



Prime Mover Magazine – TIC Article for November 2019 Issue.

Austrroads Widens its View on Heavy Vehicle Width

Back in May of this year, I detailed how Australia was in a very exclusive, but not envied, position when it came to maximum vehicle width, being one of just 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.

In November 2017 TIC spearheaded a joint industry presentation to the Strategic Vehicle Safety and Environment Group (SVSEG), a Group chaired by the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Cities and Regional Development (DoITCaRD) and consisting of federal and state government representatives, industry peak bodies and key road safety organisations. The presentation highlighted that Australia’s unique and restrictive width regulation was slowing and in some cases, even preventing the availability of the latest model trucks with their latest technical, safety and emission systems and features from entering the market here. Significant development, both time and money, is required to re-engineer and “narrow” trucks for our market. Sometimes this expense cannot be justified and the truck is simply not available for our market. It should be recognised that Australia is not a major player in the global truck market, last year we sold a record number on new trucks in Australia, however those 41,628 sales represented just 0.8 percent of global truck sales, not even one percent. Many truck manufacturers simply cannot justify the cost of specialist width modifications for low volume Australian sales. The presentation to SVSEG also highlighted that many existing and developing advanced safety systems rely on sensors fitted to the extremities of a vehicle and that due to our restrictive vehicle width regulations, it is often easier for these sensors to be removed, rather than re-engineered, to bring a truck to market in Australia in a timely manner. The result is less availability of these systems down under.

It was hence pleasing to see that DoITCaRD took on board industry’s proposal and enlisted Austrroads to study and review the issues raised by TIC and others in the SVSEG presentation. Even more pleasing was the recent announcement that the Austrroads vehicle width review supported the issues raised by industry and recommended that heavy vehicle width be extended from 2.5m to 2.55m and did not rule out a future increase to 2.6m, a move that would align Australian standards to those of the USA and refrigerated trucks and trailers in Europe. A move that would align Australia with all major international truck markets and one that TIC would support. *“Most of Australia’s trading partners regulate a maximum heavy freight vehicle width of at least 2550mm and many allow 2600mm for refrigerated vehicles. This means that most imported heavy freight vehicles must be modified to comply with Australian standards before use in Australia.”* Austrroads detailed. Further, *“Some respondents (to the study) indicated that their support is conditional on mandated safety technologies being included as part of the change and others raised concerns about the potential impact on domestic manufacturers and challenges*

for road managers when assessing the risks of wider vehicles". Continuing, "These risks could be mitigated by mandating driver training and specific safety technologies (such as blind spot information systems and side under-run protection) and by supporting domestic manufacturing (transitional arrangements and subsidies to adapt processes)".

TIC commends the Austroads recommendations, believing that if/when implemented, a move to 2.55m will allow the deployment of more new heavy vehicles fitted with the latest safety features, something that can only be a win for Australian road safety outcomes and improved vehicle choice for operators, whilst leaving the door open for future discussions on a move to 2.6 metres.

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