

INQUIRY INTO ROAD TOLLING REGIMES

Name: Name suppressed

Date Received: 21 May 2021

Partially
Confidential

Legislative Council – Portfolio Committee No. 6 – Transport and Customer Service

I, _____ make the following statement:

I have worked as a Contract Carrier for

I operate under the incorporated title of

I have worked as a Contract Carrier for my Principal Contractor for approximately two

I work from Monday to Friday, with my regular start time commencing at 5:30am.

I began working as a Contract Carrier because I knew that there was money to be made in the industry. I knew that in exchange for running your own business and taking on more responsibilities than employed drivers have, I could support my family on the money I made.

Consecutively, over the thirty-eight (38) years that I have worked as a Contract Carrier, I have seen the expenses payable by Contract Carriers rise. Working as a Contract Carrier is far less profitable than it was decades ago, not only because the price of running a truck has risen, but also due to expenses such as tolls.

Contract Carriers work balancing tight margins, which are becoming tighter.

I am currently sixty-two (62) years old.

Where I attest to a conversation in this statement and I cannot recall the exact words used, I state the words spoken to the effect of what was said.

I have been a member of the Transport Workers' Union of New South Wales (TWU) for over

I have been the Head Delegate for Contract Carriers working under my Principal Contractor.

As Head Delegate, my role includes, but is not limited to, liaising with the TWU, the Principle Contractor and rank and file members, engaging in dispute resolution and industrial disputes.

At my yard, I am often one of the first points of call for Owner Drivers when they have concerns or feel aggrieved. Owner Drivers often approach me as Head Delegate and share their concerns and ask for either advice, or for me to raise their concerns with management.

Toll charges are one of the most consistent, if not the most consistent, concern Owner Drivers raise with me. I am approached on a daily basis by Owner Drivers concerned about the mounting toll costs they have to pay and whether it is viable for them to continue working for a Principal Contractor that does not offer financial assistance for tolls.

Owner Drivers often tell me that they are already struggling with the cost of maintaining their vehicle, but also paying for their insurances and fuel. The additional expense of toll charges has made it increasingly difficult for many Owner Drivers to continue making a profit.

I have raised the concerns of Owner Drivers not being remunerated for tolls with management on multiple occasions. Consequently, I have been involved in many disputes relating to drivers that are allocated work that is time sensitive in nature and consequently have to use toll roads. Naturally, these drivers seek compensation for their out of pocket expense of toll roads.

In my experience, when Owner Drivers are offered work that is time sensitive in nature, there is no incentive for this work to be accepted as the toll expenses eat into the profit that the driver would make if they undertook the job. This is very common when Owner Drivers are directed to travel through the more costly toll points, charged at \$25 either way.

I have suggested to management that drivers should be provided with e-tags that are paid for by the Principal Contractor. Management have not been receptive to this suggestion and suggest that it is not the responsibility of my Principal Contractor to pay for toll charges used by Owners Drivers when completing work.

I was recently involved in a dispute with my Principle Contractor on behalf of an Owner Driver. This particular Owner Driver was directed that his former route from Miranda to Paigewood was being altered to include further destinations. Management directed this Owner Driver to travel from Miranda to Paigewood, to Chatswood to North

Ryde and return to Botany. Management suggested that this would be the Owner Drivers' new daily run. If this Owner Driver were to complete the proposed run, he would incur \$62 worth of toll charges daily. This would amount to approximately \$310 a week in toll charges. Within a year, this particular Owner Driver would incur approximately \$16,120 of toll charges that he would not have to pay if he continued with his run from Miranda to Paigewood.

Luckily, this Owner Driver was covered by a union workplace agreement ensuring that he was not left worse off, he was able to be taken off this run. If he had not been protected by such an agreement, the Principle Contractor would have made him do the run, and he would have either borne the cost of the tolls or had an elongated work day. These workplace agreements depend on strong union representation, so I imagine many owner drivers working for different Principle Contractors would not have the same protection.

I estimate that it would have taken him an hour and a half past his ordinary work hours if he were to go through Lane Cove and Chatswood at 3.30 in the afternoon as required by the run without using tolls given the traffic conditions on the non-tolled road.

I do not know specifically what happened to this run, but I believe it would have been outsourced to outside hire or non-unionised labour. Either way, it is always the end user who foots the bill given the Principle Contractor does not want to pay. That individual would either have to work more for the same pay at the expense of their personal and family life or take home less money.

This is one of dozens of situations where I have raised concerns with the Principal Contractor about the financial burden Owner Drivers are experiencing.

In my experience, the Principal Contractor is unwilling to negotiate about toll charges.

I have been told by members of management words to the effect of "tolls are an expense of the Owner Driver, not the expense of this company. Owner Drivers accept their contracts and terms of engagement and know that it is just another expense payable when operating your own vehicle."

Owner Drivers tell me that they are struggling with the financial burden of tolls.

I am disappointed that Principal Contractors are unwilling to negotiate with Owner Drivers who often dedicate much of their working life to the business.

, I do not recall ever being provided with an e-tag or there being any compensation scheme for Owner Drivers to back claim their toll expenses.

Despite the fact that I have always paid for tolls when undertaking work, there has been a sharp price increase in toll charges that has made it a lot less affordable to continue using toll roads as an Owner Driver. A prime example of this is that at or around 1985, tolls between Banksmeadow and North Ryde would cost approximately twenty (20) cents. Comparatively, the same route would now cost me approximately seventeen (17) dollars.

My regular run is from Botany and Macquarie Park. This journey is eighteen (18) kilometres. I make this journey approximately twice a day. I consequently encounter a minimum of six (6) toll points on a thirty-six (36) kilometre stretch of road.

I have calculated that per year, these tolls cost me as an Owner Driver a minimum of \$5300.

I think it unacceptable that my Principle Contractor overlooks and undercuts Owner Drivers struggling with toll charges, when it is in fact they benefit from work being completed in a timely and professional manner.

19 May 2021