



Industry Skills
Australia

National Heavy Vehicle Driver Action Plan



Contents

Foreword	01
Acknowledgement of Country	02
About the Action Plan	02
About Industry Skills Australia	02
Executive summary	03
Action Plan Priorities	05
Priority area 1: Elevate perceptions of the profession	05
Priority area 2: Improve the supply of HV Drivers	06
Priority area 3: Improve training/licensing pathways	07
Priority area 4: Retain the Drivers we have	08
Program of work	09

Industry Skills Australia acknowledges and thanks those organisations that supplied images to be used in this National Heavy Vehicle Driver Action Plan. All Purpose Transport (pages 8 and 10), Team Global Express (page 9), Simon National Carriers (page 11), NT Road Transport Association (page 12)



Foreword

According to available data, Australia is facing a critical truck driver shortage, with an estimated 28,000 unfilled positions in 2024, projected to balloon to over 78,000 by 2029.

The heavy vehicle road transport industry needs skilled, trained, and safe drivers who see a clear and attractive employment pathway as one that will ensure a growing and profitable career.

The current systemic block is in the institutionalised licensing system that has not listened to the road freight industry.

Already most state associations have created their own driver development programs that embrace the calls from industry to do more to create trained, job ready drivers.

In late 2024, I hosted a Heavy Vehicle Road Transport Safety Round Table meeting at Parliament House that was attended by 37 leading industry representatives from transport companies, company representatives from key supply chains, the union movement and transport and industry associations.

A key outcome of the meeting was to establish a workforce action plan that will underwrite the implementation of a structured training regime that will draw from existing models and deliver a higher quality of professional driver into the heavy vehicle road transport industry.

The National Heavy Vehicle Driver Action Plan which has been produced by Industry Skills Australia is a culmination of the work of the working group and reflects the call to action by the road transport industry.

I would like to acknowledge the work of Industry Skills Australia and their efforts in this area as well as the following Associations for their advice and guidance:

- National Road Transport Association
- National Road Freighters Association
- Australian Trucking Association
- Australian Logistics Council
- Australian Furniture Removers Association
- Cement Concrete & Aggregates Australia
- Bus Industry Confederation
- Transport Workers Union
- Transport Women Australia Limited
- TEACHO Limited
- Northern Territory Road Transport Association
- Queensland Trucking Association
- Road Freight New South Wales
- South Australian Road Transport Association
- Tasmanian Transport Association
- Victorian Transport Association
- Western Australia Transport Industry Association

Senator Glenn Sterle

Chair – Senate Rural Regional Affairs & Transport Legislation Committee, Labor Senator for Western Australia

Acknowledgement of Country

Industry Skills Australia acknowledges the Traditional Owners of Country throughout Australia and recognises the continuing connection to lands, waters, skies and communities. We pay our respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and to Elders past and present.

About the Action Plan

An enduring challenge for the road transport industry in Australia has been a shortage of drivers. Despite the efforts of the industry, peak bodies, associations, unions and government, the shortages persist and will critically impact the ability of Australia's supply chains to meet demand if not addressed.

The purpose of the National Heavy Vehicle (HV) Action Plan is to:

- bring stakeholders together to gain consensus on priorities; and
- identify actions, advocacy and a shared approach to addressing driver shortages.

The Action Plan is owned by the transport and logistics industry and responsibility for the program of work sits with a range of stakeholders based on their remit and area of influence.

Some activities in the program of work had commenced prior to the Action Plan being developed. Their inclusion recognises what the industry is already doing. The Action Plan will support and build upon this work and encourage national adoption of what is known to be effective.

Detailed information on the status, timing and stakeholders responsible for each activity in the Program of Work is provided on the Industry Skills Australia (ISA) website.

About Industry Skills Australia

Industry Skills Australia (ISA) is the Jobs and Skills Council for the transport supply chain industries. These include Aviation, Maritime, Rail, Transport and Logistics, and the emerging sectors of Omnichannel Logistics and Distribution, and Air and Space Transport and Logistics.

ISA is owned and led by industry. Our goal is to build a world-class workforce for Australia's transport supply chain industries to boost productivity, create better jobs and build opportunities for individuals. Our 30-year history working with industry supports us in researching workforce needs, promoting skills development and creating training products that meet industry priorities.



