



A PROPOSAL FOR THE INSPECTION OF HEAVY VEHICLES IN N.S.W.

NOTE that this is a proposal for discussion purposes only and does NOT represent Government policy.

1. Introduction

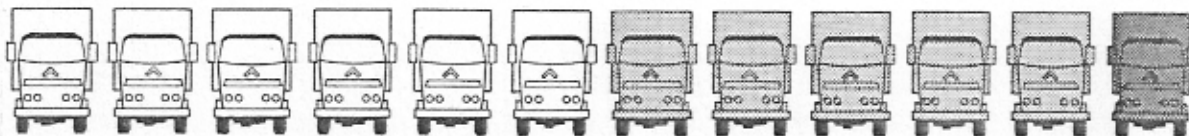
In May, 1979, a truck ran out of control down Mount Ousley Road, colliding with a number of vehicles. Five people died. It was later found that the truck was grossly defective, even though it had been passed by an authorised inspection station shortly before the crash. Many of the defects found after the crash should have been found by the authorised examiner and a certificate of inspection should certainly not have been issued. The owner and the driver of the truck were prosecuted for manslaughter. The proprietor/authorised examiner was dismissed from the AIS scheme.



Random inspections of coal trucks were then undertaken in the Wollongong area and the results showed that about one in three was very seriously defective. Following these investigations and other serious crashes involving trucks, the Department of Motor Transport set up teams of vehicle inspectors to conduct inspections of trucks. Inspections were initially concentrated on large fleets of trucks in metropolitan areas. Random roadside inspections of trucks were also undertaken throughout this period. Now that most fleets have been inspected, more effort is being put into the roadside inspections.

2. Truck Inspection Results

During 1980, almost 14,000 trucks were inspected by the mobile inspection teams. Defects of one form or another were found in 44% of them with 8% having major defects.

