

TRUCKS — AXLE SPACING REQUIREMENTS

396. Hon SIMON O'BRIEN to the parliamentary secretary representing the Minister for Planning and Infrastructure:

I ask this question, without any form of confidentiality at all, of the parliamentary secretary representing the Minister for Planning and Infrastructure or her delegate.

I refer to the intention of government to vary the axle spacing requirements for trucks with trailers or trailers on long vehicles.

- (1) Is it the case that from 1 October 2008 many large vehicle combinations currently operating will no longer receive permits unless they comply with new specifications for axle spacings?
- (2) When was this requirement notified to operators of such vehicles?
- (3) What consultation was undertaken with industry prior to the decision by government to introduce these new standards?

Hon SALLY TALBOT replied:

I thank Hon Simon O'Brien for some notice of the question, to which I provide an answer on behalf of the parliamentary secretary representing the Minister for Planning and Infrastructure. The minister has provided a response in the following terms —

- (1)-(3) As part of the latest release of the class 2 and 3 restricted access vehicle period permits issued by Main Roads on 25 March 2008, industry was advised that new controls would be put in place to address safety concerns associated with certain vehicle combinations. In the main, these concerns relate to the handling performance of 27.5-metre-long vehicle combinations that operate with short trailers and high-sided bodies—a type of combination that operates principally in the south west of the state. Under the new period permit, it was proposed that as of 3 June 2008, the maximum load height for combinations with short trailers be reduced from 4.3 metres to four metres to improve rollover stability of the vehicles. The new load height would mean a reduction in load capacity for short trailers for some products, but would not require any modifications to the trailers themselves at that time. The 3 June date was chosen to enable operators affected by the change to have time to adjust their charges to allow for the reduced load capacity.

In addition, the new period permit proposed that from 1 October 2008 the minimum axle spacing between the truck and the trailer, or trailers, on such combinations comply with the standard national requirements; that is, increasing the distance between the rear axle of the truck and the front axle of the trailer above the current minimum axle spacing allowed only in Western Australia, which will improve the stability of the combination. In many cases this can be accomplished by lengthening the drawbar between the truck and trailer, or trailers, but in other cases more significant changes may be required.

Some segments of the transport industry have now approached Main Roads expressing concern at meeting the above implementation time frame. It is acknowledged that the impact of these proposed changes on the existing truck fleet may have been underestimated by Main Roads and that further consultation is required. To that end, Main Roads is now working with industry to look at possible alternative implementation options. A committee comprising representatives of Main Roads and key stakeholders, including the Transport Workers Union of Australia and the Transport Forum WA, is being established to identify a more realistic and achievable time frame.