

# A transport business is two purchases: trucks that wear out, and contracts that can walk.

Road freight turns over \$82.2 billion a year across 69,684 businesses at an average margin of 4.5%, and 62.5% of operators are sole traders (IBISWorld, October 2026). A transport business for sale between \$700,000 and \$5 million is usually a fleet plus a set of customer relationships. A lender funds the trucks against what they would sell for today, and the goodwill against the cash flow that survives the sale. Split the price before you do anything else.

## THE FLEET

prime movers, rigids, trailers, forklifts

Valued at market by a valuer who is not acting for the vendor, never at book value or at cost. Check the age, kilometres or hours, service records and any finance owing on the PPSR. One live listing values its plant at cost; another holds the trucks in a related company that carries the finance.

**Funded as equipment. The trucks are the security.**

## THE CONTRACTS AND CUSTOMERS

the goodwill

Written contracts with the business, subcontract runs for a larger carrier, regular customers on a handshake, spot work. Goodwill is the price of the earnings that stay after the owner leaves, and a 2026 adviser's guide calls contract quality the single biggest predictor of what a transport business sells for.

**Funded on cash flow. The hardest dollar to borrow.**

## THE DEPOT OR YARD

leased or owned

A council-approved site to park heavy vehicles, a workshop, a fuel tank, sometimes a warehouse. Leased from the vendor, leased from a third party, or bought with the business. The lease term, the permit conditions and any contamination decide what it is worth to you.

**Funded as property, or protected by the lease.**

## Two ways to price the same business

Brokers price transport two ways, and listings rarely say which. The first is a multiple of normalised earnings, after a market wage for the owner. Morgan Business Sales' 2026 sector report puts contracted road freight with earnings under \$1 million at **2.5 to 3.5 times**, spot or owner-operated work at **2.0 to 2.5 times** and courier and last-mile work at **1.5 to 2.5 times**, with the fleet and premises typically priced on top.

The second is asset plus goodwill: the fleet at market value plus a goodwill figure, which one 2026 advisory guide puts at typically six to twelve months of normalised profit, and at nothing for an owner-operator with no staff and no written contracts.

### ASK WHICH METHOD THE PRICE USES

\$1.3 million can be \$650,000 of trucks plus \$650,000 of goodwill (one current listing says exactly that), or four times earnings with the trucks inside. The same business looks cheap on one method and dear on the other, and a lender funds the two halves differently.

## What 14 listings show

| Measure                          | What we saw                                                                                                |
|----------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Price ÷ stated earnings</b>   | 2.3 to 4.8 times, median about 3.3, on the six that state earnings (one since sold)                        |
| <b>Fleet as a share of price</b> | 29% to almost 100% where the fleet's value was given                                                       |
| <b>Goodwill implied</b>          | About 0.8 to 2.1 times stated earnings                                                                     |
| <b>Contracts</b>                 | From none in writing to two five-plus-five-year contracts                                                  |
| <b>Concentration</b>             | One business earns all its revenue from runs for one larger carrier; another has one customer at about 40% |

Prevail's review of 14 transport businesses listed on public Australian business-for-sale sites, 26 October 2026. Vendors' figures, not verified; earnings are stated on different bases. Morgan Business Sales, September 2026; Miro Capital, April 2026. Not a valuation.

### DO THIS BEFORE YOU OPEN A LISTING

Get your capacity assessed on rebuilt earnings, for the split you are buying: fleet, goodwill and working capital. Knowing what you can settle changes which listings are worth your time.

# The earnings are advertised before the owner is paid to drive.

In many businesses this size the owner drives a truck, runs dispatch and keeps the biggest customer happy, and a partner keeps the books and the compliance records, unpaid. Add the insurance renewal that will be yours, the runs priced before the 2026 diesel spike with no fuel clause, and the one-off job that will not come back, and the earnings move. A lender rebuilds them before it lends. So should you, before you offer.

| The rebuild: eight trucks, asking \$1.9 million with the fleet                                     | Amount           |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------|
| Revenue: general freight plus two runs for a national carrier                                      | \$3,200,000      |
| Earnings as presented (EBITDA), 3.4 times on the price                                             | \$560,000        |
| The owner's driving and dispatch at market: the industry's average wage of \$88,400 plus 12% super | – \$99,000       |
| Books, payroll and compliance records at market, replacing unpaid work                             | – \$55,000       |
| Insurance and registration at your renewal                                                         | – \$25,000       |
| Fuel two pre-March 2026 runs do not recover                                                        | – \$36,000       |
| A one-off flood-recovery job that will not repeat                                                  | – \$40,000       |
| <b>What a lender assesses (6.2 times on the price)</b>                                             | <b>\$305,000</b> |

The business has not changed. Only your understanding of it has. Illustrative only, not a valuation and not a representation about any particular business; the average wage is IBISWorld's (I4610, October 2026).