Executive summary

The biggest issue facing the Australian road transport industry, both freight and passenger, is the critical driver shortage, which in turn has serious implications for the Australian economy, communities and broader transport supply chain industries. Truck driving is the ninth most common occupation in Australia. Heavy vehicle (HV) Drivers are the essential workforce behind Australia's domestic economy. Without HV Drivers, our goods, food and passengers cannot get where they need to go. More than 185,000 truck drivers and 40,000 bus and coach drivers¹ keep national supply chains and passengers moving, contributing \$33 billion to GDP in FY 2024–25². Yet every state and territory³ is already experiencing driver shortages. The International Road Transport Union (IRU) Global Truck Driver shortage report shows a deepening driver shortage with 28,000 unfilled positions in 2024 forecast to grow to 78,000 by 2029.

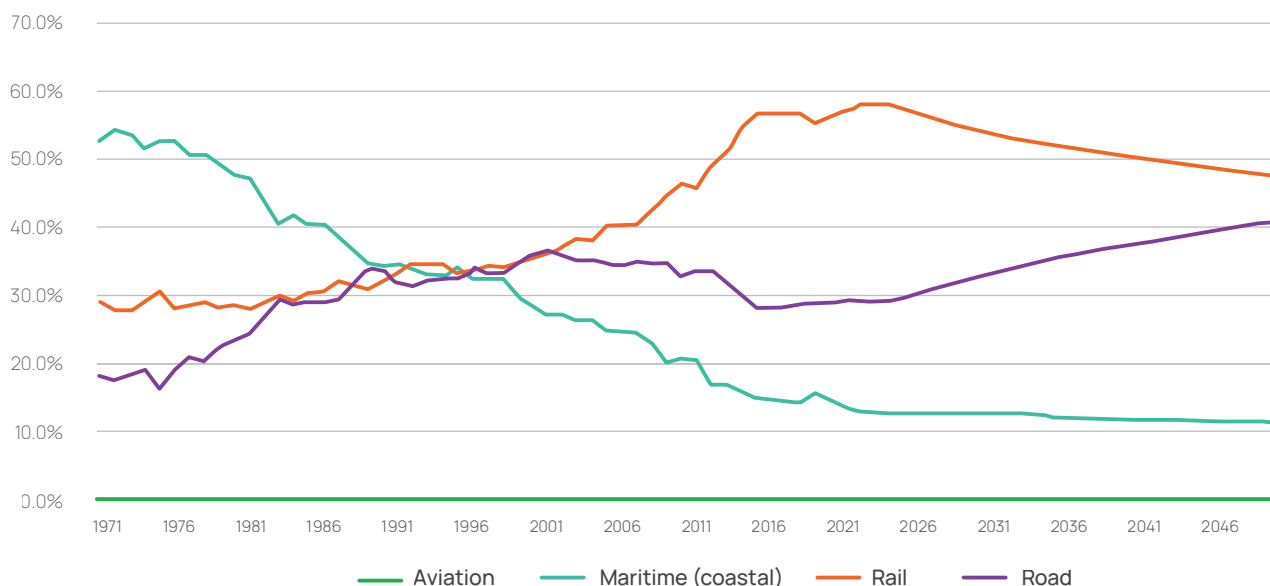
Despite these shortages, demand pressure is only set to intensify. Official forecasts show sustained growth in the road freight task to 2050, with road's share projected to rise from 31% in 2026 to 41% by 2050.

This equates to freight task volumes lifting by 54%, averaging 1.8% per year freight task to 2050.

Meanwhile, the supply of truck drivers has expanded at just 0.97% annually over the past 25 years.¹ This widening gap between fast-rising freight demand and slow workforce growth makes targeted recruitment, training, and retention of HV Drivers an urgent economic priority.

The National Heavy Vehicle Driver Action Plan (the Plan) was developed in partnership with industry leaders, and its program of work validated by broader stakeholder consultation. It provides a shared commitment to address HV Driver shortages. The Plan aims to identify and build upon local initiatives achieving good outcomes, trial new approaches, and identify where advocacy is required to ensure State and Commonwealth Government programs can better support this integral sector of the Australian economy.

% Share of Freight Task by Transport Mode



- ¹ Jobs and Skills Australia. (2025, November). National Industry Trend – November 2025 [Data set]. <https://www.jobsandskills.gov.au/data/labour-force-trending>
- ² IBISWorld. (2026, February). Industry Data Wizard [Database]. Retrieved February 6, 2026
- ³ Jobs and Skills Australia. (n.d.). Occupation Shortage List. Retrieved February 3, 2026, from <https://www.jobsandskills.gov.au/data/occupation-shortage/occupation-shortage-list>

The Action Plan, and its program of work, are organised under four priority areas.

