Fuel and productivity initiatives – Nov 2026

Fuel and cost pressures arising from the Middle East conflict are currently impacting the Australian freight and heavy vehicle industry. A recent member survey conducted by peak body Heavy Vehicle Industry Australia (HVIA) found that 61 per cent of respondents experienced deteriorating business conditions since the conflict began.

Urgent government action is needed to relieve cost pressures on the sector, and to support its ongoing viability.

HVIA proposes the below fuel and productivity-focussed initiatives, split into national and state-specific groups. They are directed towards reducing regulatory impediments and expanding access for high-productivity vehicles. They require little or no funding yet will deliver immediate productivity benefits while reducing fuel and freight costs.

National initiatives

INITIATIVE	DESCRIPTION
1. Introduce a temporary national notice (e.g. 6-12 months) allowing PBS vehicles to operate at their maximum assessed masses.	Many Performance Based Standards (PBS) vehicles operate at gross masses below their maximum potential due to restrictions imposed by state and local road managers. Prominent examples are Higher Mass Limit B-doubles on inland freight routes in Queensland. Governments could immediately introduce a temporary 6 or 12-month national notice allowing those vehicles to operate at their maximum assessed mass under the twenty PBS safety and infrastructure protection standards. Allowing PBS vehicles to immediately operate at their assessed masses would unlock productivity already proven by its set of rigorous engineering standards. The National Heavy Vehicle Regulator (NHVR) estimates that 20-25 percent of Australia's freight task is completed by PBS vehicles[1]. Even a modest, temporary improvement in total payload for that fleet could remove thousands of truck trips, and dramatically reduce fuel demand, without compromising safety, nor affecting infrastructure lifespan by any appreciable amount.
2. Automatically apply the Euro VI, Safer Freight Vehicle (SFV) mass concessions, and new MDL limits under the revised HVNL across all eligible permits and notices.	Operators investing in new Euro VI and Safer Freight Vehicles, and those operating under permits are currently required to reapply for access approvals to utilise a 0.5-tonne mass concession already agreed to by ministers. That outcome hinders productivity, creates additional fees, and ultimately delays the introduction of engines that are up to 10 per cent more fuel efficient than older models, as reported by the Federal Department of Infrastructure[2]. Ministers and road managers have already determined that vehicles not requiring permits qualify for the additional mass, but road managers conversely stipulate that the safest, most efficient, and highest productivity vehicles must reapply for their permits, to be granted that same mass concession. Automatically extending existing permits and notices to eligible replacement vehicles would accelerate fleet renewal, support the uptake of Euro VI emissions reduction technology, and deliver improved productivity and safety outcomes as well.
3. Extend General Access flexibility to 20-metre B-double combinations	Following the 1 August 2026 Heavy Vehicle National Law (HVNL) reforms, General Access vehicle length limits were increased from 19 m to 20 m for several heavy vehicle combinations to accommodate modern vehicle designs and improved driver amenity. However, B-doubles were excluded despite facing the same operational challenges. Operating with one metre added to the overall length limit would provide additional productivity, flexibility in equipment utilisation, and facilitate larger sleeper cabs and improved driver welfare, supporting workforce attraction and retention objectives while maintaining existing infrastructure impacts.

[1] TruckSales (2025) PBS trucks explained: what it is and how it affects your business (https://www.trucksales.com.au/editorial/details/pbs-trucks-explained-what-it-is-and-how-it-affects-your-business-150206/?isModal=true)

[2] Federal Department of Infrastructure (2023), Euro VI for heavy vehicles (https://www.infrastructure.gov.au/infrastructure-transport-vehicles/vehicles/vehicle-safety-environment/questions-and-answers-new-adr-8004)

