

Submission to: Pricewaterhouse Coopers
Department of Infrastructure, Regional Development
and Cities

Title: Newell Highway Corridor Strategy

Date: April 2019



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1. About the Australian Trucking Association

The ATA is the peak body representing the Australian trucking industry. Its members include state and sector-based trucking associations, some of the nation's largest transport companies, and businesses with leading expertise in truck technology.

2. Summary of recommendations

Recommendation 1

The Newell Highway Corridor Strategy should set an objective to achieve PBS level 3B (42.5 metres) as of right access along the entire corridor.

Recommendation 2

The Newell Highway Corridor Strategy should require all future upgrades to be built equivalent to PBS level 3B standard, to ensure the HPFV access objective is achievable.

Recommendation 3

The Newell Highway Corridor Strategy should set out a detailed project investment priority list, with projected timeframes, to achieve the HPFV access objective.

Recommendation 4

The Newell Highway Corridor Strategy should deliver a detailed assessment of heavy vehicle rest areas on the corridor and include an investment plan which delivers the right quality and quantity of rest areas for this significant freight corridor.

Recommendation 5

The Newell highway Corridor Strategy should incorporate the provision of livestock effluent disposal facilities.

Recommendation 6

The Newell Highway Corridor Strategy should integrate with local government land use strategies, including setting out HPFV town bypasses and coupling and uncoupling bays, to ensure the future operation of this key freight corridor for HPFV access and the protection of the amenity of local communities.

Recommendation 7

The Newell Highway Corridor Strategy should identify and integrate connections with inland rail and other road and rail corridors.

Recommendation 8

Future corridor strategies should be initiated to link the Newell Highway Corridor Strategy to Brisbane and Melbourne.

Recommendation 9

The Australian Government should implement a national, strategic planning approach to the selection of corridors for expanding the corridor strategy and investment approach.

Recommendation 10

The Australian Government should commit to developing a corridor strategy for the Hume Highway as an immediate priority.

Recommendation 11

The Australian Government should expand the corridor approach to include freight routes beyond south eastern Australia and include key links between corridors.

3. Introduction

The Australian Trucking Association welcomes the commitment from the Australian Government to develop the Newell Highway Corridor Strategy (NHCS). The Government announced funding for development of the NHCS in August 2018, and the Department of Infrastructure, Regional Development and Cities (DIRDC) has engaged PwC in consultation with Aurecon to develop the strategy.

The ATA understands that the NHCS will build on the NSW Government strategy released in 2015, taking into consideration commitments to Inland Rail, assisting drought-affected areas and Roads of Strategic Importance funding (the 2019-20 Federal Budget identified \$400 million in funding for the later half of the Australian Government's 10 year infrastructure pipeline). **The ATA strongly welcomes the intention that the NHCS will ultimately identify a set of prioritised investment opportunities along the Newell corridor.**

The Newell Highway provides a critical freight corridor between Melbourne and Brisbane, providing an essential road connection for these major urban cities, agricultural and rural industries, regional towns and hinterlands and other major connecting highways. Road transport is forecast to remain the dominant method of movement of both interstate and regional freight even with increases to the share of freight carried by rail.¹

The 2015 strategy outlines an intent to open up the entire length of the Newell to modern combinations meeting PBS level 3A standards. It also identified that the majority of freight travelling in the Melbourne to Brisbane corridor is not end-to-end. In order to future proof the infrastructure investments on the Newell this approach should be upgraded to an intent to open up the Newell to PBS level 3B standards. A key benefit of this approach would be to enable future access for modular B-triples and modular AB-triples, which would allow greater flexibility and the ability to break the combination down for form three B-doubles.

Ultimately, the NSW Government's 2015 strategy provides a strong foundation from which to build the NHCS. The 2015 strategy included:

- A vision for improved high productivity freight vehicle access,
- Analysis of current infrastructure constraints preventing HPFV access,
- Analysis of freight movements within, along and from the corridor,
- Analysis of heavy vehicle rest areas on the corridor,
- Assessment of bridge strength issues and flooding impacts,
- Land use changes, future freight volumes and impacts from climate change.

The NHCS should address all of these issues in detail and link to a stronger and more detailed investment plan.

4. Setting corridor objectives and a HPFV vision

It is of absolute critical importance that the Newell Highway Corridor Strategy sets out a vision of High Productivity Freight Vehicle access for the Newell corridor, to guide future investment decisions and project design.

Freight is critical to the national economy, enabling Australian businesses, farmers, manufacturers and consumers to access local and global markets. The national domestic freight task is forecast to grow 26 per cent by 2026, having already grown 50 per cent in the 10 years to 2016.

