

# Bold B-triple

Prime movers pulling two or three trailers are already moving freight between Geelong and Melbourne and across western NSW, and they will soon become a much more common sight, writes **Claire Stewart**.

**C**ome May next year, no longer will travellers making the 10-hour trek between Sydney and Melbourne get a glimpse of Holbrook's iconic HMAS Otway, an old Oberon-class submarine immortalised amid a patch of dry grass some 200 kilometres inland.

The NSW government expects its Hume Freeway upgrade, including dual-carriageway bypasses of the last two remaining rural towns on the route — Tarcutta and Holbrook — to be complete by 2013.

But it's also when the Barry O'Farrell government, in conjunction with Infrastructure Australia and Victoria, will start a local pilot program to test a radical new mode of transport that could save billions.

The plan is to increase the number of 'B-triples' — prime-mover trucks towing three, rather than one or two trailers — on the country's main freight corridors in an effort to boost productivity and meet a rising demand for freight, while reducing the number of transport vehicles on the road.

The government estimates that truck traffic will double between now and 2030 when freight vehicles will be driving a total of about 8.5 billion kilometres a year. It means an efficient road transport system could boost productivity by almost \$2 billion, according to the National Transport Commission and Infrastructure Australia.

State government ministers in May agreed to allow the B-triple trucks to travel on a wide range of outback and rural roads and some key routes such as the road to the Port of Adelaide.

However, the federal government would like B-triples to truck on the Hume and other

major highways linking Melbourne, Sydney, Adelaide and Brisbane.

Yet not everyone shares the same rose-coloured view of the inland freight review. State governments are concerned about the extra noise and threats to safety from the huge new rigs. And some question the claims they will actually improve traffic.

Ron Hoenig recently took his seat as a Labor backbencher in the NSW parliament for the first time, having spent 30 years as the mayor of Botany, a municipality which includes Sydney Airport and the city's port.

He says the road and rail system is in gridlock and the port is only operating at 60 per cent capacity.

"You cannot have a situation where Australia's exports and imports cannot get out of Sydney's major ports because they can't get there by road."

Hoenig says it's irrelevant that the B-triples are only allowed to travel on type 1 road train network roads, because smaller trucks are still needed to get cargo from ports or city warehouses where B-triples hitch and unhitch.

"If you've got gridlock through a mixture of trucks and cars, it doesn't matter. The road system is in absolute chaos, so reducing a handful of trucks isn't going to help as the volume of containers and freight increases."

Infrastructure Australia chief executive Michael Deegan says B-triples are already running between Geelong and Melbourne on a daily basis, and on approved routes in western NSW without any problems.

But Deegan says a larger trial is necessary to sort through the pricing issues, the road damage issues, determine whether bridges will withstand the capacity, and to get the

## Win win win

Summary of findings on B-triple truck operation 2011-2030

	Take-up scenario		
	Low	Median	High
■ Number of B-triples	1994	3665	7009
■ Reduction in total truck numbers	546	1,028	1,964
■ Reduction in vehicle-kilometres travelled (m km)	572	1,017	1,785
■ Reduction in road fatalities	14	25	45
■ Savings from reduction in road fatalities (NPV)	\$36.4m	\$64.8m	\$114m
■ Reduction in CO <sub>2</sub> emissions (million tonnes)	0.635	1.131	1.929
■ Savings from reduction in CO <sub>2</sub> emissions (NPV)	\$14.6m	\$26.0m	\$45.6m
■ Direct financial savings - net present value	\$561m	\$999m	\$1,750m
■ TOTAL SAVINGS - net present value	\$612m	\$1,090m	\$1,909m

SOURCE: NATIONAL TRANSPORT COMMISSION