Priority area 1:	Elevate perceptions of the profession	Aims to build public awareness of HV driving as a highly skilled and rewarding career that is a legitimate alternative to university with equivalent earning potential. The program of work includes development of a national communication strategy to build broad community engagement and positively influence the public perceptions of the profession.
Priority area 2:	Improve the supply of HV Drivers	Builds upon priority area 1 and considers how to attract new entrants from labour pools that are underrepresented or could be more effectively targeted. The program of work explores how to maximise benefits from skilled migration; supporting employers with recruitment tool kits; and, developing high-quality resources to facilitate work readiness and transition programs for use with a wide range of different target groups.
Priority area 3:	Improve training/ licensing pathways	Focuses on improving funding for and access to career and learning pathways for new and existing supply chain workers. It also includes actions to improve the quality and consistency of training, assessment and licensing for HV Drivers. Specific areas of focus include a national HV Driver apprenticeship, and building the driver trainer workforce so it can meet demand in terms of number of people trained, and the quality of the training they receive.
Priority area 4:	Retain the Drivers we have	The first three priorities aim to improve attraction and development of a safe and efficient HV Driving workforce. However, HV Drivers often leave the industry due to a range of issues that must be addressed to support better retention. Actions for this priority include improving access to and the quality of facilities for HV Drivers; and developing resources to support HV Driver wellbeing, continuing professional development, career planning and satisfaction with employment.



Action Plan Priorities

Priority area 1:

Elevate perceptions of the profession

Public perception of HV Driving as an attractive and rewarding career must be elevated.

Redefining the industry's image will allow a broader range of potential candidates to be aware of the significance of the driving role in Australia's supply chain, and the breadth of opportunities available to talented and ambitious individuals.

HV Driving should be seen as a professional career requiring highly skilled individuals, and an attractive alternative to professions requiring a university education with equivalent earning potential, no HECS debt, and rewarding future opportunities.

Truck Driver Pay Compared with Higher Education Qualified Occupations

Occupation	Earnings per week	Higher ed. qualified (%)
Electronics Engineers	\$1,782	79.4%
Truck Drivers	\$1,780	5.1%
Inspectors and Regulatory Officers	\$1,764	36.8%
Social Professionals	\$1,758	69.8%

Source: JSA, Occupation Profile Data, November 2025

The Action Plan Program of Work identifies opportunities to:

- Develop a coordinated national communication strategy targeted at a broad audience. The strategy should deliver consistent messaging about:
 - current and future opportunities across the range of HV freight, passenger and equipment types
 - earning potential, job security, flexibility, mobility, and self-employment opportunities
 - career opportunities and learning pathways.
- Positively influence the perceptions of school students and their parents, people considering a career change, and groups that are underrepresented in the driving workforce.
- Build stronger engagement with teachers and advisers, enhancing the manner in which driving careers are described and who is targeted.
- Produce collateral, resources and tool kits using best-practice communication techniques that can be implemented across a range of mediums, forums and contexts.
- Evaluate existing initiatives, then broaden and build upon those that are achieving positive outcomes.

Priority area 2:

Improve the supply of HV Drivers

The road transport sector has an ageing workforce. An adequate pipeline of new recruits is required to replace retiring HV Drivers.

There is a significant gender imbalance in the HV Driver workforce, with only slow improvement in female representation over time. Women made up only 6.4% of truck drivers and 16.2% of bus and coach drivers in 2025⁴. Other under-represented cohorts in Australia could also be targeted.

