

# Road freight in 2021

*Nick Leggett, [Road Transport Forum](#), talks with [AdvocacyUpdate](#)*

*AdvocacyUpdate:* How would you describe your sector and the Road Transport Forum?

*Nick Leggett:* The Road Transport Forum is the peak body for the road transport industry, which carries 93 percent of NZ's freight on the back of the trucks. We represent the National Road Carriers, the Road Transport Association and the NZ Trucking Association. We have about three thousand members across those three organisations, and about 70 per cent of those have 10 employees or fewer. So we really do represent small to medium businesses. And we do that very proudly and we're based in Wellington.

*AdvocacyUpdate:* What's on the minds of those truckers right now?

*Nick Leggett:* Well, a key issue is labour supply – getting access to workers. That's been a problem for some time in road transport. The average age of a truck driver is fifty four - we've got to lower the age and open the door to diversity. We do need more women and young people in the industry and need to show there's a career in trucking. We're launching a traineeship soon that will hopefully give on-job training and qualifications and provide that path, but it will take time. But that's certainly the number one issue, I think, for trucking companies.

We also struggle with getting fair rights - fair carrying rights - and that's having an impact on the amount that workers can be paid.

The cost structures for the industry are also quite difficult. Covid-19 has had an impact on the supply chain internationally, but the pain is yet to come for many of our exporters and importers and just businesses generally in NZ. So far, trucking has done well. But this could turn around because the trucking industry is obviously dependent on general economic activity, and we're concerned about some of the economic storm clouds that may be approaching.

*AdvocacyUpdate:* What will you be advocating for this year?

*Nick Leggett:* Well, there's plenty on the on the horizon. Because trucking is made up of such a high proportion of small to medium businesses, little changes that are planned by government could potentially affect the industry significantly.

For example, moves to improve conditions for contractors under employment law could lead to some contractors being reclassified as employees. This might not suit some of our trucking contractors. Around 14 or 15 percent of our truck drivers are owner drivers - they own the truck, they're self-employed, they contract to other businesses, and their freedom and flexibility is really important both to them and also to the businesses that contract their labour. And they want to be able to do that, without being turned into an employee, so they've got a choice. And so we'll be we'll be advocating that they keep that choice.

We are very focused on safety as an industry. So, improved testing for drug driving is really supported by us because currently we don't have adequate laws to test drivers for drug driving. We are an industry that's pretty good at compulsory testing before we employ

people, and then with on-job testing. But actually we need roadside testing as well, so we will be supporting that. We've got to look at ways of improving compliance with the New Zealand Transport Agency. We want to see more of a co-operative compliance regime to get improved health and safety outcomes for the industry.

In terms of sustainability best practice, we support emissions reductions and the route to some alternative energy, such as hydrogen or electric. We've seen these alternative fuels take off internationally and seen quite a bit of government incentive, and I think we've got to look at that for the NZ road transport industry. Road transport generally makes up a large proportion of emissions, so we need to grasp some low-hanging fruit in terms of making some initial improvements in emissions reduction before the big kahuna comes down the line - whether it is electrical or hydrogen – we need to be doing what we can now.

*AdvocacyUpdate:* That's a broad array of issues to be pushing for or pushing up against - how are you going to do that?

*Nick Leggett:* Well, working in partnership is a big part of it. And I'd like to say that BusinessNZ provides industries like ours with resources for more in-depth work into some of these issues. In employment issues or sustainability and environmental best practice, the leadership from BusinessNZ is important for our progress on that.

