



**MEDIA RELEASE**

**20 March 2023**

## **Embrace reform opportunity: VTA**

Victorian Transport Association CEO Peter Anderson has used his opening address at State Conference 2023 to encourage state and federal legislators and regulators to embrace the opportunity to create lasting heavy vehicle reform that will help attract people to the Australian freight and logistics sector.

Under the theme of ***People First – Managing Transport’s Greatest Asset*** over 170 delegates have gathered at Phillip Island, Victoria for State Conference 2023 for two days of learning and networking, with 30 presenters scheduled to address the conference.

“Our conference theme has been inspired by the enormous challenges freight operators have had in recent years when it comes to attracting, hiring, and retaining staff – especially drivers,” Anderson said. “We are a labour-intensive industry and people are our most important asset. People are also the hardest of our assets to manage, so it was only natural that our focus is directly on how to get the best from our people.”

Anderson said the pandemic has caused labour shortages in numerous industries, but for freight and logistics, it merely added additional challenges to a sector that has experienced entrenched worker shortages for decades.

“Why has this been the case?” Anderson asked delegates. “Is it because transport workers aren’t paid well enough? Is it because of a perception heavy vehicle drivers live a rough lifestyle? Is it because people don’t see a career pathway in freight and logistics. Is the industry still shrouded in the stigma that driving a truck or working in a warehouse is just a job, as opposed to the profession it is?”

Anderson told delegates labour shortages due to border closures and Covid’s close contact restrictions limited the availability of workers and played havoc with the industry last year.

“With borders now open the situation will improve as the year goes on, however the transport industry can still expect shortages to persist because of structural issues the industry has long faced and is working hard to overcome,” Anderson said.

“An aging worker profile and state licencing regulations that limit our capacity to recruit drivers after leaving school, takes time to correct, underscoring the importance of planning ahead for operators’ labour needs. Notwithstanding these shortages, our industry will continue to grow, demand for goods will volumes to be moved will grow and it will require well trained and motivated employees to support this growth.”

Anderson said labour shortages had underpinned the VTA’s work to develop training programs that deliver a pathway for new entrants to the transport industry to be trained as job ready workers in freight and logistics.

“What we need most, however, to attract workers to a career in freight and logistics is reform.

“The election of the Albanese Government last May, along with state elections that saw Labor win or retain government in South Australia and Victoria, means the ALP now occupies the treasury benches federally and in six of the seven Australian states and territories.



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“That may grow to seven if Labor wins the New South Wales state election next week, as current polling suggests it will. This opportunity presents in the context of state and federal transport policy-making that has generally been in a holding pattern for over eight years, particularly in the critical areas of heavy vehicle national law, licencing, industrial relations and productivity improvement,” Anderson said.

“With there now being general political consensus in place across the length and width of Australia there has never been a better or more opportune time to attain the reforms that have evaded the transport industry for years. The results will be a safer industry that provides productivity, efficiency, and sustainability dividends for parties to every freight transaction including operators, customers, and consumers.”

State Conference 2023 is proudly sponsored by TWUSUPER. It finishes on Tuesday.

**Ends...**

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