

Australian Governments need to take a WIDER view of the world

When it comes to maximum vehicle width Australia is in a very exclusive, but not envied, position, being just one of six countries on the planet where maximum vehicle width is restricted to 2.5m. The others in the “2.5m club” are Argentina, Japan, Lebanon, Morocco and South Korea. Even our Kiwi cousins across the ditch, ditched 2.5m in favour of 2.55m a couple of years ago now. The Truck Industry Council (TIC) has long called upon Australian governments to revise our vehicle dimension standards to align with the more globally accepted maximum width of 2.55m.

So why is 50mm is such an issue? The answer is directly related to Australia’s position in the world hierarchy of annual truck sales and despite record new truck sales in Australia last year, Australia represented just 0.8 percent of global truck production in 2018. However, with almost 80 percent of new heavy duty trucks sold in Australia each year imported directly, or being derived from truck designs, from markets where the maximum vehicle width is 2.55m or greater, most of the big trucks sold in our market must be redesigned to suit our unique width regulations. That 50mm, the height of a credit card, is actually a very big deal.

The widest parts of a truck typically include, bumpers, bodywork and aerodynamic devices; exhaust aftertreatment systems; fuel and AdBlue tanks; access steps and grab handles and; the wheels and tyres, whose width is governed by the axles they are bolted to. It is these parts that have to be redesigned and specifically manufactured to fit into Australia’s unique 2.5m width envelope. This redesign, retooling and sourcing of unique parts for Australian models cost money, a lot of money. Government has estimated that making the current range of trucks that are available in Australia meet our restrictive vehicle width limits is costing truck manufacturers between \$15 - \$30 million per year. That is for the trucks that actually make it to our roads. There are however a number of other boarder effects that need be considered in vehicle width debate. For a start, if a vehicle has to be redesigned from its source market to be brought to Australia, then substantial local sales are required to offset those development costs and make the business case stack up financially. For models where lower sales are expected, then the project simply does not get the green light. Then there is the case of new model releases in source markets, again these trucks need to be redesigned and adjusted to suit Australian width limits. Invariably this leads to significant delays before those new trucks, with their latest safety and environmental technologies, are offered for sale here. Finally, there are a number of emerging advanced safety technologies that are currently available, or that are being developed in overseas markets, that rely on sensors placed on the outermost extremities of the vehicle. Many of these systems are designed to provide safety benefits to vulnerable road users. In some cases, it is economically not justifiable to re-engineer these features for a low volume market with a 2.5m width limit. The upshot of the above, is that those new trucks with their latest safety and environmental features get left in their home market, or the features are removed for Australia because the cost of re-engineering simply cannot be justified. At the very least, there are significant delays in bringing trucks with these features and systems to our shores.

Our current Australian Design Rules (ADR’s) actually allow additional maximum width for load restraint on a truck, tie downs, curtainsider buckles, chains, etc. These can be up to 2.55m in width. This has posed no known or quantifiable safety risk, yet our law makers continue to push back on allowing trucks to be this width overall, costing industry millions of

dollars each year and slowing the uptake of trucks with advanced safety and environmental features.

TIC believes that Australia must align with international dimensional regulations to take full advantage of globally developed truck models equipped with the latest safety and environmental technologies. This alignment should start with a move to 2.55m maximum vehicle, with the Department of Infrastructure Regional Development and Cities to make recommendations to the Transport and Infrastructure Council, within COAG, to approve as soon as possible.

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