Hornby Transport Services

Safe drivers, at safe speeds in safe vehicles: a simple recipe for success

Fleet: 55 plus 70 trailers
No. of Staff: 70 permanent staff, including 40 company drivers
Case Study:

Success built on safe drivers, at safe speeds in safe vehicles

Key Outcomes:

- A safe systems approach, incorporating safe drivers in safe vehicles operating at safe speeds, delivers multiple benefits to the company and the community.
- Technology-driven safety initiatives are accepted by the workforce if they understand the benefit to them, how to use them, and how they fit into the company’s safety system.
- Improvements in safety can increase productivity and reduce maintenance, lost time to injury and insurance costs.
- Safe drivers are loyal drivers, maximising retention and reducing the need for retraining.
- Transport company owners must remain ever vigilant to improved practices, with fatigue the number one safety issue to be monitored.
- Safety is not optional in today’s transport industry: customers, clients and regulators demand it.

Synopsis:

Safety is the cornerstone of Hornby Transport Services’ longevity in a demanding industry. While safety is the overriding factor when its clients choose their transport partners, it has also delivered a range of benefits to the company including high driver retention rates, and reduced maintenance, injury and insurance costs.
Introduction

Hornby Transport Services’ comprehensive approach to safety – ensuring its drivers operate safely in safe vehicles that always travel at safe speeds – reduces the risk of trauma for its drivers, the company and the wider community.

Purchasing decisions are made with the driver’s safety, protection and comfort in mind, and equipment is modified to maximise safety. Highest risk times and routes have been identified and measures taken to mitigate the risk.

Hornby Transport Services’ non-compromising approach to safety has translated into a positive reputation across the industry and several blue chip companies choosing it as its trusted transport partner.

Driver retention is virtually at 100 per cent, reducing time and money spent on finding and training new drivers, maintenance costs have been reduced, and lost time to injury is virtually non-existent.

Organisation overview

Hornby Transport Services (HTS) is a family owned and operated business beginning as a one truck, one operator concern in 1977. The business has grown steadily and now has substantial contracts with major industry clients, including BlueScope, Incitec Pivot and OneSteel, in addition to running services in partnership with major national transport companies.

Operating along the eastern seaboard, its main operations revolve around moving recycled steel material between Port Kembla, Sydney and Newcastle, and from Sydney to Brisbane.

HTS runs a fleet of 40 company trucks, including steel body and aluminium tippers, and flat-top trailers. It employs 40 company drivers and 15 permanent sub-contractors, supplemented by casual drivers.

The company has won steel industry safety awards, including NSW Contractor of the Year, and is operated by three hands-on directors with extensive transport and logistics experience.
Safety a key business tool

HTS has always had a strong focus on meeting its safety obligations and ensuring its drivers operate safely at all times. An impeccable safety record is mandatory to operate successfully in the industry in which it works, with high-profile customers demanding nothing less.

Committed to zero harm, HTS is a signatory to the Steel Industry Logistics Safety Code and is TruckSafe accredited, including (NHVAS) for mass and maintenance management. HTS had to demonstrate it had effective safety and reporting systems in place that met specific standards to be awarded the accreditations.

While strong safety systems are a necessary business tool and reflect an attitude driven from the top, two key incidents in the past 15 years heightened HTS’ commitment to safety. The most serious was a fatal crash involving one of its own drivers in 2001. Fatigue was a major factor in the incident, which occurred at about 4am. The second incident was a truck rollover, caused by a trailer tipping, on the Pacific Highway, which also occurred in the early morning.

In both cases, HTS management resolved to never let such incidents happen again, taking immediate action to prevent a repeat and developing a comprehensive safe systems approach to all of its operations. That safe systems focus incorporates the safety pillars of safe speeds, safe vehicles, safer roads and safe drivers. The safety focus extends beyond HTS’ company drivers, treating permanent sub-contractors exactly the same as its own drivers when it comes to safety.

Safe speeds

Speed is monitored in each of HTS’ company and sub-contractor trucks through the NextGen compliance and tracking system. Installed on a 10-inch tablet in each truck, the system emits a warning ‘chirp’ if the vehicle exceeds 100kmh, meaning the driver is not distracted by constantly checking the speedometer.

