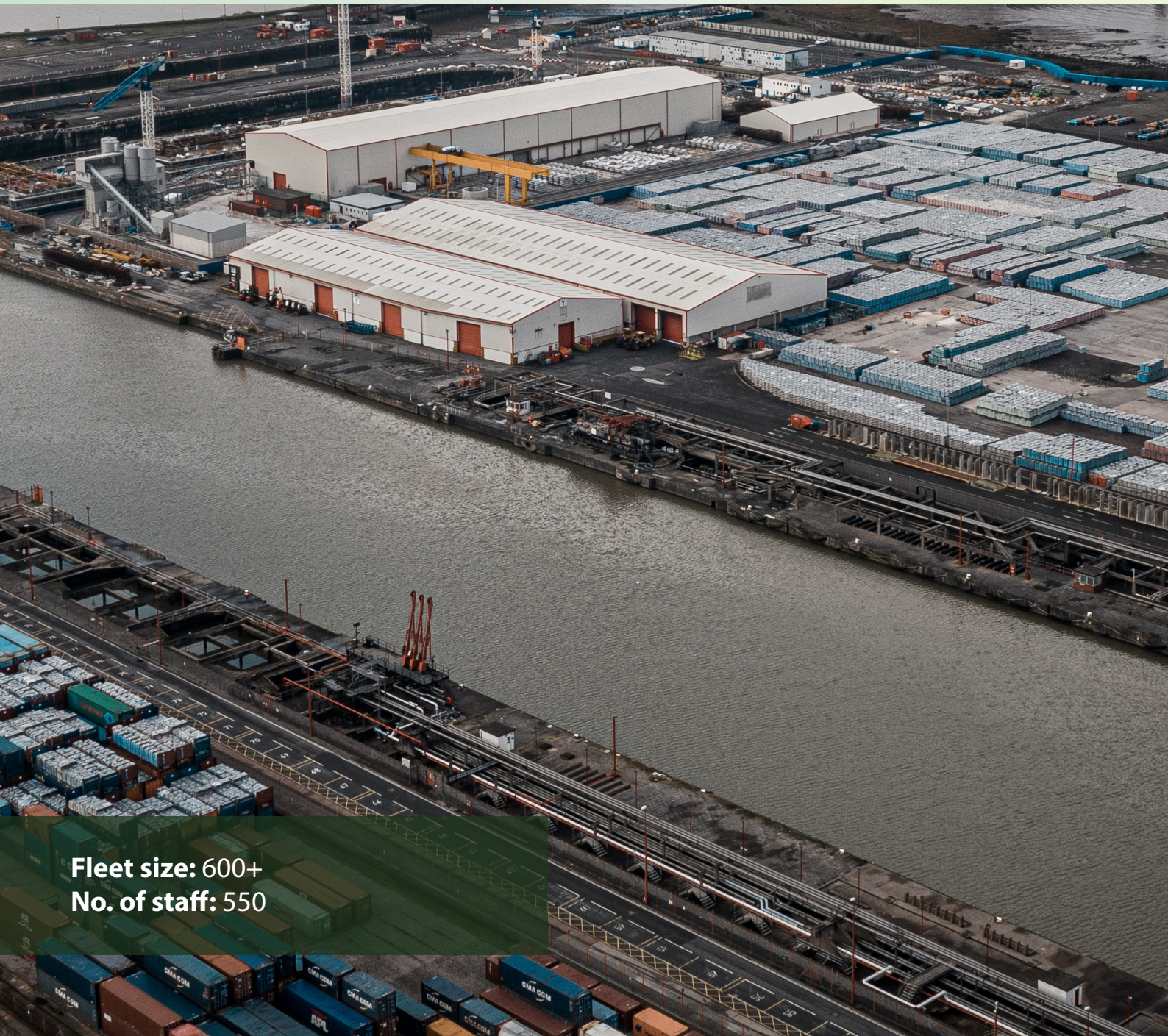


# Victorian transport logistics company

Impatient drivers, distracted pedestrians, e-rideables and nightclub patrons: managing the risk of delivery all in a day's work



