

# IRTE

OFFICIAL JOURNAL

## TRANSPORT ENGINEER

FEBRUARY 2026

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now vital in  
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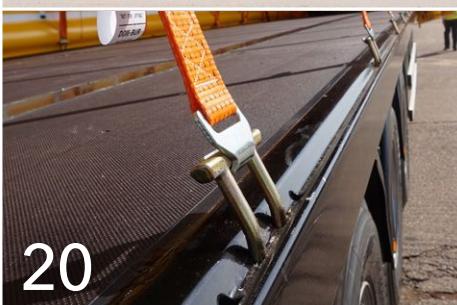
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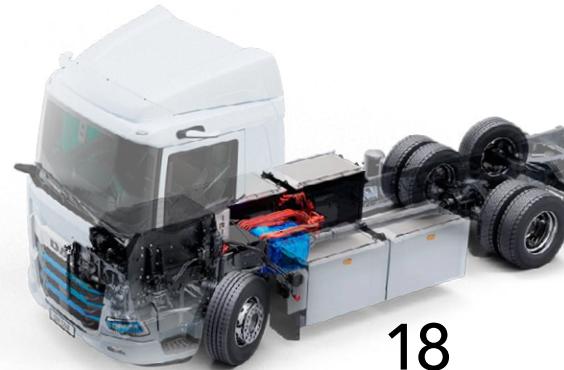
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## Evolving demands

**C**ommercial vehicle technology advancements continue to move at a rapid pace, as manufacturers bring new models to the market to capitalise on growing demand as they transition their fleets to low-carbon or carbon-free operations.

As operators add electric, gas, biomethane and other types of alternative fuel vehicles to their fleets, technicians need to be equipped with a growing array of skills to ensure fleets are operating safely and efficiently.

Key to the development of technicians is the irtec accreditation scheme. This independent benchmark for technician competence across the HGV, PSV and trailer sectors is a bedrock of how the required competence is achieved.

In this issue, our cover story looks at how irtec - which is led by the IRTE, a professional sector of the Society of Operations Engineers (SOE) - is being updated and refreshed to meet the changing needs of the industry.

SOE technical product manager, Leo Hubbard, notes that the industry has now reached a point where electrification, alternative fuels, digitisation and accountability pressures mean that the industry needs "alignment more than ever". See page 10.

Also, in this issue, as new commercial vehicle models with the latest tech constantly take to the UK's roads, we hear about some new arrivals.

Harris Bus & Coach, a business unit of Dublin-based Harris Group, gave us a hands-on demonstration at Donington Park of two models from the new Higer V Series, to be launched in the UK after impressing in Ireland.

The Higer V10 coach is for urban intercity and charter operations, and combines a Cummins D6 7EVIE320 six-cylinder diesel engine with advanced safety systems. The 12-metre Azure is an electric bus for public, urban and commuter transport, powered by advanced 352kWh lithium-ion batteries from CATL. See page 14.

As the number of battery-powered vans increases, we also hear about Kia's new PV5 Cargo, built on a E-GMP.S skateboard-style platform, and with a lithium-ion polymer battery mounted beneath the floor. See page 26.

Enjoy reading the issue.

Justin Burns  
**Editor**



To reach shortened URLs in the magazine - [www.tinyurl.com/xxxxxx](http://www.tinyurl.com/xxxxxx) - type the whole link into the address window of your web browser.

## in brief

**Queclink Wireless Solutions** has unveiled a satellite-enabled vehicle tracking device, designed to maintain uninterrupted connectivity in areas where mobile networks are unreliable or unavailable. The GV75MG SAT unit is expected to enhance security, driver safety and transport management for fleets operating in remote or harsh environments. "Freight and logistics businesses face damaging communication gaps and delayed reporting when vehicles are operating in areas beyond mobile coverage," said Vernon Bonser, UK sales director at Queclink Wireless Solutions. "Our satellite-enabled telematics device will provide uninterrupted, real-time tracking to help mitigate the impact of efficiency, safety and cost risks. This added control and peace of mind will enable commercial fleet operators to protect and coordinate vehicles, assets and staff, wherever they are."

The **IRTE Skills Challenge** is set to return in 2026, designed to recognise, develop and celebrate technical excellence across the UK's passenger service vehicle (PSV) and heavy goods vehicle (HGV) sectors. This year's challenge will see a PSV skills testing week held from 1-4 June and HGV skills testing from 20-21 August, followed by a joint awards ceremony in September. For enquiries or to register interest in participating, contact [irteskills@soe.org.uk](mailto:irteskills@soe.org.uk). Visit [soe.org.uk](http://soe.org.uk) to read more.