## STRESS-TEST THE FUEL

Purchases, mostly diesel, are 21.6% of industry revenue. Diesel's national average terminal gate price ran from 165.4 cents a litre on 27 February 2026 to a peak of 325.9 cents on 9 April; on 26 October it was 264.9 cents in Melbourne. A 20% rise in diesel not passed on costs up to about four cents of every revenue dollar, close to the whole 4.5% margin.

| Funding the \$1.9 million: the cash flow decides                              | Amount                 |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------|
| Fleet appraised and financed in full over 5 years at 9.5%, with a 30% balloon | \$900,000              |
| Fleet repayments a year                                                       | \$184,400              |
| Total repayments the rebuilt \$305,000 supports at 1.25 times cover           | \$244,000              |
| Left a year for a business loan on the goodwill                               | \$59,600               |
| Business loan that supports, 7 years at 11%                                   | about \$290,000        |
| <b>Your equity: 37% of the price</b>                                          | <b>about \$710,000</b> |

Plus working capital for the debtor book: 38 days on \$3.2 million is about \$333,000. Plus a \$270,000 balloon due in year five. On the advertised \$560,000, the same deal looked as if it funded itself. That gap is where transport purchases fail.

## THE TRUCKS SHOW UP TWICE

Once in the price and once in the repayments, and the repayments come out of the same cash flow as the goodwill loan. A business that looks cheap on its earnings can be expensive on its fleet.

## RUN IT ON A REAL LISTING

The funding check on our transport page takes the listing's price, the fleet's market value and the earnings, and shows the loans the cash flow supports and the equity to find:  
[prevailfinance.com.au/buying-a-transport-business](http://prevailfinance.com.au/buying-a-transport-business)

Illustrative arithmetic: monthly principal-and-interest repayments; 1.25 times cover is the minimum one business bank told us it tests (September 2026); rates are illustrative, in line with written lender positions in September and October 2026. Not a quote and not advice.

# Goodwill is the next load, in writing, at a rate that covers the fuel.

Ask for the customer list before the financials: every customer, the share of revenue each one pays, the paperwork behind it and when the rate was last reviewed. Then read the paperwork, and work through what does and does not move to a new owner under the amended Heavy Vehicle National Law, in force since 1 August 2026.

## Read every contract for four things

- ☐ **Who it is with.** A written contract with the business is goodwill you can fund; a handshake with the founder may leave with the founder.
- ☐ **The notice.** How quickly either side can end it, and whether subcontract runs are allocated to the business or to the driver who does them.
- ☐ **Assignment.** Whether it can be assigned to you, and what a change of owner triggers. Consents before the contract goes unconditional.
- ☐ **Fuel.** A working fuel or rise-and-fall clause. Operators on contracts signed before the 2026 spike absorbed it.

### CONCENTRATION AND PAYMENT TERMS

One customer above a third of revenue is a finding: meet them, and make settlement conditional on the work continuing, as one current listing already offers. Debtors run 38 days across the industry (59 in 2020), and the Fair Work Commission is considering an application for a payment-terms order whose union draft would require undisputed invoices to be paid within 21 days.

### THE FUEL COST RECOVERY ORDER

The Commission's order took effect on 21 April 2026 and required parties across road transport chains to adjust rates for fuel. Its obligations stopped when diesel fell below \$2 a litre in June; on 16 October 2026 the Commission proposed reviving them with monthly adjustments, a decision still pending at 26 October.

