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National Access Framework
for Heavy Vehicles
Consultation Draft September 2022

NOT GOVERNMENT POLICY

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Publication information

This draft of the National Access Framework for Heavy Vehicles is provided for consultation. It is not government policy.

The *National Access Framework for Heavy Vehicles* was developed in consultation with members of the NAFHV Working Group:

- Transport for NSW (NSW)
- Transport Canberra and City Services (ACT)
- Department of Transport (VIC)
- Department of State Growth (TAS)
- Department for Infrastructure and Transport (SA)
- Department of Main Roads (WA)
- Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Logistics (NT)
- Department of Transport and Main Roads (QLD)
- Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts (C'wlth)
- Australian Local Government Association
- National Heavy Vehicle Regulator
- National Transport Commission
- Austroads

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To provide feedback please complete an [online survey](#) or email nafhv@austrroads.com.au by **Friday 18 November 2022**.

Executive Summary

The National Access Framework for Heavy Vehicles (NAFHV) aims to realise the benefits of best-practice access decision-making through improved collaboration, transparency, and shared principles and actions for state and local road managers and industry.

This Framework aims to support the agreed objectives of the *National Freight and Supply Chain Strategy* and its National Action Plan in line with the national heavy vehicle regulatory framework and key national initiatives, such as the Heavy Vehicle Road Reform and Heavy Vehicle National Law Review.

The NAFHV aims to support consistent, efficient, best-practice access decision-making based on the shared principles.

It is proposed that under the NAFHV, road managers will adopt a set of shared principles to enhance road manager functions:

- Access should be enabled unless by exception
- Foster collaboration and coordination between state and local road managers, third parties and industry;
- Harmonise access decision-making practices while encouraging innovation;
- Encourage the use of safe, productive and sustainable vehicles;
- Automating access decision-making; and
- Facilitate the exchange of open data.

The NAFHV will support a targeted program of work based on agreed principles.

1. Framework context and strategic settings

Introduction

The key aim of the proposed National Access Framework for Heavy Vehicles (NAFHV) is to realise the benefits of best-practice access decision-making through shared principles, actions, partnerships and transparency.

The NAFHV aims to support the agreed objectives of the *National Freight and Supply Chain Strategy* and its National Action Plan in line with the national heavy vehicle regulatory framework and key national initiatives, such as the Heavy Vehicle Road Reform and Heavy Vehicle National Law Review. The NAFHV supports improved access decision-making processes and harmonisation based on the shared principles.

Since the passage of the Heavy Vehicle National Law in 2014, the regulation of heavy vehicles has progressed from a jurisdiction-based model to a harmonised regulatory framework, under the National Heavy Vehicle Regulator (NHVR), in participating jurisdictions. In these jurisdictions road managers and the NHVR manage heavy vehicle access to ensure a safe, efficient and sustainable road network. The proposed NAFHV aims to support ongoing progress towards a more harmonised approach to managing heavy vehicle access across both HVNL and non-HVNL jurisdictions.

Heavy vehicle operations are vital to the national economy. Since 2000, Australia's freight task has been steadily increasing and the road freight industry is forecast to grow in linewith the Australian economy's projected recovery from the COVID-19 induced recession.

Forecast growth in total merchandise imports, exports and rising demand from agriculture and manufacturing markets are projected to boost demand for road freight transport servicesover the next five years¹

Maximising freight productivity is an established priority and ministers have committed to deliver well-targeted infrastructure investment and reforms to improve the supply chain usingnew and existing assets to achieve productivity gains for governments and industry.

Critical Area 3 of the *National Action Plan* identifies that the freight sector has suffered from inconsistent decision-making, lack of certainty and inconsistent rules across borders. A key Action (3.3) from the *National Action Plan*, is to address this problem and investigate policy, planning and operational solutions to improve freight access and movement along domestic and international supply chains. Newer and more productive vehicles which can carry more freight will put downward pressure on the number of heavy vehicles in operation while providing safety, environmental and performance benefits.

The NAFHV aims to support the development of networks for efficient heavy vehicle movements, characterised by consistent access requirements across jurisdictions. This coordinated approach will assist road managers to deliver positive outcomes for productivity, safety, environmental, community amenity, and in addressing network impacts and infrastructure constraints.

