

Green Reflector Marking of Informal Truck Bays

Rod Hannifey

Truckright

Abstract

There is a recognised and confirmed lack of sufficient truck rest areas in Australia. Changes to the laws and penalties under which truckdrivers operate and more trucks on the road, has seen even more pressure put on these sites. The growing number of “Grey Nomads” on the road at certain times of the year, many of whom “freecamp”, often in designated truck bays, is yet another factor.

The cost of new rest areas is substantial and the long time to build is yet another delay, so a cheap and effective alternative, even if only as an interim measure, was needed.

Background

I’m an interstate truckdriver and on one trip on an unfamiliar road, found myself tired and looking for somewhere to sleep. Not knowing this road, I found it difficult to find a safe place and had to travel on whilst fatigued, till I did. There were areas, which had they been marked to show me they were there, would have allowed me to sleep, but in a loaded fuel tanker, you cannot simply pull up on a road verge to sleep. Following this trip, I sought a way to mark such sites efficiently so other truck drivers wouldn’t find themselves in the same situation.

I approached an RTA Transport Industry Liason Officer with the problem and my idea of marking these sites with blue reflectors on guideposts. The guideposts are in place, so no major cost or labour is required to put in posts, the posts have reflectors fitted with room for more and the reflectors are cheap. We agreed on the layout of three blue reflectors on a post at least 300m before the site, two on the next and one blue reflector immediately before the site, with blue being the colour used on truck rest area signs.

This allowed the three to be seen first clearly from a vehicle on highbeam, gave time to slow and call up a truck behind to inform them what the driver was doing and gave good indication of where the site was. Many of these sites have been used for years by drivers who knew they were there, having run that road regularly and possibly having needed a rest in that area, possibly due to a lack of truck bays. Many of these sites have shade from trees, where many formal truck bays lack this important need and so the reflectors are still valuable in the daytime.

An unofficial trial was started on the Newell Highway from Parkes north to Peak Hill in December 1999 and was extended to Gilgandra in 2000 by the RTA officer. In 2005, Queensland Department of Transport and Main Roads adopted a formal set of guidelines setting out site distances and requirements for “Blue Reflector Marking of Informal Truck Bays” and finally NSW RMS, did the same in 2008. Vicroads and WA refused to use blue citing a conflict with fire hydrants and green was trialled in Qld and then adopted in 2013.

I have pursued this road safety initiative since the initial idea was put forward to national road safety inquiries, to every state in Australia and am still trying to see it adopted nationally. I have had drivers tell me the idea saved their life and many still comment on the simplicity and effectiveness of the idea.

In 2015 the Federal and NSW Governments have contributed \$200,000 each over two years towards completing 4 major north western NSW Highways The Newell Highway from Brisbane to

Melbourne is very nearly completed now, following recent marking of many sites. I have been in contact with RMS and will be able to participate and offer advice when the rollout begins. My understanding is that sites are currently being scoped and that not only will the funding cover marking of suitable sites, it will also allow for sites to be installed where there are large gaps without any truck rest areas at all now.

I want to see this national and with such a low cost, the cost benefit ratio to save even one life, makes this a worthwhile initiative.

This is from the List of recommendations from the National Road Safety Inquiry 2004.

The Blue Reflector Marking of Informal truck Rest Areas was also included in my written and oral submissions to the House of Representatives National Inquiry into Road Safety, Eyes on the Road Ahead, June 2004. As per the recommendation below it was adopted and the inquiry suggested an immediate roll out of this road safety initiative.

Recommendation 31 114

The Committee recommends that the Australian Government request the Australian Transport Council to:

- devise standards for truck rest areas;
- establish a program of works based on those standards; and
- immediately commence a program for establishing temporary truck rest areas based on interim measures such as standardised coloured reflector stops.

Unfortunately, none of the above have been completed since that time.