Trucking is an Australian success story. Between 1971 and 2007 trucking industry productivity increased six-fold due to the uptake of high productivity vehicles like B-doubles. Without this

¹ NSW Government, May 2015, [Newell Highway Corridor Strategy](#), 145.

productivity growth an extra 150,000 articulated trucks would have been required to keep our economy moving.²

However, transport has recorded lower recent productivity growth since 2007 compared to long-term averages.³ Even with the commitment to inland rail, further productivity improvements enabled by improved HPFV road access will be required on the Newell Highway to reduce the likely growth rate in heavy vehicle numbers needed to move the increasing freight task, and deliver safety, environmental and productivity benefits on the corridor.

The NHCS needs to set out to achieve PBS level 3B access on the Newell. It also needs to ensure that this future access is as of right and does not require a significant regulatory burden on operators (ie repeated permit applications) that would only prevent the productivity benefits from being realised.

To achieve this goal it is important to define the access objective, require project upgrades to meet this standard, and to define a plan to achieving the objective. Otherwise, the Newell Highway will risk repeating the situation on the Hume corridor, where significant upgrades have failed to deliver modern, as of right access for HPFV combinations.

The 2015 strategy referenced the potential for the impacts from climate change to increase the frequency and intensity of storms and more frequent highway closures. Planned upgrades to mitigate the impacts from flooding should incorporate the potential for flood impacts to increase.

Recommendation 1

The Newell Highway Corridor Strategy should set an objective to achieve PBS level 3B (42.5 metres) as of right access along the entire corridor.

Recommendation 2

The Newell Highway Corridor Strategy should require all future upgrades to be built equivalent to PBS level 3B standard, to ensure the HPFV access objective is achievable.

Recommendation 3

The Newell Highway Corridor Strategy should set out a detailed project investment priority list, with projected timeframes, to achieve the HPFV access objective.

5. Prioritising a long-term investment plan

Whilst the 2015 strategy identified some investment priorities, it ultimately did not produce a detailed plan of investment priorities required to achieve its HPFV vision. In line with the ATA's recommendation 3, this should be a critical objective for the NHCS.

The ATA welcomes the Australian Government's introduction of the Roads of Strategic Importance (RoSI) program, and in particular the allocation of investment funds for upgrading a road on a corridor basis. Producing the detailed investment plan as part of the NHCS is important to realising the full value of the RoSI program and identifying the level of funding that the corridor will require.

The ATA has performed a desktop analysis of the existing heavy vehicle access approvals for the Newell Highway (**Attachment A**).

The table shows the current equivalent levels of access along sections of the Newell Highway together with the access levels of the connecting roads in Queensland and Victoria. It shows significant gaps in access for 30 metre PBS 2B, Super B-double and PBS A-double combinations along the entire Newell corridor. It also illustrates gaps south of Dubbo for 36.5 metre A-double, B-triple, Modular B-triple and AB triple combinations. There are also some gaps around

² Bureau of Infrastructure, Transport, and Regional Economics, 2011, *Truck productivity*, pixy

³ Productivity Commission, 3 August 2017, 5 Year Productivity Review Supporting Paper No. 1, 16.

Coonabrabran and Tooraweenah, and there is no access for PBS 3B and Modular AB-triple combinations on the corridor.

It is also vital that the NHCS provides a detailed assessment and investment plan for the provision of heavy vehicle rest areas. New heavy vehicle rest area (HVRA) guidelines were released by Austroads in January 2019. The new HVRA guidelines identify that provision of HVRA on the road network supports the safe system objectives and the safe people cornerstone. Additionally, the guidelines specify that a detailed HVRA strategy should be developed for major highways and significant freight routes.

Austroads also report that issues relating to spacing and placement of HVRAs are fundamental to their ability to safely and effectively facilitate adequate rest for heavy vehicle drivers. Issues such as fatigue requirements, traffic congestion, heavy vehicle demand and steep grades are all critical in determining the spacing between HVRA, which may require increases in frequency. Austroads recommend spacing between HVRA to be 70-100km apart for class 1 and class 2 HVRA, 35-50km apart for class 3 and class 4 HVRA, and 15-25km apart for class 5 HVRA.

Noting the Austroads recommendation, the ATA would recommend that a detailed HVRA strategy for the Newell needs to allow that average heavy vehicle speeds are typically around 80 km/h and are not the same as the top allowable speed. Considering this, the ATA would recommend that class 1 HVRA's should be no greater than 80km apart.

