

Vehicle Standards Guide 31 (VSG-31)

Road trains - Trailer coupling requirements

This guide provides information for vehicle inspectors, Approved Vehicle Examiners and owners of heavy vehicles about road train rated trailers.

Background

Road trains are multi-vehicle combinations consisting of a Prime mover towing at least two trailers (and is not a B-double). Each prime mover and trailer used in a road train combination must be road train certified.

Certification as a road train trailer specifically requires that the couplings fitted meet the necessary requirements to be used in these larger combinations and the electrical system to be capable of passing an electrical signal the longer distance.

For some time, industry has sought clarification from regulators about the requirement for road train trailers, dedicated for use as the last trailer in the combination, to have a tow coupling fitted at the rear of the unit.

The Federal Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Communications has recently determined (Circular 63/00-3-1) that a rear coupling is not mandatory on all road train trailers.

How does this affect me?

This determination impacts vehicle inspectors and AVE's. Vehicle inspectors are advised that the absence of a rear coupling is not a reason for rejection. Also, AVE's are advised that a rear coupling is not mandatory when certifying a S11 modification.



Figure 1: Road train trailers do not require a coupling fitted to the rear of the unit.

Vehicle markings and modifications

A trailer originally built as suitable for use in a road train must comply with the requirements detailed in *Australian Design Rule 63 Trailers Designed for Use in Road Trains* (ADR 63/..). ADR63/.. compliant trailers must show the words 'ROAD TRAIN TRAILER' on the vehicle plate.

Existing trailers may be modified and certified as road train trailers. Modification must be done in accordance with Vehicle Standards Bulletin 6 (VSB6), Modification Code S11 — Road train trailer rating. Modified trailers must be fitted with a modification plate that contains the ATM/GTM and shows the words 'ROAD TRAIN TRAILER'

Note: Modifications to a trailer certified to ADR 63/.. to include a rear coupling, must be carried out and approved in accordance with the road train requirements detailed in VSB6 Section P – Tow couplings

Accessing the road network

Road train combinations have restricted access to the road network. This means that they must operate in accordance with a valid access authority (Access permit or Gazetted Notice).

The access authority will include any additional conditions applied to the vehicle specific to accessing the roads listed in the authority. Operators are encouraged to ensure they are familiar with the conditions that apply to accessing the road network. NHVR Gazetted Notices can be found at: <https://www.nhvr.gov.au/law-policies/notices-and-permit-based-schemes>

Warning Signs

Vehicles operating in a road train combination are required to display warning signs at the front and rear of the combination. More information about vehicle warning signs can be found in [VSG19](#).

Chain of Responsibility

Under the Chain of Responsibility (CoR) laws, relevant parties in the transport supply chain have a duty to ensure the safety of their transport activities.

Parties in the chain have an obligation to eliminate or minimise potential harm or loss (risk) by doing all that is reasonably practicable in their business to ensure safety.

Implementing a system to ensure you are informed of changes to the vehicle safety standards and apply these to your business can support transport safety.

Complying with the Heavy Vehicle National Law

The operator of a heavy vehicle must ensure their vehicle complies with the Australian Design Rules (ADRs) and Heavy Vehicle (Vehicle Standards) National Regulation. Using or permitting another person to use a defective heavy vehicle on a road is an offence.

A defective heavy vehicle is a vehicle that:

- does not comply with the heavy vehicle safety standards; or
- has a part that does not perform its intended function; or
- has deteriorated to an extent that it cannot be reasonably relied on to perform its intended function.

Penalties can include on-the-spot fines or prosecution. Formal warnings or a defect notice may also be issued. For more information see the Heavy vehicle defects—Compliance and enforcement bulletin at www.nhvr.gov.au/ce-bulletins

For more information:

Visit: www.nhvr.gov.au/hvmodifications
Subscribe: www.nhvr.gov.au/subscribe
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