

MEDIA RELEASE



3 October 2008

25 National Circuit
FORREST ACT 2603
Tel: (02) 6253 6900
www.atatruck.net.au

THE ATA'S PLAN FOR 900 EXTRA TRUCK REST AREAS

The Australian Trucking Association (ATA) is calling on federal politicians to deliver 900 extra truck rest areas on major highways by 2019, under the industry's plan to amend the Government's new heavy vehicle charges legislation.

The Government introduced the new heavy vehicle charges legislation into Parliament last week. The legislation would increase the effective fuel tax paid by trucking operators – the road user charge – from 19.633 to 21 cents per litre, and would give the Government the ability to index this rate in the future. The legislation would also introduce new registration charges for the 21,500 trucks with Federal Interstate Registration Scheme (FIRS) number plates.

The Chairman of the ATA, Trevor Martyn, said the ATA's plan to amend the legislation would tie future increases in the road user charge to the construction of truck rest areas on the AusLink National Network. He said the plan would also deliver an open and transparent system for setting the road user charge in the future, rather than indexation.

"Every truck driver and trucking operator knows we need more rest areas, because fatigue is a major cause of truck accidents. A number of states have just introduced new fatigue laws, but those laws won't be effective unless truck drivers have more places to stop safely and rest," he said.

"A recent independent audit found there isn't a single major highway in Australia that meets the national rest area guidelines. Our estimate is that the AusLink National Network needs an additional 900 rest areas to bring it up to the mark.

"The rest areas that we need range from large facilities in urban areas, such as near the intersection of the M7 and M4 in Sydney, through to gravel parking bays in remote areas.

"Under our proposed amendments, the Government would only be able to increase the road user charge beyond 21 cents per litre if the Chair of Infrastructure Australia certifies that:

- on average, at least 90 additional heavy vehicle rest areas per year have been constructed on the AusLink National Network since the last road user charge determination was issued;
- the number and type of rest areas constructed, their spacing, and their amenities are consistent with the goal of bringing the AusLink National Network into conformity with the national guidelines by 2019; and
- the rest areas make adequate provision for the current and future use of high productivity vehicles.

"In total, our proposed amendments would deliver the 900 extra rest areas we need on the AusLink National Network by 2019. It is a realistic plan that could be delivered by the Government if the amendments go through," he said.

Mr Martyn said the ATA's proposed amendments would also prevent the Government from indexing the road user charge by an automatic annual formula.

National Voice of the Australian Trucking Industry

“The Government’s legislation would allow it to index the road user charge, which means the charge would automatically ratchet up every year by seven per cent or more,” he said.

“The industry is strongly opposed to indexing the charge, because it would be a stealth tax. The charge would go up without consultation or parliamentary scrutiny. The indexation formula would be based on figures that we wouldn’t be able to confirm.

“We believe in paying our way, but we need to be consulted about how it’s done. Our proposed amendments would require the Government to adopt an open and transparent system for setting the road user charge, instead of indexation.”

Mr Martyn said the ATA was urging legislators not to oppose the Government’s changes to the registration charges for trucks registered under FIRS and in the ACT.

“In February, Australia’s transport ministers agreed on a new set of registration charges for heavy vehicles. The state governments all implemented those charges in July.

“As a result, the vast majority of trucks in Australia are already subject to the new charges – except trucks registered under FIRS and trucks in Canberra, due to a quirk in the existing legislation.

“We need to fix this inconsistency, because it is causing strange cross-border anomalies. For example, it is currently much more expensive to register a heavy rigid truck in Canberra than across the border in the NSW town of Queanbeyan. But it’s cheaper to register a B-double prime mover in Canberra than in New South Wales, where you would actually use the truck.”

Mr Martyn said the ATA and its member organisations had already begun lobbying MPs and would circulate model amendments next week.

“We’ve commissioned a national law firm to turn our plan into amendments that could be slotted straight into the legislation on the floor of Parliament. It highlights how serious we are about our plan, which would:

- deliver 900 extra truck rest areas on the AusLink National Network by 2019;
- resolve the long-standing argument about how to set heavy vehicle charges;
- protect the industry from the stealth tax caused by the indexation of the road user charge; and
- unlock the \$70 million in funding that the Government has already allocated to the industry under its Heavy Vehicle Safety and Productivity Program.”

The industry’s approach to the legislation was agreed unanimously by the ATA’s Transport and Economics Policy Committee, which is chaired by the managing director of Simon National Carriers, David Simon.

Media contact: Stuart St Clair (02) 6253 6900 / 0428 488 330
 Bill McKinley (02) 6253 6900 / 0488 292 823