Appendix C: Guide to ACA–Mass

This guide is provided for general guidance only and does not substitute the *Heavy Vehicle National Law Act 2025* (HVNL), the SMS Standard 2026, the National Audit Standard (NAS), the Ministerial Guidelines for Heavy Vehicle Accreditation 2026 or any applicable notices or permits.

Operators should check these instruments at the time of application or audit.

Purpose

This guide summarises the requirements and criteria to support operators seeking Alternative Compliance Accreditation – Mass (ACA–Mass) under the Heavy Vehicle Accreditation (HVA) scheme.

The information in this guide has been taken from the SMS Standard 2026 and summarised to assist operators to become accredited with ACA–Mass. For the purposes of this Appendix, 'you' means 'the Operator' as identified in the SMS Standard.

ACA–Mass allows access for you to comply with the requirements of Higher Mass Limits (HML), Performance Based Standards (PBS), and other relevant notices and permits, subject to applicable eligibility and regulatory requirements.

This guide should be read in conjunction with the HVA Scheme Operator Guideline, which sets out the accreditation application, assessment and auditing processes.

How ACA–Mass integrates with GSA

GSA is a mandatory entry requirement for participation in the HVA scheme. To achieve GSA, operators must successfully complete an audit demonstrating that their Safety Management System (SMS) complies with the SMS Standard 2026.

Operators seeking ACA–Mass must satisfy additional mass accreditation requirements beyond those required for GSA. These requirements are specified in Schedule 3 of the SMS Standard 2026 and are designed to demonstrate an operator's capability to effectively manage mass-related risks.

The ACA–Mass requirements should be integrated into an operator's broader SMS rather than implemented as a separate or standalone framework.

The NHVR can only approve your application for ACA–Mass if it is satisfied that your SMS meets the criteria below:

- the GSA SMS requirements of the SMS Standard 2026
- the specific ACA–Mass requirements listed in Schedule 3 of the SMS Standard 2026
- the Ministerial Guidelines for Heavy Vehicle Accreditation 2026
- HVNL – Chapter 8

Note: Operators are encouraged to undertake their GSA and ACA–Mass audits at the same time. This can reduce audit costs, minimise duplication of effort and streamline the accreditation process.

Responsibility and accountability

Good mass management starts with making it clear who is responsible. You need to decide which roles in your business are involved in loading vehicles and checking mass, and clearly assign those responsibilities. Responsibility should be assigned based on a practical understanding of the loading process and who is best placed to manage it.

What the criteria means and what you must do to comply

- Ensure everyone in the business clearly understands who is responsible for managing mass, including the managers, drivers and anyone checking or verifying mass.
- Ensure management and responsible persons are aware of mass-related risks, such as overloads or equipment failure, so they can make improvements to ensure the processes and procedures are working effectively.
- Check that staff with mass-related responsibilities are consistently carrying out their duties in practice, and provide management with compliance reports.
- Ensure that staff involved in mass-related tasks are trained, capable and applying the correct procedures every time.

Vehicle identification and capability controls

ACA–Mass only applies to the vehicles covered by your accreditation. You must maintain control over all vehicles and trailers operating under ACA–Mass, including subcontractor vehicles.

You need to clearly identify which vehicles are operating under ACA–Mass and show they can legally operate within the required mass limits. This means keeping accurate, up-to-date details on each vehicle's identity, configuration, specifications and any mass concessions or authorisations.

If you use subcontractor vehicles, your system must show they are properly linked to your ACA–Mass accreditation and that the same mass control rules apply to them.

The aim is to manage mass-related risks across every vehicle operating under your accreditation, not just the ones you own.

What the criteria mean and what you must do to comply

- Clearly identify all vehicles and trailers operating under ACA–Mass at any time.
- Keep current and accurate details for every vehicle under the accreditation, including subcontractor vehicles, so they can be checked during audits and regulatory reviews.
- Keep vehicle records that clearly show each vehicle's identity, configuration, specifications and whether it has any mass concessions or authorisations.
- Ensure that every vehicle operating under ACA–Mass is technically capable, by design and specification, of meeting all axle and gross mass limits.
- Ensure any required mass authorisations (e.g. permits or network approvals) are current and apply to the vehicles operating under your accreditation.
- Ensure subcontractor and third-party vehicles managed under your ACA–Mass controls do not operate outside of those controls.

Vehicle use controls

Before every trip, you must know the actual mass of the vehicle in a way that reliably confirms you meet all axle and gross mass limits. This means loading decisions must be based on accurate, objective information, not guesses, assumptions or informal practices. A loaded vehicle must be weighed or assessed using a method that gives the same level of certainty as a direct measurement.

Your system also needs to account for normal variations in the load, such as changes in density, volume, quantity or how the load is positioned, and ensure these variations do not cause an overload. The requirement focuses on controlling mass compliance before the vehicle commences a trip. Because of this, your loading practices must be structured and repeatable, and you are able to provide proof that mass limits are not exceeded during normal operations.

What the criteria mean and what you must do to comply

- Have a process for checking vehicle mass before every trip using a method that gives reliable, objective proof that axle and gross mass limits are being met.
- Use defined, consistent and repeatable methods for your loading decision.
- The method you use to determine mass must account for normal variations in the load, including changes in density, volume, quantity or how the load is distributed.
- Keep records showing that vehicles do not start a trip unless mass compliance has been confirmed.
- Keep records of any regulatory non-conformance related to vehicle suspension such as breaches or defects, so you can identify, review and manage any suspension-related mass risks.

Suspension maintenance controls

Vehicle suspension systems are essential for keeping vehicles within mass limits and protecting the road network. Because of this, you must ensure that the suspension on all vehicles operating under your accreditation, including trailers and subcontractor vehicles is properly maintained and repaired to recognised technical codes or standards. Your suspension maintenance must follow manufacturer specifications, advice from qualified professionals and any relevant industry codes or inspection manuals.