¹ IBISWorld October 2021, Road Freight Transport in Australia - Market Research Report, accessed 3 December 2021

It is proposed that the NAFHV would be supported by a national Access Working Group (AWG). The AWG would provide a forum for ongoing collaboration and identify opportunities for road managers to engage with industry and third parties in continuing to work towards a more efficient and accessible road network. The AWG would lead an agreed work program that ensures the NAFHV remains current and forward-looking.

It is intended that the AWG will collaborate with subject matter experts, industry, key agencies, third parties and authorities. The AWG's work program should be approved by the Infrastructure and Transport Ministers' Meeting (ITMM) to provide direction and resourcing to deliver improvements.

The Framework is intended to be a 'living document' and is expected to be reviewed every three years.

The importance of managing heavy vehicle access

Road managers and industry each work to maximise the productivity benefits associated with heavy vehicle access, while mitigating the risks to public safety, infrastructure and amenity. This ensures that the most appropriate vehicles are provided access to suitable routes based on the freight task.

While access to the road network is essential for the efficient movement of freight, road managers face significant challenges balancing productivity with network impacts, road safety, infrastructure capacity, environmental goals and public amenity. Road managers manage these risks and maximise productivity by regulating access to the road network through: vehicle classification; Performance-Based Standards Scheme; authorisation; accreditation; prescribed limits and on-road controls².

In addition, industry continue to invest in safe, more productive and sustainable heavy vehicles while embedding safe management practices throughout their operations. By continuing to work together, road managers and industry can improve the operating environment for safe and efficient journeys.

Purpose

The principles, outlined in section 2, have been proposed by road managers to realise the benefits of more consistent and efficient decision-making for heavy vehicle access. Best-practice road management requires the most appropriate vehicle operating on the most appropriate routes, based on capacity, location, performance and the freight task. The NAFHV provides an opportunity to optimise access to the road network for vehicles which maximise productivity, while improving road safety and reducing infrastructure wear and emissions.

Improving access nationally requires a shared commitment and collaboration from all jurisdictions, regulators, industry and third parties. The consistent application of a nationally agreed set of principles will work towards addressing inefficiencies in the access decision making process.

Vision

The NAFHV envisages road managers and the National Heavy Vehicle Regulator, working in partnership with each other, industry and third parties, to ensure safe, productive and sustainable heavy vehicle access and movements with consistency and certainty.

² Source: Based on National Transport Commission 2019, Easy access to suitable routes, Issues paper, NTC, Melbourne

Opportunity statement

The NAFHV seeks to reduce inconsistency in decision-making, provide increased certainty for industry and harmonised rules across borders which currently negatively impact the movement of heavy vehicles on the road network.³

Objectives

The key objectives for the NAFHV are to:

- provide an agreed national vision of best-practice access decision making, with clear overarching policy and principles for making access decisions at a strategic level;
- prioritise projects and initiatives to make efficient use of available resources;
- streamline the assessment process, through increasing use of automation, and to reduce the need to obtain permits;
- a reduction in the number of notices, as networks are harmonised to deliver network access for heavy vehicles;
- continue to reduce the need to obtain permits, using pre-approvals and notices as networks are harmonised to enable access as appropriate;
- support the development of tools such as: consistent access decision making guidelines; bridge and network assessment tools; spatial systems and databases;
- improve systems to match vehicles to available networks, identify network requirements of vehicles and maximise the use of road infrastructure assets;
- support road managers in prioritising future investment in road infrastructure;
- encourage industry investment in safer, more productive and sustainable vehicles by increasing certainty about where vehicles will have future access on the road network;
- improve clarity for on-road enforcement authorities when conducting cross-border operations.

Context

The NAFHV should support the aims and objectives of the *National Freight and Supply Chain Strategy* and its *National Action Plan* with a set of shared principles to inform access decision-making.

It is proposed that NAFHV objectives be delivered through key initiatives that are prioritised in the Access Work Program. Agreement on national access priorities is being sought to compliment improvements to the legislative framework expected as part of the Heavy Vehicle National Law Review.

³ Source: Commonwealth of Australia 2019, National Freight and Supply Chain Strategy: National Action Plan, August.

Figure 1: Overview - National Access Framework in relation to the National Freight and Supply Chain Strategy



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2. Principles

Road managers deliver an essential service to keep heavy vehicles moving safely and efficiently around the network, by completing route assessments and maintaining the network for use by suitable vehicle combinations as the basis for decision-making regarding HV access.