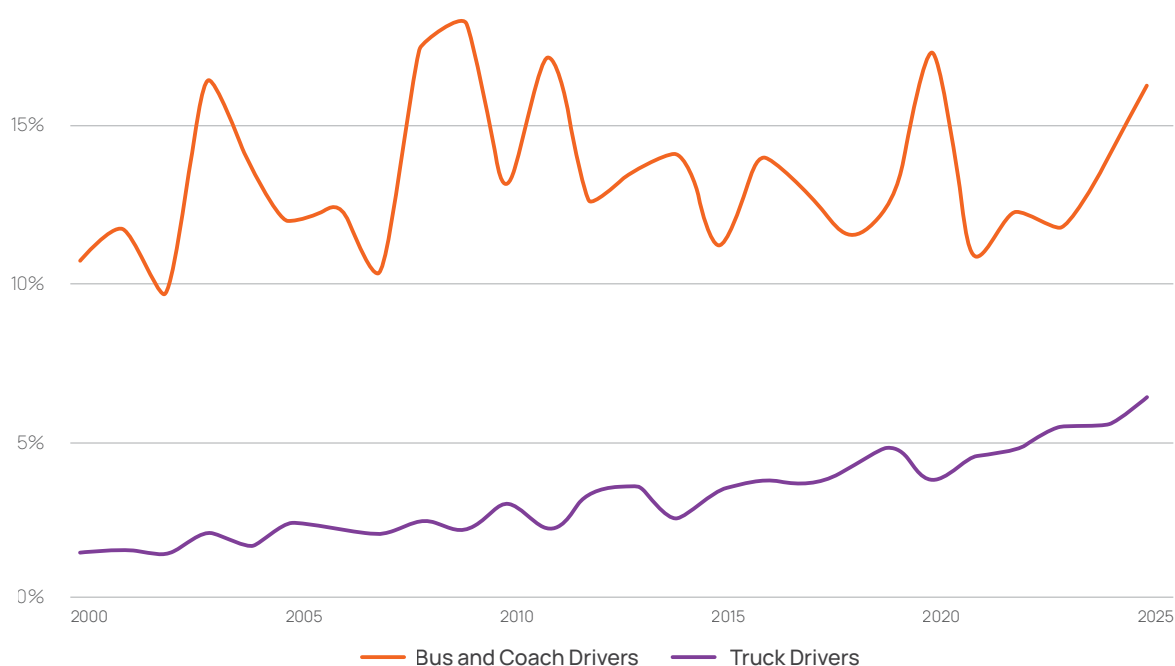
Skilled migration is an option to address driver shortages; however, migration settings/agreements, licence recognition schemes and programs to support transition must be improved.

Age restrictions currently prevent employers attracting younger workers. Pathways facilitating the entry of 18-year-olds to the driving workforce should be established.

The Action Plan Program of Work identifies opportunities to:

- Build upon the work of priority area 1, develop a recruitment tool kit that provides advice and resources about how and where to best target candidates in different target groups.
- Develop a multifaceted program to better utilise skilled migration, including:
 - advocating for HV driving to be included in skilled migration arrangements
 - advocating for more robust training and assessment requirements for recognition of international HV licences, and consistency between jurisdictional licensing bodies
 - advocating for a national program to support migrants' cultural transition
- Review existing school-to-work and work-readiness programs, and develop a national approach that draws on what has proven to be successful in the past
- Work with jurisdictional bodies to identify possible solutions to current age restriction barriers
- Identify pathways and attraction strategies for workers with transferable skills
- Address issues with workplace facilities and culture that may be a barrier for some people.

Female Participation in HV Driving Occupations, 2000–2025



⁴ Australian Bureau of Statistics, Detailed Labour Force Survey, EQ08 - Employed persons by Occupation unit group of main job, November 2025 (annual average of original data)

Training and assessment requirements to obtain an HV Driver's licence can be a disincentive for potential new entrants, and a substantial investment for employers. Regional access to training and licensing as well as licence age restrictions also often pose a challenge.

Holding a licence alone does not meet industry expectations of what defines a safe and productive HV Driver. A broad range of skills and knowledge must be developed through additional training, mentoring and experience.

Employer confidence in the consistency and quality of licensing and training systems means some licensed HV Drivers are not employed because employers cannot have certainty candidates have the necessary skills to operate heavy vehicles safely and efficiently.