4. Speed up permit approvals by setting turnaround targets	A concerted, nation-wide effort on expediting permit approvals (e.g. down to 14, 7 or 5 days instead of the current maximum of 28 days) would have a huge impact on the ability of the road freight sector to respond to customer needs and deliver freight in increasingly more productive ways. It could be facilitated by providing incentive payments to road managers that meet the new targets. Reducing permit approval times would make productive freight capacity available weeks earlier, and is likely to prevent or significantly reduce the use of less productive freight options. It would also increase the uptake of PBS and other permit vehicles, allowing the sector to build on the hundreds of thousands of litres of fuel savings already achieved annually[3].
5. Target and rectify the worst bridge bottlenecks	There are a number of bridge 'bottlenecks' that block vehicles on key routes from operating at high gross masses, such as on the Western Highway in Victoria, linking Melbourne with Adelaide, and on routes between industrial and freight centers in Dandenong in Victoria, and the Hume Highway. A single bridge restriction can force significant detours. In many cases, an alternative route may not be available, resulting in the entire trip being completed at the lower weight, due to one specific bridge. Addressing a small number of bridge bottlenecks can therefore deliver significant productivity benefits at relatively modest cost. Bridge assessment and upgrade works could be funded through the Safer Local Roads and Infrastructure Program (SLRIP), which is open until 31 January 2027 with grants of up to $5M available.
6. Review the suitability of the existing 'X-Y' rule for B-doubles	The X-Y rule is a minimum spacing requirement for B-double combinations that feature triaxle groups on both trailers. Some B-doubles failing to meet the rule even by a small margin are required to undertake a much stricter bridge calculation, vastly increasing their assessment time, and delaying their introduction onto the road network. The rule's logic should be revisited for different categories of B-doubles.

[3] NHVR (2026) Heavy Vehicle Productivity Plan 2025-2030 (https://www.nhvr.gov.au/about-us/corporate-documents/heavy-vehicle-productivity-plan)

State-specific initiatives

INITIATIVE	DESCRIPTION
1. Expand and harmonise high-productivity vehicle networks across Australia's east coast.	Access approvals that grant access for high productivity vehicles but unreasonably limit gross mass fail to deliver meaningful benefits and undermine private sector investment in more productive and efficiency freight equipment. The NHVR estimates that PBS vehicles offer productivity improvements of between 15 and 30 percent[4], bringing vast fuel savings while completing the same freight task. Expanding access to higher-productivity freight vehicles, and harmonizing conditions across state borders along the east coast without unnecessarily limiting their productivity benefit, would offer similarly dramatic fuel and productivity benefits as explained earlier.
2. Remove Queensland's re-assessment on vehicle approval amendments	Queensland is currently the only jurisdiction that requires route-by-route reassessment when an operator adds a vehicle to an existing access approval, despite the route, vehicle class and operating conditions having already been approved. That unnecessary duplication routinely delays the deployment of new vehicles by up to 21 days, preventing operators from using new equipment, and diverting government resources away from assessing other applications. As an example, a new prime mover that is unable to work for up to 21 days can result in an additional $8,000 in financing costs, and revenue opportunity losses equivalent to $20,000.
3. Accelerate PBS access for 30m+ high-productivity combinations into major QLD freight precincts.	Queensland road managers and the NHVR should accelerate approved PBS access for 30m+ high productivity combinations into major Brisbane freight precincts. Existing requirements force operators to split combinations at locations such as Gatton and the NSW border at Chinderah, costing 30-90 minutes additional time, adding coupling and uncoupling labour, adding more trucks to the road, consuming truck parking capacity, exacerbating driver shortages, increasing fuel use, and reducing supply chain efficiency. Allowing access for those vehicles would permit an A-double with triaxle trailers to operate at up to 91.6 tonnes, instead of the current 83 to 85 tonne limit. The successful Toowoomba to Port of Brisbane PBS A-double corridor demonstrates that appropriately designed freight routes can safely accommodate longer PBS combinations while delivering productivity and sustainability benefits.
4. Allow access to the South Eastern Freeway in SA for PBS B-doubles	PBS B-doubles operating in South Australia currently travel north via the Sturt Highway, then on Halfway House Road to join at Murray Bridge. Access to the South Eastern freeway would save at least 100 kilometres of unnecessary travel per trip. Many of those B-doubles meet PBS Level 2, meaning that their safety and infrastructure performance has been confirmed by the twenty engineering standards to be equivalent to the non-PBS B-doubles of nearly the same overall length, that currently access the Freeway daily.

[4] NHVR (2018) Performance Based Standards – A guide for road managers (https://www.nhvr.gov.au/files/201810-0924-pbs-a-guide-for-road-managers.pdf)