingly faced with the challenge of providing adequate networks and linkages, facilities and space for heavy vehicles as well as increasing congestion and the impact on fatigue and safe driving practices.

NRMA has concerns that key data and infrastructure is not being provided to the community and specifically to heavy vehicle operators to enable them to adequately plan for trips and influence safe driving practices on NSW roads.



NRMA's submission is therefore focussed on three key issues. These are the lack of available crash data to enable stakeholders to make informed decisions, deficiencies with rest areas, and real time traffic information. These are discussed below.

a) Crash Data

Detailed crash statistics provide essential information to road agencies, road safety advocates such as the NRMA, and the community. They can be used to identify high risk crash areas and information on crash factors such as fatigue, time of day and weather conditions. This data is very important to all those working in the transport, logistics and road safety sectors and can help transport operators manage their vehicle and driver trips.

Currently, the Roads and Traffic Authority (RTA) provides only limited information on crashes and withholds more detailed information from external stakeholders. The data that is available is difficult to interpret and does not go into enough detail to be of significant valueⁱⁱ.

Victoria is a good example of best practice for data provision. Examples can be seen in VicRoadsⁱⁱⁱ and the Transport Accident Commission (TAC)^{iv}.

What is NRMA seeking?

NRMA would like the RTA to provide comparable data to that supplied by Victorian Government agencies. This would provide increased transparency for the general public and enable NRMA and others to conduct more focussed research, advocacy and education programs. NRMA would welcome improvements to current levels of data that the RTA provides to align with information from other jurisdictions.

b) Rest Areas

Rest areas are a critically important safety feature to ensure that facilities are available for road users to take a break, manage fatigue and comply with the new fatigue legislation^v. Fatigue has been linked to 21 percent of fatal heavy vehicle crashes^{vi}. Additionally, between 13 and 41 percent of all heavy vehicle crashes are influenced by fatigue^{vii}.

NRMA believes that there is a critical lack of rest areas along the majority of the state's highways and also in and around metropolitan areas.

Demand for rest areas on key freight routes in particular, is increasing as more facilities and locations are required to enable heavy vehicles operators to comply with new fatigue legislation. This potentially is placing motorists at risk because heavy vehicle operators are unable to find safe places to take breaks and 'Stop, Revive, Survive'.

In February 2006, the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) meeting directed that an audit into the provision of rest areas against National Transport Commission (NTC) National Guidelines^{viii} was to be completed by mid-2007 with the provision of rest areas to nationally agreed standards by the end of 2008.

Austrroads published the Audit^{ix} in March 2008. The audit assessed rest areas along what are predominantly National Land Transport Network freight routes. The rest areas were divided into the following categories:

- *Major rest area*: 15 + parking spaces, separated heavy/light vehicle parking, intended for long rest breaks – maximum spacing interval of 100km.
- *Minor rest area*: Up to 15 parking spaces (no minimum number), non-segregated heavy/light vehicle parking, intended for short rest breaks – maximum spacing interval of 50km.
- *Truck parking bay*: short, purpose-based stops, parking for at least 4 heavy vehicles. – maximum spacing interval of 30km

The report found that **none** of the audited routes met spacing recommendations with particular reference made to the lack of any major rest area on the Princes Highway between Sydney and the NSW/Victorian border.

This is concerning, not just for heavy vehicle drivers, but for all motorists and regional communities and visitors who rely on these roads. The Princes Highway, Mitchell Highway, Federal Highway, Sturt/Midwestern Highway and Hume Highway were all assessed in the audit as not meeting recommended design and layout features, including provision of suitable facilities.

NRMA also has concerns about other key roads such as the Pacific Highway, Newell Highway and New England Highways and also roads around metropolitan areas. NRMA believes a lack of adequate planning has resulted in there being no rest areas at all for trucks on any of the Sydney Orbital network roads. There are also inadequate facilities on the F3 and the last rest area available for truck operators heading north towards Sydney (which is also the first heading south) is at Pheasants Nest on the Hume Highway.

