

JULY 30, 2021



WESTERN AUSTRALIAN SKILLS SUMMIT  
2021

MORE THAN JUST SKILLS FOR THE  
TRANSPORT INDUSTRY

SUBMISSION FROM THE TRANSPORT WORKERS UNION WA BRANCH  
(TWU WA)

## Table of Contents

About the TWU .....	2
Executive Summary .....	2
Road Transport .....	3
A Safe Work Australia report shows .....	3
Truck Driver Obesity and Depression .....	4
Key findings from the Monash University study include: .....	4
What do these studies mean for the industry and skills gap? .....	4
Aviation .....	5
Aviation Workers Sleeping at the airport to make their split shifts .....	5
Hole in Qantas plane – safety of workers and passengers at risk .....	6
Training .....	6
Amenities .....	7

## About the TWU

The Transport Workers Union WA Branch (“TWU”) is the collective voice for people working in the West Australian transport industry and has been for more than 120 years.

The TWU represents members who work across a variety of industries including aviation, mining, oil and gas, cash-in-transit, security, road transportation, freight logistics, public transport, and waste management.

Our goal is to make sure that transport workers in Australia get a fair go, with comparable entitlements and safe working conditions for an industry that is increasingly dangerous.

The TWU welcomes the opportunity to inform the forum of our concerns in attracting and retaining people into the transport industry.

## Executive Summary

This submission from the WA Branch of the Transport Workers’ Union to the Skills Summit concludes that there are more profound issues to why people are not attracted to the transport industry than just the lack of training and a skilled pathway.

They include: a deficiency of pathways for young people to enter the industry, an industry where the people in it are shown a lack of respect, a lack of diversity, unsafe work practices, insecure work, and low pay rates for the skill a professional truck driver is expected to have.

Transport and Logistics industry is competing with more high profile or fashionable industries for workforce talent. This challenge is further exacerbated by the introduction of new technology into the workplace which will require sourcing of skilled workers.

The transport industry is an aging industry, with the average age of a truck driver being over 45 years old. We conclude the industry is already in a crisis and is only going to get worse as these aging workers retire.

While being less of an attractive career option for young people, the industry also fails to promote itself as prospective employment for women, with women accounting for only 14% of full-time transport and logistics roles and only 3% of truck drivers<sup>1</sup>.

Mental Health in the Transport and Logistics industry has been an ongoing problem and has become even more prominent recently. COVID-19 has put more pressure on the logistic sector where workers have had to work longer and harder to keep the supply chain flowing. Improving workers’ mental health can assist reduce the rate of incidents on the road or in warehouses.

Therefore, the industry must not only focus on the skills gaps, but also the problems within its structures.

This submission concludes that to close the skills gap, the transport industry must work on skills delivery by introducing more training programs that deliver drivers into the industry that are job ready like the Heavy Vehicle Driving Operations Skill Set program, an apprenticeship style system as an additional pathway for entry, and accredited training.

However, this submission also concludes that better industry regulation, supply chain regulation, full-time employment, and improved wages are all required if we are to achieve the projected shortfall of jobs that will be needed in the transport industry.

If we are to promote truck driving as a prospective and sustainable career path more is needed to be done about cleaning up its image. This can be done by truck drivers being provided adequate, safe, clean, and frequent rest stops and healthy food options. The industry must also work toward long-term sustainable goals during ‘Boom’

---

<sup>1</sup> Women at the Wheel: Closing the Transport Gender Gap: <https://www.teletracnavman.com.au/resources/blog/women-at-the-wheel-closing-the-transport-gender-gap#:~:text=Australia's%20transport%20and%20trucking%20industry,per%20cent%20of%20truck%20drivers.>

times but remain sustainable so that the industry does not lose these skills during a downturn. In both road transport and aviation.

Attracting and retaining talented operators in the Aviation industry must also be a priority. The ongoing contracting out of full-time work, loss of secure jobs and the loss of human capital that has been built over years of experience, will herald a new skills shortage, after companies like Qantas made a decision to outsource a large part of its workforce. No longer will these jobs be sought after and instead a new transient workforce will fill the gap, at the expense of safety of workers and passengers.

## Road Transport

One of the major disincentives to attracting or retaining people in the transport industry is the danger the industry imposes. Annual fatality statistics from Safe Work Australia indicate that as of 22 July 2021 the transport, postal and warehousing industry averages more workplace deaths than any other industry<sup>2</sup>. We have seen 200 truck drivers killed on Australian roads since 2016 (current as of July 26, 2021).