**Fleet size: 600+**  
**No. of staff: 550**



## Case Study:

# Flexible, continuous improvement approach 'solves' workplace road safety problems

**Organisation:** Victorian transport logistics company

**Deliveries:** 475k annually

**Customers:** 400+

### Key outcomes

- Many workplace road safety risks are shared but some can be specific to your operation, so putting processes in place to identify and reduce specific hazards can help eliminate or reduce risk
- Communicating the risk and sharing information with drivers and across the company in how to manage it is critical; informal communications must be encouraged by management and supported by formal processes
- Creating a strong safety culture requires a visible and sustained involvement from company ownership and management, supported by resourcing safety measures to minimise risk and maximise safety performance
- Strong safety performance minimises or eliminates incidents and lost time to injuries, improving company productivity; it is also an expectation of modern clients and regulators
- Effective driver training ensures drivers operate to a high safety standard and can be a valuable tool in identifying and addressing gaps in knowledge
- Enlist the support of others with a mutual interest in solving safety problems and reducing risk; in this case, an efficient and safe delivery is as much in the interests of the receiver of the goods as the transport company
- Prioritising visual communication and adding an element of 'competition' between teams or depots can drive engagement with safety measures.



### Synopsis

All transport operators face risks and challenges in getting the job done, safely and efficiently. For one Victorian transport logistics company, the breadth of the freight task and their customer base creates a long list of hazards to negotiate, from distracted pedestrians and chaotic supermarket carparks to peak hour-traffic and late-night revellers. Its 'problem solving' mentality has been central to keeping its drivers safe and its clients happy.

## About the organisation

The company is a leading Victorian-based transport logistics service with a distribution network that extends across the country, with custom logistics solutions for short and linehaul freight, contract logistics, temperature controlled transport, warehousing options, pick-and-pack requirements and third-party logistics.

Safety has always been at the centre of its operations, guided by the belief that all injuries are preventable and that no task is so important that it can't be done safely, with its positive safety culture progressing over time as the company has grown.

In more recent years, changes in policy and regulation as well as customer expectations have driven the introduction of new safety measures.

Driver education, hazard mapping and risk mitigation is at the centre of its workplace road safety efforts. And the growth of the business, and subsequently the number of drivers, has seen an expansion in professional driver training expertise bought into the business to communicate risk and improve safety – all against a background of demands from the business' directors to remain at the forefront of safe operations.

The company operates from 11 sites, with a fleet of more than 600 vehicles and 550 employees. Annually, its drivers travel 36 million kilometres, completing almost 500,000 deliveries to more than 400 active customers, with its list of current and previous customers including well-known names in Australian retail.

## Introduction

From impatient car drivers and distracted pedestrians to people on e-scooters and nightclub patrons, the daily delivery task for the drivers at one Victorian transport logistics company presents myriad workplace road safety risks.

Add in manual handling, and meeting regulations around fatigue and mass management, and managing those challenges becomes even more complex for the company, who delivers for several retailers ranging from major supermarket chains to small independent operators.

The Victorian-based operation, who will be referred to as 'the company' in this case study, has a deliberate focus on safety, building a strong safety culture over many years that, for example, empowers drivers to refuse to complete deliveries if they feel their safety is compromised.

In recent years, new safety measures have been implemented as the business has grown and regulations around chain of responsibility and other compliance duties have been introduced. Safety measures have included expanding the number of expert driver trainers, to ensure drivers are trained to the company's standard and that any incidents or near misses are capitalised on as opportunities for improvement, and incorporating technology into operations to improve safety and productivity.

This case study will focus on the specific solutions the company has introduced to manage many and varied workplace road safety risks, highlighting its approach to journey planning and managing pedestrians and other risks presented by working in urban environments as well as how it navigates a diverse driver workforce and challenges around language to maximise safety.



## Into the safety fold

Impatient car drivers, pedestrians focused on their phones instead of where they're going, kids on skateboards or others on e-rideables, stray shopping trolleys, tight car park spaces.

It is a long list of workplace road safety risks for the company to manage and its drivers to navigate – and that's not to mention queuing nightclub revellers between the truck parking and delivery points.

