

Improving safety with expanded competencies and training minimums

What are the issues?

Under the current Heavy Vehicle Driver Competency Framework, drivers are required to be assessed against 15 competencies to obtain a heavy vehicle licence. Depending on the licence class and where a person lives, assessment can occur via:

- a competency test conducted by a state or territory licence tester or an outsourced assessor
- a progressive and final competency assessment undertaken as part of an approved training program.

Some, but not all, states and territories require drivers to complete training. This is usually one of two nationally VET recognised qualifications *Licence to Drive* or *Drive a Heavy Vehicle*.

Shortcomings have been identified with the current competency standards and training and assessment pathways:

- Industry has reported that drivers are not sufficiently skilled for employment when they are first licensed and that increased behind-the-wheel time in particular is needed to build competence.
- Coroners' inquests have identified deficiencies in the skills of some heavy vehicle drivers.
- There is significant variation in the length of training and assessment programs with some outsourced providers offering very short courses.

What is being progressed to address the issue?

Two key changes proposed are:

- strengthening the competencies
- introducing minimum mandated course lengths which include minimum behind-the-wheel time.

Strengthening competencies

A set of revised competency elements which cover the knowledge and skills heavy vehicle drivers need, as well as their attitude and approach to the driving task have been developed. These were based on research, industry input, a review of overseas approaches, and coronial reports.

Training and assessment which builds knowledge will be delivered online. This will allow licence applicants flexibility to undertake the training when and where it best suits them, and reduce costs. Alternative approaches to online will be provided for those people who are unable to readily access or use an online approach.

After completion of the knowledge based assessment (either delivered online or through another mechanism) remaining competency elements will be delivered through a combination of face-to-face training and behind-the-wheel experience and assessment.

Minimum mandated training

The proposed mandated minimum training and behind-the-wheel times, outlined in the table below, may be modified based on trials of the new material in the field.

Licence Class	Total hours	Online hours	Class based learning hours	Behind-the-wheel hours
Light rigid (LR)	20.5	10	4.5	6
Medium rigid (MR)	20.5	10	4.5	6
Heavy rigid (HR)	24.5	10	4.5	10
Heavy combination (HC)	19	4	4	11
Multi-combination (MC)	25.5	10	4	11.5

The hours indicated are those required to gain each licence class. However, it should be noted that it is possible to move directly from a car licence to either an LR, MR or HR licence. To gain a HC licence a person must have first held an MR or HR licence. To gain an MC licence a person must have first held a HC licence.

With a growing freight task and changing vehicle fleet, Australia needs a lot of well-trained and capable heavy vehicle drivers. That starts with effective driver licensing.

What problem are we trying to solve?

Heavy vehicles are over represented in crashes, particularly fatal crashes.

The National Heavy Vehicle Driver Competency Framework (the Framework) and heavy vehicle licensing regimes exist to help protect all road users by ensuring drivers are competent to safely operate the vehicles they are licensed to drive.

Through the review of the Framework, requested by Transport Ministers, three problems were identified:

1. Heavy vehicle driver licensing is not sufficiently focused on key risks.
2. Arrangements governing heavy vehicle training and assessment are affecting the quality of driver training.
3. Heavy vehicle driver licensing is applied inconsistently, even across jurisdictions which have adopted the Framework.

Australian transport ministers have approved changes to the National Heavy Vehicle Driver Competency Framework.

What's next?

Austrroads is leading a national program of work with licensing authorities. Our focus will be to deliver a harmonised approach across Australia.

We expect to implement this large and complex program in stages. We anticipate it will be implemented in phases and take a number of years to be fully in place.

