

Why driver training is my most rewarding career

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Passing a road train on an SA outback highway, 70+ tonnes, 62 wheels, travelling at 90km/h. Good thing both drivers were well trained by road safety professionals. Image: Hughes Training Group

By Andy Hughes

My grandfather was a fantastic role model, he taught me how to think, and he had a knack of cutting through the BS. He always said you should keep things simple. I've generally struggled with this principle, but I'll give it a crack.

Driver training is fundamentally a road safety issue. Enhanced driver training programs and lifting minimum standards will lead to safer roads. However, there will be a bottleneck due to a shortage of professional educators – trainers who understand the industry, possess strong communication skills, and are eager to

pursue further study. We need to work together across jurisdictions to identify and support the development of more highly skilled driver trainers to help fill the gaps.

Recently, there has been significant media coverage about driver shortages, training standards and an increase in dangerous driving behaviours. As a nation, we need to re-evaluate heavy vehicle training and licencing on three fronts: lifting minimum standards, harmonising training and assessment standards across jurisdictions, and promoting a culture of competence over tenure.

Quantifying the return on investment of enhanced driver training policy and programs is challenging, but its importance is undeniable. It builds workforce capacity, keeps freight moving, and saves lives. Win, win, win.

Pop used to say, "Get your facts right before you start flapping your lips," so here goes:

- **Demand for road freight and public transport is increasing greatly:** Australia's road transport activity has grown over the past 35 years resulting in an eight-fold increase in road freight. And road freight is projected to grow by 77 per cent to 2050 (NFDH Navigating Australia's Freight Future).
- **Australia's highways and busy city streets are very dangerous places to work, and therefore require a special skillset:** Transport (truck drivers), postal and warehousing accounted for 7.8 fatalities per 100,000 workers in 2020. It's one of the deadliest sectors in Australia, (Safe Work Australia, 2023).
- **The human factor is the most common cause of road-related incidents. Risky behaviour, fatigue, poor attitude, and driver distraction are the worst offenders:** The proportion of serious crashes attributed to human-factor related causes increased to 63.5 per cent of all losses (NTI, NTARC Major Crash Investigation).
- **We need an army of job-ready truck and bus drivers to keep Australia moving:** Over 26,000 drivers are needed to fill the current gaps. This is not just a crisis for the trucking industry, it's a crisis for the national economy (IRU and NatRoad, 2024).
- **Competency based assessment should be prioritised over a tenured licencing pathway:** Heavy vehicle licensing should prepare applicants by ensuring that they receive adequate behind the wheel training (VTA, Prioritise training over experience, 2022).

Potential candidates are hard to find. Heavy vehicle driver training and assessment requires a specific mindset, a couple of Certificate IV qualifications, a clean police report, an understanding of adult learning principles, and extensive industry skills and experience.



“No more backseat for me baby!” Toby, 18 months. As parents we are the first educators for the next generation of drivers. So let's be road safety role models. Image: Hughes Training Group

My grandfather would proudly say, “Nobody taught me how to drive, I worked it out myself.” I suspect I'm lucky to be here as a result.

Providing someone a truck licence offers them a career opportunity, and comprehensive training equips them with the extra knowledge and skills required to survive and thrive.

I don't claim to have all the answers to the issues that I've outlined in this editorial, but I do know that becoming a driver trainer is the most rewarding career choice I've ever made. If you're interested in becoming a truck or bus driver trainer, we can provide advice and support. Contact us at hughestraining.com.au

“ROAD SAFETY STARTS AT THE STEERING WHEEL”

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Andy Hughes, Hughes Training Group Pty Ltd

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Image: Hughes Training Group

Andy Hughes is the director of Hughes Training Group Pty Ltd. With Diplomas in Vocational Education and Training, and over a million kilometres driving heavy vehicles all over the country, he is well placed to help you become a professional driving instructor. He also has years of truck (and bus) driver training experience.

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Hughes Training Group Pty Ltd is a member of the Australian Driver Trainers Association and the Australasian College of Road Safety.

