



ROADSIDE REST AREAS

POLICY

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Owner: Department of Transport

Manager: Transport Infrastructure Planning Division

Background

The Northern Territory Government aims to provide road users with a safe driving environment and a level of service that allows motorists to enjoy their travels in the Territory. Rest areas are an important part of providing that safe driving environment.

A rest area is a safe area beside the road where motorists can pull off the roadway to rest. Current research indicates that fatigue has been underestimated as a contributor to vehicle accidents in rural and remote Australia. Rest areas can reduce fatigue-related accidents by allowing motorists to stop and rest at regular intervals.

If rest areas are to be effective against fatigue, they must be located at strategic points, taking into consideration motorist speeds, fatigue onset times, desired driving interval times and the location and suitability of other stopping opportunities. Further, to ensure they meet the needs of motorists, and to encourage ongoing future use, rest areas need to be conveniently located, readily accessible, attractive, and include appropriate rest facilities.

The spacing of rest areas needs to be conservative. If a driver decides to miss an opportunity, this should not mean they have too far to drive before another opportunity. For example, if a rest area is located every 1.5 hours, a driver who chooses not to stop at this rest area will need to drive for three hours before stopping – an undesirable distance. Forcing motorists to “push on” when fatigued promotes dangerous driving.

The intention of rest areas is to provide a place for a short break. Accordingly, rest areas must provide a level of ‘relief’ and amenity that encourages motorists to stop, without being so equipped that long term stays are encouraged, potentially leading to overcrowding.

Overcrowding and extended use by campers can impact on the environment, with longer stays contributing to the fouling of the area, overuse of local timbers, fire hazard and the degradation of environmentally sensitive niches.

Some overnight stays at rest areas must however, be allowed for. Research suggests that only long periods of rest will alleviate fatigue once it has set in. Therefore, for rest areas to be effective in reducing accidents, limited overnight stays must be allowed.

Rest areas that are appropriately appointed and maintained increase visitor satisfaction and add to the travel experience of the Territory.

The provision of rest areas is primarily the responsibility of the Department of Transport. However, as a feature that contributes to the tourist’s experience, the [Tourism NT](#) has an interest in their development and facilities.

Commercial enterprises are also interested in rest areas in terms of the impact that they may have on their business. The sensitive development of rest areas with regard to location and facilities shall safeguard against their being seen to “compete” with commercial businesses in any way.

The Department, the Tourism NT and commercial businesses need to work together to ensure motorists have a safe journey and an enhanced visitor experience. The policy has attempted to fairly meet the needs of each party while maintaining that ultimately, road safety is the primary goal.

This policy is the result of surveys, responses to a public Roadside Rest Area Discussion Paper, direct consultation and national research.

Enforcement of this policy is limited by the impracticality of monitoring a large number of road users over a vast distance. Enforcement will therefore be restricted to serious breaches. In these situations, a notice of Trespass will be issued (under the [Trespass Act](#)). Other management strategies included in this policy are likely to have a greater effect than enforcement strategies.

This policy pertains to the Territory's major highways in the first instance.

Objective

The aim of the policy is to reduce fatigue-related accidents through a managed network of strategically located and attractive rest areas.

Rest areas should also contribute to a positive tourist experience of the Northern Territory that takes into account towns, tourist interest points, wayside inns and other commercial facilities.

Guidelines

Principles

The following are the major principles that underpin the policy:

1. It is the role of the Department to provide the road user with a safe driving environment and a level of service that allows motorists to enjoy their travels in the Territory.
2. Rest areas are a fatigue and road safety management tool. To be effective in this role, rest areas need to be attractive and accessible to potential users.
3. The prevention of fatigue requires short regular breaks from driving however, after the onset of fatigue; a period of prolonged rest is required. The location of rest areas should correspond to motorist speed and fatigue risk factors
4. Rest areas need to be environmentally sustainable, and where practical, plantings should contain species from the local area.
5. Solutions to rest area management should represent value for money.

Length of Stays at Rest Areas

Road users may not stay at any one rest area for longer than 24 hours.

Tourist Interest Points

Tourist interest points are an important part of the rest area network that provide a safe place for stopping, based around attractions located at or near the roadside. The spacing of rest areas will take into account the proximity of tourist interest points. The development of tourist interest points is the joint responsibility of the Tourism NT and the Department.

Truck Parking Bays

Truck parking bays and rest areas are to be kept well separated. Motorists are not to use truck parking bays except in an emergency.

Facilities at Rest Areas

Minimum facilities will include:

- garbage bins with animal protection grills; and
- shelters and table.

Additional facilities may include:

- emergency water tanks in isolated areas; and
- dry composting toilets.

Spacing of Rest Areas

Rest areas should be located at approximately 80 km intervals, taking into account commercial facilities and noting that tourist interest points are regarded as part of the rest area network.

Rest areas should not be located within 80 km of a commercial facility, unless they are tourist interest points. Existing rest areas will be considered on a case-by-case basis.

Location and Structure of Rest Areas

The degree of set back of a rest area from the roadway will need to be a balance between visibility and an environment conducive to rest.

Rest areas should be well defined using landscaping and barriers.

Access to and from the roadway should be sealed while the rest areas itself can be sealed where traffic numbers and environmental concerns require it.

Facilities other than natural shade should be accessible only on foot (i.e. located behind barriers).

Signage

It is important in terms of signage that:

- the location of rest areas be clearly signposted, and included on 'advance warning' signage;
- the location of the next rest area and the next commercial facility be signposted in the rest area;
- signs for rest areas and truck parking bays be clearly differentiated; and
- prescriptions for rest area use are clearly signposted.

Management

Fires should not be lit at rest areas.

Fire, weed and litter management will be undertaken at rest areas through the normal contracting process.

Marketing

Department marketing will include education on:

- the correct use of rest areas (including length of stay);
- fatigue management principles;
- the dangers of fire (e.g. encourage the use of gas stoves); and
- environmental issues associated with rest area usage