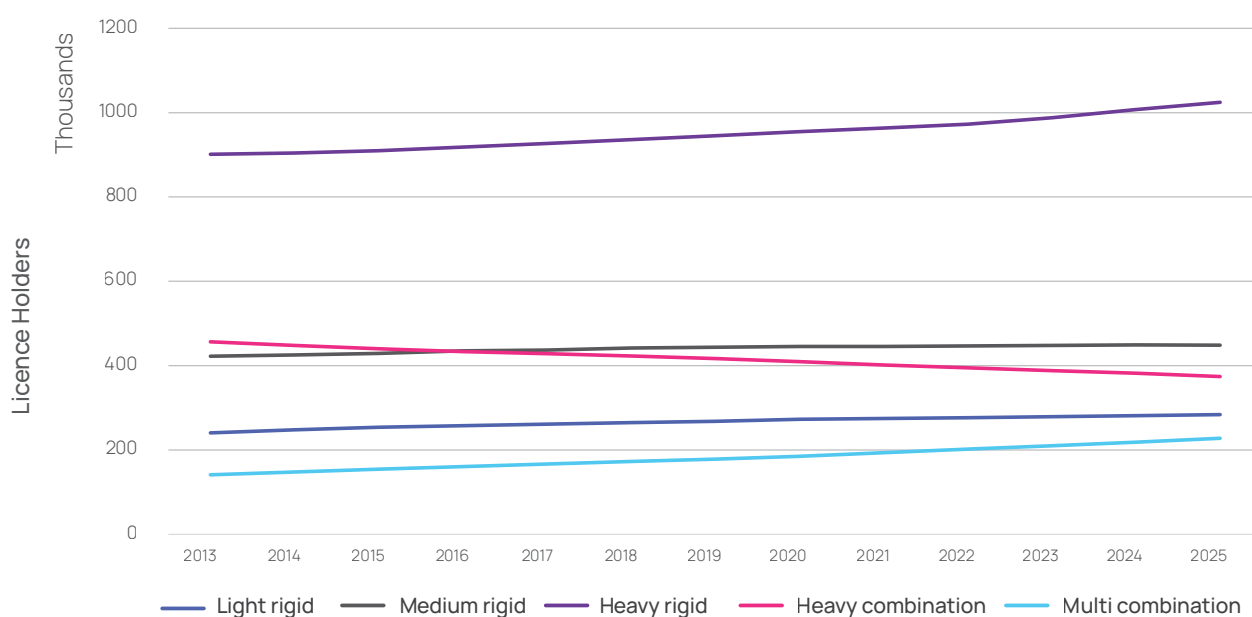
VET funding and employer incentives vary across jurisdictions, as do designations of traineeships and apprenticeships. This makes implementation of initiatives such as a HV Driver apprenticeship difficult.

Emphasis must be placed on increasing driver trainer and mentor numbers, and a complementary program of professional development designed with this cohort in mind.

The Action Plan Program of Work identifies opportunities to:

- Document all State/Commonwealth funding sources related to HV Drivers and make this easily available to employers and job seekers.
- Identify gaps and inconsistency in funding and training arrangements, and engage with funding bodies to advocate for industry's needs.
- Advocate for consistent national arrangements for:
 - a national HV Driver apprenticeship
 - skill development programs to meet the needs of different types of driving and industry sub-sectors
 - licensing processes and training to prepare candidates
 - identifying and responding to changing competency requirements related to emerging technology such as Advanced Driver Assistance Systems
 - building the HV Driver Trainer workforce and providing continuing professional development.
- Engage with employers to identify key factors that impact confidence in the industry's training and licensing systems, and identify training provider capacity-building required to improve quality.
- Document and promote clear training (qualification/licence) pathways aligned to career progression.
- Develop resources to support employers to better understand and engage with the national VET system.

Over the last decade the number of HV licence holders has not kept pace with growth in the freight task.



Source: BITRE, Yearbook 2025

Priority area 4:

Retain the Drivers we have

The first three priorities in the action plan aim to improve attraction and development of a safe and efficient HV Driving workforce. However, drivers often leave the industry due to a range of issues that must be addressed to support improved retention.

Mental health is a major issue for young drivers, with 1 in 5 truck drivers under the age of 35 reporting severe psychological distress, compared with 1 in 9 Australian men in the same age group⁵. Issues HV Drivers encounter in their work include, but are not limited to: aggression/violence; psychosocial challenges; discrimination and bullying on worksites; poor rest stop facilities (including appropriateness for women); stringent compliance obligations that often lead to fines for minor administrative errors; turnaround and waiting times and access to facilities at load/unload points; and, treatment of drivers by customers and others.

The Action Plan Program of Work identifies opportunities to:

- Continue current work in partnership with Commonwealth, State and Local Government to improve rest facilities for HV Drivers.
- Collect information about HV Drivers' experiences at work so data-informed responses can be identified.
- Work with industry to support driver wellbeing, continuing professional development, career planning and satisfaction with employment.



1 in 5

YOUNG TRUCK DRIVERS
REPORT SEVERE LEVELS
OF PSYCHOLOGICAL
DISTRESS



⁵ van Vreden, C. et al. (2020). Driving Health Study Report No. 6: Survey of the physical and mental health of Australian professional drivers. Monash University

Program of work

The program of work is a key part of the industry's approach to addressing Heavy Vehicle Driver shortages. Whilst ISA will monitor and report on the status of each activity, many fall outside of the Jobs and Skills Council remit and may be undertaken and funded by other stakeholder groups.