The company's focus on driver safety begins with manual handling training at induction and on-boarding, with new drivers receiving training in tailgate and electronic pallet jack handling procedures to prevent falls and crush injuries.

And while most drivers bring a level of experience, every driver undergoes in-house driver trainer to ensure their capabilities meet industry standards, not just minimum licensing requirements.

The company employs a buddy system, utilising adult learning techniques by demonstrating the behaviour, performing tasks together and then the driver performing tasks under supervision. The approach means a new driver will be an observer on their first trip and will begin driving on their second trip. Some empty pallets will be loaded to incorporate manual handling training, with education around mass and fatigue management also addressed as part of induction.

Over a 5 day training period, tasks become increasingly complex and in-depth before a driver is signed-off as competent and inducted into company procedures by its expert driver trainers, who are guided by VicRoads' performance standards in deciding if a driver is assessed as competent. This also means drivers across the business are trained to the same consistent high standard.

Company recruits usually have pallet jack experience, however the buddy training picks up where that leaves off, covering issues such as weights, leverage and angle of tilt on the tailgate when you walk a pallet out to it. It also allows experienced drivers to pass on the 'tips and tricks' of low speed manoeuvring and handling a pallet jack in the challenging environments the company operates.



## The pedestrian menace

One of the greatest risks the company must manage is pedestrians and other vulnerable road users (VRUs) in urban environments, particularly when navigating supermarket car parks.

Pedestrians, in particular, present hazards, often looking at their phones rather than where they are walking and unaware of a loaded pallet jack or a raised tailgate in their path.

Vehicle drivers are often impatient, attempting to squeeze between a truck in a loading zone and another passenger vehicle coming in the opposite direction. The perennial issue of young people on skateboards has expanded in recent times with the boom in e-rideables.

Sometimes people are just curious and, in wanting to see what's in the back of the truck, come too close. That phenomenon reached its peak in what the company now refers to as the 'the great toilet paper crisis of 2020', where as soon as a tailgate was lowered, hopeful customers would ask if there was toilet paper going into the store.

Congested traffic and others VRUs, particularly cyclists and increasingly e-rideables, are particular challenges in the city and suburban deliveries that make up a large proportion of the company's freight task, with drivers often forced to park anywhere from a street to cobblestone lane ways, with the drop off point often 40 metres from the truck, as loading zones have joined dedicated delivery docks as being consigned to times past.

The loading zones that do remain are often the size of a standard passenger vehicle, meaning heavy rigid vehicles encroach onto cycle lanes or into the path of e-rideables as well as the parking space on either side of the loading zone.

## Journey to centre of the problem

To mitigate such issues, the company has regularly worked in conjunction with store owners to change delivery times.

For example, a new supermarket on the Melbourne University campus will receive its deliveries at 6.30am, before early morning peak hour traffic. At another suburban supermarket, where the only way to exit is to reverse out of the carpark, store owners will display 'forklift at work' signs and manage traffic to assist the driver to safely exit.

A central convenience store that was (inconveniently for the company) positioned near a nightclub was delivered to earlier in the evening, to avoid both the times when revellers would begin to queue and the post-dinner peak period (see breakout box).

Such solutions are often devised in collaboration with the store owners. It is in the best interests of store owners that stock is delivered as intended, rather than issues causing delays, which has driven cooperation in flexible delivery times to avoid risks.

The risks became apparent during company surveys of new sites to identify hazards and simple measures like entry and exit or where trucks are going to park, or they are identified when driver trainers are conducting training with drivers. At its essence, the equation is the riskier the delivery, the greater the effort to complete it when there is less traffic, both vehicular and people.

Drivers are open to being flexible with delivery times, prioritising measures that maximise the efficiency of deliveries and minimise the 'headaches', with only sites where there will physically be store personnel in attendance considered for out-of-hours deliveries.

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## Problem solving part I: Nightclub queues

When the company delivered to a convenience store on Collins Street in central Melbourne, it came across a unique challenge: a nightclub between where the delivery truck was forced to park and the store.

Initially, the delivery was scheduled for 11.30pm, which forced the driver to navigate a laden pallet around revellers queuing on the footpath to enter the club. While security personnel would help move patrons, ensuring no ankles were clipped by laden pallets was a challenge.

