Vehicle Dimensions & Mass Rule (2016)

Frequently Asked Questions

BACKGROUND

Why is the current Rule being reviewed?

The Vehicle Dimensions and Mass (VDAM) Rule has been in place for over 13 years and has undergone 12 amendments. It's timely to undertake a proper review of the Rule to ensure it remains fit for purpose, takes into account technology advancements and projected increases in freight and passenger transport demand, reconciles the dual roles of the NZ Transport Agency as an RCA and the agency that administers the Rule, and aligns with the Government's *Safer Journeys* commitment to improvements in road safety.

Where can I get a copy of the consultation 'yellow' draft?

The consultation documents are available on the NZ Transport Agency website www.nzta.govt.nz/vdam-2016

How can I make a submission?

You can either:

1. Make an online submission using the form provided [www.nzta.govt.nz/vdam-2016] and submit your response.
2. Send us a written submission focusing on the elements of the draft Rule that are relevant to you.
3. Email your submission to rules@nzta.govt.nz with 'VDAM Rule Review Submission' in the subject line.

Or post it to: VDAM Rule 2016, Rules Team, NZ Transport Agency, Private Bag 6995, Wellington 6141.

When do submissions close?

The deadline for submissions is 5pm, Friday 12 August 2016.

What happens after public consultation finishes?

Submissions will be reviewed and a final proposed Rule will be sent to the Associate Minister of Transport for signing. Following signing and Gazetting, the Rule will be implemented and information will be prepared for those who will be using the Rule, to understand the changes and what this means for them.

When does the review finish and when will the changes be implemented?

Once submissions have closed and can be assessed, detailed planning for implementation in November will be finalised. However, we will be continuing to engage with stakeholders throughout this period to address requirements.

DETAILS OF THE NEW PROPOSED RULE

General

How will the proposals help make better use of the roading network and increase efficiencies?

By making small adjustments to the rules covering height, width and tonnage, many trucks and buses will be able to carry more in fewer trips. This will particularly benefit those involved in the export production of dairy, meat, logs, wool, and providing bus services for public transport and tourist operations.

How would the changes affect safety?

Allowing more to be carried on heavy vehicles helps reduce the number of vehicles that would be required to manage the increasing freight and passenger transport tasks.

Additionally, aligning some international dimensions would allow fleet purchasers to access newer, more environmentally friendly vehicles with more safety features that are built for overseas markets.

How would the changes improve compliance?

Changes arising out of the VDAM Rule review, combined with proposed amendments to the Land Transport Act 1998 (the Act), will enable enforcement to be more effectively targeted at non-compliant operators. This is expected to result in a reduction in non-compliant behaviour as the likelihood of those overloading being detected will increase.

By doing this, compliant operators can benefit. For example, the proposed reduction in weighing tolerance makes it possible to provide additional mass to compliant operators. Essentially, this means rewarding compliant operators.

Changes to axle and gross mass limits

Why do I require a minimum length to make use of the additional gross mass limits above 44,000kg?

The minimum length ensures the additional weight of the vehicle is distributed sufficiently to ensure the load does not create safety risks when crossing bridges. This is consistent with the approach taken in the current Rule, which specifies increasing minimum lengths for increasing gross mass limits.

Will any vehicles be required to reduce their maximum load as a result of the changes?

Vehicles loaded within the current limits will not need to make any reductions.

Do the increases in mass limits apply to High Productivity Motor Vehicles (HPMVs)?

No. Gains in productivity for HPMVs were provided for in changes made to the Rule in 2010. There is considerable flexibility within the HPMV limits for operators to carry additional weight under permits.

Will permits still be required for 50MAX vehicles?

Yes. Some parts of the road network are not suited for general access for 50MAX vehicles. Permits ensure 50MAX operators know where the vehicles can go and create incentives to stay within the 50MAX network.

What changes are being made to weighing tolerances and why?

For most maximum weights, the weighing tolerances will reduce to 500kg for gross mass (compared to up to 1,500kg currently) and 1,000kg for axle sets.

This better reflects the level of accuracy of current weighing approaches and is intended to discourage operators from regularly overloading their vehicles.

What else is being done to encourage operators to stay within the loading limits specified in the Rule?

Proposed Act changes are being prepared whereby the current 10% limit on the maximum extent of overloading before a vehicle must offload will be replaced by a 2,000kg limit. This means vehicles with gross mass limits over 20,000kg have a lower overloading tolerance before being required to off-load.

These changes, if enacted, would also enable the Police to more easily redirect vehicles for up to 10 kilometres in order to be weighed (currently they may redirect up to 5 kilometres). This will help reduce the ability of operators to deliberately take alternative routes to avoid weighing.

What impacts will the increased gross mass limits have on road infrastructure?