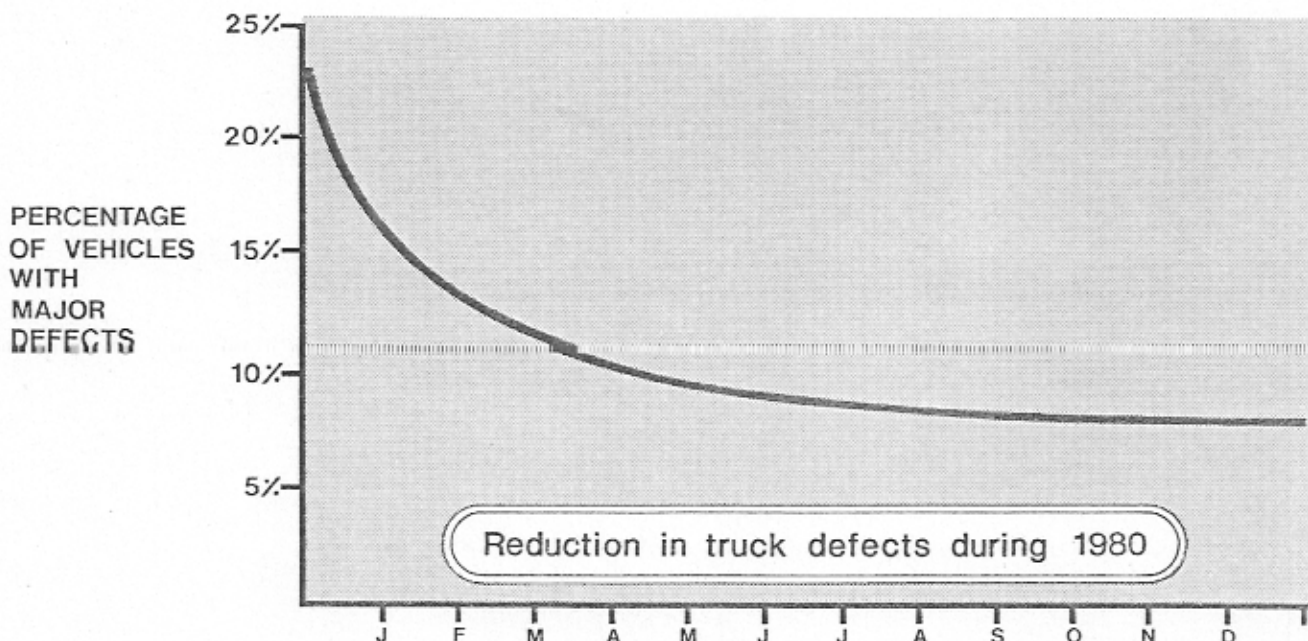


On average, one of these 12 trucks is dangerously faulty and 5 others have minor faults

Two-thirds of the major defects found involved brakes; they included brakes completely removed from axles; brake lines disconnected; cracked and broken brake drums, air lines blocked with grease, oil, dirt and water. Steering defects included components held together with fencing wire, while suspension defects included broken springs and mounting brackets.

When the inspection teams first started operations, about 25% of all trucks inspected had major defects, but as operators learned that the teams were active, the standard of trucks improved.

The effectiveness of the inspection teams is also shown by experience with inspections of fleets of trucks compared with random roadside inspections. Typically, on first inspection, 12% of fleet trucks had major defects. Follow-up inspections of the same vehicles about one year later showed a very marked improvement. Only 3% of vehicles were then found to have major defects. By comparison, random roadside inspections reveal a major defect rate of about 15%; these are trucks which, in most cases, have not been inspected by government officers before. Overall about one in every twelve trucks inspected still has major defects. This unsatisfactory rate is due mainly to the poor condition of trucks inspected for the first time and there is clearly room for improvement through intensified government inspections.



3. Comparison of Truck Inspections with other Vehicles

Trucks are not the only vehicles checked by inspectors: buses are seen by government inspectors at least every six months (and as frequently as every two months in some cases), and a separate team of inspectors carries out follow-up checks of cars passed at authorised inspection stations.

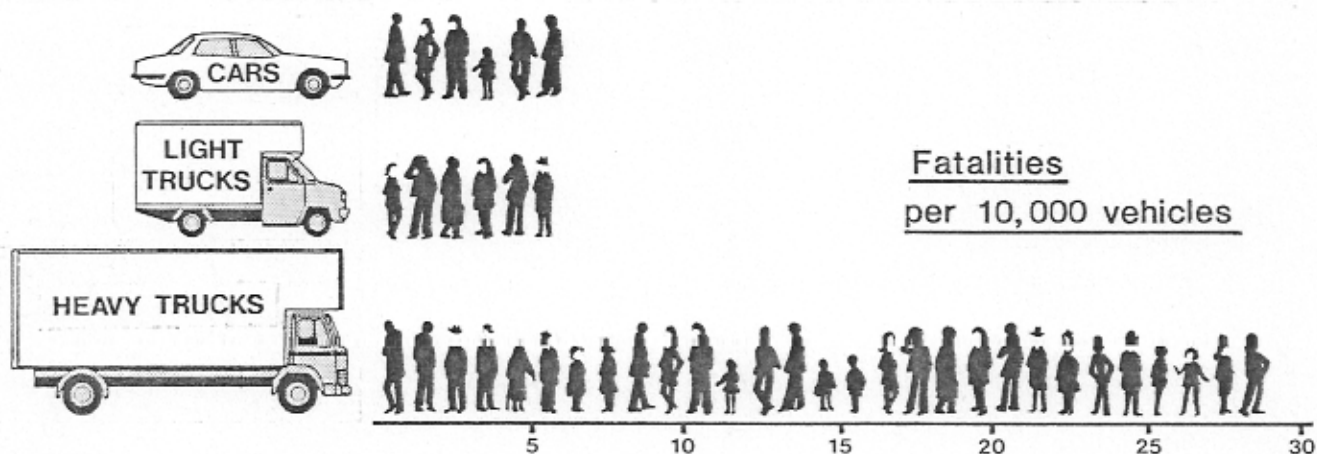
Both buses and cars have been found to have far fewer defects than trucks.