Your system needs to support the timely identification, reporting and repair of suspension faults, with serious defects treated as a priority because they can affect safety, performance or compliance. You must also have clear decision making and sign off processes to make sure suspension repairs are completed correctly and verified before the vehicle returns to service. When using subcontractor or third party vehicles, you still need evidence that their suspension maintenance meets the required standard and is being properly managed.

What the criteria mean and what you must do to comply

- Maintain the suspension systems on all vehicles operating under your accreditation to the correct technical standards, following manufacturer specifications.
- Ensure suspension faults are identified, reported, prioritised and repaired in a way that properly manages mass-related risks.
- Ensure all suspension repairs and maintenance are carried out by qualified people or by others working under proper supervision.
- Ensure decisions about suspension repairs have appropriate oversight and signoff, confirming the work is done correctly before the vehicle returns to service.
- When using subcontractor or third-party vehicles, check the evidence that their suspension maintenance meets the required standard before they operate under your accreditation.

Verification controls

Verification is about proving that your method for checking vehicle mass is accurate and reliable. You must have processes in place that confirm the mass that is assessed before departure is correct. This usually involves comparing your assessed weights against certified or calibrated weighing equipment at set intervals, having processes and evidence that your system is working as intended and that your loading controls can be trusted over time.

Where your loading controls are strong enough to consistently show that every load and trip meets axle and gross mass limits, verification requirements may be met without relying on periodic re-weighing. However, in these cases, your system must still be able to clearly demonstrate that mass compliance is achieved reliably.

What the criteria means and what you must do to comply

- Show that your mass assessment method is regularly checked for accuracy using reliable, certified or calibrated equipment or processes.
- Your verification activities must produce clear, auditable evidence proving that the mass checks done before departure are accurate.
- If you do not rely on periodic re-weighing, you must be able to demonstrate that your loading controls consistently ensure every load is within axle and gross mass limits for every load and trip.
- Ensure the verification processes are strong enough to confirm that the Mass Management System is working properly over time.

Training and competence

ACA–Mass depends on the competence and awareness of the people who carry out or influence mass-related tasks. You must ensure that anyone with responsibilities under the system is properly trained and familiar with the policies, procedures and instructions relevant to their role. Training should ensure staff involved understand not just what they need to do, but why it matters and how their actions affect mass compliance outcomes. Good training reduces reliance on informal knowledge and helps embed consistent mass management practices into everyday operations.

Your system must also be able to show that training has been completed and that those responsible remain competent as roles, procedures or operating conditions change.

What the criteria mean and what you must do to comply

- Ensure staff with mass management responsibilities are able to show they understand the policies, procedures and instructions relevant to their role.
- Ensure training is appropriate for the responsibilities held and the mass-related risks being managed.
- Keep records of training that has been delivered and that those responsible remain competent as systems, roles or operating conditions change.
- Ensure training arrangements support the consistent and correct application of mass management controls across the whole organisation.

Review and continuous improvement

Internal review is essential to make sure the controls that support your ACA–Mass accreditation remain effective, up to date, and aligned with how your business actually operates. These reviews confirm whether your policies, procedures and instructions are being followed and whether they still reflect your current business activities.

Internal reviews must occur regularly, by means of quarterly oversight and a more detailed annual assessment. The review process should identify any nonconformances, weaknesses or emerging risks, and ensure corrective actions are taken quickly to prevent issues from recurring.

Internal review is also how you consolidate your mass management results into formal reporting, including structured compliance statements. This process supports continuous improvement and provides confidence that your system adapts to changes in operations, vehicles or regulatory expectations.

What the criteria mean and what you must do to comply

- Monitor mass-related data such as weighbridge results, onboard scale readings or differences between planned and actual loads to confirm that mass controls are being applied consistently in day-to-day operations.
- Ensure your review processes spot patterns or trends, such as a particular vehicle type regularly operating close to its limits, which may indicate the need to adjust loading instructions or check equipment calibration.
- Where mass limits are exceeded, ensure corrective actions address the real cause, such as incorrect density assumptions or faulty weighing equipment, rather than simply blaming the loader.
- Conduct reviews at intervals that match the risk and scale of your operation. Routine operational checks may be used to provide this oversight instead of separate formal assessments.
- Show that any changes made after a review, such as updating a loading plan, have improved or maintained mass compliance performance.
- Document and communicate to staff any significant changes to mass management procedures, ensuring the system stays relevant as vehicle types, freight or operating conditions change

Evidence

You must keep reliable evidence showing that vehicles are loaded within legal mass limits and that mass-related control processes are being applied correctly. This evidence must allow mass compliance to be reconstructed and verified when needed, especially for loads that exceed general mass limits. In line with the requirements in Part 2 of the SMS Standard 2026, the focus is on keeping credible proof of safe outcomes that supports sound decision-making, rather than creating unnecessary or duplicate administrative systems.

What the criteria mean and what you must do to comply

- Keep records such as trip logs, weighbridge dockets and load plans as a credible and accurate picture of the actual mass determinations made, especially for trips operating above general mass limits.
- Keep evidence that clearly shows which vehicles were involved and how mass was determined for each trip, whether by physical weighing or a mass-certain loading method.
- Keep up-to-date information about vehicles and personnel with mass-management responsibilities. This can be part of normal business records like fleet lists or HR files. Separate mass-specific registers are not required.
- Show evidence of appropriate corrective action when mass-related defects or infringements occur, to address the issue and prevent it from happening again.
- Ensure all documentation is accessible and easy to understand for the people who need it to perform their roles safely, whether stored physically or digitally.