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TRUCKRIGHT Industry Vehicle (TIV)

Ten Years on the road, 2019.

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TRUCKRIGHT Awarded Highly Commended, 3M ACRS Diamond Road Safety Awards 2015.

Finalist 3M ACRS Diamond Road Safety Awards 2016, Awarded Churchill Fellowship 2016.

Green Reflector Marking Informal Truck Bays, finally completed the Newell Highway 2019.

NATIONAL REST AREA STRATEGY 2019.

The lack of truck rest areas is both critical and criminal. I submitted to the National Road Safety Inquiry in 2003. Of the 31 recommendations, two were mine, specifically about truck rest areas and I was involved in three others and yet in 2019, none of this has been addressed. No wonder truck drivers are cynical of government and how they want to keep us safe.

The only study of truck rest areas done in 2012, showed not one of our major highways met the minimum number or standard for truck rest areas and whilst there have been some new sites built, we continue to lose small informal and other sites, so realistically little has changed or improved, we are actually going backwards. I have written, emailed and begged for more and better rest areas for many years and yet as with the following two examples.

The Pacific Highway has less rest areas now than it did ten years ago and I detailed and explained that then, let alone explained the need for a changeover facility as the road was improved. This has been ignored. The new Toowoomba Second Range Crossing has just been completed and yet in the 41 kilometres, there is not one truck rest area, another criminal oversight and I did request this be considered during construction and was ignored yet again.

At my request, we now have updated national truck rest area guidelines, but no national enforced standard to the number, frequency, size or facilities that should be included in new road projects, let alone on current roads. I have been promoting the green reflector marking of informal trucks bays for over 19 years and have had to do the Newell Highway myself to get even one highway completed. Drivers tell me I have saved their life, but I can't get one state government to commit to this simple, cheap and effective interim strategy. If we can't get reflectors on guideposts, what hope do we have of getting sufficient truck rest areas?

We must have a national rest area standard for all new roads and this must be then rolled out to existing roads, starting with major highways. We are losing sites, whether due to town bypasses, or simply due to perceived safety concerns about informal sites and as each one is lost in many separate districts, we fall behind in the number available.

We need an absolute minimum of informal sites at the minimum of 20 kilometres apart. These for;

1. Rest if needed to make it to the next formal rest area.
2. Alternative of a safe place to pull up to get out and walk round truck.
3. Load check, movement.
4. Tyre check, blown tyre.
5. Animal strike, to check for damage etc.
6. Toilet break.
7. Any other need to stop safely where there is no knowledge of next formal rest area.

These could be informal green reflector bays, or signed formal but smaller truck bays. They can be done at nominal cost for a start and could be extended or expanded as either funds are available or removed if formal sites are built. We could do most of the national highway network in 12 months for the cost of one major truck rest area and will save lives and afford drivers a chance to be compliant and safer.

Then we need formal rest areas every 50 kilometres. Suitable for rest/sleep. Requires shade, suitable size for vehicles operating on that road and for separation to allow good quality sleep.

Then we need major sites with all the above plus toilets, every 100 kilometres. These could be commercial service centres, but only if there is sufficient room for truck parking. Parking could well be provided adjacent for trucks, thereby reducing the cost of supplying toilets and facilities for trucks elsewhere. This may well be a very effective strategy to adopt.

However, currently some highway service centres are allowed to be built on major roads with little or no truck parking provided. I believe there must be some minimum requirement for truck parking in such commercial activities, if they are on major highways.

These must be mandated on all major highways. A rollout of green reflector bays can be done simply and cheaply as an interim measure. I recognise there is simply not millions laying around, but the need for rest areas to allow drivers to manage fatigue is critical now and must be addressed and started ASAP.

Currently many car only rest areas have all the facilities needed, but do not allow truck access by design or signage. These sites are mostly them empty at night and so the value is wasted. Many car drivers will not park in such sites alone at night and so go to truck bays where they know trucks will be present and so they feel safer. Funds spent on car only bays that exclude trucks do not then provide best value for the money spent. We need sites that suit cars, trucks and the ever-growing number of caravans and motorhomes.

When such sites as "Wiki camps" recommend truck bays as free camping sites and there are not enough truck bays to provide the required number of spaces and facilities for truck drivers to best manage their fatigue as required by law, we will continue to have tired truck drivers forced to drive on to find somewhere to sleep.

I also seek a national standard be designed and implemented for "Stopping Bays". Currently there are sites built with little thought to the safe use of such sites. Most are too small to park safely in, let alone have a repair done. Many repair companies will now refuse to work on a broken-down truck unless they are safely clear of the road. These sites then fail miserably to meet such guidelines. This can then require a very large and expensive tow, involving having a tow truck hook up within inches of highway traffic, to tow a truck away for what could be a simple repair able to be done on the side of the road.

I have seen such sites, not marked in any way so completely invisible at night till you are on or past them, virtually meaning they do not exist to help any driver with a break-down or other issue. Some have many within 50 kilometres, then nothing for hundreds more.

Why is there no national guideline for such sites, to both ensure they provide what is intended, somewhere safe to stop for a problem, but meet a standard to ensure the money spent is not completely wasted because the design or delivery does not provide what is required, a safe place to stop on the roadside. Green reflector bays do provide this for trucks where such marked formal sites do not exist and can be done cheaply, but some sites are marked, yet too small, others are signed "Stopping Bay Only", yet no-one knows what this implies legally.

Such a standard would see value provided for the money spent, see all drivers aware of what the signs meant and what was provided, would improve safety on the side of the road for all, not just those in need of such a place to stop and could simply be applied to new projects and or any road improvements or upgrades over time.

The roll out of wire rope barriers in Victoria along the Hume Highway is completely removing our ability to stop safely on the roadside. I have spoken with them since it was started and they have said they have increased the size of some overlap sites and will mark them with green reflectors, but this is too little too late.

This is further accentuated in capital cities where we used to be able to park close to a delivery site, but with more and more council and other parking restrictions, by law or simply by no room available, then even worse, truck parking being stopped in many industrial areas. WE ARE GOING BACKWARDS with truck rest areas sites and parking opportunities and until this is rectified and addressed nationally, we will continue to have tired drivers trying to meet the demands of the community, our customers and the road authorities. All of these depend on road transport and we must see something done now.

I seek a commitment from both the Federal and State Governments and would hope the NHVR as our national regulator (who currently has no jurisdiction over rest areas) will get behind this critical need to help Australia's truck drivers both be safe and complaint and until we get sufficient truck rest areas, we will struggle to do this every day on the road.
Safe Travelling, Rod Hannifey.