The risk was highlighted when a company Driver Trainer accompanied the driver to complete a verification of competency. The Driver Trainer spoke to the store owner, who said 'why don't you deliver at 8 o'clock? No-one's here then, everyone is having dinner. But after 9 o'clock everyone comes for the nightclub and after dinner the store starts to get busier too'.

The request was relayed to a company owner and the delivery time was changed immediately, demonstrating the company's 'see problem, fix problem' mentality.

## Communication is king

Information sharing and formal and informal communication are key factors in the company's drivers being aware of and reducing risks.

Informally, drivers share information about delivery sites they are familiar with, and drivers visiting a site for the first time know they can call other drivers to ask questions or even, in some cases, be guided through safe practices as they approach the site. One of the reasons drivers are willing to share information is because management encourages such informal knowledge sharing. Drivers can also contact the store owner directly for information – as mentioned, store owners are receptive to assisting drivers because safe, efficient deliveries are in everyone's best interests.

Such practices are supported by formal processes within the business that ensure drivers are aware of the safety procedures for each delivery site. For example, each site has what the business calls a 'mud map'.

Accessible to drivers in hard copy and electronic form, the detailed maps include Google Earth images of the site, the actual delivery address, outline safety hazards such as pedestrians or low trees, show access streets and include indicative arrows highlighting the safest entry and exit routes. They also include store contact numbers, delivery times, and the mode of loading and unloading – that is, whether a forklift lifts product off a raised tailgate or whether the delivery is taken pallet by pallet off the truck and into the store.

Such information is regularly updated as drivers visit sites and new information comes to light.

The mud maps are provided as hard copies with the Day and Run Sheets each driver begins their working day with. The Day Sheet is where drivers declare their Fitness for Duty and that they have inspected their truck; the Run Sheet is an itemised list of the driver's customers for that day, and includes their mandated breaks.

The company has also progressed an app that allows drivers to electronically access information specific to a delivery, including hazard and risk ratings, as they approach a store.

## In a language that's understood

The company's understanding of the importance of clear communication extends to the training it provides drivers.

For example, videos might be used, clear still images with ticks and crosses and accompanying highlight points, or a series of progressive pictures that guide drivers step-by-step through a process.

While driver training is direct via one-on-one sessions between driver and trainer, general information may also be shared via safety alerts or during induction of new staff. The company is also working on developing QR codes, allowing drivers to scan and access links to store information and to view safety alerts or videos.

The focus on visual communication methods is also integral to ensuring drivers with English as a second language receive clear training and understand expected procedures. The company employs several drivers from overseas, with the visual communication focus helping to minimise the language barrier.

The company's buddy training system is also conducive to navigating language barriers, with driver trainers actively engaging buddy trainers from the same ethnic or language background to help train new drivers.

**Rather than expecting drivers to read large amounts of text, the company focuses on using visual methods to build knowledge.**



## Driving driver buy-in

The company's approach to flexibility in delivery times is built on a 'give and take' approach with drivers, negotiating rosters where possible. The company is also up-front with expectations when drivers are recruited and there is also potential for drivers to swap shifts, provided they comply with fatigue management regulations.

While a handful of drivers have left the business rather than complete out-of-hours deliveries, many put their hand up, particularly for the bonuses available for weekend work. Similarly, some drivers prefer the 'long country runs' to the regional NSW towns of Wagga Wagga or nearby Griffith and the associated overnight stays.

The introduction of an app has been another barrier to acceptance of safety measures from some drivers. However, in this case, resistance was mainly linked to the driver's age.

The app allows drivers to electronically sign on to their shift and access their delivery schedule and 'mud maps' of stores they are delivering to.

Younger drivers, familiar with using apps, readily accepted the app as another tool to help them efficiently complete tasks. Reluctance from older drivers was driven by a fear of technology.

The app itself is easy for the end user to navigate so simply showing drivers how to use it quickly overcame any reluctance.

Store owners can also access certain areas of the app to see where their delivery is. At least one store owner in suburban Melbourne uses this feature to call in casual staff at the relevant time so when the driver arrives, they are on hand to unstack pallets.

