Supply chain management

Bonnie Ryan is director freight, logistics and industrial sectors at GS1 Australia, the supply chain standards organisation that will operate the National Location Registry.

New registry to smooth flow of goods

There are more than 40,000 transport operators in Australia and the number of loading docks, back doors and delivery entrances they have to service is many times that.

When things go awry and drivers go to the wrong gate or miss their window on the loading dock, the efficiency of the national supply chain takes a hit, not to mention the freight forwarders and their customers.

Up to now, the responsibility for providing accurate information about where to make deliveries has rested with site operators – manufacturers, retailers, distributors to name a few – and their communications with their transport providers.

Each individual relationship has to generate and maintain accurate delivery information and, whenever there is a change in circumstances – new opening/trading hours, COVID-19 restrictions, safety constraints etc – each transport company servicing a particular site has to be updated individually.

Given that some factories or distribution centres may have 50 or more transport companies delivering raw materials and taking away finished goods, notifying all those operators of a change in circumstances at the site can be laborious and expensive.

The good news is these issues will soon be relegated to the history books thanks to a government-backed industry plan to create the National Location Registry (NLR). The registry will be operated by GS1 Australia, the not-for-profit supply chain standards organisation, which, among other things, maintains the

barcoding system used across the country. The NLR will store all relevant information about pick-up and delivery sites across Australia, giving authorised transport operators quick and easy access to information.

"The drag on the economy caused by the current piecemeal system is too difficult to measure, but everybody believes it is huge," says Bonnie Ryan, director freight, logistics and industrial sectors at GS1 Australia.

"Currently, everyone is working with their own version of 'the truth'," she says. "Having a digital framework that is based on standards everyone can follow means there will be only one truth about a site, and that's going to lift productivity.

"The freight and transport sector represents about 8 per cent of gross domestic product. Even if you lift efficiency by 1 per cent, that would be a saving of something like $2 billion."

All the information uploaded into the registry will be provided in a standard format so that it can be digitised and used to provide uniform information whenever a transport operator downloads site data before they plan to enter a location.

"The main thing here is to support a smoother flow," says Ryan. "If we know the environment we are sending our trucks into, and they are less likely to experience any delays when they get there, then they can just get on with the job and do what they need to do."

She says the registry started operations in October and currently offers two modules, the freight module and the healthcare module.

In fact, the 10,500 records currently on the

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registry are mostly healthcare records because the healthcare industry has been using location data for many years to support supply chain processes other than transport, such as e-procurement.

Those records have now been migrated to the National Location Registry platform where they can be leveraged to take advantage of the added functionality it provides in improved transport and freight-related data.

Healthcare facilities are often complex precincts to navigate if you are a truck driver trying to deliver goods so it will help to have better information about where exactly to go.

Ryan says another important aspect of the NLR is driver wellbeing and the chain of responsibility.

"Everyone in the supply chain has a responsibility to not push the driver to the brink through overwork," she says.

"The registry holds details about driver amenities at the various sites. Some of the biggest centres have dedicated amenity areas for drivers, offering toilets, food and coffee, shower facilities, even a gym.

"The registry supports all that information so location owners can put that data into the registry and that can be passed down to the drivers so they can plan their day more thoroughly."

Rest areas is another opportunity where better information could be made available; those discussions have commenced with the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Communications and driver wellbeing organisation Healthy Heads in Trucks and Sheds to explore how the NLR could be used to provide more detailed data about rest areas.

"We know where the rest areas are, but there's no real information about exactly what facilities there are at those rest areas: for example, how many parking spaces, is there food, is it just an informal off-the-road kind of site, or is it a more substantial place to stop for a rest."

Ryan says the creation of the NLR is part of a wider digitalisation of the freight sector.

"We just need to get everything flowing a lot smoother because the reality is freight volumes are expected to grow 75 per cent in the next two or three decades.

"COVID and the exponential increase in online shopping has stretched our transport networks. We must find smarter ways of doing things and the NLR is one way to support the freight industry as we collectively move into a more digitised world."