Priority area 1:

Elevate perceptions of the profession

Activity

National communication strategy and resources

- Determine the information needs of various audiences and the most effective ways to reach and inform them. Target groups to include:
 - school students/leavers and their parents
 - unemployed job seekers, career changers and people re-entering the workforce
 - existing transport supply chain workers, and workers in other sectors with transferable skills
 - people from underrepresented groups including: women, First Nations peoples, culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) groups, people with disabilities, and any other groups identified
 - teachers and careers advisers/counsellors.
- Develop a co-ordinated national communication strategy that positively influences community perceptions and delivers consistent messages about:
 - current and future opportunities across the range of HV freight, passenger and equipment types, including the implications of autonomous equipment and vehicles
 - earning potential, job security, flexibility, mobility, and self-employment opportunities
 - career and learning pathways
- Undertake an audit of existing resources and initiatives. Evaluate and consolidate content that could be used nationally.
- Produce collateral, resources and tool kits that can be implemented across a range of mediums, forums and contexts.
- Build stronger engagement with teachers and advisers, improving the way they describe driving careers and which students are targeted.



Activity

HV Driver recruitment

- Building upon the work of priority area 1 and the existing work of others, develop and make available to industry a recruitment tool kit that provides advice and resources about how and where to best earmark candidates in different target groups, e.g., different age groups, females, career change, return to work, CALD people, First Nations peoples, people with disabilities.

Skilled migration

- Identify, document and promote Skilled Migration pathways and programs currently available for industry to utilise in addressing workforce shortages.
- Advocate for improved Skilled Migration arrangements for HV Driving occupations.
- Engage with the Department of Home Affairs to ensure current assessment criteria for HV Driver migration delivers skilled drivers.
- Work with Industry to support migrants' transition to the Australian HV Driving workforce. The National program should include driving skills and knowledge, industry-specific language and literacy and cultural awareness.

Age restrictions for HV Drivers

- Work with jurisdictional bodies to identify possible solutions to current age restriction barriers. May include the worker being enrolled in an approved structured training program such as an apprenticeship.



Activity

Funding for training, VET system arrangements and employer incentives

- Identify, evaluate and document all State/Commonwealth funding related to HV Drivers.
- Identify gaps and inconsistency in funding and training arrangements and work with funding bodies to address industry concerns, including advocacy for improved funding models including wage support for new entrants while they are in training.
- Undertake focused work, in consultation with State Training Authorities, employers, RTOs and HV Drivers to improve rollout and uptake of national HV Driver apprenticeship. This will include developing a case study on the implementation of the HV Driver apprenticeship in Queensland.

Improve the quality of HV Driver training

- Develop a strategy to attract experienced HV Drivers to become trainers and mentors.
- Advocate for improved pension settings to encourage experienced HV Drivers to continue supporting the development of the driving workforce.
- Develop a national HV Driver Trainer professional development program. Explore options for industry-mandated CPD.
- Work with industry to identify how the training system can support emerging technology such as Advanced Driver Assistance Systems.
- Identify key factors that impact employer confidence in the training and licensing systems, and identify RTO capacity-building required to improve quality.
- Engage with industry bodies, employers, drivers and licensing bodies to determine what can be done to further harmonise licensing arrangements and associated training, assessment and testing practices.
- Develop and promote resources to support employers and employees to better understand and engage with the national VET system. Clear training (qualification/licence) pathways aligned to career progression to be included.



Priority area 4:

Retain the Drivers we have

Activity

Improve HV Driver employee experience

- Continue current work in partnership with Commonwealth, State and Local Government to improve rest facilities for HV Drivers.
- Work with industry to establish a national mechanism to collect and analyse information about drivers' experiences in their work (e.g. community/customer behaviour, facilities, excessive compliance requirements, etc.) so data-informed responses can be introduced.
- Develop and make available a suite of national resources/programs based on HV Driver feedback and input from experts to:
 - support driver wellbeing, including those returning to work after injury
 - support drivers working in areas where cost-of-living and housing pressures exist
 - facilitate continuing professional development, and career planning
 - provide information on publicly accessible amenities and facilities.

Online Employer Information Hub

Activity

- Develop an Employer Information Hub for transport and supply chain Industry employers that will serve as a 'one-stop-shop' for information on:
 - Funding and incentives
 - Skilled migration pathways
 - Workforce development (how to become an employer of choice)
 - Careers and career and learning pathways