## Problem solving part II: Working alone

In addition to workplace road safety, another significant safety challenge for the company to navigate is working alone. While the bulk of deliveries are to staffed stores, deliveries to one supermarket's regional stores are often unattended by store personnel.

The company has created a checklist for delivery drivers to create a standard procedure. One issue centred on store alarms incorrectly going off. From the time drivers begin their delivery, they have a specified time to re-lock access doors before an alarm will be triggered. Alarms were incorrectly being triggered – sometimes by drivers forgetting to lock stores but more often by inaccurate sensors – meaning the store manager would need to attend to disarm the alarm.

The checklist now includes the delivery driver contacting supermarket security personnel before leaving to check if the store has been successfully locked.

Given the nature of the work and that drivers were delivering items of value, a process has also been developed in conjunction with the supermarket to protect drivers in the event of attempted robbery, with security personnel contacting police if certain actions are taken by the driver.

In addition, a group gathered at the back of a store is considered a 'red flag' and drivers are empowered to continue driving in this instance. They will then contact store security, who may contact local police, and will advise when it is safe to proceed with the delivery.

Further, drivers are also empowered to stop any delivery to any store if they feel their safety is compromised by an unsafe situation. A company manager will then visit the store, with the onus on the store owner to eliminate the risk otherwise the delivery will be left outside the store rather than bought inside.

## Spirit of continuous improvement

The company views incidents or near misses as an opportunity for improvement, highlighting areas where specific training can be provided to relevant drivers or an issue highlighted to the wider workforce through safety alerts or toolbox talks (see 'Measure of success').

In a similar vein, the company conducts a regular 'Yarno', where trainers will use the gamified microlearning platform to test drivers' knowledge on a particular topic, such as refrigeration procedures in the lead up to summer.

The company trainers will create a quiz of about 30 questions, with a few questions sent to drivers each day over a week. If the driver gets the question wrong, the platform will provide an explanation of why or refer them back to the relevant part of the procedure. Depending on the answer chosen, trainers may discuss the process with the individual driver, or the process may also prompt drivers to seek out trainers for further information.

As well as testing drivers, the quizzes also test the company's training processes. Questions are often made relatively difficult or ambiguous and trainers will examine answers for those specific questions to assess whether their training processes are effectively conveying information to drivers.

As well as a financial incentive, there are 'bragging rights' attached to the quizzes with depots engaging in friendly competition against each other for the 'Yarno Cup'.

In a similar spirit of improving processes rather than punishing non-compliance, the company uses information drivers enter into their Day Sheet to check for fatigue or mass management breaches.

As part of logging their daily activities, drivers must record their breaks. That information is entered into the company's system and any breaches are automatically flagged.

The Training team will raise breaches with Operations, who follow up with the driver. In many cases, the driver has simply forgotten however where an actual breach has occurred, the process highlights a potential gap in driver knowledge or company processes – or both – that can then be addressed.

## Measure of success

A lack of incidents and lost time injuries are strong indicators that the company's approach to managing workplace road safety risk is effective.

The business has recorded no fatalities and has virtually eliminated on-road incidents and driver injuries in recent years, with one rollover recorded in the past five years and the only two injuries recorded relating to unloading.

Safety and any other issues, including near misses, are shared across business groups, via 'shared learnings', where learnings are shared with Insurance, Human Resources, Operations, Training and the Directors of the business.

Where incidents or near misses are recorded, one-on-one remedial training is provided to the driver and learnings shared across the driver workforce via a toolbox talk or safety alert, which drivers must sign to acknowledge they have read.

Using incidents as learnings to prevent a repetition is one of the key lessons of the company's sustained success in safety.

It reflects a strong, consistent and prominent safety culture, where safety measures are supported by management and well-resourced to drive strong safety performance. Drivers are also trained to high standards and empowered to avoid risk.

Connecting with drivers has been another key factor in strong workplace driving safety performance. This can be as simple as asking a driver how their truck is going, where they are going today, and have they encountered problems at any specific stores.

In the experience of one of the company's Driver Trainers, drivers are keen to talk about issues, which uncovers what they describe as 'little gems and little warnings' that the business can then act on to close the safety loop.