This is despite the majority of drivers and companies aiming to operate safely and are of a professional calibre. It is unfortunate that the pressure to speed and meet deadlines comes from the top, from wealthy clients and economic employers that leads to unsafe practices<sup>3</sup>.

A Safe Work Australia report from 2015 showed safety rules were being broken on a colossal scale in transport. The report says that one in five transport industry employers break safety rules to meet deadlines – this compares with just 6% of employers in other industries<sup>4</sup>

This rule breaking continues in 2021 because of pressure being put on transport companies by major clients at the top. These clients regularly request that transport companies reduce their pricing to keep their contracts. This leads to risk-taking and rule-breaking to meet cost cuts. Since Safe Work Australia released this report in 2015, this has not changed.

The Transport and Logistics industry employs more than 530,000 Australians across its major subsectors of road transport, logistics, warehousing, and stevedoring. During 2020 the industry earned an estimated \$101.51 billion and contributed \$39.91 billion to Australia's GDP. While these are impressive figures, it was the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the necessity of maintaining the Australian supply chain that highlighted how important the Transport and Logistics sector is to the economy and to every household.

The Transport and Logistics sector in Australia is expected to employ around 600,500 people by 2026, an approximate 12% increase<sup>5</sup>. We cannot wait for an answer of how to attract and retain people we need to fix it now.

## A Safe Work Australia report shows

The report states that “workplace conditions and to some degree pressure from management stops workers from following safety practices”.

- 40% of transport employers say their workplace does not suit those overly concerned about being injured while only about 20% of workers agreed
- 20% of employers consider minor incidents a normal part of daily work compared with 10% or less in other industries, and
- 20% accept dangerous behaviour, compared to less than 2% in other industries.
- 45% of workers say risks are unavoidable
- 31% of employers say workers ignore safety rules to get the job done<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup> Fatalities by industry <https://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/statistics-and-research/statistics/fatalities/fatality-statistics-industry>

<sup>3</sup> Risks for Road Transport Workers <https://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/transport>

<sup>4</sup> Transport industry: Synthesis of research findings July 2015, <https://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/system/files/documents/1702/transport.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> Transport and Logistics Industry Overview [https://www.australianindustrystandards.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/20210609\\_TLI\\_IO.pdf](https://www.australianindustrystandards.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/20210609_TLI_IO.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> Research Brief Transport industry: Synthesis of research findings July 2015 <https://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/system/files/documents/1702/brief-transport.pdf>

The lack of safety also relates to the health impact workers in the industry face.

Led by Monash University, a recent survey found half of all Australian truck drivers suffered psychological distress<sup>7</sup>.

Is it any wonder our industry cannot attract drivers?

### Truck Driver Obesity and Depression

A three-year study published by Monash University in February 2021 reveals the mental health crisis faced by truck drivers.

This first major survey of truck driver health reveals shocking problems in Australia's most common job for men, with over 80% of drivers overweight or obese, one in five suffering from depression, over 70% living with chronic pain and almost a third with multiple chronic health conditions.

The survey outlines that poor health is not only bad for drivers it is also linked to an increase in the chances of crashes and near-misses.

The study has shown that risk factors involved in the job include: "long working hours, sedentary roles, poor nutrition, social isolation, shift work, time pressure, low levels of job control, and fatigue". It points to a need for urgent reform to address and prevent mental health and poor health among drivers.

### Key findings from the Monash University study include:

- Truck drivers work long hours, and this is linked to their poor physical and mental health. Half of those surveyed work 41-60 hours per week and 37.5% working over 60 hours per week.
- 13% of drivers reported having a crash in the past year with over 70% stating they had a near miss on average once per week. Having three or more chronic conditions nearly doubles the odds of experiencing a crash.
- Over a third of drivers have a diagnosed back problem, double that of the average Australian male, and over a quarter have high blood pressure
- Almost a third reported being diagnosed with more than two of the health conditions listed, compared to 7.8% of the general population.
- One in two drivers reported some level of psychological distress. The proportion of truck drivers under 35 with severe psychological distress was almost double that of the average for Australian males for that age bracket.<sup>8</sup>

### What do these studies mean for the industry and skills gap?

When we have an industry, and their clients, that expect dangerous behaviour as the norm, is it any wonder the transport industry cannot attract or retain skilled people?