There are guidelines for formal, signposted truck rest areas and recommendations for the size and number of trucks and spacings between such sites. However a national rest area audit done in 2006 by ARRB for Austroads found, none of the audited routes complied.

In August 2006, Austroads commissioned ARRB to undertake a national audit of Rest Areas against the National Guidelines for Provision of Rest Area Facilities (NTC, 2005). The audit concentrated on three tasks:

1. examination of siting, design, layout and facilities information for a sample of heavy vehicle Rest Areas across Australia to determine the degree of compliance with the National Guidelines and the level of national consistency
2. site investigations of a limited sample of Rest Areas to validate the accuracy of the supplied information
3. review of existing literature on safety and economic benefits of provision of Rest Areas for heavy vehicles.

The audit has assessed the Rest Areas along the 12,700 km of mostly AusLink freight routes. The siting analysis found that none of the audited routes fully met the spacing recommendations of the National Guidelines. Sixty per cent of the audited routes had substantial deficiencies in the frequency or provision of rest opportunities.

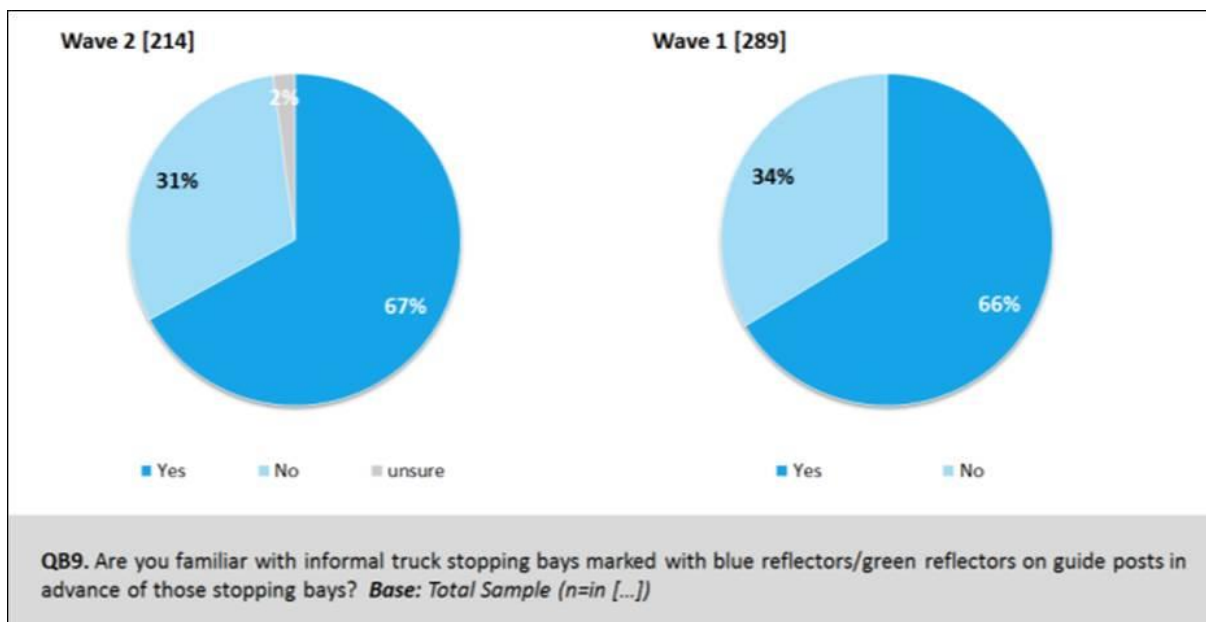
I have recently been approached to offer comment on the Golden Highway Corridor Strategy and in discussing rest area needs, was told of research done by RMS prior to the request for feedback.

Your interest in the Green Reflector stops initiatives sounds commendable and any effort to educate within the industry will have good effect. As I mentioned, we did do our own evaluation of rest stop signage in 2013 and 2014. In that research we asked heavy vehicle drivers some survey questions on green reflector sites. The report is an internal one and was not intended to be published so it lacks much of the context required for a public document. I am happy to provide a summary on the green reflector signage findings below. If you have further specific questions about the study I am happy to try and answer them also.

