



All correspondence to be addressed to:
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7 September 2026

Chairperson
Regional Road Group

Dear Chairperson

Regional Road Network Sustainability and Heavy Vehicle Access Governance

Please find attached a proposal paper dealing with the sustainability of Western Australia's regional State road network, heavy vehicle access governance and long-term road asset renewal.

As many regional delegates would be aware, given the freight task being carried on these roads, many routes are struggling to achieve a 25-year life before major repairs are required. For example, last year the Goldfields Esperance region reconstructed approximately 4 kilometres of road, the Wheatbelt approximately 11 kilometres and the Kimberley approximately 32 kilometres.

Many of our major and secondary arterial routes appear to be deteriorating much faster than they are being renewed. Main Roads Western Australia manages approximately 18,000 kilometres of regional road network, however last year reconstructed less than 100 kilometres across the regions. On that basis, the current rate of replacement represents close to a 200-year replacement program.

For a State currently thriving on the wealth generated by the mining and agriculture industries, it is a concern that we are continuing to use up our road assets to support this economic activity without a sustainable replacement or management program in place.

It is also important to recognise that Local Governments manage and maintain approximately 125,000 kilometres of road network across Western Australia. In raising this matter, I wish to make it clear that the proposal is not intended, in any way, shape or form, to adversely affect the funds that flow through to Local Government under the State Road Funds to Local Government Agreement between the State Government and WALGA. Rather, the intent is to promote discussion on the broader sustainability of the State's road network while preserving this critical funding arrangement for Local Government roads.

If you consider the attached proposal paper has merit, I ask that you please circulate it within your Regional Road Group subgroups for discussion and consideration. The immediate objective is to encourage other Regional Road Groups to recognise and give appropriate weight to the core issues raised, with the hope that this will lead to constructive engagement and collaboration across the regions.



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Where there is support, the matter may then be progressed through the relevant WALGA Zone or other appropriate regional forum in a coordinated and considered way.

Please feel free to contact me at any time should you have any queries.

Regards

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'G. Robins'.

Cr Grant Robins
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Chairperson, Wheatbelt South Regional Road Group
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PROPOSAL PAPER: REGIONAL ROAD NETWORK SUSTAINABILITY AND HEAVY VEHICLE ACCESS GOVERNANCE

To:

Regional Road Group Chairs and Regional Road Group Members across Western Australia

Purpose:

To seek Regional Road Group consideration and support for a coordinated WALGA Zone advocacy item addressing the sustainability of Western Australia's regional State road network, heavy vehicle access governance and long-term road asset renewal.

Author:

Cr Grant Robins, Shire President, Shire of Kulin
Chairperson, Wheatbelt South Regional Road Group

For Consideration By:

Individual Regional Road Groups and WALGA Zones across Western Australia

Requested Action:

That Regional Road Groups circulate the paper within their subgroups and, where supported, progress the matter through their respective WALGA Zones to establish a united regional advocacy position.

Date:

7 September 2026

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This Proposal Paper is provided for consideration by Regional Road Groups across Western Australia and seeks support for a coordinated WALGA Zone advocacy item addressing the sustainability of the State road network, heavy vehicle access governance and the rate at which regional road assets are being renewed.

The immediate concern is that many major and secondary arterial routes are deteriorating significantly faster than they are being reconstructed or renewed. Main Roads Western Australia manages approximately 18,000 kilometres of regional State road network, yet recent indicative information suggests less than 100 kilometres was reconstructed across the regions last year. On that basis, the current rate of reconstruction would represent an approximate 180 to 200 year replacement cycle, well beyond the practical life being achieved by many freight routes.

By comparison, many regional delegates would be aware that heavily trafficked freight routes are often struggling to achieve a 25 year pavement life before major repairs or reconstruction are required. Last year, the Goldfields Esperance region reconstructed approximately 4 kilometres of road last year, the Wheatbelt approximately 11 kilometres, and the Kimberley approximately 32 kilometres. These figures highlight the scale of the renewal challenge and the importance of establishing a stronger evidence base for future investment decisions.

The paper does not seek to oppose freight productivity or higher productivity vehicles. Rather, it seeks a united regional position that recognises the road network as a critical economic asset supporting mining, agriculture, freight, regional communities and State prosperity, and calls for a sustainable replacement, management and funding framework to protect that asset over the long term.

