

ONLINE ARTICLE

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HIT HARD: Adelaide transport business owner Brian McArdle is facing a minimum increase of \$50,000 a year under new registration fees to be introduced on July 1.

SOUTH Australia's peak road transport body remains locked in a battle with the State Government over registration costs for heavy vehicles.

Fears were raised last year when the registration costs for A-trailers were lifted and therefore the cost of registering a B-double unit rose by more than \$10,000 under charges proposed by the National Transport Commission.

To target the rising registration costs, the Standing Council of Transport and Infrastructure - made up of federal and state transport and infrastructure ministers - accepted recommendations by the NTC to cut A-trailer charges by 50 per cent, or about \$3000.

But South Australian Road Transport Association executive director Steve Shearer says the government has compensated itself for this drop by increasing the registration for a multi-combination prime mover.

Mr Shearer said while he welcomed the \$3000 cut in A-trailer fees - despite preferring a \$4000-\$5000 cut - the cost of registering a B-double would fall by only \$1450 from the current \$15,780 as of July 1, which still was not enough to make the configuration viable.

He said the organisation met with Transport Minister Patrick Conlon earlier this month to try to resolve some issues, but had not met him since then, despite numerous requests.

A spokeswoman for Mr Conlon said variations in all heavy vehicle registration fees were based on new road-wear parameters developed by the NTC.

She said government spending on roads had more than doubled over the past seven years - from \$5.2 billion in 2004-05 to an average of \$10.9b in the three most recent years, and registration charges for all heavy vehicles had been rising to reflect this increased road spending.

"The changes were not arbitrary but rather they reflected the NTC's latest understanding of road wear developed from the latest data and scientific analysis of heavy vehicle road wear," she said.

She said Mr Conlon had always been a strong supporter of nationally uniform charges and was concerned that other jurisdictions were unable to support a nationally uniform approach.

"The Ministerial Standing Council for Transport has recently approved further pricing work be undertaken immediately with a view to re-establish nationally uniform charges across Australia," she said.

"This work is due to report back to Ministers in early 2013."

But Mr Shearer said the NTC's understanding of road wear was inaccurate.

"If you compare the road-wear impact of one B-double to one semi trailer, the B-double does have more impact," he said.

"But what you need to compare is the road impact of two B-doubles to three semi-trailers. That's the relative ratio of the number of vehicles required for the task."

***Full report in *Stock Journal*, May 31 issue, 2012.**