Recommendations from the Austrroads audit included each road authority clarifying the minimum numbers of parking spaces, including details of heavy and light vehicle spaces, to be provided at Major and Minor Rest Areas.

What is NRMA seeking?

- i. Provision of additional rest areas on major highways – Australian Government funding from the Nation Building Program is now available for this purpose;
- ii. Rest areas designed to an appropriate standard so that heavy vehicles can access them safely and with appropriate facilities;
- iii. RTA to provide detailed and accurate information about facilities and accessibility of all NSW rest areas for all motorists; and
- iv. RTA to publish a detailed audit of rest areas in NSW.

c) Real time traffic information

NRMA contends that any consideration of the provision of infrastructure by the Government as outlined in the Inquiry Terms of Reference should also address facilities (or lack of) for the RTA to proactively provide real time traffic information to the benefit for all road users.

Typically, the electronic variable message signs (VMS) located on many of Sydney's roads do not warn drivers of incidents such as delays until they have already turned onto the road and are unable to re-route due to limited motorway on and off ramps and there is a need for additional and better located VMS. Better use could be made of providing traffic information via radio, (for example, Transport for London has a dedicated traffic radio channel).

NRMA suggests the RTA could seek to communicate traffic conditions to drivers via VMS and other means at key locations such as Port Botany. This would help to inform drivers of the current regular night-time closures of the M5 east tunnel and communicate unplanned incidents such as traffic crashes or breakdowns. Such information could also be communicated to truck haulage companies via email or other means to allow dispatchers and drivers to plan and manage trips accordingly and would help to support the implementation of heavy vehicle driver fatigue management and safe driving plans in NSW.

NRMA's own experiences reveal the traffic condition information that is available for drivers via the RTA's Transport Management Centre 131700 telephone number is sometimes incorrect or simply not available and does not replicate the information available on the RTA website^x. This is a particular concern for drivers who are already on the road and would not have access to the internet.

What is NRMA seeking?

Improved communication of traffic conditions from the RTA to motorists on key roads, including better use of VMS signs.

d) Sharing the Road with Heavy Vehicles

In response to the increasing number of NRMA members raising their concerns about sharing the road with trucks, NRMA is developing a Truck Safety Strategy. The aim of the strategy is to educate and inform motorists about safely sharing the road with heavy vehicles. It is expected that the campaign will contribute to a reduction in incidents involving heavy vehicles, improve public awareness of safety precautions when sharing the roads with trucks and improve the image of the trucking community with the general public.

What is NRMA seeking?

Improved information and education programs for motorists to be delivered by the RTA about trucks and sharing the road with them safely.

NRMA looks forward to working constructively with the Staysafe Committee to achieve improved outcomes for NSW motorists.

Should the Committee's Members or staff require any additional information about our submission I encourage them to contact Ms Madeleine Carr, Policy Analyst – Government Relations and Public Policy, on 9276-7234.

Yours sincerely



Chris Siorokos
General Manager – Corporate Affairs

Endnotes

ⁱ Bureau of Infrastructure, Transport and Regional Economics, Working Paper 60: An Overview of the Australian Road Freight Transport Industry, 2003.

ⁱⁱ http://www.rta.nsw.gov.au/roadsafety/downloads/accident_statistics_dl4.html

ⁱⁱⁱ <http://www.vicroads.vic.gov.au/Home/RoadSafety/StatisticsAndResearch/>

^{iv} <http://www.tacsafety.com.au/jsp/statistics/roadtollicurrent.do?arealD=12&tierID=1&navID=1>

^v From 29 September 2008, the Road Transport (General) Regulation 2005 will contain New provisions relating to driver fatigue.

^{vi} NSW Staysafe Inquiry into Heavy Vehicle Safety Media Release

^{vii} AP-T95/08: Austroads Audit of Rest Areas against National Guidelines, 2008

^{viii} NTC National Guidelines for the Provision of Rest Area Facilities, Final Report, November 2005.

^{ix} AP-T95/08: Austroads Audit of Rest Areas against National Guidelines, 2008

^x <http://www.rta.nsw.gov.au/trafficreports/index.html>