



DISCUSSION PAPER

MRWA Accredited Mass Management Scheme Review – Network Sustainability

Executive Overview

Main Roads Western Australia is consulting with Local Governments on proposed network sustainability provisions for Restricted Access Vehicles operating at Accredited Mass Management Scheme Level 2 or 3 mass limits. The proposed arrangements would allow an “NS1” access condition to be applied to relevant roads and may require a Road Maintenance Agreement where extraordinary freight activity creates additional maintenance impacts.

The objective of protecting road assets is supported in principle. However, the proposed framework raises practical questions for the Shire of Kulin as a regional Road Manager, particularly in relation to seasonal agricultural freight, cumulative impacts from multiple users, identification of the Freight Generator, administrative capacity, consistency between jurisdictions, compliance and enforcement, and the timing of Road Maintenance Agreement negotiations.

This paper provides a basis for Council and Administration to consider a Shire position before responding to Main Roads WA, WALGA, the Regional Road Group or other stakeholders. It is not intended to oppose network sustainability reform; rather, it seeks a proportionate, risk-based and workable system that protects local roads without imposing unnecessary complexity on routine or seasonal freight activity.

Discussion Paper Objectives

- Summarise the proposed AMMS network sustainability arrangements;
- Identify the matters most relevant to the Shire of Kulin’s road network and freight environment;
- Support an informed Council discussion on the Shire’s preferred policy position;
- Identify issues requiring clarification or further advocacy; and
- Provide a foundation for a future Council Agenda Item and formal submission.

Background

Main Roads WA has revised the Accredited Mass Management Scheme to include network sustainability provisions intended to help Road Managers address extraordinary maintenance impacts associated with AMMS Level 2 and 3 vehicles. Where requested by a Road Manager, Main Roads may apply the NS1 condition to an approved road. A Transport Operator using that road would then apply to the Road Manager for confirmation that a Road Maintenance Agreement is in place, is not required, or must be negotiated.

Under the proposed process, operations may commence once an application has been made. If a new Road Maintenance Agreement is required, the Freight Generator would generally have two months to negotiate with the Road Manager. Main Roads has indicated that operators will be given a six-month compliance period after the arrangements are finalised.

KEY IMPLICATIONS FOR THE SHIRE OF KULIN

Issue	Potential implication for the Shire
Seasonal agricultural freight	Harvest, fertiliser, livestock, hay and other movements may be high-intensity but short-duration, involve multiple parties and use changing routes.
Freight Generator definition	Responsibility may be difficult to assign where producers, purchasers, suppliers, receival sites and transport operators each influence the freight task.
Road Manager administration	Assessments, confirmation letters, negotiations, monitoring, reporting and renewals may require engineering, financial and administrative resources.
Materiality and proportionality	A formal agreement process should be reserved for freight tasks that create a demonstrable and material additional road asset risk.
Cross-boundary consistency	Different approaches between Road Managers may create uncertainty for freight travelling across several Local Government areas.
Compliance and enforcement	Administrative agreements will not, by themselves, confirm compliance with approved vehicle mass limits; a credible Main Roads enforcement response remains necessary.
Financial exposure	The framework may provide a mechanism to recover extraordinary maintenance costs, but implementation and monitoring costs to the Shire also need to be understood.

Proposed Shire Position for Council Consideration

- Support, in principle, the objective of protecting local road assets from extraordinary freight impacts associated with higher mass operations.
- Seek a State-wide, risk-based framework with clear definitions, common assessment criteria, transparent materiality thresholds and standard documentation.
- Request that seasonal and cumulative agricultural freight be addressed separately from sustained mining, quarrying, industrial or major project haulage where appropriate.
- Require clear allocation of responsibilities between Freight Generators, Transport Operators, Road Managers and Main Roads WA Heavy Vehicle Services.
- Seek confirmation that Main Roads WA will retain primary responsibility for vehicle mass compliance, monitoring and enforcement.
- Advocate for practical scenario testing and meaningful involvement by regional Local Governments and grass-roots freight sectors before implementation.
- Request guidance, tools and resourcing support so smaller Local Governments can administer any final framework consistently and effectively.

Purpose of the Detailed Analysis

This Discussion Paper identifies a number of practical and policy considerations arising from Main Roads WA's proposed changes to the network sustainability arrangements applying to AMMS Level 2 and 3 access. The purpose is not to oppose the intent of the review. There is broad merit in ensuring appropriate mechanisms are available to protect road infrastructure from extraordinary freight impacts, while recognising the significant productivity benefits that AMMS provides to Western Australian industry.