**Microlise** has appointed Dean Garvey-North as chief technology officer, succeeding Duncan McCreadie, who retires after a decade of leadership at the Nottingham-based technology company. Garvey-North brings experience in digital, data and technology strategy, having worked as an executive in the utilities sector and as a management consultant partner. He is a governing body member of Gartner's chief information officer community, which shapes UK and Ireland digital strategies, and contributes to the Forbes CIO Technology Council. Throughout his career, Garvey-North has led transformation functions, data and AI initiatives, business performance and IT operations, earning industry awards and top regulatory scores for cybersecurity strategy and investment.

## Road map needed for decarbonisation

Government plans to phase out diesel-powered road freight vehicles are in jeopardy due to low confidence across the logistics industry and insufficient infrastructure support, according to Logistics UK.

The report ([www.tinyurl.com/nz4s6hcu](http://www.tinyurl.com/nz4s6hcu)), titled 'Powering Change: Building a Credible Plan for Decarbonising Road Logistics', draws on data and insights from industry stakeholders and warns of a widening gap between official decarbonisation targets and the sector's readiness to meet them – particularly among smaller operators.

Research by Logistics UK reveals 80% of respondents do not believe the government's phase-out deadlines for diesel vans and heavy goods vehicles (HGVs) will be achieved. The report calls for a "pragmatic and cost-effective" roadmap, jointly developed by industry and government.

Concerns centre on the lack of infrastructure and financial support for zero-emission vehicles. More than 85% of respondents expressed low confidence in the availability of public charging facilities, while



over 80% said they were unable to install chargers with sufficient capacity at their own sites. Around 60% cited inadequate guidance and funding as further barriers.

"The date to end the sale of internal combustion engine vehicles is now less than 10 years away for the lightest road freight vehicles, and under 15 for the heaviest," said Lamech Solomon, Logistics UK's head of decarbonisation policy. "Road logistics stands at a critical juncture on the pathway to decarbonisation."

Solomon stressed the industry is committed to reducing emissions, noting ongoing investment in infrastructure, trials of battery-powered HGVs and increased use of low-carbon fuels. However, he acknowledged operators view the current technology and policy landscape as "confusing and fragmented."

Despite these challenges, the report forecasts a significant reduction in diesel use – from 80% today to 50% by 2030 – driven by greater adoption of battery-electric vehicles and alternative fuels.

## A generational workforce crisis

The UK transport and logistics industry is at risk of a severe workforce shortage unless urgent action is taken to address generational inclusion.

The finding is part of a report from the Road Haulage Association (RHA) and Women in Transport (WIT).

'Navigating Generational Change: Building a Future-Ready Transport Workforce' ([www.tinyurl.com/mudmy5wx](http://www.tinyurl.com/mudmy5wx)) highlights that the average age of transport workers is now 46, with nearly 40% expected to retire within the next 10 to 15 years.



At the same time, only 2% of HGV drivers are under 25, despite the sector needing to recruit around 60,000 drivers annually for the next five years to meet demand.

The findings also reveal a disconnect between workplace practices and younger workers' expectations. Access to flexible working in frontline

roles remains at just 14%, even though flexibility and wellbeing rank among the top priorities for younger generations.

Launched at the RHA's Logistics Leaders Forum in London, the report sets out 11 recommended actions for employers to build a multigenerational workforce. These include mapping workforce demographics, updating policies, introducing intergenerational mentoring, modernising learning and development, and embedding generational inclusion into workforce strategies.

 in brief

## Fleets turn to safety technology

A study by Teletrac Navman reveals that driver exoneration is a key motivator for fleets adopting safety technology.

According to the report ([www.tinyurl.com/yfwhuc45](http://www.tinyurl.com/yfwhuc45)), 'Mobilizing the Future of Fleets: 2026 Risk and Exoneration Edition', 84% of fleets cited exonerating drivers as a primary reason for deploying such systems. Among fleets that experienced accidents in the past year, more than half (53%) successfully cleared drivers of fault using these tools.

The research also found that fraudulent motor claims remain a significant challenge, with 34% of fleets reporting exposure to such incidents. Legal pressures are mounting globally, as 77% of respondents expressed concern over rising litigation and associated costs.



This trend is reflected in insurance premiums, which have surged in recent years. Data from Risk Strategies shows umbrella liability coverage climbing from 10% to 30%, while auto liability has increased from 10% to 20%.