Road managers should apply a set of shared principles to support efficient, best-practice decision-making:

Principles	Description
Access should be enabled unless by exception	Registration fees, fuel surcharges and other revenue sources contribute funding to the road network. Road managers should provide access to the road network unless a safety or amenity risk has been established.
Fostering collaboration and coordination between state and local road managers, third parties and industry	Road manager practices can be continuously improved by collaborating with other state and local road managers and road authorities, to build capacity, share information and transfer knowledge. This collaboration offers the opportunity for road managers to unlock opportunities, such as increased automation, information sharing improved harmonisation of practices.
Harmonise access decision-making practices while encouraging innovation	Road managers, third-parties and industry benefit from access decision-making based on consistent approaches and outcomes reflected in permit conditions, network development, cross-border connectivity and data sharing and access. Road managers should continue to develop new tools, innovate their own practices – including through automation – and share lessons with their state and local counterparts to support harmonisation of good practice to meet safety, productivity and sustainability outcomes.
Encourage the use of safe, productive and sustainable vehicles	More productive vehicles fitted with modern safety and environmental design features can be used by road managers and the transport sector to drive a further downward trend in the number of fatal and serious crashes on the network as well as deliver emission reductions. For instance, conditions for Restricted Access Vehicles can be used to drive sustainability outcomes where allowable under the HVNL.
Automate access assessment decision-making	An automated approach to submitting, assessing and access decision-making ensures the process is replicable, transparent and timely for both road managers and industry. This includes re-using the outcomes from previous applications to guide decision-making, where appropriate, to provide much needed certainty.
Facilitate the exchange of information and open data	The voluntary exchange of data by road managers and industry helps 'paint a picture' of traffic journeys and volumes that allows for improvement and maintenance of the road asset critical to ensuring ongoing access for heavy vehicles. It can also support transparency by demonstrating progress towards more consistent access decision-making and improved access on the network. Telematics, in particular, offers opportunities for the generation and sharing of data for non-regulatory purposes to benefit road managers and industry.

3. Partnerships

A collaborative approach is critical in the development and ongoing maintenance of the Framework.

It is proposed to establish the AWG to collectively set and manage the Access Work Program in line with vision, purpose, objectives and principles of the NAFHV. This should be done in consideration of existing access forums.

The NAFHV Framework should be agreed to by road managers with the support of key industry stakeholders. Ultimate responsibility for approving the NAFHV and associated work program should be held by ministers, with the NHVR and asset managers being engaged stakeholders.

It is proposed that responsibility for chairing the AWG rotate among states and territories. This includes all jurisdictions whether they operate within or outside the HVNL.

Membership of the AWG is proposed to be comprised of subject matter experts from jurisdictions, local government, industry, key agencies and authorities. It would be responsible for proposing projects for the Work Program which will be considered by ITMM.

AWG representatives should be enabled to involve additional SMEs within their own organisation depending on the nature of the initiative, such as network planners.

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4. Actions

It is proposed to establish an Access Work Program under the NAFHV which will be endorsed and managed collectively by the AWG.

The Access Work Program (AWP) would comprise of access-related initiatives that will iteratively deliver on the principles outlined in the NAFHV. These initiatives could be established through the NAFHV or adopted following a successful rollout by a lead jurisdiction.

To ensure transparency around delivery of the AWP, it is proposed that a report would be provided to the Infrastructure and Transport Senior Officials' Committee (ITSOC) and Infrastructure and Transport Ministers annually on the implementation of the action items and application of the NAFHV principles.

The AWP would be re-set biannually to keep pace with developments in the existing and ongoing complimentary initiatives.

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5. Reporting arrangements

Where the objectives of the proposed NAFHV complement those of overarching national strategic documents, it is expected that existing reporting arrangements will be leveraged.

For productivity, road freight performance will be monitored through the *National Freight and Supply Chain Strategy* Supply Chain Benchmarking Dashboard. Heavy vehicle safety outcomes will be monitored through reporting arrangements for the National Road Safety Strategy 2021-30. These safety and productivity reports should be reviewed by the AWG to inform development of the access work program.

It is proposed that the AWG report annually to ITSOC and ITMM with an update on progress that will include feedback from industry and jurisdictional participants.

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