

PRESS ARTICLE

Title:	“Bold B-triple trial to test transport mode”
Issue:	Tuesday, 11 September 2012
Publication:	The Australian Financial Review, pages 44-45

Prime movers pulling two or three trailers are already moving freight between Geelong and Melbourne and across western NSW, and they will soon become a much more common sight, writes **Claire Stewart**.

Come May next year, no longer will travellers making the 10-hour trek between Sydney and Melbourne get a glimpse of Holbrook's iconic HMAS Otway, an old Oberon-class submarine immortalised amid a patch of dry grass some 200 kilometres inland.

The NSW government expects its Hume Freeway upgrade, including dual-carriageway bypasses of the last two remaining rural towns on the route – Tarcutta and Holbrook – to be complete by 2013.

But it's also when the Barry O'Farrell government, in conjunction with Infrastructure Australia and Victoria, will start a local pilot program to test a radical new mode of transport that could save billions.

The plan is to increase the number of 'B-triples' – prime-mover trucks towing three, rather than one or two trailers – on the country's main freight corridors in an effort to boost productivity and meet a rising demand for freight, while reducing the number of transport vehicles on the road.

The government estimates that truck traffic will double between now and 2030 when freight vehicles will be driving a total of about 8.5 billion kilometres a year. It means an efficient road transport system could boost productivity by almost \$2 billion, according to the National Transport Commission and Infrastructure Australia.

State government ministers in May agreed to allow the B-triple trucks to travel on a wide range of outback and rural roads and some key routes such as the road to the Port of Adelaide.

However, the federal government would like B-triples to truck on the Hume and other

major highways linking Melbourne, Sydney, Adelaide and Brisbane.

Yet not everyone shares the same rose-coloured view of the inland freight review. State governments are concerned about the extra noise and threats to safety from the huge new rigs. And some question the claims they will actually improve traffic.

Ron Hoenig recently took his seat as a Labor backbencher in the NSW parliament for the first time, having spent 30 years as the mayor of Botany, a municipality which includes Sydney Airport and the city's port.

He says the road and rail system is in gridlock and the port is only operating at 60 per cent capacity.

"You cannot have a situation where Australia's exports and imports cannot get out of Sydney's major ports because they can't get there by road."

Hoenig says it's irrelevant that the B-triples are only allowed to travel on type 1 road train network roads, because smaller trucks are still needed to get cargo from ports or city warehouses where B-triples hitch and unhitch.

"If you've got gridlock through a mixture of trucks and cars, it doesn't matter. The road system is in absolute chaos, so reducing a handful of trucks isn't going to help as the volume of containers and freight increases."

Infrastructure Australia chief executive Michael Deegan says B-triples are already running between Geelong and Melbourne on a daily basis, and on approved routes in western NSW without any problems.

But Deegan says a larger trial is necessary to sort through the pricing issues, the road damage issues, determine whether bridges will withstand the capacity, and to get the



Move over, Northern Territory, because road train B-triples and their efficiency benefits are catching on down south as well.

community engaged and on side.

Big freight companies such as Toll, Linfox and Australia Post are all interested in the proposal, Deegan says, despite some disgruntled voices within the industry who oppose the idea of a user-pays infrastructure system to fund upgrades.

Last week Australian Trucking Association chief Stuart St Clair criticised the NSW government for foreshadowing that it will use a European-style tolling system to charge companies for the number of kilometres travelled by the bigger trucks.

"If the NSW government wants to charge trucking operators more, it should first seek the agreement of Australia's other governments to hand back this money," he says, referring to the more than \$1 billion in registration and fuel taxes paid by truck operators each year.

Deegan is quietly confident those "issues" can be resolved once the pilot program is up and running.

"The big boys have indicated they understand the economics of this. For them it

would be a huge benefit. They know the advantage of having groups like ourselves and the National Transport Commission, and others in a pilot means at least you've got the grown-ups within government working with industry to make sure it works".

Initially, trucks will operate with loads based on cubic size rather than weight, to ensure any potential road damage during the test is kept to a minimum. B-triples are likely

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be less of an issue for trucks carrying light loads.

"But we still want to think all that through. The previous effort at the COAG road reform program tried to answer all questions across every part of the country. Our interest is in the big freight routes, the major arteries."

Now he says the biggest issue is action, particularly after numerous submissions to organisation's May discussion paper

Michael Deegan, Infrastructure Australia

to be carrying toilet paper, and mail, Deegan says.

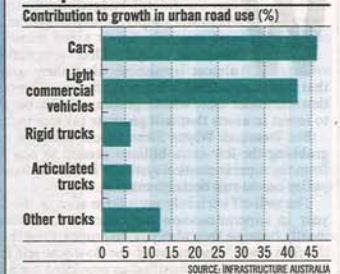
It raises the question of whether the usage tolls, which ostensibly go to paying for road upgrades to carry the heavier loads, should be levied on trucks by weight, rather than by kilometre.

Deegan acknowledges road gouging will

criticised the slow speed of transport reform.

Infrastructure Australia is in the midst of finalising its tender proposal to hire a project director to oversee the Hume Freeway test run. And he expects the number of B-triples using the road to ramp up fairly quickly once everything is in place, meaning maximum productivity benefits will be seen

Keep on truckin'



relatively quickly. "The Hume is the busiest freight route in Australia by a country mile. It is where we get the biggest productivity benefit, cut costs for moving freight and it's the obvious place to do the trial," Deegan says, pointing to a possible 30 per cent boost to productivity if B-triples are allowed to use existing road train networks.

In Victoria, B-triples use a fully duplicated carriageway on the Melbourne-Geelong route. There are some type 1 road train routes in the north west, near Mildura, but B-triples have not been given the go-ahead to operate out there.

The benefits will need to be tested on the 900-odd kilometres from the outskirts of Sydney to outer Melbourne.

Where a B-double will take 26 trips to move 1000 tonnes of cargo, a B-triple will do it in 20 trips.

The resultant fuel efficiencies and lower carbon emissions are just one part of the picture. B-triples are also built using new technology, which makes them safer to drive than many existing trucks.

"The trucking industry understands that," Deegan says. "But the car driving community still need to be exposed to these issues because they are concerned about some of the alarmist stuff you get sometimes about 'monster trucks'."

"The whole idea of a trial would be to engage in those sort of issues."

But a 2010 survey commissioned by the National Transport Commission found that of 1500 city and regional road users questioned about their major concerns while driving, large vehicles only featured in the bottom three concerns.

The NSW government estimates introducing just over 7000 of the higher productivity vehicles (HPVs) could generate \$1.9 billion in savings a year through reduced road fatality costs, reduced vehicle kilometres travelled and reduced carbon output.

Win win win

Summary of findings on B-triple truck operation 2011-2030

	Take-up scenario		
	Low	Median	High
■ Number of B-triples	1994	3665	7009
■ Reduction in total truck numbers	546	1,028	1,954
■ Reduction in vehicle-kilometres travelled (m km)	572	1,017	1,785
■ Reduction in road fatalities	14	25	45
■ Savings from reduction in road fatalities (NPV)	\$36.4m	\$64.8m	\$114m
■ Reduction in CO ₂ emissions (million tonnes)	0.635	1.131	1.929
■ Savings from reduction in CO ₂ emissions (NPV)	\$14.6m	\$26.0m	\$45.6m
■ Direct financial savings - net present value	\$561m	\$999m	\$1,750m
■ TOTAL SAVINGS - net present value	\$612m	\$1,090m	\$1,909m

SOURCE: NATIONAL TRANSPORT COMMISSION