"The role of telematics is evolving and taking on a more strategic purpose in fleet organisations," said Alain Samaha, chief executive officer at Teletrac Navman. "It's moving from a cost-control tool to a proactive risk prevention and management solution."

Samaha noted that many safety incidents stem from third-

party actions, making video telematics a critical resource. "Video telematics provides irrefutable, contextual evidence that protects people, preserves reputations and stabilises margins," he added.

The study indicates that fleets are adopting layered risk management strategies, with 56% using five or more technologies and 74% combining telematics with dashboard cameras. 85% of fleets reported mitigating insurance premium increases, and 65% even achieved reductions. 70% said the combined use of cameras and telematics significantly shortened accident claim processing times.

Samaha also urged fleet leaders to view safety technology as a long-term investment.

## SOE welcomes DVSA's focus on apprentices

The Society of Operations Engineers (SOE) has reported that the Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency (DVSA) is actively investing in the professional development of Vehicle Standards Assessor apprentices by supporting membership with the Institute of Road Transport Engineers (IRTE), a sector of SOE.

This supports the DVSA and SOE's mission to raise competence, professionalism and recognition across the road transport engineering workforce. By promoting IRTE membership and progression toward

Engineering Technician (EngTech) registration, DVSA Vehicle Standards Assessor apprentices will have access to the tools, guidance and industry insight required to demonstrate verified professional capability, supporting safer and better-maintained vehicles on UK roads.

The SOE said it welcomes DVSA's leadership in embedding professional standards from the start of an engineer's career.

Responsible for setting and enforcing safety standards, the DVSA plays a crucial leadership role in shaping road transport



industry expectations.

SOE chief executive Emma Thompson said: "By encouraging IRTE membership, DVSA is recognising the value of competence, accountability and continuous professional development, standards that SOE is proud to uphold and promote.

"The technical guidance and industry insight we provide helps bridge the skills gap and encourage professional practice and verification of the engineer's qualities."

**Northgate Vehicle Hire** has expanded its network with the opening of a new branch in Hoddesdon, Hertfordshire, located 10 minutes from junction 25 of the M25. The site is among the company's busiest in the South and has been developed to meet growing demand from customers in the region. The Hoddesdon branch forms part of Northgate's nationwide network of 73 locations, supported by a fleet of more than 50,000 vehicles. This infrastructure enables the company to maintain high vehicle availability and provide rapid assistance to businesses across the UK. Customers at the new site will have access to a range of vehicles, including car-derived vans, small and medium models, 3.5-tonne panel vans and chassis cabs.

**The Environment Agency** has added two Mercedes-Benz Unimog vehicles to its national incident response fleet, enhancing its ability to tackle flood emergencies across England. The specialist trucks will be used to rapidly transport equipment, machinery and personnel to areas affected by severe flooding. Their capabilities include carrying excavators and large pumps into locations that are often inaccessible to conventional vehicles. Designed to meet the demanding requirements of emergency operations, the Unimogs are ADR compliant, allowing them to safely transport large fuel cells needed to keep pumps and generators running during prolonged incidents.

**Mercedes-Benz Trucks** has partnered with VEV to strengthen its TruckCharge consultancy service, designed to help operators transition to sustainable transport. VEV, backed by global energy trader Vitol, provides a proprietary VEV-IQ platform that integrates vehicles, charging infrastructure and advanced power management into a single intelligent portal. The collaboration aims to simplify electrification for fleet operators by combining Mercedes-Benz Trucks' consultancy with VEV's technology and installation capabilities. Ibrahim Kraria, eMobility trucks eConsultancy manager at Daimler Truck UK, said: "By adding a top player like VEV as a partner for our TruckCharge service, we're now able to give customers the best service in the market - the best truck, the best charging solutions and the best installation partner."

## in brief

**Bridgestone's** fleet management platform, Webfleet, has collaborated with Bia Power and ChargeBroker to deliver an integrated electric vehicle energy and fleet management solution. The partnership aims to simplify depot charging operations for businesses without requiring changes to existing infrastructure. The combined system addresses one of the key challenges in fleet electrification – managing charging across multiple vendors and platforms. By linking Webfleet's vehicle data with Bia Power's optimisation tools and ChargeBroker's connectivity layer, operators can coordinate charging schedules, reduce costs and maintain grid capacity. Webfleet provides real-time insights such as battery levels, vehicle status, and usage patterns through its interface.