During 1978-1980, 18% of buses inspected had defects, including non-safety defects peculiar to buses (for example, faulty destination and bus route number signs). Even including the non-safety items, this is far lower than the trucks' defect result of 44%. Similarly, 4% of buses had major defects, compared with 8% of trucks.

The checks of cars are made in response to complaints and therefore the cars seen are more likely to be defective than the rest of the cars in the state. The proportion of the cars checked recently that were found defective was 37%, with 8% found to be badly defective. When it is remembered that, unlike the trucks, the cars are chosen for inspection because of complaints, it can be seen that trucks are in worse condition than cars in New South Wales.

4. Crash Involvements of Trucks

The chance of death or injury in any crash is greatly increased if one or more of the vehicles involved is a heavy truck. Larger and heavier vehicles usually have more complex mechanical systems - particularly braking systems - with more items requiring maintenance and more things to go wrong. Such vehicles travel greater distances each year than light vehicles and thus are more exposed to the chance of being involved in a fatal crash. In 1980, trucks up to five tonnes tare weight, and cars, were involved in about six fatal crashes per 10,000 vehicles registered. Heavier trucks had a far greater involvement; the largest of them were involved five times as often as cars and the smaller trucks.



The disproportionate involvement of heavy vehicles in crashes suggests that there should be a corresponding application of countermeasures (which include inspection and maintenance). Without any doubt, there is much to be gained from intensified inspection of these vehicles.

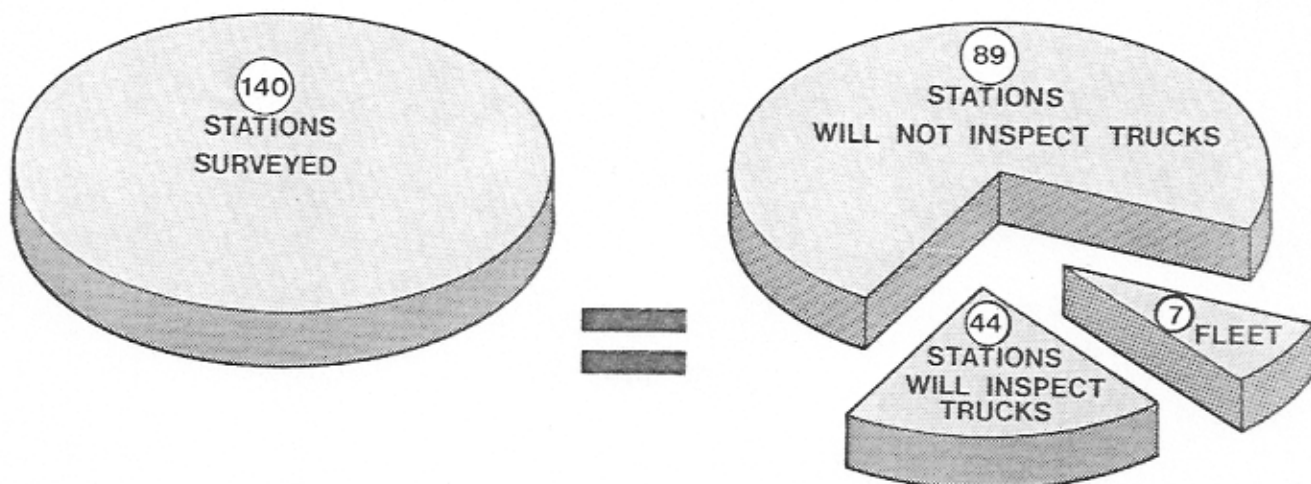
5. Present Inspection Scheme

Trucks are currently inspected annually at authorised inspection stations. The results of inspections conducted by the mobile inspection teams show that the present system is not working properly.

