

More Than a Quick Fix: Securing the Future for Traffic Controllers in WA

Recently, Main Roads WA (MRWA) announced changes to its Traffic Management Company Registration Scheme (Scheme) that mandated that traffic controllers working on state roads must be paid a minimum ordinary hourly rate of \$37.24 per hour. However, the plan may inadvertently cause more harm than good.

The traffic control industry is entering a new era of professionalism and maturity with the introduction of national training standards overseen by Austroads. As our workforce develops under this framework, it is important that traffic controllers receive fair compensation aligned with similar industries. Rather than creating arbitrary wage rates, pay scales should reference established awards like the Building and Construction General On-site Award 2020 (BCGOA).

It is hard to understand why MRWA did not consider using the BCGOA (CW2) rate as a more realistic minimum rate for traffic controllers. This would have represented a positive 12.2% pay raise for the lowest paid traffic controllers, while ensuring their base rate was on par with comparably skilled construction sector roles. Unfortunately, the recent unilateral decision to institute new hourly rates overlooked opportunities to support industry-wide standards.

The proposed \$37.24 minimum hourly rate seems like a step in the right direction. But the 38% increase over BCGOA rates will disrupt the industry in ways that jeopardise jobs, as recently evidenced by Infrastructure Minister Catherine King's cancellation of 50 projects after significant cost overruns. There is no doubt that some companies will struggle with cashflow issues resulting from the sudden large increase in payroll. The disproportionate increase in traffic management costs will cause the market to shrink, affecting the viability of businesses. Unfortunately, a seemingly well-intended decision to help traffic controllers will have the perverse effect of jeopardising their employment.

The TMAA wants win-win solutions that lift traffic controller livelihoods while also upholding safety and employment over the long haul. Rather than a short-term bump that could later get reversed, traffic controllers deserve permanent raises built into an industry-wide Award. The independent Fair Work Commission determines these awards to protect pay nationwide. Bypassing this process means missing a real chance to make lasting improvement.

Collaborative policymaking brings the best results. Instead of acting alone, the WA government could have worked with industry groups and the Fair Work Commission. This cooperative approach may take more time and discussion, but it delivers change that sticks.

Traffic controllers are valued and give so much to keep our road network operating and safe for all. They deserve fair pay. Let's make sure it is done the wise way. We urge a reconsideration of the MRWA decisions, emphasizing the imperative to uphold fair compensation practices based on the Federal IR system and promote consistency across the sector. Quick fixes won't deliver the lasting results that traffic controllers and a strong and viable Traffic Management Industry need.

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