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# Bus Permits Frequently Asked Questions

**MAY 2016**

## How large is New Zealand's bus fleet?

There are approximately 9000 vehicles in New Zealand's bus fleet. They travel around 15 percent of the total vehicle kilometre travelled (VKT) for heavy commercial vehicles (HCVs with a gross vehicle mass of greater than nine tonnes (9 tonnes was chosen on a practical basis as a change point in RUC which allows for ready vehicle kilometres travelled identification and the point below which vehicle weight has little effect on pavement wear).

## What has changed?

This amendment to Land Transport Rule: Vehicle Dimensions and Mass 2002 (the principal Rule) expands the limited changes that came into effect on 1 October 2015 which introduced permits for higher axle mass, but only for high capacity urban buses (such as the double-decker buses recently entering service in Auckland).

This change will allow the operators of any bus to apply for the higher mass limits set out in the principal Rule.

From 15 April 2016, road controlling authorities (including the NZ Transport Agency, city or district councils, and Auckland Transport) were able to consider and issue permits for any bus, not just the largest vehicles in service on commuter routes.

## What amendments have been made to the Rule?

1. The definition "high capacity urban bus" has been replaced with a wider one: "passenger service vehicle". This definition determines which buses can apply for a permit.
2. The provisions governing the issue of a permit now apply to all passenger service vehicles.
3. Existing permits, issued to double-decker buses, continue to be valid.

## What impact will the changes have on road safety?

We expect a small safety benefit through fewer buses being required to carry the same number of passengers.

## Will all buses benefit from having permits available?

No, not all buses benefit – increased axle mass is only of benefit to larger or heavier buses.

Smaller to medium buses operate well within the current general access axle loadings. Other buses are constrained by other limits, such as the manufacturer's rating for axle loading. Permits cannot allow a bus to exceed a design limit for the vehicle.

Permits for buses are also limited by the fit-out of existing vehicles, particularly the number of seats installed – additional capacity is not easily provided.

### Which buses will benefit from having permits available?

The increase in allowed axle mass through a permit widens the range of vehicles that can comply with our mass limits – providing options when considering which buses to purchase.

Allowing higher axle mass may assist (limited) introduction of hybrid and pure electric buses. These vehicles are generally heavier than conventional vehicles (e.g. by adding storage batteries).

Larger inter-city buses also benefit – previously some of these vehicles could not load to their full capacity without exceeding the allowed axle mass limits.

### Does the Certificate of Loading (CoL) for a bus still apply?

The CoL does still limit the number of passengers allowed on a bus – a permit cannot allow passenger loadings that exceed the number allowed by the CoL. However, a bus is not allowed to load to its full CoL passenger limit if this would exceed the mass limit contained in the principal Rule, either under general access or permitted limits. This amendment is designed to make this less of an issue for many heavier buses.

### How will road controlling authorities decide whether to give a permit for heavier buses to travel on a route?

In considering permit applications, road controlling authorities (RCAs) must consider the safety of the vehicle and other road users, as well as the suitability of the intended routes for heavier axle loads.

### Will buses under permit create higher pavement wear?

Yes, higher axle loadings do create increased pavement wear. Therefore, before issuing a permit, the road controlling authority (RCA) should consider the impact of the additional weight on the routes that are specified in the permit application.

### Will buses under permit result in bridge restrictions

The bus limits may result in bridge restrictions. As with other High Productivity Motor Vehicles these heavier buses are generally required to operate at normal speeds across bridges to reduce the risk to other motorists.

### What about routes that use roads under the control of more than one RCA?

All RCAs have to agree to the issue of the permit if it includes roads managed by more than one authority.

### Does this affect Road User Charges (RUC) for a vehicle holding a permit?

Heavy vehicles used on New Zealand roads pay a proportional charge related to the estimated road wear they cause.

Vehicles operating above the standard axle limits are generally subject to higher RUC rates. A RUC rate for buses with three axles operating with a permit has already been set. New rates would be considered if permits are issued to buses with two axles.

### Where can I read the updated Rule?

<http://www.nzta.govt.nz/resources/rules/>