Regional Road Groups are therefore asked to circulate this Executive Summary within their subgroups and, where supported, bring the matter forward through their respective WALGA Zones so that a strong and united regional position can be advanced to WALGA and relevant State Government agencies.

BACKGROUND & COMMENT

Western Australia's Regional Road Groups perform a vital role in ensuring that local government road funding decisions maximise community benefit and preserve and improve the public road network across the State. There are 10 Regional Road Groups in Western Australia, established under the State Road Funds to Local Government Agreement, with membership drawn from elected representatives from local governments within each road group.

Given this role, Regional Road Groups are well placed to consider the broader implications of higher mass vehicle access, increasing freight demand, road asset consumption and the long-term sustainability of both State and local government road networks.

Whilst recent discussion has centred on Accredited Mass Management Scheme (AMMS) operations and higher mass vehicle access, the broader issue extends well beyond any individual policy or concession. It raises the question of whether governance arrangements, infrastructure investment and long-term asset renewal are keeping pace with the increasing demands being placed upon Western Australia's road network.

As Chairperson of the Wheatbelt South Regional Road Group, I consider it appropriate that this matter be considered by Regional Road Group Regional Chairpersons across Western Australia, given the shared interest of Regional Road Groups in road funding, freight movement, compliance and long-term asset sustainability.

It is acknowledged that, in the absence of comprehensive publicly available data from Main Roads Western Australia or the State Government relating to matters such as long-term network condition, asset renewal rates, compliance activity, enforcement outcomes and the impacts of higher mass vehicle access, some observations contained within this report should be regarded as indicative rather than definitive.

While detailed and current Statewide data is not readily available, anecdotal feedback from local government and industry suggests there is a growing concern that parts of the road network are being asked to carry a freight task well beyond the capacity originally contemplated when many roads were designed and constructed. This includes concern that renewal programs may not be keeping pace with the rate of pavement deterioration, particularly across regional and strategic freight routes.

The purpose of this Proposal Paper is therefore to invite Regional Road Groups to consider supporting the establishment of a collaborative Statewide Working Group that can objectively examine these issues, develop a stronger evidence base and provide practical recommendations to Government that support both freight productivity and the long-term sustainability of Western Australia's road infrastructure.

In this context, the issue is best approached pragmatically. The objective is not to oppose higher productivity vehicles or major transport projects, but to ensure that decisions about access, funding, compliance and asset renewal are informed by reliable data and a clear understanding of the long-term consequences for the road network.

The establishment of a Statewide Working Group presents an opportunity to bring together Government, Main Roads Western Australia, local government, industry and technical stakeholders to collaboratively examine these issues and identify practical improvements that will maximise the return on public investment in Western Australia's road network while supporting future economic growth.

ENGINEERING PRINCIPLES

Road pavements are designed and constructed based on anticipated traffic volumes, axle loads and expected service life. Consequently, changes in vehicle loading have a direct influence on pavement performance, maintenance requirements and long-term asset life.

It is a well established engineering principle that pavement deterioration increases exponentially with axle loading through the “Fourth Power Rule”. Accordingly, relatively small increases in axle group loading can result in disproportionately greater pavement deterioration and significantly reduce pavement life where roads are not designed to accommodate those loads.

These engineering principles are well recognised throughout the road engineering profession and have previously been presented by Main Roads Western Australia during industry forums, including presentations delivered to the Livestock and Rural Transporters Association of Western Australia in 2023.

The relationship between axle group loading and pavement deterioration is therefore well understood within the engineering profession and should remain a fundamental consideration when determining higher mass vehicle access arrangements.

Recognising the relationship between engineering design, pavement performance and higher mass vehicle access is central to ensuring Western Australia's road network remains safe, resilient and capable of supporting future freight demand.

For this reason, it is considered appropriate that recognised engineering principles form an integral part of any future review of Heavy Vehicle Access Governance and the long-term sustainability of the State's road network.

COMPLIANCE, MONITORING AND ENFORCEMENT

Effective governance of higher mass vehicle access relies not only upon sound engineering principles and operator accreditation, but also upon appropriate compliance, monitoring and enforcement arrangements.

During the preparation of this report, I identified limited publicly available information regarding the extent of compliance monitoring, enforcement activity and axle group loading outcomes associated with Accredited Mass Management Scheme (AMMS) operations across Western Australia.

It is also understood anecdotally that while gross vehicle mass may be monitored at many compliance points, axle group loading is not always measured or reported with the same level of visibility. Given that pavement damage is closely linked to axle group loading, this is an important issue for any future review to examine objectively.