The system also automatically generates an email to the Compliance Manager and Company Director Bob Hornby if the vehicle exceeds 105kmh. If the truck reaches 110kmh, the driver will receive a warning letter and will be dismissed for a second offence. Speed compliance is part of the company’s induction process, so drivers are aware of their responsibility before they sign on.

To ensure accuracy, two speed tracking systems are installed – so higher speeds can be verified – and devices are regularly checked as part of a maintenance program. The company has only ever needed to dismiss one driver for excessive speed.
Safe drivers and roads

Fatigue is a major risk factor in the transport industry. In response to the fatal accident, and the early hours being the riskiest time in our industry to be on the road, HTS instigated a policy where its long-distance drivers must be off the road between midnight and 4am. There are no exceptions.

Compliance is enforced via the NextGen tracking unit, which flags if the truck is operated between those times. In that case, the driver is asked for an explanation and receives written notification that a second breach will result in dismissal.

Driver wellbeing is also part of the company’s safety culture and vehicle purchasing decisions are informed by a driver’s specific circumstances.

For example, automatic trucks were purchased for two drivers who had ankle and shoulder problems. While also repaying loyalty, such measures result in driver retention levels of virtually 100 per cent, meaning the company seldom needs to train new drivers.

The company has identified higher-risks roads and changed procedures to mitigate risk to its drivers. For example, when it operated a longhaul route to Brisbane, it utilised only drivers accustomed to working at night and ran a changeover at Kempsey, and it purchases vehicles with a higher safety specification to operate on routes identified as posing a higher danger. Technology utilised to help limit risk on those roads includes the Intelligent Access Program (IAP), which provides instant mass management. As HTS is permitted to carry different weights on different routes, the program records axle weights, with that information monitored against the route. If the weight is not permitted on that route, a third party is notified and investigates.

Safe vehicles

In addition to equipment modifications, likes EBS with rollover technology being installed on trailers (see breakout box), tyre pressure and temperature monitoring has also been installed in many trucks and trailers because working with recycled steel often means operating in harsh environments. Trailers are also inspected in the workshop every 10 days for damage or cracks.

Tyre blowouts are prevented because the driver is alerted if the pressure drops below a pre-set level or tyre temperature is too high, and HTS has a tailored plan to deal with low pressure warnings on each of its regular routes. Preventing tyre blowouts saves the company
money from lost or extended delivery times, and also eliminates such associated on-costs as tyre supplier callouts.

Each driver must log in to the NextGen system via the in-cabin tablet before starting work. To encourage drivers to log in, they are paid via the tracking reports on the trucks when working in remote areas. If a driver begins work without logging in, the system brings up a non-compliance report alerting management that the truck has moved. The Compliance Manager or a company director will contact the driver seeking an explanation.

Similarly, a pre-trip check, which is also completed electronically using the NextGen system, will generate an email if the truck has moved without the check being completed. If maintenance is required, it is recorded in a repair book in the truck and highlighted in the system, becoming part of an in-house process of raising repair requisitions within the workshop. The allocator for the day then decides whether to send the truck out or hold it back depending on the urgency of the repair request.

The system also operates as an Electronic Work Diary (EWD), recording driver hours and alerting them when breaks are due. At the end of the day, manual log book sheets are checked against the electronic equivalent and are stored electronically.

**Technology becomes a tool**

The EWD system calculates the hours drivers have spent driving and when breaks are due, meaning drivers no longer have to make those calculations manually. The EWD provides the drivers with 30 minute and 15 minute warnings to give the driver enough time to plan where to stop. The information is specific to the driver’s NextGen login not the vehicle, so even when drivers swap trucks the data is accurate. Driver feedback showed that while the system achieved the goal of improving safety, it also made truck drivers’ jobs easier by helping them comply with their legal obligations. The industry regulator in NSW has examined and given an informal ‘thumbs up’ to HTS’ safety systems.

Implementation of safety initiatives is underpinned by regular training and a comprehensive company induction. When the NextGen system was introduced, for example, it was demonstrated to drivers in a dedicated training session on a Saturday. Once the system was being used in the real world, positive feedback from early users soon overcame reluctance among a handful of drivers.

Ongoing training is provided every three months, which includes updating drivers on any changes in customer practice, with additional updated information posted on company noticeboards. Feedback from the NextGen system helps identify areas where training is required and if drivers appear on exception reports they are counselled regarding the issue and the requirement to adhere to company policies.