The key question is whether the proposed framework will be practical, proportionate, clearly understood and capable of being effectively administered, complied with and enforced across Western Australia's diverse freight environment. The paper is intended to assist Local Governments, Regional Road Groups and other stakeholders in considering the proposal and identifying matters that may warrant further discussion with MRWA Heavy Vehicle Services (HVS).

1. Scope of the Review – Why AMMS Only?

A fundamental question is why the network sustainability review is focused specifically on AMMS Level 2 and 3 rather than considering the broader Restricted Access Vehicle (RAV) Network framework.

Many of the matters the proposal seeks to address are broader heavy vehicle network issues, including:

- road capacity and pavement condition;
- freight volume and intensity;
- route suitability;
- cumulative heavy vehicle movements;
- seasonal road conditions;
- Road Manager involvement;
- compliance and enforcement; and
- long-term road asset sustainability.

These issues are not necessarily unique to AMMS. There is a risk that introducing an additional network sustainability process specifically for AMMS may create another administrative layer without fully considering how it interacts with the broader RAV Network system.

Matters for consideration include:

- Why has the review been confined to AMMS Level 2 and 3?
- Has consideration been given to these issues within the broader RAV Network framework?
- How will the proposed NS1 condition and RMA arrangements interact with existing RAV conditions?
- Could the review provide an opportunity to simplify and improve the broader network access framework rather than create another stand-alone process?
- The longer-term objective should arguably be an integrated and readily understood heavy vehicle access framework.

2. Network Sustainability Objective

The underlying objective of protecting road infrastructure is supported.

AMMS provides important freight productivity benefits. However, increased axle group masses can also result in increased pavement impacts. Where an identifiable freight task demonstrably creates extraordinary additional road wear, there is merit in considering an appropriate mechanism through which that impact can be managed. The key issue is therefore not whether network sustainability should be addressed, but whether the proposed mechanism is appropriately targeted to the freight task and actual road risk.

3. Avoiding a One-Size-Fits-All Approach

The proposed Road Maintenance Agreement model appears particularly suited to sustained and identifiable freight tasks such as:

- mining;
- quarrying;
- major industrial haulage;
- major construction projects; and
- other long-term, high-volume freight tasks.

These activities are more likely to involve an identifiable Freight Generator, defined route, predictable tonnage and known operating period. Other freight tasks can operate very differently.

Agricultural freight, for example, can include:

- grain;
- liquid fertiliser;
- granular fertiliser;
- hay and fodder;
- livestock; and
- other primary produce and agricultural inputs.

These movements can involve multiple producers, operators, origins, destinations and routes, with freight volumes changing substantially between seasons and throughout the year. A network sustainability framework needs sufficient flexibility to recognise fundamentally different freight tasks rather than attempting to fit all operations into essentially the same RMA model.

4. Seasonal and Cumulative Freight

Harvest is an obvious period of intensive agricultural freight activity, but it should not be considered in isolation. Significant fertiliser movements can occur ahead of seeding, while hay, fodder, livestock and other primary produce may generate substantial freight movements at other times. The impact on an individual road may therefore result from cumulative freight activity involving numerous parties rather than one readily identifiable Freight Generator.

Road vulnerability may also vary considerably depending upon:

- pavement condition;
- rainfall and pavement moisture;
- seasonal deterioration;
- existing traffic volumes; and
- cumulative heavy vehicle activity.

Consideration should therefore be given to whether seasonal or high-intensity freight requires a different mechanism from sustained industrial freight.

5. Definition of the Freight Generator

Clear definition of the Freight Generator is potentially one of the most important elements of the proposed framework. If the model relies upon identifying a Freight Generator to enter into an RMA or assume other obligations, that definition needs to be capable of being applied consistently in real-world circumstances. For a mine, quarry or similar operation, identifying the Freight Generator may be relatively straightforward. In other supply chains it may be considerably more complex.

Depending upon the freight task, relevant parties could include:

- producer;
- purchaser;
- supplier;
- commodity marketer;
- receival facility;
- transport operator;
- contractor; or
- another party arranging or benefiting from the movement.