Industry feedback and discussions I have undertaken also suggest that incorrect axle group loading continues to be an area of concern. Whilst these observations are anecdotal and should not be regarded as definitive, they highlight the importance of ensuring that compliance and enforcement capability keeps pace with increasing freight productivity and higher mass access arrangements.

Given the recognised relationship between axle group loading and pavement deterioration, even isolated instances of non-compliance have the potential to disproportionately affect pavement performance, increase maintenance requirements and reduce the service life of road infrastructure.

The purpose of raising these matters is not to suggest widespread non-compliance, nor to criticise existing regulatory arrangements. Rather, it is to recognise that a contemporary heavy vehicle access framework should be supported by an evidence-based understanding of:

- compliance monitoring practices;
- enforcement capability and resourcing;
- operator education and awareness;
- axle group loading outcomes; and
- the relationship between compliance and long-term road asset performance.

The proposed Statewide Working Group would provide an appropriate forum to objectively examine these matters, identify any information gaps and make practical recommendations aimed at strengthening governance, improving confidence in the system and protecting Western Australia's road infrastructure into the future.

ROAD ASSET SUSTAINABILITY

Western Australia's road network is one of the State's most valuable public assets, underpinning agriculture, mining, manufacturing, tourism, regional communities and the broader economy.

As the freight task continues to increase, so too do the demands placed upon the network. Higher freight volumes, increasing vehicle masses and changing freight movements continue to place additional pressure on road infrastructure and the long-term sustainability of the network.

Whilst significant investment continues to be made in major transport infrastructure projects, this report raises the broader question of whether investment in renewing and maintaining the existing road network is keeping pace with the increasing freight task it is expected to carry.

A key concern raised through this report is that, anecdotally, renewal and reconstruction rates across parts of the regional road network appear to be minimal when measured against the scale of asset consumption occurring across the network. Put simply, the rate at which road pavements are being consumed by increasing freight volumes, higher axle loads and general network use appears to be materially greater than the rate at which those assets are being renewed or reconstructed.

While the precise renewal gap should be confirmed through better Statewide data, the concern is significant. If renewal rates remain well below asset consumption and long-term renewal requirements, the network will progressively deteriorate, maintenance backlogs will grow, and future governments may be left with a substantially larger and more expensive reconstruction task.

By way of context, Main Roads Western Australia manages approximately 18,000 kilometres of regional State road network. Indicative figures suggest that less than 100 kilometres of regional road reconstruction occurred last year, including approximately 4 kilometres in the Goldfields Esperance region, 11 kilometres in the Wheatbelt and 32 kilometres in the Kimberley. Even allowing for the indicative nature of these figures, the comparison between network scale and annual reconstruction highlights a significant sustainability issue that warrants further investigation.

At a broad Statewide level, reconstructing less than 100 kilometres of a network of approximately 18,000 kilometres suggests an indicative replacement cycle approaching 180 to 200 years. This sits in sharp contrast to the practical reality that many major and secondary freight routes may require major intervention within approximately 25 years, particularly where pavement loading, seasonal conditions and freight demand accelerate deterioration.

Large capital projects, including major route upgrades, bridges and strategic transport improvements, are important and often necessary. However, they should sit alongside, rather than displace, a sustained

focus on maintaining and renewing the existing network that carries the day-to-day freight task across regional Western Australia.

Research I have undertaken, together with discussions across local government and industry, suggests there is an increasing perception that sections of Western Australia's road network are carrying freight volumes and axle loads well beyond those originally anticipated when many of those roads were constructed.

In the absence of comprehensive publicly available data relating to long term network condition, asset renewal rates, future freight demand and infrastructure performance, these observations should be regarded as indicative rather than definitive. Nevertheless, they identify important questions that warrant further investigation through a collaborative and evidence-based process.

The proposed Statewide Working Group would provide an opportunity to objectively examine whether current governance arrangements, engineering practices, infrastructure investment and asset renewal strategies are sufficient to support Western Australia's future freight task whilst protecting the long-term sustainability of the State's road network.

Ultimately, every additional year of pavement life achieved through improved governance, engineering, compliance, targeted investment and informed decision making represents a significant return on public investment and contributes to a safer, more productive and more resilient transport network.

This proposal should therefore be viewed not simply as a review of higher mass vehicle access, but as an opportunity to strengthen the long-term stewardship of one of Western Australia's most important public assets.