### OWNER-DRIVERS COME WITH OBLIGATIONS

In Victoria, a hirer engaging an owner-driver for 30 days or more in any three months must give the information booklet and the rates and costs schedule at least three business days before work starts, and three months' notice to a heavy vehicle owner-driver once an engagement passes three months. Regulated road transport contractors can bring unfair termination claims (since 26 February 2025), and sham contracting carries heavy civil penalties for each contravention.

## What moves with an asset sale

| Item                                         | Moves?                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
|----------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Heavy vehicle accreditation</b>           | No. NHVAS accreditation cannot be transferred between entities, and NHVAS stopped taking new applicants on 1 August 2026. Apply for Heavy Vehicle Accreditation in your own name, with a safety management system, or add the vehicles to accreditation you hold in the same modules. |
| <b>Performance-based standards approvals</b> | Yes. Since November 2022 they belong to the vehicles; lodge the free transfer request if an older approval names the vendor.                                                                                                                                                          |
| <b>Registration</b>                          | Yes, within 14 days in Victoria, New South Wales and Queensland, with duty on each vehicle: in person for companies in Victoria; over 4.5 tonnes at a Service NSW Centre; a certificate of inspection in Queensland.                                                                  |
| <b>Customer contracts</b>                    | Only if assigned or novated to you.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| <b>WA accreditation</b>                      | No. WA runs its own scheme, and it is not transferable.                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| <b>Insurance and fuel tax credits</b>        | No. Quote insurance on the fleet schedule before you offer; register for fuel tax credits (21.3 cents a litre for heavy vehicles on public roads from 3 August 2026).                                                                                                                 |

### SHARES OR ASSETS

Buy the shares and the accreditation and registrations stay with the company, along with its history: chain of responsibility breaches, driver entitlements, tax and disputes. A contract with a change-of-control clause can still end or need consent. Buy the assets and you re-apply, re-register and re-paper everything above. Your solicitor and accountant choose; we arrange the funding for either.

### CHAIN OF RESPONSIBILITY STARTS ON DAY ONE

The business must make its transport activities safe so far as is reasonably practicable; the duty cannot be delegated, and each director carries a separate duty of due diligence. Maximum penalties in the most serious category: \$4,230,550 for a corporation; \$436,850 or five years' imprisonment, or both, for an individual (from 1 July 2026).

Fair Work Commission and Fair Work Ombudsman; Victorian Government; National Heavy Vehicle Regulator and National Transport Commission, 2026; VicRoads, Service NSW and Queensland Government; Main Roads WA, July 2026; ATO. Fuel order proposal as reported by the Australian Industry Group, October 2026. General information, not legal advice.

# The 12 deal-killers.

Run every transport business past the list. One is a negotiation. Three is a walk, and at this stage walking costs you a few hours and two searches. Anything touching the cash flow counts double, because a transport purchase is funded on the earnings a lender can see after the fleet repayments.

- 1 One customer carrying the business.** A carrier or customer above a third of revenue.  
Meet them, and make settlement conditional on the work continuing.
- 2 Contracts with the owner, not the company.** A handshake with the founder is not goodwill you can fund.  
No paper, no premium: price it nearer the trucks.
- 3 Rates with no fuel recovery.** Runs priced before March 2026 with no fuel or rise-and-fall clause.  
Reprice them before settlement, or reprice the business.
- 4 Revenue that will not repeat.** A project, a storm clean-up, a run that ends in June.  
Normalise it out of the earnings you pay for.
- 5 Plant valued at cost.** A fleet schedule at purchase price, not market.  
Get an appraisal. A lender lends on market value, and so should your offer.
- 6 Trucks in another company, with finance on them.** Assets you assume come with the business that do not.  
PPSR search, payout letters, clear title as a condition.
- 7 A fleet due for replacement inside the loan term.** Two prime movers at the end of their life are a capital bill you are buying.  
Put the replacement in the price, or in the vendor's column.
- 8 No maintenance records.** No service history, no defect records, no maintenance system.  
The trucks are worth less and accreditation is harder. Price both.
- 9 Accreditation assumed to transfer.** It does not, and NHVAS has closed to new applicants.  
Put the application timetable, or a share purchase, into the deal.
- 10 A safety history nobody mentioned.** Infringements, defect notices, incidents, fatigue breaches.  
In writing before exchange. Your directors carry the duty from day one.
- 11 Drivers who leave with the owner.** The senior drivers and the dispatcher are the business.  
A handover in months, key people staying, a restraint that holds.
- 12 Contractors who are employees in substance.** Owner-drivers with one customer, set hours and no business of their own.  
Get advice before you inherit the arrangement.