Pay rates and safety contribute to the shortage of workers and clients must take some responsibility for the issues with attracting and retaining transport workers.

We need to look at the economics at the top of our industry that is creating the dynamics which result in poor health for drivers and high death rates of drivers and other road users. The financial squeeze by major retailers, miners, manufacturers, and oil companies which continually demand lower cost contracts from transport operators, results in an industry continually under pressure and subsisting on tight margins. This leads to pressure to work long hours, cut corners on maintenance adding stress and injuries to drivers. The evidence is abundantly clear from any number of reports and studies into the transport industry.

---

<sup>7</sup> Keeping Australia's Truck Drivers' Moving <https://www.monash.edu/medicine/news/latest/2021-articles/keeping-australias-truck-drivers-moving>

<sup>8</sup>Driving Health Study Report No 6:

[https://bridges.monash.edu/articles/report/Driving\\_Health\\_Study\\_Report\\_No\\_6\\_Survey\\_of\\_the\\_physical\\_and\\_mental\\_health\\_of\\_Australian\\_professional\\_drivers\\_/13315961](https://bridges.monash.edu/articles/report/Driving_Health_Study_Report_No_6_Survey_of_the_physical_and_mental_health_of_Australian_professional_drivers_/13315961)

This leads to drivers being pressured to skip breaks, drive longer and faster with over loaded vehicles, or loads not correctly restrained, all in a stressed and tired state. They face losing their jobs if they do not abide by this rule-breaking.

It is vital we improve the health and safety of drivers, given that trucking is Australia's most common job, employing 1 in every 33 men<sup>9</sup>, or 200,000 drivers in Australia. Without truck drivers Western Australia will stop.

## Aviation

Many airport workers are paid at or below award rates including baggage handlers, drivers, airline caterers, cleaners, cabin crew, security staff and refuellers. Many are kept for years on part-time contracts and some guaranteed as few as 60 hours a month. This issue has been further exacerbated since the Covid-19 pandemic shut down international travel and since Qantas sacked several thousand workers and contracted their jobs out. Those jobs still exist. However, they are currently all casual and with some paid at or below award rates<sup>10</sup>.

It is difficult to attract and retain people when they have no job security, or regular hours and their jobs are not reliable. Aviation work was once highly sought after and a job for life. Now it has become an insecure and a low paying industry. This has been a deliberate outcome by companies like Qantas with a short-sighted view to putting profits before people. The long-term outcome will be an unsafe aviation industry that will not be able to attract workers. In fact, we have seen an increase in serious incidents across the country in the last 6 months especially since Qantas outsourced more jobs.

## Aviation Workers Sleeping at the airport to make their split shifts



<sup>9</sup>Driving Health Report, No 7:

[https://bridges.monash.edu/articles/report/Driving\\_Health\\_Study\\_Report\\_No\\_7\\_Uneven\\_wear\\_Health\\_and\\_wellbeing\\_of\\_truck\\_drivers\\_/13316000](https://bridges.monash.edu/articles/report/Driving_Health_Study_Report_No_7_Uneven_wear_Health_and_wellbeing_of_truck_drivers_/13316000)

<sup>10</sup> Race to the bottom: How workers and safety are the real losers in the war for profits in aviation

[https://www.pc.gov.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0019/231580/sub060-airports.pdf](https://www.pc.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0019/231580/sub060-airports.pdf)



### Hole in Qantas plane – safety of workers and passengers at risk

An example of a serious incident since Qantas outsourced more than 2,000 baggage handlers and ground crew.

## Training

Training in transport has been seen as a fringe issue by the industry. A key reason for this is cost. With slim margins, companies do not have the resources to train people from a young freight handler through to a MC driver it usually up to the individual to pay for that themselves. A concern for the company is if they train someone, they risk losing them to go work in the mining industry or to another company.

The Heavy Vehicle Driving Operations Skill Set program is a great initiative and an alternative education pathway that the State Government has implemented and is funding. The Heavy Vehicle training scheme has already secured \$6.1M in funding. The course is an extensive 5 weeks of training new entrants or upgrading licenses which will upskill 1000 people<sup>11</sup>. This alternative education pathway must be supported by the transport industry and their clients.

The Transport industry needs to continue to provide programs like this going forward to close the skills gap and fill vacancies in a safe way. We need to make sure people entering the transport industry are job ready.