**Maidstone Borough Council** (MBC) has taken a step towards its target of achieving net zero carbon emissions by 2030 with the introduction of an electric refuse collection vehicle. The Dennis Eagle eCollect joins the council's growing fleet of electric vehicles, which already includes street cleaners, transit vans, and transport for parks and open spaces. The council operates its own fleet alongside an eight-year contract with waste management company SUEZ. Dennis Eagle and SUEZ have worked together for three decades, and MBC's recent partnership with the manufacturer has been well received.

**Volvo Bus UK & Ireland** has introduced B8R – MCV eVoTor model, a new 72-seat coach designed to meet the growing demands of school transport operators across the UK and Ireland. Built on Volvo's B8R eight-litre chassis, the coach offers flexible seating configurations, including 3+2 or 2+2 layouts, accommodating either 72 or 59 passengers. This adaptability allows operators to adjust capacity over the vehicle's lifecycle, supporting long-term operational needs. "We've worked closely with our partner MCV to develop a solution for school transport operators," said Domenico Bondi, managing director of Volvo Bus UK & Ireland. "These customers face unique challenges, balancing safety, capacity and cost efficiency while ferrying the next generation to and from the classroom and for educational outings."

## Haulage sector under pressure

The UK's haulage industry is bracing for further financial strain as economic growth remains sluggish and operating costs continue to rise.

This finding is from the 2025 RHA annual cost movement survey. While the recent budget confirmed a freeze on fuel duty until September, the chancellor's decision to reverse the 5p cut thereafter and introduce subsequent increases has sparked concern among operators.

Richard Smith, managing director of the Road Haulage Association (RHA), said the sector is under significant pressure.

"Our wide-ranging survey shows members are facing escalating costs, up 5.91%, and growing uncertainty about the economy," he said.

"With more firms entering administration and profits falling,



operators have been forced to delay investment, consolidate operations and prioritise survival."

Smith urged the government to work closely with the industry to reduce costs and regulatory burdens, stressing its importance to economic growth.

The RHA survey revealed that operating costs, excluding fuel, climbed by 5.91% over the past year, while profit margins remain at around 2%. Employment costs rose by 6%, driven by higher National Insurance contributions

and wage pressures.

The sector faces a shortfall of 60,000 HGV drivers annually for the next five years, compounded by over 100,000 drivers failing to renew their Driver Qualification Cards last year.

Industry confidence is at its weakest in over a decade, with the Barclays BDO Logistics Confidence Index falling to a 14-year low. Insolvency rates remain above long-term averages despite a slight improvement compared to last year.

## Apollo Tyres to expand tyre range

Apollo Tyres has announced a shift in its truck and bus radial (TBR) tyre production strategy, aimed at increasing product availability and variety for fleets and operators.

The company plans to expand its TBR portfolio significantly, covering up to 80% of all formats and sizes required by the European market by the end of 2026.

Under the new approach, all TBR tyre production will move from Gyöngyöshalász in Hungary to Apollo Tyres' advanced manufacturing facility in India. The plant, which has an annual capacity of 5.5 million



units, already meets stringent European quality standards.

This transition will enable the company to accelerate the introduction of new products, including mega trailer and drive tyres, alongside updates to established ranges such as Apollo EnduRace and EnduTrax.

To support customers locally, Apollo Tyres is strengthening its technical service capabilities

in Europe. Two new teams have been established: the product technical service department, which will provide first-line technical support, and the field technical service team, which will deliver on-site assistance, product validation and work closely with account managers and retail partners.

The company is also investing further in its European research and development centre in the Netherlands. This will enhance TBR product benchmarking, concept development and prototype testing, ensuring tyres are engineered in Europe for European customers.

# SMARTER WIRELESS LIFTING

For workshops that need to adapt quickly and avoid the trip hazards associated with cabled lifts - investing in wireless columns makes sense. But with digital communication, not all cable-free systems are equally reliable.

Some wireless column lifts rely on basic radio communication or Bluetooth to synchronise movement. In busy workshop environments, these systems can be vulnerable to interference, leading to unexpected downtime and, in some cases, safety concerns.

So how can workshops retain the flexibility and convenience of wireless column lifts while ensuring reliable synchronisation, consistent uptime, and uncompromising safety in real-world conditions? And what role does the underlying communication technology play in achieving this?

## BLUETOOTH LIMITATIONS

Standard radio-based or Bluetooth wireless column lifts often operate using 'daisy-chain' or 'peer-to-peer' communication. Each column depends on a limited number of signal paths, and if one column drops out, the entire lift set can be affected.