## TWO SEARCHES, TEN MINUTES

Run a **PPSR search** on the vendor entity and against every vehicle and trailer: trucks you assume come with the business are often financed, sometimes in another company's name. Then ask for the **accreditation and incident history** in writing. Ten minutes, and either search can end a deal.

## ANYTHING TOUCHING THE CASH FLOW COUNTS DOUBLE

One big customer, fuel that is not recovered and a fleet near the end of its life are not three findings among twelve. They are the cash flow, and the cash flow is the loan.

**Score it: one column per business you assess**

|         |         |         |          |          |          |
|---------|---------|---------|----------|----------|----------|
| 1 _____ | 2 _____ | 3 _____ | 4 _____  | 5 _____  | 6 _____  |
| 7 _____ | 8 _____ | 9 _____ | 10 _____ | 11 _____ | 12 _____ |

# Three facilities settle together. The goodwill loan decides the deal.

The fleet is funded as equipment against the trucks' market value. The goodwill is funded by a business loan sized on the cash flow left after the fleet repayments. Working capital carries the debtor book, and a depot is funded as commercial property. Indicative pricing in written lender positions from August to October 2026: about 8.4% to 11% for equipment finance; about 6.5% to 7% for a business loan secured on a home; about 9.5% to 11.2% at a specialist business bank or without property security. The cash rate rose to 4.60% on 30 September 2026, so earlier quotes have moved.

## THE FLEET

Usually a chattel mortgage, with a balloon if needed. One lender: asset finance to \$750,000 over up to five years, on twelve months' bank statements and the tax portal for eligible deals, no deposit up to \$500,000 where no property is offered, prime movers and trailers named. Another: \$1 million on bank statements, \$2 million on full financials (September 2026).

On one September card, a non-property owner turning over \$250,000 to \$1.5 million paid 2.6 points more than a property owner. Truck age limits differ by lender.

## THE GOODWILL

One specialist business bank wants about 30% of the price from the buyer on a standalone purchase of an established business, tests cover of at least 1.25 times and may set lower gearing for first-time operators (September 2026). A large business bank has no appetite for a buyer new to the industry outside professional services (October 2026).

Cash-flow lenders go to \$1 million without property, at higher rates and shorter terms. Vendor finance on part of the goodwill, repaid after the senior lender, can close the gap.

## WORKING CAPITAL

In an asset sale the vendor usually collects what it is owed, so you pay drivers, fuel and tolls for a month or more before the first customer pays you. Budget the debtor book as part of the purchase.

One invoice financier funds up to \$1 million and accepts a debtor book concentrated in a single customer (September 2026), which suits a business whose work comes through one carrier.

## The depot: lease it, buy it, check it

- ☐ **Lease it.** The lease has to outlast the loan, permit the use, the number of heavy vehicles and your hours, and survive the sale with the landlord's consent. Where the vendor is the landlord, settle the new lease before the price.
- ☐ **Buy it.** Written positions, August to October 2026: industrial property to 70% with a private lender; commercial property to 80% on full or low documentation over 30 years with no annual reviews at a non-bank; up to 100 to 105% in total considered at one specialist bank for owner-occupied commercial property alongside the trading business; commercial property in an SMSF to 80% at two non-banks.
- ☐ **Check it.** In Victoria, owners and tenants alike carry a duty to manage contamination even if they did not cause it; underground fuel tanks carry their own obligations, and if no assessment exists, EPA Victoria suggests considering a preliminary site investigation before you buy.

## DUTY ON A \$2 MILLION DEPOT, 2026-27

About \$91,287 in NSW and \$95,525 in Queensland on the property alone, more if other assets are counted with it. In Victoria, industrial property pays duty one last time on its first qualifying sale from 1 July 2024, then 1% a year of its unimproved land value from ten years later.

## Experience changes the gearing

One specialist bank weights the buyer's skills heavily and asks for a resume and evidence of relevant experience before an indicative offer (October 2026). A fleet manager, a dispatcher, an owner-driver of ten years: that history is part of the security. First-time owners can be funded, with more equity and a longer paid handover.