The party producing a commodity may not arrange its transport. The purchaser may determine the destination. A supplier may arrange delivery through numerous independent operators. Ownership of the product may also change during the freight task.

The framework therefore needs to clearly establish:

- who constitutes the Freight Generator;
- when the obligation arises;
- whether responsibility follows ownership of the product, generation of the freight task, engagement of the transporter, commercial benefit or another test;
- who must enter into an RMA;
- who reports tonnage;
- who makes any financial or in-kind contribution; and
- who carries responsibility where requirements are not met.

The proposed definition should be tested against a range of practical freight scenarios before implementation.

6. Clear Allocation of Responsibilities

There should be an equally clear distinction between the responsibilities of:

- Freight Generator;
- Transport Operator;
- Road Manager; and
- MRWA Heavy Vehicle Services.

A Transport Operator may be responsible for vehicle and mass compliance while having limited control over the broader commercial freight task. Conversely, a Freight Generator may generate a substantial freight task undertaken by numerous independent transport operators.

A simple State-wide responsibility matrix may assist in identifying who:

- applies;
- provides notification;
- negotiates an RMA;
- records and reports tonnage;
- makes financial or in-kind contributions;
- monitors road impacts;
- monitors vehicle compliance;
- undertakes enforcement; and
- responds where requirements are breached.

The framework should avoid gaps, duplication or circumstances where responsibility can be passed between parties.

7. State-wide Consistency and Road Manager Discretion

Local road knowledge remains critical. Road Managers understand the construction, condition, maintenance history, seasonal vulnerability and freight characteristics of their respective networks. At the same time, excessive variation in how individual Road Managers apply the proposed framework could create significant inconsistency. A single freight task crossing several Local Government areas could potentially encounter different requirements in each jurisdiction. This may become difficult for industry and Local Government to administer and could ultimately work against reasonable compliance.

A preferable balance may involve:

- clear State-wide definitions;
- common assessment criteria;
- common documentation;
- consistent materiality thresholds; and
- appropriate Road Manager discretion where genuine local circumstances warrant it.

The objective should be consistency without removing the value of local road knowledge.

8. Materiality and Risk-Based Triggers

Not every AMMS Level 2 or 3 movement should necessarily trigger a formal RMA process. Administrative effort should be concentrated on freight tasks presenting a material additional risk to the road asset.

Potential considerations could include:

- estimated tonnage;
- number and frequency of vehicle movements;
- duration of the freight task;
- AMMS level and axle group loading;
- route length;
- pavement construction and capacity;
- existing pavement condition;
- existing freight volumes;
- seasonal and weather conditions; and
- cumulative freight impacts.

Clear and transparent thresholds could provide greater certainty to both Road Managers and industry and reduce inconsistent interpretations.

9. Timing of the RMA Process

The proposed arrangements contemplate operations commencing while an RMA is being considered and negotiated. This may be practical for a long-term mining, quarrying or industrial freight task. It may be considerably less effective for a short-duration and intensive agricultural, construction or project freight task. A significant freight task could potentially be substantially completed before an RMA is finalised. Consideration should therefore be given to whether the proposed process can respond quickly enough where a genuine short-term road asset risk exists.

10. Administrative Burden

The proposed arrangements potentially involve:

- applications;
- Road Manager assessments;
- confirmation letters;
- RMA negotiations;
- formal agreements;
- tonnage reporting;
- record keeping;
- auditing;
- invoicing;
- maintenance monitoring; and
- agreement renewal.

This level of administration may be reasonable for significant and sustained freight tasks. Applied too broadly, however, it could become disproportionately cumbersome, particularly for smaller regional Local Governments with limited engineering and administrative resources. Industry equally requires a system that can be readily understood and realistically complied with. The administrative burden should therefore be proportionate to the road asset risk being managed.

11. Compliance, Monitoring and Enforcement

A significant question for MRWA/HVS is what consideration has been given to compliance, monitoring and enforcement as part of the proposed framework. RMAs principally establish administrative and asset-management arrangements. They do not themselves ensure that vehicles are operating within approved mass limits.

Matters requiring further clarification include:

- How will actual AMMS axle group loading be monitored?
- What level of on-road compliance activity is envisaged?
- What enforcement resources will be available?
- Will compliance activity be risk-based and targeted towards higher-volume or higher-risk freight routes?
- How will seasonal freight peaks be addressed?
- What compliance responsibilities, if any, will be expected of Road Managers?
- How will compliance outcomes be communicated to Road Managers?
- What action will occur where repeated non-compliance is identified?