It is not good enough that the West Australian business community during a boom or when we have a shortage of drivers to continue to use the easy and dangerous solution of importing inexperienced people into the transport industry, especially drivers. Workers that have no experience in a truck no larger than a ridged or single articulated semi can receive a Multi Combination (MC) License upgraded within days or a 27 metre multi combination without any license upgrade or training and be driving a Multi Combination truck weighing up to 200 tonnes at 60 metres in length. The danger is coupled by unfamiliarity of a new country and roads.

A way to attract young people and retain the current work force is by providing a sustainable career path into the industry, one that has accredited training, an apprenticeship scheme, and transferable skills so transport workers can pursue a professional career that is recognised inside and outside the industry.

The TWU has been at the forefront of improving the career path for the transport industry for many years and was behind a government announcement into a pilot advanced skills training program for truck drivers at Collie TAFE<sup>12</sup>, and the Heavy Haulage Driving Operations Skill Set program. The TWU continues to push for the introduction of an

<sup>11</sup> New Heavy Vehicle Operations Skill Set <https://www.jobsandskills.wa.gov.au/news/new-heavy-vehicle-driving-operations-skill-set>

<sup>12</sup> Further [Government] Support for the Transport Industry, to keep WA Moving <https://www.mediastatements.wa.gov.au/Pages/McGowan/2021/02/Further-support-for-transport-industry-to-keep-WA-moving.aspx>

apprenticeship scheme to create new pathways into the industry. This is the type of support transport workers need to get the end-to-end skills for a sustainable transport industry that can service West Australians into the future.

This will lead to encouraging young people to enter the transport industry and become long term transport workers, truck drivers and aviation workers. When there is a pathway for young people to enter the transport industry they see it as a viable career path, one that they can build accreditation and transferable skills from, that will hopefully lead to them to becoming truck drivers, and they will make a great contribution to our industry. These pilot programs are the beginning of the first material change to our industry in not only attracting women and young people but developing more professional drivers from the onset.

## Amenities

One of the biggest barriers to attracting and retaining professional and skilled truck drivers to the industry is the lack of truck stop amenities on the highways.

In the twenty-first century we should demand better amenities showers and toilets for Long-Distance truck drivers. Truck drivers are made to pay to use amenities, parking bays, dangerous roads and dirty facilities are often full of caravans even when drivers have arrived at their required/planned stop. It drives home the lack of respect truck drivers feel prevents them from remaining in the industry<sup>13</sup>.

Something needs to be done about the appalling conditions of truck bays and amenities truckies endure on the highways of Western Australia and even more dreadful, finding decent toilets and showers at Fremantle Port.

In no other industry are workers expected to put up with third world conditions such as:

- Having no choice but to squat behind a truck or bush when you need to use the toilet.
- Go days without using a clean shower.
- Not having access to good healthy food or get a good sleep
- Having no choice but to skip rest breaks when truck parking bays are full to the brim with holiday makers – thus risking safety.
- Truck drivers want to be able to manage their own rest. Fatigue regulations can mean drivers are required to rest when they are alert and drive when they are sleepy
- Regulations and legislation around fatigue management, but there is nowhere decent to stop.
- Work had a big impact on relationships with family and friends and changed how drivers fitted in with their family and friends.
- Drivers feel that the public do not respect them and what they do

The State & Federal Governments have recently announced a \$14 million upgrade to amenities in Regional WA, in 2021/22 budget and a \$36 million allocation in the 2022/23 budget for amenities. This money will also go to improve safety by adding more passing lanes to our regional roads. This will go some way to resolving the issues of amenities and pressure to pass heavy vehicles. But more needs to be done by Mining, Oil & Gas and Retail companies, Businesses that rely on transport companies, or more importantly truck drivers. These businesses, have a responsibility to make sure truck drivers that deliver to their sites have 21<sup>st</sup> amenities on our highways.

Things need to change, because if they don't, how are we expected to attract or retain drivers?

**If we don't WA will stop.**

---

<sup>13</sup> Uneven wear: Health and wellbeing of professional truck drivers from interviews with drivers and family members: Monash University November 2020 [https://900e23b0-9c7a-456c-a659-de325e888021.filesusr.com/ugd/554660\\_88f321c45aa4414d954d281bd3e1a6d5.pdf](https://900e23b0-9c7a-456c-a659-de325e888021.filesusr.com/ugd/554660_88f321c45aa4414d954d281bd3e1a6d5.pdf)