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To: The Committee Secretary,
House of Representatives
Standing Committee on Communications, Transport and the Arts
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

MANAGING FATIGUE IN TRANSPORT

During a five year research and development project culminating in the launch of a simple but innovative “matching” service between empty trucks and available freight and vice versa, it became increasingly obvious that a major problem existed in the area of fatigue in drivers of line-haul or long distance transport.

This submission will specifically comment on the problem of managing fatigue in interstate and long distance intrastate transport in view of the fact that it is this segment of the transport industry that was so widely researched and in which we can claim to have some detailed knowledge.

A UNIQUE SERVICE TO THE TRANSPORT INDUSTRY

Australiawide Loading

**Submission to the Standing Committee on Communications, Transport and the Arts
The Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia
House of Representatives**

Managing Fatigue in Transport

Introduction

Under the current methods of operating in the long distance transport industry, the owner-driver spends at least 3 hours per day coordinating his work for the coming 24 hours when in fact he probably should be sleeping to ensure correct legal Logbook hours apply.

An example of a typical day for a sub-contracting owner-driver would be as follows:

A sub-contractor based in Melbourne departs Melbourne on Sunday evening for Sydney at approx. 6.00 PM. He arrives in Sydney at 6.00 am for unloading after 12 hours driving. By law this driver should have 6 hours rest away from his truck. However after unloading he needs to locate a load for Monday unless he is lucky enough to have one pre-arranged.. If not, he needs to make a number of phone calls to get a load. Once he has done that he needs to stay by his phone, awake, awaiting instructions as to the pick-up and delivery points. Upon receiving instructions after a search that may take 3 or 4 hours it might be around 11.00 am. The instruction may be a 3.00 PM pick-up so the driver then gets only 3 hours sleep before waking up at 2.00 PM and then driving to the pick-up point, loading at 3.00 PM and completing paperwork by 4.30 PM. He then showers and rests until 6.00 PM and starts his journey back to Melbourne for a 6.00 AM time slot delivery on Tuesday, covering the trip in round 10 ½ hours by sitting on 100km non-stop except for a 1 ½ hour break along the way.

It is not uncommon for this scenario to repeat itself every second day and from this it is not difficult to see that the driver is “out of hours” for a large proportion of his driving week. Had he available to him a system with which to pre-plan his loading he would have been able to achieve his tasks within legal Log-book hours.

Consequences, Initiatives and Reducing the Problems

The line-haul sector of the Road Transport industry has had no method of recording future transport availability. Consequently there has been no facility for freight forwarders to be able to plan ahead to secure their future transport requirements. In fact the majority of industry participants have no technology tools to help them at all.

The final step prior to launching the Australiawide Loading Information Service (ALIS) and the critical factor required to achieve the launch was the obtaining of a Commercialisation Loan from the Federal Government in the amount of almost half a million dollars. An integral part of our application for such funding was our being able to demonstrate to the appropriate committee, the various National benefits that accrue from ALIS in addition to the simple and obvious improvement in efficiency. (See attached ALIS profile).

The potential relieving of driver fatigue is one such National benefit and was addressed in our submission thus:

- *The problem of driver fatigue, a major road safety issue, is addressed by drivers being able to locate freight quicker and more efficiently before setting off on their journeys, therefore being less tired when they do so and less “keen” to drive at illegal or dangerous speeds to make up lost time or to meet another commitment. Similarly they will have time to make the required rest breaks along the way to remain refreshed throughout the journey.*

The consequences of driver fatigue are that tired drivers drive erratically and aggressively causing trauma or discomfort to other road users or they simply fall asleep and drive their truck into a tree, a culvert, off a bridge or into the path of an oncoming car or truck. More far reaching consequences include bereavement to innocent family members, a drain on the nations resources as injured “truckies” and innocent victims are nursed back to health and harming of the industry reputation by a few “bad apples”.

Statistically 31% of trucks on our National highways are in fact empty¹. To avoid being part of that 31%, truck operators have three options.

1. To make numerous ‘phone calls to likely or hopeful sources of freight. This is time consuming and often frustrating particularly at the end of a long driving stint, when the driver would rather be asleep. The driver will attempt to have a sleep after making the calls but not be fully relaxed in anticipation of being called back by one of the sources he has approached.
2. To engage a Loading Agent to search for freight for him. As in the previous scenario the driver will be anticipating a call to be returned and stay awake, expectantly.
3. To return to base, with a part or poorly paying load. This is often not profitable and used merely as a method for recovering fuel costs. The decision to accept the job will often be left to the last possible moment and probably the departure time for the trip will be imminent. This causes the driver to hurry the return trip to meet a delivery deadline or to fulfil a regular or previous commitment to cart another load. He will try to avoid having his rest breaks despite being tired at the commencement of his

¹ ABS, Registration of Articulated Long Haul Transport 1994/5.

journey due to lack of sleep caused by the necessity to obtain that all important return load.

If after the above remedial action the “truckie” still finds himself amongst the “31%” he can decide to sit and wait, perhaps for days, or he may simply decide to return to base or to another freight location in the hope of finding some paying work.