Increases in maintenance costs are not expected to be significant and the effect of the mass increases on local bridges is expected to be within their current safety parameters.

Will heavier and larger vehicles have any impact on road safety?

The small increases in dimensions and mass limits would not produce noticeably bigger trucks or buses and are therefore unlikely to pose a significantly higher safety risk. The changes are expected to support safety outcomes because:

- operators will be able to carry more with fewer trips, reducing the exposure of other road users to heavy vehicles for some freight tasks
- changes will encourage take up of vehicles with improved safety specifications.

The proposed Rule would also enable, with no loss to productivity, the use of close proximity monitoring systems which identify others using the road, which can help improve the safety of cyclists and pedestrians around large vehicles. In addition, operators would still need to comply with current safety performance standards for braking, acceleration, slope start-ability, load securing, rollover, and stability.

Will the proposed changes in mass mean an increase in road user charges?

The road user charges regime will continue to operate on the existing principle that heavy vehicle operators pay for the impact their vehicles have on our roads.

Will road controlling authorities (RCAs) be able to decline permits for the new limits?

Yes. If an RCA assesses that the load will affect the durability of roads or bridges on the proposed route, or will impose risks to the safety of road users or the safety of the vehicle, it may decline a permit. This already applies under the current Rule.

How were the selected specialist vehicles identified as being able to carry extra weight?

The vehicles identified as specialist vehicles are those that, like buses, often carry heavier loads on their rear axles and the load cannot be easily redistributed. The permitting process allows such vehicles to be operated on routes that can safely accommodate the heavier axle mass.

Changes to dimensions – width and height

What are the proposed changes in width and height?

The maximum width is being increased to 2.55m including the use of load securing devices. This means enclosed vehicles will be able to use the additional 25mm each side currently allowed for load securing devices in addition to the current body width limit of 2.50m. The benefit of this is that vehicles can carry more with fewer trips. On the same basis, the maximum height is being extended from 4.25m to 4.30m, inclusive of load securing devices.

There will be exceptions for productivity and safety improvement devices such as aerodynamic tabs (increased fuel efficiency and stability) and close proximity monitoring systems (safety of other road users).

Does this mean there will be wider trucks on the road?

No, the effective maximum width remains unchanged, but more vehicles would be able to make use of that maximum width.

The proposal to increase the width of trucks from 2.50m (+50mm for load-securing devices) to 2.55m (including load-securing devices) allows closed-in vehicles, like refrigerated trailers, to be 2.55m.

This will effectively standardise the width of trucks, as those with load securing devices will remain at 2.55m maximum width as they are at present.

How will the proposed width and height changes affect local RCA infrastructure?

No changes are required to the width of local roads as the effective maximum width of vehicles has not been increased.

In respect of height, no new action is expected of RCAs, however RCAs are encouraged to submit details on any identified problem points. There are existing structures lower than the current 4.275m limit or between the current limit and proposed 4.3m limit. All of these structures, however, should already be clearly sign-posted.

Will the proposed changes in dimension limits have any impact on road safety?

The additional height is not expected to increase risks to other road users as vehicles will still have to meet the stability requirement set out in the Rule (i.e. the static roll threshold). Similarly, while there may be more vehicles operating at the maximum effective width, the increase is relatively minor.

The ability for vehicles to use close proximity monitoring systems in addition to the width limit will help increase driver awareness of cyclists and people around them. Crash data cites lack of vision as the main cause of side-impact crashes.

Overdimension vehicles

Are changes being proposed to the management of overdimension loads?

Yes. While the rate of crashes involving overdimension loads or vehicles is very low, there are still opportunities for improvements, especially for very large loads.

What is the approach taken to controlling very large loads?

The proposals follow the approach taken in the current Rule that requires stricter controls as the size of a load or vehicle increases. The aim is to ensure that permit conditions better reflect the circumstances of the route travelled.

What are the key changes for moving very large loads?

Applicants for permits will be required to assess the route and identify that moving a very large load can be safely managed within the requirements of the Rule, or identify what other measures might be necessary. Proposed changes to manage road safety in these instances include:

- the creation of critical conditions for overdimension permits which will carry a greater fine (in the Offences and Penalties Regulations) than a standard breach of a permit condition
- the Transport Agency being able to refer to the traffic offending history of a person applying for an overdimension permit (similar to what is done now for HPMV permits)
- ensuring the Rule explicitly details the kinds of matters than can be included as permit conditions, such as speed, width and number of pilots.

Are there any changes to limit the width of houses and buildings being moved?

No. Permits will continue to be managed on a case-by-case basis. There is a range of circumstances facing each load, making it difficult to apply an appropriate fixed width limit. In some circumstances, transporting a house or building in separate parts may be the most appropriate and safest method and may be a condition of receiving a permit.