

Alarm at proposed single rear axle mass reduction

A succinct article run in Fleetwatch summarises the road freight industry's alarm at a proposal by the Department of Transport (DoT) to reduce the single rear axle mass load from 9 000 to 8 000 kg on all secondary roads.

A letter of intent of law, from the DoT, is requesting transport stakeholders to submit inputs and comments to Deputy Director General; legislation, at the DoT in Pretoria on a proposal to reduce the axle limit from 9 000 to 8 000 kg.

A further notice explains that the DoT is "looking at reviewing axle mass limits, as provided in Regulation 240(c)(v) (Act 93 1996) to relieve the burden off the secondary road networks infrastructure", which, it says, "has reached a state of disintegration thus necessitating measures to be put in place in order to salvage these road networks".

Further to this, the DoT intends to prohibit the transportation of certain commodities on both the primary and secondary road networks and move these to rail.

Gavin Kelly, the Road Freight Association's (RFA) technical and operations manager, said that this move was in line with project initiated by the DoT entitled "the Road Freight Strategy", for which a consultant has been appointed and which involved the activation of a committee to look at relieving/reducing the load on the secondary network and revitalising the rail branch lines.

The intention of this is also to reduce the burden on treasury to sustain and repair damage to the road infrastructure which according to the intention of the proposed change, is mainly due to the impact of heavy vehicles on road surfaces.

Concerns from industry

Technical consultant and Institute of Road Transport Engineers technical committee member, Jim Campbell, says the proposed amendment will have major ramifications on the road freight industry and should be dealt with circumspectly by all interested members of the freight industry.

"The point of particular interest to the road freight industry is the consideration of reducing the single axle mass load on freight vehicles only to 8 000 kg. This will further widen the divide between freight vehicles' permissible single axle mass load and other specified vehicles (currently operating at 10 200 kg on a single axle), and the BRT bus single axle ratings at 12 000 kg and 13 000 kg."

Ajesh Sunnnyhall, operations director at Sentinel Logistics remarked that "it will have a major negative impact on the price of transport and the cost of the end product for which the consumers will pay. Further to this, should these proposals be ratified, it will cost the South African transport industry literally billions of Rand to change the design and specifications of their equipment in order to comply."

Garth Bolton, joint CEO of Cargo Carriers concurs: "There is no doubt that this will increase the cost of road transport and have a seriously negative effect on the economy as a whole."

Bolton also voiced doubts about whether law enforcement authorities will have the capacity to enforce the legislation if passed.

"Rather focus on improving the policing of overloaded vehicles and increasing expenditure on road maintenance," Bolton said.

He also noted with concern the lack of consultation with the road transport sector on the impact of the proposed changes. Bolton also said that this seemed like a thinly veiled attempt to make rail competitive.

He did, however, agree that if one had to apply the proposed 8 ton axle limit to a tridem-ridem rig with a 6,5 ton limit on the



A proposal by the DoT to review axle mass limits is ostensibly aimed at reducing the pressure on secondary roads