In a high proportion of cases the “truckie” will have to be in a certain place at a certain time to fulfil a regular contract or commitment, but will delay his departure on that empty “leg” until the last possible moment in case some work comes up. Once again he is departing without being rested and because he is “cutting it fine” to get to his commitment, he won’t take his rest breaks along the way. When he loads again at his regular pick-up, he departs immediately and strives to meet the deadline set by that freight provider. And so the problem repeats itself over and over again.

The Australiawide Loading Information Service is now a fourth option. It is believed by most in the industry that ALIS will become the most popular and widely used option as the system proves itself. ALIS gives both the drivers and the freight forwarders the ability to plan ahead. The owner-operator or sub-contractor can advertise the availability of his empty truck well in advance of when it is actually empty. This may be hours, days or weeks in advance but is certainly more efficient and preferable to having to wait until he arrives at his destination to have to locate a load. Similarly, the freight forwarders can advertise as far in advance as they wish that they have certain freight to move from point “a”. to point “b”. There will be no charge incurred by either party for using ALIS until a ‘match’ is made. This means that both truck operators and freight forwarders can advertise availability on the Internet and Austext 24 hours a day seven days a week in order to give each other plenty of advance warning and opportunity to plan ahead, and be cost free until ‘connected’.

It has been said that ALIS is the most significant change in efficiency to the transport industry since the introduction of the B Double. ALIS provides the technology platform via which safety issues and industry inefficiencies can be addressed. Furthermore the national introduction and uptake of ALIS will result in a major reorganisation of work flow in the Road Transport industry. ALIS will provide a ‘state-of-the-art’ database, accessible continuously by transport operators and freight forwarders, across the nation, using the initial data dissemination technologies of Austext and the Internet.

The Transport Industry is renown for being slow to accept change The old habits of options 1, 2, and 3 above will have to be gradually broken. As ALIS becomes more widespread and more successes are notched up it will become the preferred if not the only option in the line-haul sector of the industry for the 20,000 (approx.) single truck and small fleet operators who have trouble locating freight from time to time. For the other 20,000 (approx.) drivers for small to medium fleets, some of whom are tied to the major contractors or freight forwarders but don’t always get return freight after a contract delivery, and indeed for the further 20,000 (approx.) trucks belonging to the major fleets and freight forwarders who can’t always manage to keep their fleets fully utilised particularly on return legs, using ALIS will also become an option.

Furthermore, ALIS is able to assist in matching trucks with freight in or close to the drop-off point for the previous load, thus avoiding wasted empty trips across the suburbs of capital cities and regional centres. Apart from the environmental and safety benefits of a reduction in such trips, the hours saved by the driver by being able to pick up his next load close to where

he dropped his last, will result in more rest and relaxation time at the beginning, during or at the end of the journey.

With the cooperation of The Australian Trucking Association, (formerly RTF), National Transport Insurance and NatRoad, ALIS will highlight, on the screens, those members of the industry who are TruckSafe accredited or who have accreditation with, for example, BHP or any other recognised program concerning road safety or driver fatigue(e.g. FMP).

It will be a long process but as non-accredited drivers or companies see preference being given to accredited drivers or companies, they will take steps to embark on an accreditation program and in so doing join the ranks of those who practice safe driving habits and allowable hours of driving.

On the other side of the “coin”, with the above measures in place, the providers of freight, who currently insist on unreasonable deadlines for delivery of their freight when instructing the freight forwarders, will slowly accept that they are dealing with a far more professional industry than the one that existed a few years ago and that they must accept reasonable transit times to various destinations around the nation. If the transport industry as a whole is united in its resistance to clients demanding the unreasonable, those organisations will have little alternative but to accept the industry standards. Eventually there will be extremely few drivers anywhere who will be willing to comply with unreasonable deadlines and those few will ultimately be “starved” out of the industry or they will comply, in order to survive.

When ALIS has been fully accepted by the Transport Industry and is being widely used by transport operators and freight forwarders alike, Australiawide Loading will be in a position to provide information from its data base to the regulatory bodies in the industry, with the full knowledge of the users of the service, in the interests of addressing problems such as driving hours, speeding, safety and driver fatigue.

Using the ALIS database it will be a simple matter for the regulatory bodies to reward those drivers who consistently comply with driving hours regulations and who seriously address driver fatigue. These rewards could, for example, take the form of reduced 3rd party insurance premiums, reduced registration fees, subsidisation or discounting of comprehensive insurance premiums etc. This program would in turn become an incentive for other operators to lift their game and contribute to the general raising of industry standards.

In conclusion it must be emphasised that the vast majority of participants in the long distance transport industry are professional operators who operate legally in most instances. As they become more professional by embracing such industry developments and initiatives as ALIS, so it will be harder for the “fly-by-night” operators to exist and it will eventually lead to those ‘cowboys’ leaving the industry or changing their attitudes and striving to become professional in order to survive. This will not be an overnight process but will be constant and gradual as have been the progressive changes that we have noted since first starting to research the industry in 1994.