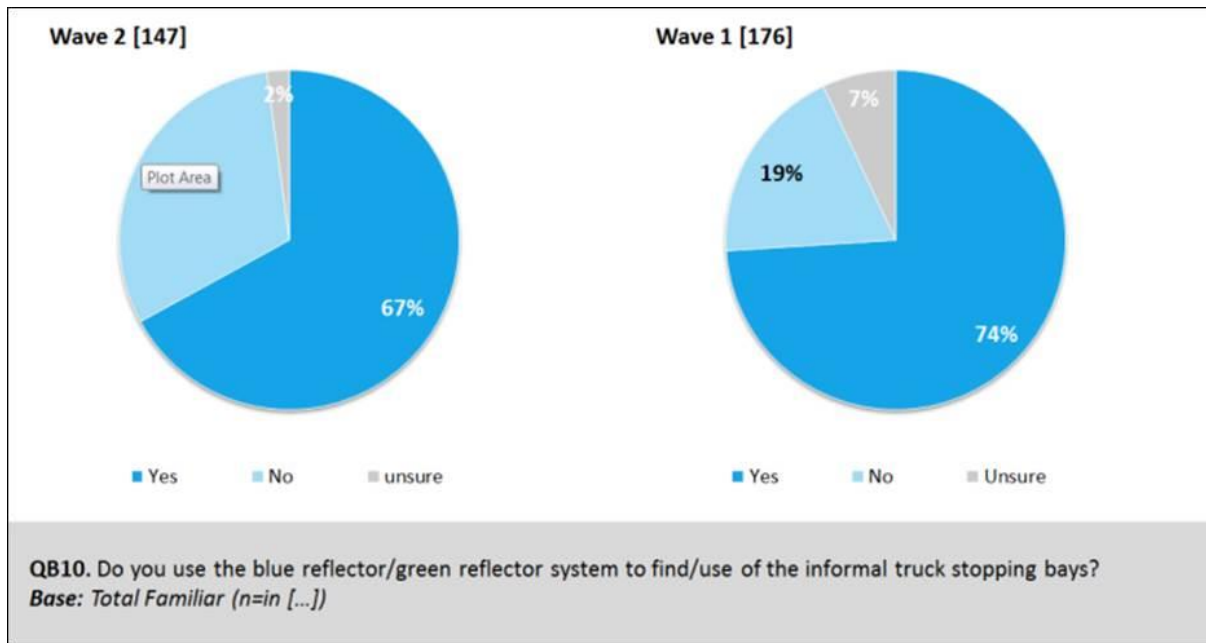
Survey Wave 1 – October November 2013 – 289 respondents

Survey Wave 2 – November 2014 – 214 respondents

Both surveys were conducted as face-face interviews with truck drivers at heavy vehicle inspection bays & roadhouses.



This is a good result for a signage scheme that is largely informal and has no specific targeted education at this point in time that I am aware of. It also shows that there is room for promotion and education in the industry to improve on the awareness.



We have no further information on why the use of the green reflector system dropped in the year between these surveys. The change that did occur in that year between surveys was the implementation of over 90 rest-stops ahead signs along the Newell Highway, Great Western Highway and Mitchell Highway.

Regards, **Joshua Parkin**, Leader Network Optimisation Planning (Western) Journey Management - Network Optimisation

There is a three tier standard for formal or recognised truck bays and guidelines on where or how far apart, they should be placed. This is also linked to the number of heavy vehicles using that road, other facilities, eg truckstops, towns and distances between them.



The left hand photo shows truck parking ahead and recognition of a Truckstop, Service Centre or Petrol station. In the background, where the ute is parked, is an informal truck bay which has shade and only room for a couple of trucks and at the time, was not marked in any way whatsoever. There is now wire fencing and green reflectors, marking this site.

