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Trucks and roads the key to economic survival

While it is great to see the Government listening to professional road users and committing to a greater spend on State Highway maintenance, it is disappointing that in doing so they continue to demonise trucks, Road Transport Forum (RTF) chief executive Nick Leggett says.

Transport Minister Phil Twyford released today the final Government Policy Statement on land transport (GPS) 2021.

“While it is less than we asked for, we are pleased to see a \$510 million increase for state highway maintenance – we have been vocal about the unsafe state of some of these roads and it is good to be heard,” Leggett says.

“Of course, this spend is over time and equates to \$100 million per year on additional state highway maintenance for the first three years and the spending doesn’t include local roads. It is a bit of a drop in the bucket, but better than nothing.

“But it is always disappointing to hear this Government say that moving freight off roads to rail and ships will make roads safer and be better for the environment.

“Trucks are not unsafe and the evidence doesn’t stack up on rail being better for the environment. These are purely perceptions pushed by the sectors of government and society that are opposed to the use of fossil-fuelled vehicles.

“Trucks are in fact, made ‘safe’ both in manufacturing and via a number of New Zealand laws, rules and regulations. Afterall, it would be negligent of the Government to allow unsafe vehicles on our roads.

“There is only 43 kilometres of rail for 1000 kilometres of road, but sadly the pro-rail brigade believe that rail can compete with the effectiveness, convenience and efficiency of road freight. This is despite all evidence to the contrary. Even in European countries with vast and efficient railways, freight movers pick road over rail.

“One of the four strategic priorities of the GPS is to improve freight connections and improve the freight network for primary producers to market. Not many

trains or ships go to our farms. And of course, goods that travel by train or ship, first travel by truck.

“In New Zealand, the National Freight Demand Study, commissioned by the Ministry of Transport and released in October 2019, showed that freight delivered by road was 93% of the freight task, up 16% since 2012, while rail was 5.6% of the freight task, down 17% since 2012.

“The re-engineering of the transport system to satisfy ideology is not only costly, but flies in the face of economic reality at a critical time for the New Zealand economy recovering from Covid-19. Using market manipulation, it attempts to engineer out choices for businesses who need to move freight to survive in a highly competitive global market.

“Ultimately, the market will decide which is the best mode for transporting their goods. Road offers door-to-door delivery, even in the remote parts of the country; is more resilient in weather events, natural disasters, and Covid-19; and is reliable for time-sensitive perishable goods.

“We say, show us the evidence that spending billions of dollars on rail will achieve the laudable goals of road safety and environmental improvements – that is, facts, figures, timelines, improvement scales, not just someone’s beliefs.”

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About Road Transport Forum New Zealand (RTF)

RTF provides unified national representation for several regional trucking associations. RTF members include Road Transport Association NZ, National Road Carriers, and NZ Trucking Association. The affiliated representation of the RTF is about 3,000 individual road transport companies which in turn, operate 16-18,000 trucks involved in road freight transport, as well as companies that provide services allied to road freight transport.

The road freight transport industry employs 32,868 people (2.0% of the workforce), has a gross annual turnover of \$6 billion, and transports 93% of the total tonnes of freight moved in New Zealand.