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# Set rate for freight 'to protect drivers'

**BY BRAD WORRALL**

TWO-hundred and eighty seven white crosses lined Albury's Union Bridge yesterday as a stark reminder to the people killed in truck accidents across the nation last year.

The symbolism is also part of the truck drivers' union push for a better and safer deal.

It says cut-throat tendering for freight contracts is pushing its members' wages down — some working for as little as \$7 an hour.

The Transport Workers Union says it forces the drivers to speed and drive beyond their limits to make a living.

They want the Federal Government to legislate a minimum rate for freight contracts in a bid to make the highways safer.

Border union representative Daryl Coghill says it has been an ongoing issue.

"The drivers tell me that they

are often pushed to get the job done but companies would say that is not the case," he said.

"But because the rates aren't quite up to speed, they are forced to go that little bit harder, that little bit faster.

"If you compare the time the guys put in, to the money they get in their hand, then on an hourly basis they would be pretty close to the lowest paid workers in Australia — sometimes it breaks down to \$7 or \$8 an hour before tax.

"The drivers know the quicker they get a job done the more opportunity for another run, a bit more money.

"We want the Federal Government to establish a safe rate for freight, so that tenders can't be undercut to the point where it puts the drivers at risk."

Transport Workers Unions campaign officer Richard Priest

said studies had proven a link between pay structures and accidents.

"A study late last year found drivers paid a kilometre rate tend to speed and those paid a trip rate tend to work excessive hours," he said.

"All of the studies tell us that it is the economic pressure applied by clients that causes crashes.

"We need to see workplace investigators holding clients and operators accountable — every time there is a crash."

Mr Priest said the Federal Government was planning to create an industry committee to set the freight rate benchmark.

"But this won't bump up prices at the supermarket," he said.

"The transport cost is such a minimal component that the consumer won't see, shouldn't see, any change."



● Richard Priest says cost-cutting freight contracts is one of the causes of truck accident fatalities.