
Land Transport Rules

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

Vehicle Dimensions and Mass Amendment Rule 2015

What is this Rule?

This draft Land Transport Rule: Vehicle Dimensions and Mass Amendment 2015 (the amendment Rule) proposes changes to the principal Rule: Land Transport Rule: Vehicle Dimensions and Mass 2002 (the Vehicle Dimensions and Mass Rule).

What changes does the proposed amendment Rule make to the Vehicle Dimensions and Mass Rule?

The proposed amendment Rule allows road controlling authorities (such as city or district councils, and Auckland Transport) to issue permits to high-capacity urban buses (such as double-decker vehicles) allowing them to exceed the current axle weight limits, but only where pavements (road surfaces) are sufficiently robust.

What problems have been addressed in the proposed changes?

In Auckland in the near term, there are capacity constraints around key corridors on the rapid and frequent networks such as the Northern Express, reflecting increased passenger numbers.

These trends are reflected in other metropolitan centres, but they will take longer to exceed capacity limits. Wellington will need to address capacity constraints within existing corridors in order to meet public transport demand and its regional targets. In addition, Christchurch is experiencing severe congestion on some routes.

As buses reach capacity, the most visible effect is that they continue past people waiting at bus stops – not meeting a level of customer service acceptable to the potential passengers.

Why can't we simply put more buses on those routes to meet passenger demand?

A solution based on higher frequency services (less of a gap between buses, more buses on each route) is subject to a number of constraints:

- the capacity of current roads (most routes are shared with all other traffic, and some core intersections are highly congested at peak times)
- space allowances at bus stops (how many buses can be accommodated at a stop at any one time) and
- layover capacity within the CBD (how many buses can be “held” in the area at any one time).

Do the proposals meet all the identified problems?

The use of higher capacity vehicles, such as double-decker buses, does help to address the identified capacity problem. Other initiatives, such as bus priority treatment along key corridors or the further introduction of bus lanes and dedicated busways will also need to be considered as part of an overall plan.

What types of bus are included?

The proposal is designed to enable the introduction of higher capacity vehicles, such as double-decker or articulated buses. These can accommodate significantly higher passenger numbers per vehicle.

Why double-decker buses?

They provide an approximately 50% increase in the number of passengers, but impose higher axle loadings (and road wear). These are in regular use in metropolitan areas (e.g. London, Hong Kong) where road space is at a premium and passenger numbers are high.

A key advantage for this form of vehicle is that its “footprint” is equivalent to existing conventional buses.

The potential disadvantages for operating double-decker buses are:

- higher axle loadings and, consequentially, road wear
- slightly less efficiency for loading/ unloading
- constraints where the route has restricted height limits and
- a higher driver licence class is needed than for a conventional bus (class 4, not class 2).

What about “bendy” (articulated) buses?

This form of vehicle also provides higher capacity, close to that of the double-decker buses discussed above. They can be configured to track through corners with a similar swept path to conventional buses.

However, they do take up more space than a conventional bus or a double-decker vehicle. This may require major reconfiguration of parts of the road space (e.g. to allow stacking at intersections). As well, existing bus stops do not have sufficient space to accommodate more than one of these vehicles at any time.

What services can be permitted?

The proposal only allows permits where the bus:

- is used on a regular route identified in a regional public transport plan and
- has at least 60 passenger seats.

What services and buses would not be eligible for permits?

Permits would not be available for passenger coaches that will be travelling long distances along highways and secondary routes where the roads are not of uniform construction.

Permits would not be available or necessary for the conventional buses which are the most common vehicles currently used for urban services. These have a seating capacity (typically) of up to 48 passengers.

So buses operating under a permit create higher road wear?

Yes, higher axle loadings do create increased road wear. However, permits should only be issued where the road construction is sufficiently strong to bear the additional weight.

How would that affect Road User Charges (RUC) for a vehicle subject to a permit?

The balancing factor for every heavy vehicle used on New Zealand roads is that it pays a proportional charge related to the estimated road wear it causes.

The existing RUC rates for buses are only valid for vehicles that do not exceed the standard axle weight limits. Under this proposal, high capacity buses will be able to operate under higher axle weights. A new rate therefore needs to be set for these buses when operating on a permit.

When are these changes expected to be in place?

We anticipate the amendment Rule being signed in May, and for it to come into effect by 1 July 2015.