The right hand photo shows a site which would be deemed a truck parking area, but it is sited over the crest of a hill and leaves the truckdriver sleeping on a slope.

Categories of rest areas

“Three categories of rest area should be reflected in the *Rest Area Strategy Plans* developed by road agencies for all major highways and significant freight routes: *Major Rest Areas*, *Minor Rest Areas* and *Truck Parking Bays*.” - Page 26 *National Guidelines for the Provision of Rest Area Facilities*

Major Rest Areas: These areas are designed for long rest breaks, offering a range of facilities and separate parking areas for heavy and light vehicles where possible. They are designed to allow drivers to take rest and sleep breaks required under current driving hours regulations.

Minor Rest Areas: These areas are designed for shorter rest breaks, and at a minimum should provide sufficient parking space for both heavy and light vehicles. While it is not anticipated that these stops will be used for long rest breaks/sleep opportunities, separate parking areas for heavy and light vehicles may be required at some locations.

Truck Parking Bays: These areas are primarily designed to allow drivers of heavy vehicles to conduct short, purpose-based stops including load checks, completing logbooks and addressing associated operational needs.

There is considerable variation in the categories of *Rest Areas* applied across Australian jurisdictions. However, the majority of State and Territory policies differentiate between *Major* and *Minor Rest Areas* that are designed for long rest breaks, and other types of stopping places designed for short-term stops. While the categories may differ in terms of the facilities offered and the layout and spacing intervals between them, these *Rest Areas* generally fall into one of the three categories defined above.

On a given highway or freight route, a mix of the three rest area categories should be provided.



You will note above that informal truck bays are not even listed in the above description. This has changed in some states with Queensland and New South Wales now not only recognising informal truck bays, but marking and recording them.



The above photos show a site on the Nullabor Plain, where there are some large gaps between truck rest areas and little signage giving you any idea how far to the next one. You will note there is an informal bay on each side of the road and drivers do sometimes need to stop and meet or help another truck, which is why these sites over time, can end up being opposite one another. The first set of 3 green reflectors goes on a guide post a minimum of 300 metres from the site, 2 on the next and a single green reflector is attached to the last post before the bay, allowing a driver to pick up the reflectors on high beam at night and, should there be a truck following, he can then tell the truck of his intention to stop via the UHF radio, rather than seeing the bay at the last minute and trying to stop in a hurry and often, taking the truck behind by surprise. In the right hand photo and in the one below, you can see the truck parked in the opposite bay.

Whilst this bay has no shade, green reflector bays are often chosen by drivers for a number of reasons, many have shade which is very much missing in truck rest areas and hard to even supply in herringbone, or side by side parking bays. This makes them of value in the daytime, where yes, you can see them, but again, without any warning of them being there, a driver looking for a safe spot to stop, whether for a call of nature, to inspect damage from an animal strike, to check the load, or simply because they are tired and need to stop for rest and may not know how far to the next formal truckbay.

Many informal bays are only big enough for one truck and so you will not have your sleep interrupted by other trucks. The cost to mark such a bay, is only the reflectors, 6 at \$5 each plus the labour and it can be done in about 15 minutes, walking up and down, cleaning the post and fitting the adhesive sticker, so if you save one life by providing a safe place to stop for a tired driver, then you will never get a better cost benefit ratio from any other road safety initiative.

I am hoping the current roll out on the four highways in NSW will see further interest from other states and in the long term at some point in the distant future, when there are suitable and sufficient truck and car rest areas available, that we will not need informal green reflector bays, but that is a long way off. Building new formal truck bays can take years, with preliminary planning, site acquisition, ecological issues, funding approval and finally building and yet it can still not provide the necessary facilities and needs of those looking to manage their fatigue. I have also pursued national guidelines for truck rest areas and hope these will over time, come to be, but until that time, this green reflector initiative is simple, cost effective and will save lives. Thank you, Rod Hannifey.