Administrative compliance should not become a substitute for physical compliance with approved mass limits. If network sustainability is the objective, the administrative framework and physical compliance regime need to work together.

12. Working Group Membership and Industry Representation

Further information regarding the Committee or Working Group responsible for developing the proposal would assist stakeholders in understanding the basis upon which the framework has been developed.

Relevant questions include:

- Who is represented on the Working Group?
- What are its Terms of Reference?
- Is WALGA represented?
- Are Local Government Road Managers represented?
- Are regional Local Governments represented?
- Are transport operators represented?
- Are Freight Generators represented?
- Is the agricultural sector represented?
- Are mining, quarrying and other major freight sectors represented?
- Are regional operators with practical grass-roots experience involved?

The issue is not simply whether industry has been consulted. Direct involvement from people who will actually have to operate under the revised arrangements may assist in ensuring the framework can be practically implemented and managed on an ongoing basis.

13. Practical Scenario Testing

Before State-wide implementation, there may be considerable value in testing the proposed framework against representative freight scenarios.

Examples could include:

- grain harvest;
- liquid fertiliser delivery;
- granular fertiliser delivery;
- hay and fodder movements;
- livestock movements;

- mining;
- quarrying;
- renewable energy construction;
- major civil construction; and
- freight tasks crossing multiple Local Government boundaries.

For each scenario, the framework should be capable of readily answering:

- Who is the Freight Generator?
- Who holds the obligation?
- Who applies?
- Which Road Manager or Road Managers are involved?
- What triggers an RMA?
- How quickly is a decision required?
- Who reports tonnage?
- Who contributes towards additional maintenance?
- Who monitors compliance?
- What happens where several Local Governments are involved?

Practical scenario testing may identify unintended consequences before any revised framework is implemented.

14. Possible Tiered or Risk-Based Approach

Consideration could be given to whether a tiered approach may provide a more proportionate response:

- Routine or normal freight could continue under standard RAV/AMMS access arrangements without additional administration;
- Seasonal or high-intensity freight could potentially involve notification, targeted monitoring, seasonal conditions and wet-weather controls where warranted;
- Extraordinary or sustained freight tasks involving an identifiable generator, defined route and material additional road impact could trigger a formal RMA, financial contribution and/or in-kind maintenance arrangement.

Such an approach may better align the level of administration with the actual road asset risk.

15. Key Questions for MRWA/HVS

- Why is the review limited to AMMS rather than the broader RAV Network?
- What specific network sustainability problem is the proposal intended to address?
- How will the Freight Generator be defined in practical terms?
- Who ultimately holds the obligation?
- How have complex and seasonal supply chains been considered?
- What objective threshold will determine when an RMA is required?
- How will consistency between Road Managers be achieved?
- How will short-duration and seasonal freight tasks be managed?
- What consideration has been given to physical compliance and enforcement?
- What resources will HVS commit to compliance monitoring?
- Who is represented on the Committee or Working Group?
- What direct grass-roots industry involvement has occurred?
- Has the framework been tested against representative freight scenarios?
- How will the arrangements interact with the broader RAV Network framework?
- Can the process be realistically administered by regional and smaller Local Governments?

Overall Position for Discussion

There is merit in the objective of strengthening network sustainability and providing a mechanism to address extraordinary freight tasks that demonstrably impose additional road maintenance requirements. The key consideration is ensuring the mechanism works in practice.

Particular attention should be given to:

- the scope of the review and its relationship with the broader RAV Network;
- clear definition of the Freight Generator and allocation of obligations;
- recognition of different freight tasks;
- State-wide consistency balanced with Road Manager knowledge;
- proportionate administration;
- credible compliance and enforcement; and
- meaningful Local Government and grass-roots industry involvement.

Any revised framework should be practically tested before implementation and should ultimately provide a system that is readily understood, reasonably consistent and capable of being administered and complied with on an ongoing basis.

Bottom Line

The issue is not whether road assets should be protected. The key question is how this can be achieved in the simplest, fairest and most effective manner. Any revised system should clearly identify who is responsible, target genuine road risk, recognise the practical differences between freight sectors, retain appropriate local knowledge, provide reasonable State-wide consistency and be capable of being realistically administered, monitored and enforced by all parties involved.

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