

# MEDIA RELEASE



5 December 2008

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## MORE TRUCK REST AREAS ON MAJOR HIGHWAYS

The Australian Government will build more truck rest areas on Australia's major highways, now that Parliament has passed new laws about heavy vehicle charges.

The Chairman of the Australian Trucking Association, Trevor Martyn, said the extra rest areas would make Australia's roads safer, as well as better places for truck drivers to work.

"Fatigue is a major cause of truck accidents, but there just aren't enough rest areas for truck drivers to stop and take a break. It is a key safety issue that has united the whole trucking industry," Mr Martyn said.

"The Australian Government has taken decisive action to help build more rest areas. Until this year, the Government was legally prevented from paying for rest areas. It was only able to pay for roads, traffic signs, traffic control equipment, bridges, tunnels and bike paths.

"The Infrastructure Minister, Anthony Albanese, fixed this huge legal roadblock. He also announced the Government would spend \$70 million over four years on rest areas and other safety measures under its Heavy Vehicle Safety and Productivity Program.

"The funding under the program is now available, because Parliament has passed the Government's new heavy vehicle charges laws.

"The program will deliver as many as 125 new truck rest areas on major highways. If the states and territories provide matching funding, the figure will double to 250 new rest areas.

"The ATA has already submitted our priority rest area funding list to the Government. We will now be working to make sure the money is spent where it will help truck drivers the most," Mr Martyn said.

The Government's heavy vehicle charges laws will increase the effective fuel tax paid by the trucking industry – the road user charge – from 19.633 to 21 cents per litre from 1 January 2009.

Trucking operators will still pay the normal fuel tax – 38.143 cents per litre – when they buy fuel. They will still be able to claim for fuel tax credits on their Business Activity Statements, but will receive 17.143 cents per litre in credits from 1 January 2009 instead of the current figure, 18.51 cents per litre.

The original version of the laws would have allowed the Government to index the charge, so it would have gone up every year according to a mathematical formula. As a result, the charge could have increased by an extra six cents per litre over five years without consultation – but the trucking industry was able to secure amendments to block the indexation of the charge.

Thanks to an amendment crafted by the Shadow Infrastructure Minister, Warren Truss, and Senator Ian Macdonald, section 43-10(11) of the *Fuel Tax Act* will now specifically state that:

*In determining the road user charge, the Transport Minister must not apply a method for indexing the charge.*

*National Voice of the Australian Trucking Industry*

“This new section of the *Fuel Tax Act* reflects the wording in the model amendments that we circulated to MPs and Senators, and is an important win for the industry,” Mr Martyn said.

“The Government will only be able to increase the charge beyond 21 cents per litre if it issues a legislative instrument. The charge won’t go up automatically, and Parliament will still have the power to disallow increases in the charge.

“The Transport Minister will have to hold a 60 day consultation period on any proposed increase and release all of the information that was relied on to determine the new charge. The Minister will have to consider the comments received from the public and the industry.

“I want to thank the Infrastructure Minister, Anthony Albanese, for listening to the industry and moving these new rules as amendments to his own legislation.

“The new rules won’t make the headlines, but will make an enormous difference in the long run. They will help end the long-standing and bitter controversy about how to set heavy vehicle charges,” Mr Martyn said.

The industry also argued the Government should increase its funding for the Heavy Vehicle Safety and Productivity Program from \$70 million to \$100 million over four years, with a review of the program in 2011 to decide if it should continue.

“We are disappointed we did not succeed in getting the extra funding. We did, however, secure a review of the program, thanks to an amendment moved by Senator Steve Fielding,” Mr Martyn said.

“The review will be a chance for the industry to argue that the Government should aim to bring the AusLink National Network into line with the National Rest Area Guidelines by 2019. Our estimate is that we will need an extra 900 rest areas on the network to meet this goal,” Mr Martyn said.

The new heavy vehicle charges laws will also allow the Government to bring the registration charges for federally-registered vehicles into line with the charges imposed by the states.

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