*To management’s surprise, drivers have embraced much of the technology-driven safety and compliance initiatives introduced by HTS, particularly electronic work diaries.*
Prevention better than cure

A key foundation of HTS’ approach to safety is a proactive focus on continually limiting risk. Regular and accurate tracking is effective in highlighting issues – if a driver is getting out of a truck regularly, for example, it may suggest that fatigue is an issue. The company also ensures it drivers are ‘fit to drive’ through such initiatives as an annual medical check – which can identify and help address such common transport industry health issues as sleep apnoea or obesity – and all drivers are subject to random drug testing.

HTS also has people on the road monitoring safety compliance to reduce the risk as much as possible. In addition to the Compliance Manager, two Occupational Health and Safety Officers and a Newcastle-based Business Manager take a leading role in conducting on-site safety observations, which also reinforces safety at customer sites as well as mitigating risk.

The simple act of talking to drivers while they are in the yard, particularly while they are refuelling, can also highlight issues that need addressing, especially around fatigue. This is something the directors make a point of doing regularly and with decades of industry experience they have a strong ‘feel’ for when drivers have underlying issues that may affect their safety. Low driver turnover also means directors know drivers well enough that if something is amiss then it often stands out – this is another advantage of having a strong culture through the organisation with managers engaged with drivers.

EBS on trailers – instant cost recovery

A rollover in 2008, caused by a combination of driver error and a top-heavy load, led to HTS’ decision to fit all new trailers with Electronic Braking Systems (EBS) for rollover stability, and to progressively retrofit the existing trailer fleet.

All trailers over 60 cubic metres and every trailer with disc brakes have been fitted with the technology. The system also includes an anti-tilt alert that flashes in-cab if the trailer is not level during tipping, and provides trailer axle weights to assist with mass management.

While eliminating the rollover risk, installing the technology has more than halved maintenance costs on disc brake components. Previously, discs and rotors needed replacing every six months, at a cost of $1000 a wheel. Now brake pads last 12 months and rotor replacement intervals are at least 18 months.

As Bob Hornby explained, “it costs $4500 to retrofit and $3000 to install the technology on a new trailer. It is nothing compared to the benefits you get out of it.”
Benefits outweigh cost

HTS recognises that its proactive focus on safety is not free, but it also knows there are many benefits to having safe drivers, operating in safe vehicles at safe speeds, including driver retention and reduced maintenance costs.

However in the industry in which it operates, HTS also realises it has little choice. Reputation is everything and its customers will only work with companies they are confident will complete work safely and legally.

HTS has a very strong safety record. For example, the only case of lost time through injury in the past four years is a driver who injured a shoulder throwing chains over a trailer.

The company’s safety practices have received an informal ‘tick of approval’ from industry regulators and its insurer’s risk assessment could only recommend one initiative to improve practice. The insurer suggested that rather than paying an individual performance bonus to the top three drivers over a 12-month period – safety is the key consideration in that reward, along with productivity and presentation – the company group drivers and pay a bonus to the top-performing group. HTS directors plan to implement the initiative reasoning, in their typical style, that it would only have been suggested if it had worked elsewhere.

Speed and fatigue compliance levels are also extremely high, estimated at around 95 per cent for fatigue and with only a handful of speed violations across a fleet of 40 company vehicles. The company has also won steel industry awards for safety, and is regularly audited as part of its TruckSafe accreditation.
A matter of survival

HTS management believes that operators who are not safety conscious will not survive in today’s transport industry: either clients will not deal with them or regulators will close them down. You can’t put a price on safety, they believe, and vigilance must be a daily focus.

The most surprising thing for HTS directors along its safety journey has been driver acceptance of new technologies and systems, with management expecting resistance in particular to the introduction of electronic work diaries and in-cabin tablets for compliance.

With drivers understanding the benefits of the new system, and how it works, they accepted and engaged with the changes. Positive feedback from early users also drove acceptance across the workforce.

“I had a text message from one of my drivers – he’s been here since 2007 when he came across from another company – and he commended us on what we had done over the past seven years, from when he started to where we are today,” Bob Hornby said.

“I’ve kept that on my phone because I thought that’s pretty good for a driver to say that.”

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