The resulting signal dropouts or delays may lead to unplanned downtime, while inconsistent communication can undermine operator confidence during lifting operations.

## MESH NETWORKING EXPLAINED

To address these challenges, Stertil-Koni wireless mobile column lifts use mesh networking technology. Rather than relying on fixed communication paths, mesh-based systems allow every column to act as both a transmitter and a receiver, creating a self-supporting digital network.

If interference weakens one communication route, signals are automatically rerouted through



neighbouring columns - sometimes referred to as "lane changing." This many-to-many communication approach helps maintain continuous synchronisation, even in demanding workshop environments.

## KEY BENEFITS

- Signal quality is continuously managed, automatically selecting the strongest communication path.
- Communication adapts automatically when interference occurs, without requiring operator input.
- Lift sets are configured via RFID key, selecting each column before locking the configuration.
- Multiple lift sets can be



created for different vehicles or tasks without complex setup.

- Touchscreen displays confirm active configurations, including the number of columns in use.
- Mesh-based systems support larger lift configurations, suited to complex and growing workshops.

## LOOKING BEYOND "WIRELESS"

Wireless lifting is no longer just about removing cables from the workshop floor. As expectations around uptime, flexibility and safety continue to rise, the technology behind how lift columns communicate is becoming increasingly important.

By addressing common communication failure points, mesh networking reflects the realities of modern workshops - providing smarter, more dependable wireless lifting, designed and built by Stertil-Koni for real-world conditions.



For further information contact Stertil-Koni: [www.stertil-koni.co.uk](http://www.stertil-koni.co.uk)  
Tel: 01604 662049 Email: [lifts@stertil.co.uk](mailto:lifts@stertil.co.uk)



# Evolving to meet today's industry

**A**s the commercial vehicle sector grapples with rapid technological change, regulatory scrutiny and a persistent skills shortage, the question of technician competence has never been more pressing.

Against this backdrop, the irtec accreditation scheme, long established as an independent benchmark for technician competence across the HGV, PSV and trailer sectors, is undergoing a significant update.

Led by the IRTE, a professional sector of the Society of Operations Engineers (SOE), the refresh aims to ensure irtec's training modules, assessments and governance remain aligned with

**Tom Austin-Morgan reports on the changes being made to irtec accreditation to bring it up to date with current and future technologies**

the realities of modern workshops, emerging vehicle technologies and the expectations of regulators, operators and OEMs alike.

According to SOE technical product manager, Leo Hubbard, the timing is deliberate: "Irtec has been around for a long time and, historically, the course content and question bank hadn't changed for several years.

"This is because, until recently, the pace of change in the industry didn't necessarily justify frequent updates. But we've now reached a point where electrification, alternative fuels, digitisation and accountability pressures mean the industry needs alignment more than ever."

## **ALIGNMENT OVER FRAGMENTATION**

One of the key drivers behind irtec's evolution has been closer collaboration across the sector, particularly through the development of the Maintenance Provision Rating Scheme (MPRS).

Often described as 'hotel stars' for commercial vehicle workshops,

**"When everyone goes off in different directions, people don't know which scheme to trust. Alignment is what gives credibility"**

Leo Hubbard

as they point out what facilities and services are available, MPRS audits workshop processes, facilities and staff competence, and has brought OEMs, fleets, independents and regulators into the same conversation.

"The real value of MPRS has been getting all the industry drivers in one room," Hubbard says. "That's allowed us to reopen conversations with organisations that may not historically have engaged with irtec and to understand where OEM training frameworks are heading."

Rather than positioning irtec as a competitor to OEM-led training, SOE's aim is to create a common competence framework that complements manufacturer-specific programmes.

"We're not saying everyone must adopt irtec," Hubbard says.

