

NTI SEEKS DRIVER INPUT ON BLACKSPOTS

NATIONAL Transport Insurance (NTI) wants to ask the nation's professional truck drivers where they think Federal and State Governments should spend windfall road funding of almost \$2.4 billion announced in the recent federal budget.

"Nobody knows our highways better than the thousands of professional drivers using those stretches of bitumen every hour of every day," said NTI executive, Mike Edmonds. "As a major stakeholder in truck and road safety in Australia, NTI wants to ensure that project decision-makers are armed with every bit of useful information they can have."

Drivers can register their worst blackspot locations and suggest where rest areas should be set up by free calling 1800 007 046 or e-mailing help@blackspots.info.

Edmonds said the data will be collected by NTI and cross referenced with its Truck Crash Data to create an extensive national blackspots and rest areas issues register. The insurer intends to join with the Australian Trucking Association in reporting this information to federal and state transport ministers.

Highlights of the recently announced roads funding package are:

- \$800 million for the Hume Highway;
- \$160 million extra for the Pacific Highway in NSW (to be matched by the NSW government);
- \$268 million for the Bruce Highway;
- \$323 million for Western Australia's Great Northern, Great Eastern and Eyre Highways;
- \$100 million for the Sturt Highway in South Australia;
- \$60 million for the East Tamar Highway in Tasmania;
- \$30 million for the Victoria Highway in Northern Territory.

In addition, the Federal Government is to provide a one-off \$307.5 million to Local, State and Territory Governments for investing in local roads.

SCOTT'S DRIVER WINS HIGHWAY HERO AWARD

THE skilled driving and bravery of Scott's Transport tanker driver, Kevin Sinkinson, has been recognised with the annual Goodyear Highway Heroes award.

After narrowly avoiding a collision between a car and a roadtrain which resulted in the roadtrain tipping over, Sinkinson and another truck driver, Wayne Stocker, managed to drag the roadtrain driver clear moments before his outfit burst into flames.

Accepting the award, presented at the Australian Trucking Convention on the Gold Coast, Kevin Sinkinson said, "It's very generous for Goodyear to present me with this award and I appreciate their support of the transport industry."

"A tremendous amount of thanks and praise must also go to Wayne Stocker who was instrumental in pulling the roadtrain driver to safety," he added.



VOLVO PREPARES FOR NEW MID-RANGE MODELS



Corporate collaboration. New Volvo FE employs a Renault cab and a seven litre common rail engine jointly developed with German maker Deutz.

VOLVO Trucks is preparing to expand its local model range at the lighter end with the introduction over the next 12 months of new FE and FL models.

The revamped FE and FL models were recently launched in Europe after considerable speculation that Volvo would adapt new Medium and Premium cabs from corporate cohort Renault to bolster its business prospects in lighter weight categories.

Indeed, several months back a European report predicted, "Volvo will replace its FL range with a new model equipped with Renault cabs and a range of Euro 4

engines that will be jointly developed with German firm Deutz.

"New five and seven litre Deutz engines will power the Volvo and Renault mid-range products; Volvo will use versions of the Renault Medium and Premium cabs."

It's no secret, of course, that both Medium and Premium models have been in the past badged as Macks in a largely lacklustre attempt to win business in the Australian medium-duty market so firmly dominated by Japanese brands. However, it now appears that following Volvo's decree that Mack will market conventional models only, Volvo is taking control of the light-duty cab-overs.

According to a vague press release from Volvo, the FE is aimed at the 15 to 23 tonne class and will be introduced here in late 2006. It will replace the heavy end of the previous FL range as well as fill the gap up to the Volvo FM9 model.

The FE will be available as a 4x2 prime mover and in 4x2, 6x2 and 6x4 rigid configurations, each with the option of an extended day cab or a sleeper.

The engine is the seven litre common rail unit offered at outputs of 280 hp with 774 lb ft (1050 Nm) of torque, or 320 hp with 885 lb ft (1200 Nm) of torque.

Meanwhile, the only information supplied on the new medium-duty FL model is that it is intended for the 12 to 16 tonnes weight segment and will make its local debut around the middle of 2007.

Typically, safety rates highly with both models equipped with a Swedish standard safety cab, electronically controlled disc brakes and an electronic stability program.

Still, these trucks will not be Volvo's first crack at lighter-duty markets in Australia. Over many years the company has invested considerable effort and expense in a bid to expand its horizons at the lighter end of the market. Success, however, has been minimal and the new Volvos will need to show some spectacular assets if they are to make an even modest impact.