## WHO YOU ARE TALKING TO

Priyank assessed and approved loans to transport businesses as a bank lending manager and commercial credit analyst. The questions in this guide are the ones a credit team asks first: whose freight it is, what the trucks would fetch, what is left after the repayments, and who drives when the owner leaves.

## STAMP DUTY ON THE BUSINESS

Queensland charges duty on business assets, goodwill and plant included, with a possible credit for vehicle duty paid; New South Wales and Victoria do not charge duty on goodwill. Vehicle duty applies on transfer: \$8,400 on a \$200,000 used truck in Victoria; \$7,000 on a \$200,000 five or six cylinder heavy vehicle in Queensland.

Subject to lender criteria, security position and eligibility. Lender positions in writing, 12 August to 22 October 2026; indicative only, not a quote. EPA Victoria; Revenue NSW; Queensland Revenue Office; VicRoads; Victorian Department of Treasury and Finance. We arrange credit; we do not provide legal, tax or accounting advice.

# Send the pack. Get an answer in 24 hours.

Send these to [priyank@prevailfinance.com.au](mailto:priyank@prevailfinance.com.au) and within 24 hours you have our answer: fundable, not fundable, or what's missing. Once you accept our quote, your written Action Plan follows within one business day: what happens, in what order, the funding pathway scoped for that business, an indicative pricing band, and the finance clause date your contract needs.



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With gratitude

## About the business

- ☐ The information memorandum and how the price was built
- ☐ Three years of financials and tax returns, add-backs itemised
- ☐ Twelve months of bank statements and the tax portal
- ☐ The fleet register: year, kilometres or hours, registration, finance owing, appraised value
- ☐ The customer list with each share of revenue and the contract behind it
- ☐ The depot lease or title; accreditation, maintenance and incident records
- ☐ The insurance schedule with its claims history

## About you

- ☐ Statement of position, with the source of your deposit
- ☐ Two years of personal tax returns and notices
- ☐ Six months of loan statements, three months of transactions
- ☐ Photo ID and a resume of your transport or operating experience
- ☐ The proposed buying entity, and a twelve-month plan

Our fee is quoted up front. If the numbers say walk, we will still tell you to walk.

## The industry in numbers: IBISWorld, October 2026

| Measure                                 | Figure                  |
|-----------------------------------------|-------------------------|
| Revenue, 2026-27                        | \$82.2 billion          |
| Growth this year; forecast to 2031-32   | 0.4%; 0.2% a year       |
| Businesses; sole traders                | 69,684; 62.5%           |
| Revenue and profit per business         | \$1.2m; \$53,100        |
| Profit margin                           | 4.5%                    |
| Purchases, mostly diesel; wages         | 21.6%; 20.1% of revenue |
| Average wage                            | \$88,400                |
| Interest cover, 2024; five-year average | 4.5; 3.2 times          |
| Debtor days, 2024; 2020                 | 38; 59 days             |
| Largest operator's share                | 1.9%                    |

### WHO PAYS FOR THE FREIGHT

Intrastate work is 51.4% of revenue, interstate 30.3%, urban 18.3%. Crude material and chemical markets pay 44.9%, manufactured goods 33.8%, agriculture 11.9%, fuel retailers 5.8%. Victoria holds 31.8% of establishments, New South Wales 30.2%, Queensland 18.7%.

### WHAT MOVES THE MARKET

Integrated logistics firms hold most of the larger contracts and subcontract to smaller operators with little pricing power. The driver shortage reached 12% in 2025, with an average driver age of 51. Producer prices for road freight rose 15.5% in the June 2026 quarter, and operators have since built rise-and-fall clauses into contracts.

Source: IBISWorld, **Road Freight Transport in Australia** (I4610), October 2026; driver figures from the IRU as cited by IBISWorld. Forecasts are forecasts, not records.

Indicative only. Pricing, gearing and approval are subject to lender assessment and full application. General information only, current at October 2026, not legal, tax, accounting or financial product advice, and it does not consider your objectives, financial situation or needs. Obtain advice from a qualified solicitor and accountant before acting. Worked examples are illustrative, not valuations, and do not refer to any particular business. Prevail Finance Pty Ltd · Australian Credit Licence 509527.