

# GIPPSLAND FORESTRY HUB: TRANSPORT INFRASTRUCTURE BARRIERS & OPPORTUNITIES SUMMARY



The report examines transport infrastructure barriers affecting the forestry and timber industry in Gippsland, with a focus on roads, bridges, and access for larger, higher- productivity heavy vehicles. As local processing capacity has declined due to bushfires and the cessation of native timber harvesting, forest products increasingly travel long distances (often 400 km or more) to interstate or metropolitan markets. Transport has therefore become the single largest cost component for many forestry operations, making efficiency improvements critical to the industry's viability.

## Current State and Key Challenges

Road transport remains essential for almost all forestry products, even where rail or sea freight may play a supporting role. Analysis of NHVR-approved networks across Gippsland identified widespread and consistent barriers across the Eastern, Central and Western zones, including:

- **Bridge mass limitations** (commonly capped at 68.5 tonnes) that restrict Higher Productivity Freight Vehicles (HPFV) and prevent operation at Higher Mass Limits (HML).
- **Inconsistent permit processing** across local government authorities (LGAs), with the forestry and timber sector experiencing a permit rejection rate around four times higher than the transport industry average.
- **Restricted access for longer vehicles** (e.g. 23 m B-Doubles), particularly within the Latrobe City Council LGA.
- **Congestion and speed restrictions** on key arterial routes, especially the A1/M1 corridor through West and Metro Melbourne.
- **High toll costs** when transporting products through Melbourne, significantly increasing freight costs.

These barriers limit the uptake of safer, more efficient HPFV configurations, resulting in more truck movements, higher emissions, increased road wear, and higher costs for industry.

# Key Findings

- **Payload efficiency is critical:** Moving from 19 m vehicles to 23 m B-Doubles or HPFV configurations can reduce haulage costs by 13–14% per operation, while cutting truck movements by more than 30%.
- **HPFV benefits are only realised at HML:** Without HML access, HPFVs deliver limited payload gains due to higher tare weights.
- **Bridge assessment processes are costly and inefficient:** Current “single- use” assessments cost \$10,000–\$20,000 each and must be repeated for similar vehicles and routes, creating unnecessary duplication.
- **Permit inconsistencies undermine investment:** Unpredictable approvals discourage operators from investing in modern, safer vehicles and infrastructure upgrades.

## Priority Recommendations

The report identifies seven priority themes, distilled into the following key recommendations:

|   |                                                                                                                                                                 |
|---|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1 | Advance access for Restricted Access Vehicles (RAV) and HPFVs at HML, particularly within the Latrobe City Council LGA.                                         |
| 2 | Develop strategic HPFV HML freight corridors from Gippsland to Melbourne ports, Western Victoria (Geelong/Colac), and southern NSW.                             |
| 3 | Increase the frequency of bridge assessments and improve industry access to assessment results through shared reference vehicles and targeted upgrade programs. |
| 4 | Improve consistency in NHVR permit processing across LGAs through joint training for permit officers and industry operators.                                    |
| 5 | Establish a formal engagement framework enabling transport operators, forest growers and road managers to collaboratively resolve access issues.                |
| 6 | Reduce or offset Melbourne toll costs for Gippsland forestry freight.                                                                                           |
| 7 | Increase awareness of the broader safety, economic and environmental benefits of HPFV solutions.                                                                |

## Conclusion

Improving access for HPFVs operating at HML is the single most effective lever to reduce transport costs, emissions, congestion and road impacts for the Gippsland forestry and timber industry. Targeted investment in bridge assessments, consistent permitting, and strategic freight corridors would deliver significant economic and safety benefits, supporting the long-term competitiveness and sustainability of the region's forest industries.