The NHCS needs to deliver this detailed assessment and plan for HVRA on the corridor, or it will breach this new safety standard for major highways and significant freight routes.

Additionally, Austroads recommends that design of an HVRA, where livestock traffic is expected, should consider the disposal requirements for livestock effluent (or if it is more appropriate to locate it at a separate facility nearby). This is highly relevant for the Newell corridor and the 2015 strategy identified the movement of live animals on the corridor as one of the major export freight tasks transported on the Newell.

The Australian Livestock and Rural Transporters Association (ALRTA), an ATA member association, identifies that the management of livestock effluent on public roadways is important for protecting road safety, animal welfare, biosecurity, amenity, environment and business interests. Livestock processing facilities are not required to provide disposal areas for captured effluent and primary producers do not accept it due to biosecurity concerns. The lack of livestock disposal facilities can lead to the depositing of captured material in public places, creating local environmental problems.

In contrast, New Zealand is funding, building and operating purpose-built livestock effluent disposal facilities on public roads. This approach should be incorporated by Australia, especially on corridors such as the Newell where livestock transport is significant.

Recommendation 4

The Newell Highway Corridor Strategy should deliver a detailed assessment of heavy vehicle rest areas on the corridor and include an investment plan which delivers the right quality and quantity of rest areas for this significant freight corridor.

Recommendation 5

The Newell highway Corridor Strategy should incorporate the provision of livestock effluent disposal facilities.

6. Integration with land use strategies

The 2015 strategy identified that urban development in the corridor is concentrated in major towns and centres, and issues such as urban development in east and west Dubbo are likely to increase traffic volumes on the corridor. It also identifies pressures from growth in the mining industry on land and housing supply.

It is also important to address current and future concerns about the amenity of towns, communities and main streets (such as from the impact of heavy vehicle traffic), accessibility from current and future industrial lands and the Newell, and the possible impacts from current or future town by passes. Additionally, coupling and uncoupling bays to allow for combination assembly needs to be incorporated for access to urban areas and links where HPFV access is not possible.

As a major freight corridor, the vision for the Newell Highway corridor needs to be one for HPFV access, without operating under time curfew or other restrictions. This requires integration with local land use strategies which should identify:

- Corridor protection for the Newell and HPFV access and staged upgrades in urban areas, including HPFV bypasses. Where necessary, this should include HPFV town bypasses to protect the amenity of communities and local main streets and ensure that residential development does not restrict the future ability of the highway to operate without time curfews.
- Accessibility from the corridor to urban industrial estates and logistics zones, including the provision of coupling and uncoupling bays.
- Incorporation of rest areas and service centres in urban regions of the Newell corridor to allow HPFV drivers to take rest breaks adjacent to urban areas.

Recommendation 6

The Newell Highway Corridor Strategy should integrate with local government land use strategies, including setting out HPFV town bypasses and coupling and uncoupling bays, to ensure the future operation of this key freight corridor for HPFV access and the protection of the amenity of local communities.

7. Identifying strategic hubs and connections

The Newell corridor will also need to integrate with existing and future freight movements within the corridor and connecting with other corridors. The development of inland rail will be a major consideration within this context, along with other road and rail connections.

As illustrated in **attachment A**, the inland rail corridor at Parkes, Narrabri and Moree would appear to be likely places where the inland rail and Newell corridors will intersect and be potential locations for strategic freight hubs. Likewise, Wagga Wagga and Narromine are within close road accessibility from Narrandera and Dubbo respectively.

Similarly, east west road connections into Narrandera and Dubbo should also be considered, along with north south connections from the Newell corridor to both Brisbane and Melbourne.

Critically, any suggestion around Parkes potentially serving as a major hub will be face significant road access barriers, as only limited heavy vehicle combinations have access on the Newell through to Parkes.

Recommendation 7

The Newell Highway Corridor Strategy should identify and integrate connections with inland rail and other road and rail corridors.

Recommendation 8

Future corridor strategies should be initiated to link the Newell Highway Corridor Strategy to Brisbane and Melbourne.

8. Linkage with a national corridor investment strategy

The ATA welcomes the Australian Government reforms to consider and fund road projects on a planned corridor basis. It is important to consider a corridor in its entirety, as opposed to the need to upgrade a single intersection, blackspot or bridge. This places a higher priority on ensuring that road upgrades deliver an improvement in the corridor, in particular for heavy vehicle access and use of modern, safer and more productive vehicles.

Initiatives including the development of corridor strategies for the Newell and Princes highways, and allocation of funding across the Australian Government's 10-year infrastructure pipeline to upgrade these corridors, represent important reforms to the delivery of infrastructure funding.