There are several reasons for this. Firstly, many authorised examiners face a conflict of interests when asked to inspect a truck. The truck might be owned by a valued customer of the business and to reject it - with consequent loss of earning by the owner, plus the cost of repairs - can cause the customer to take his business elsewhere. In the case of a fleet owner's authorised inspection station, the authorised examiner can be put in the position of having to reject his employer's truck and jeopardising his employer's livelihood - and perhaps his own. In both cases, an authorised examiner is under considerable pressure to issue certificates of inspection for unsafe vehicles. Numerous examples of such cases have come to the attention of the Committee of Review which advises the Commissioner for Motor Transport on action which might be taken where the Rules for Authorised Inspection Stations have been violated.

Many authorised inspection stations inspect large trucks relatively infrequently. Lack of continuing and frequent business of this type means that examiners do not gain sufficient familiarity with large trucks to carry out proper inspections. Another problem in this area is that truck mechanical systems and inspection requirements - particularly braking systems - are becoming increasingly complex. If examiners don't inspect a variety of these vehicles on a regular basis, they will be unable to maintain a uniformly high inspection standard.

An increasingly apparent problem with the present AIS scheme is that, in some areas, there are not enough authorised inspection stations able and willing to carry out inspections of large trucks. In some instances, the mobile inspection teams have had to travel to fleets specifically to inspect them so that registration could be renewed. Local authorised inspection stations were either unable or unwilling to perform the inspections; the diagram on page 5 gives the results of a recent random survey of stations: only about 30% of stations are willing to inspect trucks.



Results of random survey of A.I.S.

(FLEET OPERATORS ONLY INSPECT THEIR OWN VEHICLES.)

An improvement of AIS truck inspections would necessitate substantial upgrading of the monitoring of stations and the introduction of regular training sessions for authorised examiners. To adequately serve the whole state, the number of authorised truck inspection stations needs to be large (about 1,000 stations) and the costs to the Government of providing upgraded monitoring and training resources would be substantial.

6. Outline of a Possible Inspection System

Evidence from around the world supports the view that the most effective safety inspections of heavy trucks are performed by specially built and equipped government-operated inspection stations, and the least effective by a licensed garage system (in N.S.W., authorised inspection stations). However, it is equally true that the capital costs are also greatest in the case of government inspection stations so the Department's efforts have been put into developing a scheme which gives the quality of government inspections but at a lower capital cost.

The most attractive scheme is based on the existing N.S.W. scheme of inspection of buses and taxis. Under this scheme, vehicle inspectors from the Department travel around the state on pre-arranged itineraries, making inspections by appointment. Inspections are carried out at the best sites available: sometimes these are local shire or council workshops, at other times they are the operator's own premises.

The proposal for the truck inspection scheme is to expand this existing system to include annual inspections of heavy trucks. (In this context, heavy trucks means those having a tare weight of 5 tonnes or more plus trailers and prime movers weighing more than 2½ tonnes). A total of 48,000 trucks, prime movers and trailers would be involved (less than 2% of the vehicles registered in N.S.W.).

The use of government inspectors overcomes current problems of conflict of interests for vehicle examiners at authorised inspection stations and of reluctance of many stations to inspect these large trucks. The inspectors would be specialists fully familiar with the range of vehicles that they inspect.

7. How the Proposed Scheme would Operate

The scheme would operate as follows: a truck operator would receive a letter giving the dates when vehicle inspectors would be in his area. The operator would telephone his local motor registry and arrange a time for inspection. When the vehicle passes inspection, a sticker and an inspection report would be issued to him. The sticker would cancel any previous inspection stickers and it would be a requirement to display the sticker in the same way that it is now a requirement to display a current registration label. Annual renewal of registration would require presentation of the most recent inspection report in the same way renewal now requires presentation of a certificate from an authorised inspection station.

If the vehicle did not pass inspection on first presentation, a defect notice would be issued. The necessary repairs would then have been carried out and the vehicle re-presented (no appointment would then be necessary). In cases where the motor vehicle inspector had moved on, the defect notice could be cleared and a sticker and certificate issued at the local motor registry. In some cases, clearance of the defect notice might be possible at an authorised inspection station.