PROPOSED STATEWIDE WORKING GROUP AND REGIONAL ROAD GROUP SUPPORT

It is proposed that Regional Road Groups across Western Australia support the establishment of a Statewide Working Group to undertake a collaborative, evidence-based review of Heavy Vehicle Access Governance, Accredited Mass Management Scheme (AMMS) operations and the long-term sustainability of Western Australia's road network.

The issues extend beyond any single region or sector. A Statewide review would allow Regional Road Groups, local government road managers and affected communities to contribute practical knowledge about freight growth, higher mass access and road asset renewal pressures.

The Working Group could include representation from key stakeholders, including:

- State Government;
- Main Roads Western Australia (including Heavy Vehicle Services);
- WALGA;
- Regional Road Groups;
- Local Government;
- Mining industry representatives;
- Agricultural industry representatives;
- CBH Group;
- Livestock and Rural Transporters Association of WA;
- WA Road Transport Association;
- Institute of Public Works Engineering Australasia (IPWEA WA); and
- Other organisations with expertise in freight, engineering, infrastructure planning, road asset management and transport logistics.

Subject to support from Regional Road Groups, the matter could be further considered with relevant State Government representatives, Main Roads Western Australia, WALGA and other key stakeholders.

This would ensure any future work is grounded in the regional road funding and asset management framework that already exists across Western Australia.

KEY AREAS FOR CONSIDERATION

Whilst it is recognised that the detailed Terms of Reference for any Statewide Working Group would ultimately be determined through consultation with Government and key stakeholders, it is envisaged that the following key areas could inform the development of those Terms of Reference:

- Heavy Vehicle Access Governance.
- Accredited Mass Management Scheme (AMMS) operations.
- Engineering principles associated with axle group loading and pavement performance.
- Compliance, monitoring and enforcement capability.
- Consultation and collaboration with local government road managers.
- Long term road asset sustainability and infrastructure investment.
- Funding strategies that better align investment in road infrastructure with the growing freight task across Western Australia.
- Seasonal operating arrangements and network resilience.
- Opportunities to improve freight productivity whilst protecting public road infrastructure.
- Interstate approaches and examples of recognised best practice.
- Practical, evidence-based recommendations that support Government, local government and industry in developing a sustainable long term framework for heavy vehicle access, road asset management and infrastructure investment.
- Development of an immediate and long-term funding strategy that recognises the scale of renewal required across regional and strategic freight routes.
- Improved collection and reporting of data relating to axle group loading, compliance activity, network condition and renewal rates.

The intention of the proposed Working Group is not to revisit established policy for its own sake, but to facilitate a collaborative and evidence-based review that assists Government, industry and local government to better understand the challenges facing Western Australia's road network and identify practical opportunities to strengthen governance, improve long term infrastructure sustainability and support the State's future freight task.

CONCLUSION

Regional Road Groups are well placed to provide leadership on this matter because they bring together elected member representation, local government road management experience and a direct role in regional road funding priorities across Western Australia.

A collaborative Regional Road Group discussion provides an opportunity to develop a shared Statewide understanding of the issues before the matter is further considered with Government, Main Roads Western Australia, WALGA and other stakeholders.

The proposal represents a constructive investment in protecting one of Western Australia's most valuable public assets while supporting a productive, efficient and sustainable freight network for future generations.

Ultimately, the long-term success of Western Australia's freight network should be measured not only by the efficiency with which freight is moved, but also by the condition, resilience and sustainability of the road infrastructure upon which that freight depends.

RECOMMENDATION

That Regional Road Groups across Western Australia be requested to:

1. Support, in principle, the establishment of a Statewide Working Group to undertake a strategic review of Heavy Vehicle Access Governance, including Accredited Mass Management Scheme (AMMS) operations, compliance and enforcement capability, and the long-term sustainability of Western Australia's road network.

2. Recognise the value of Regional Road Group input in identifying practical issues associated with heavy vehicle access, compliance, road funding and long-term road asset sustainability.
3. Consider endorsing the Key Areas for Consideration contained within this executive summary as matters that may inform the development of Terms of Reference for the proposed Working Group.
4. Circulate this Executive Summary within their respective subgroups and, where supported, bring the matter forward through their WALGA Zone to assist in establishing a strong and united regional position on road asset sustainability, heavy vehicle access governance and long-term renewal funding.