It is of vital importance that the corridor strategies deliver detailed, prioritised investment plans in order to realise the benefits from this reform. Government may also need to reconsider the infrastructure pipeline commitments to these corridors once the full scale of what is actually required is known.

Additionally, as the development of corridor strategies and infrastructure pipeline commitments on a corridor basis have the ability to improve the delivery of infrastructure upgrades, the Australian Government should ensure that there is a considered, national and strategically planned approach to the selection and delivery of corridor strategies and commitments.

The NSW Heavy Vehicle Access Policy Framework (September 2018) seeks to provide a strategic planning approach to heavy vehicle access.⁴ It identifies that the freight routes with the highest freight flows in NSW are the Newell, Hume, Sydney-Newcastle, Pacific, New England, Golden and Great Western corridors.⁵ In particular, the Hume Highway from Melbourne to Sydney is the nation's busiest interstate freight route which carries 40 per cent of the total national road freight task.⁶

This NSW strategic planning approach identifies the Hume, Pacific and Golden highways as priorities for enabling access for 30 metre PBS 2B vehicles. It also identifies that whilst the Hume Highway is suitable for these vehicles operating at 68 tonnes (due to bridge constraints), that existing rest areas were designed for 26 metre B-doubles and could not adequately accommodate 30 metre vehicles. There is also a lack of decoupling sites at the Sydney end.⁷ This demonstrates:

- The need to identify, via a strategic approach, corridors which need to be planned and invested in on a corridor basis,
- Pressing need to include the Hume Highway in the corridor approach, and
- The limitations that result from infrastructure upgrades which do not enable future productivity (in this case, rest areas which are not long enough).

Additionally, a national strategic planning approach to the selection of corridors should consider the need to link corridors and the need to also include corridors outside of south east Australia. There are a number of key corridors that could benefit from this approach in Queensland, the Northern Territory and Western Australia.

The ATA would strongly recommend that corridor planning for the Hume should proceed as a priority and include productivity considerations of a PBS 3A standard.

Likewise, the strategy for the Newell corridor will need to be linked to Brisbane and Melbourne, and not be restricted to NSW. Freight does not stop at state borders.

⁴ NSW Government, September 2018, NSW Heavy Vehicle Access Policy Framework, 5.

⁵ Ibid, 26.

⁶ Ibid, 33.

⁷ Ibid, 33.

Recommendation 9

The Australian Government should implement a national, strategic planning approach to the selection of corridors for expanding the corridor strategy and investment approach.

Recommendation 10

The Australian Government should commit to developing a corridor strategy for the Hume Highway as an immediate priority.

Recommendation 11

The Australian Government should expand the corridor approach to include freight routes beyond south eastern Australia and include key links between corridors.

9. Attachment A: ATA analysis of Newell Highway access approvals

		PBS L1	PBS L2A	B-double	PBS 2B	Super B-double	PBS A-double	PBS 3A	A-double	B-triple	Modular B-triple	AB triple	PBS 3B	Modular AB triple	Inland rail access
Road Section:															
	Barwon Hwy - from Bungunya to QLD/NSW border near Goondiwindi														
	Cunningham Highway - from Yelarbon to QLD/NSW border near Goondiwindi														
	Gore Highway - from Millmerran to QLD/NSW border near Goondiwindi														
	Leichhardt Hwy - from Moonie to QLD/NSW border near Goondiwindi														
Newell Highway (travelling south from QLD border)	Moree														
	Narrabri														
	Coonabrbran (6km North)														
	Tooraweenah														
	Gilgandra														
	Dubbo														
	Peak Hill														
	Parkes														
	Daroobalgie														
	Forbes														
	West Wyalong														
	Ardlethan														
	Narrandera														
	Newell - Kidman intersection														
	Tocumwal														
	Goulburn Valley Highway [A39]														

Key/description on next page.

Available access:	
PBS L1	≤ 20 metres
PBS L2A	≤ 26 metres (PBS Truck & Dog)
B-double	≤ 26 metres
PBS 2B	≤ 30 metres
Super B-double	≤ 30 metres
PBS A-double	≤ 30 metres
PBS 3A	≤ 36.5 metres
A-double	≤ 36.5 metres
B-triple	≤ 36.5 metres
Modular B-triple	≤ 35 metres
AB triple	≤ 36.5 metres
PBS 3B	No sections - ≤ 42.5 metres
Modular AB-triple	No sections
Relationship with inland rail	
Town with both inland rail and Newell Highway - potential hub	
Town on Newell close to inland rail - potential hub with suitable road access	