If an operator moves to a new area or purchases a truck with an inspection sticker which would expire before the roving vehicle inspector was due in the area, he would be able to obtain an interim sticker from his local motor registry; in country areas this might require an initial inspection at an authorised inspection station.

Annual inspections are proposed at this stage but inspectors would visit each area at least twice each year and in many cases more frequently to spread out the workload and avoid major disruptions to fleet operators. In metropolitan areas inspectors would be at some locations almost on a full-time basis.

8. How much would it Cost?

The proposed new scheme would employ 25, two-man teams to cover the state. However, it would absorb the 14 vehicle inspectors already involved full time in public vehicle inspections and five of the ten, two-man mobile truck inspection teams (the other five teams would be retained for spot-checking around the state).

The new scheme would be financially self-supporting through the payment of an inspection fee. On present costing a fee of about \$20 per vehicle would be payable. This is higher than the present authorised inspection station scheme fees of \$13.50 and \$16.00 but compares very favourably with inspection fees in other countries where heavy trucks are required to be inspected at government inspection stations - for example the present fee in Britain is \$30, the fees in Sweden and West Germany in 1979 were respectively \$25 and \$32.

9. The Benefits

The overall cost to the community of the proposed new inspection scheme for heavy trucks compares very closely with costs for any upgraded monitoring of authorised inspection stations aimed at raising heavy truck inspection standards in that scheme. At the same time, experience to date indicates that the new scheme would result in far better maintenance of heavy trucks, and a consequent up-grading of the roadworthiness of trucks on N.S.W. roads (for example, government-inspected buses in N.S.W. have less defects than trucks inspected at authorised inspection stations). Sweden and Britain have introduced government inspections of trucks and both have found that, because of the improved maintenance, truck reliability improved dramatically with a consequent elimination of down-time and lost deliveries and that truck life also improved (with savings in replacement costs). It is interesting to note the present uniform hostility of the British trucking industry to a proposal by the British government to sell to private industry the government-owned truck inspection stations in that country (clippings attached). Prior to the 1968 introduction of the government inspection scheme, trucks in Britain were inspected at licensed garages (equivalent to N.S.W. authorised inspection stations). Before then the same types of problems we have found in N.S.W. were also experienced in Britain: responsible truck operators were undercut by others who were prepared to sacrifice maintenance to keep costs down. The introduction of the government inspection station scheme eliminated these problems as well as resulting in longer term economic benefits to the trucking industry.

COMMERCIAL MOTOR w/e September 20, 1980

Fall in standards if test stations sold?

THE GOVERNMENT's plans for selling the 91 heavy goods vehicle testing stations are ill-conceived, according to the Freight Transport Association which says they should instead be transferred to a State-owned company.

In its submission to the Department of Transport, the FTA says it has not departed from its initial view that the sale of the stations is wrong.

It says it supports the Government's overall policy of withdrawing from sectors which can be run satisfactorily by private enterprise, but this, it insists, does not apply to the test stations.

"In many ways, it is the worst candidate for Government withdrawal because it is an area where the Government has a prime responsibility and duty in terms of ensuring public safety."

According to FTA, it would be better to transfer the station to a Government corporation, with industrial and entrepreneurial management and vehicle operators represented on the board.

At a later stage, the corporation could float shares on the open market, and so meet the ultimate objective of financing vehicle tests from outside the exchequer.

FTA says that the record of hgv testing since its inception 12 years ago speaks for itself. There has been a 50 per cent cut in the number of serious defects in lorries, and there has been a corresponding reduction in accident statistics.

It fears that this record would be jeopardised by sale to the private sector, as the test-station

owners will make profits through skimping test procedures.

And it goes on to say that the present impartiality of the stations will be put at risk if operators closely associated with the transport industry buy the stations. "The risk, according to circumstances, could be too high or too low a standard of testing. At all events, they could hardly be regarded as impartial."

The Association writes off the hopes of competition helping the service as being "largely illusory". The spread of test stations, it says, means that few operators will have a realistic alternative.

Similarly, it says that the planned cut in the number of civil servants in the stations will not happen. While the sale of the stations will remove staff from

the Government's payroll, there will have to be a sharp increase in the number of monitoring staff.

The FTA concludes by cautioning the Government against launching into a disposal programme which would lead to the fragmentation of the present network.

The Road Haulage Association, which says it has had few complaints from its members about the present form of test-station ownership, told CM that a detailed response is still being prepared.

IoTA slams private test stations plans

THE GOVERNMENT's plans to hive off all 91 heavy goods vehicle test stations to private enterprise will be a backward step of the worst kind, according to the Institute of Traffic Administration.

It has told Transport Minister Norman Fowler that a survey of IoTA members was unanimous in its opposition to the scheme. "The kindest description of the proposals is that their implementation will be a retrograde step of the gravest nature," says IoTA.

The Institute points out that it is a non-political body, with no biased axe to grind, but says: "Surely a point of this nature, which must be based upon political factors in that it will fly in the face of a complete industrial sector, cannot be good for either the Government or the industry."

Like the Freight Transport Association (CM, September 20), IoTA is in favour of privatisation, if it has to happen, being restricted to the sale of the entire chain of stations to one semi-state body.

It suggests that the chain is run along similar lines to the British Airports Authority, as a viable concern.

"This would enable the Government to retain, maintain, and develop standards within a complete organisation which already enjoys a high standard of integrity and reputation within the industry, and is understood to be the envy of the majority of colleagues in Europe."

IoTA considers that the impartiality of the present system could be lost if the stations are

sold to private buyers, and it has asked Mr Fowler whether there will be a list of potential buyers to take over from a bankrupt operator.

It says that Mr Fowler should curtail his "unsupported and ill-advised" plans which are against the interests of all concerned. "It can only severely jeopardise your [the Department's] image in the eyes of transport and traffic people."

Meanwhile, the Road Haulage Association's national council has decided to oppose the transfer of the stations, and is to make a written submission to Mr Fowler.

COMMERCIAL MOTOR w/e November 1, 1986

No U-turns likely on private testing

TRANSPORT MINISTER Norman Fowler still looks set to sell heavy goods vehicles test stations to the private sector, despite a gathering swell of opposition to the plan.

Speaking to the Motor Agents' Association last week, he said that private enterprise test stations would give operators a better service, and asked: "How much has it cost an operator to have a vehicle off the road because he could not get it booked in at a testing stations?"

He said he expected private ownership test stations to be open for longer hours, and at weekends.

But the Government line was attacked in the House of Lords when Labour transport spokesman Lord Underhill said

that the existing system was efficient, whereas privatisation proposals have met with overwhelming opposition from operators.

He instanced the Road Haulage Association, Freight Transport Association, the Institute of Traffic Administration, and noted also that the Confederation of British Industry had also expressed concern.

But Government spokesman Lord Avon would only admit that there were some who do not like all of the new test station package but added that consultations are still taking place, and he would not like to prejudge the issue.

He said the Government sees no reason why the public sector should carry out functions which can be performed equally well by the private sector.

And he disagreed with Lord Underhill's claim that standards will fall, or that the integrity of testers, or anything else, would be different. In fact, according to Lord Avon, the proposal to transfer commercial vehicle testing to the private sector will result in a more efficient and more sensible service.

Meanwhile, the Institute of Road Transport Engineers has added its voice to the protests, saying that its 12,000 members fear that safety parameters might be relaxed, and that there will be a rapid decline in the safety and efficiency of commercial vehicles.

It endorses the FTA's view that the private stations would not be impartial, and says that privately controlled testing of cars and light vans leaves much to be desired. It feels that the thorough annual tests on heavy commercials would be more difficult to discipline.