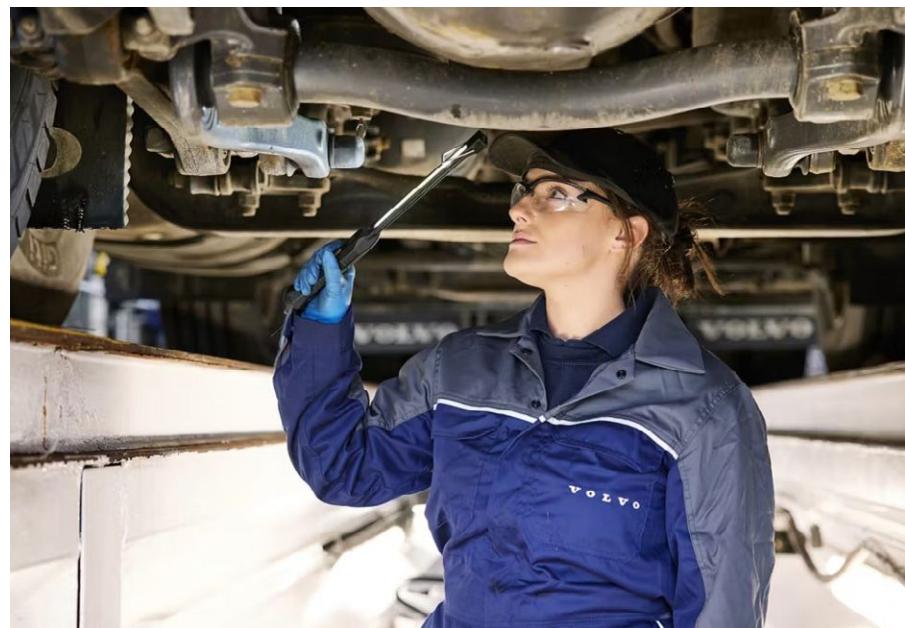
"OEM training can still be acceptable. What we're trying to achieve is industry-wide alignment, a general certificate of competence that provides confidence across different areas of a technician's career."

That emphasis on alignment reflects a broader shift within engineering and transport. Hubbard adds that fragmented standards create confusion, dilute value and ultimately undermine safety. "When everyone goes off in different directions, people don't know which scheme to trust. Alignment is what gives credibility."

#### KEEPING STANDARDS CURRENT

From a training provider's perspective, the challenge is balancing relevance with accessibility. Richard Belton, quality director at S&B Automotive Academy and chair of the irtec steering group, says the review process is about modernising content without excluding parts of the industry.

"Inspections today are fundamentally similar to how they were 20 years ago," Belton explains. "The core safety principles haven't changed, and



we're not throwing those away. What has changed is the reporting, defect categorisation and the technology surrounding diagnosis."

The Inspection Technician level, currently the most widely adopted irtec qualification, is the first to be updated. Changes include refreshed online test packages, updated assessment methods and a shift towards digital delivery. Crucially, the theory test is moving to an open-book format.

"We don't want people memorising old DVSA manuals because regulations change," Belton says. "What matters is that technicians can find the correct, current information and apply it properly. Open-book assessments make the process less daunting and more realistic."

That approach also helps address a longstanding challenge: engaging highly experienced technicians who may lack formal qualifications but possess decades of practical knowledge.

"There are brilliant engineers who've been in workshops for 30 or 40 years and don't like the idea of taking assessments," Belton adds. "However, once you talk them through it, they realise it's not there to catch them out. It's about confirming competence."

Hubbard agrees. "Accountability is far more important now than it once was. Even the most experienced technicians need a way of demonstrating competence in a formal, recognised way."

#### BEYOND INSPECTION

While inspection remains the primary focus, driven in part by traffic commissioner expectations, irtec's higher levels are also under review.

Advanced and Master Technician qualifications, which focus on fault diagnosis and complex systems, were developed several years ago and are now being reassessed.

"These levels are showing signs of age in places," Belton admits. "Technology has moved on significantly. The aim now is to bring them up to current standards while ensuring they're accessible to independent workshops as well as large OEM sites."

That inclusivity is important. Advanced competence should not be limited to technicians working with high-end diagnostic equipment or manufacturer-only systems.

"It's about having the right tools and knowing how to use them effectively," Belton says, "not excluding people because they don't work for a big brand."

SOE expects all irtec levels to be reviewed and updated over the next 12 months, creating a clearer progression pathway for technicians as well as greater confidence for employers.

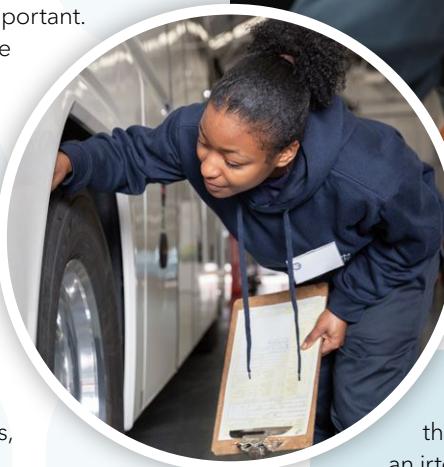
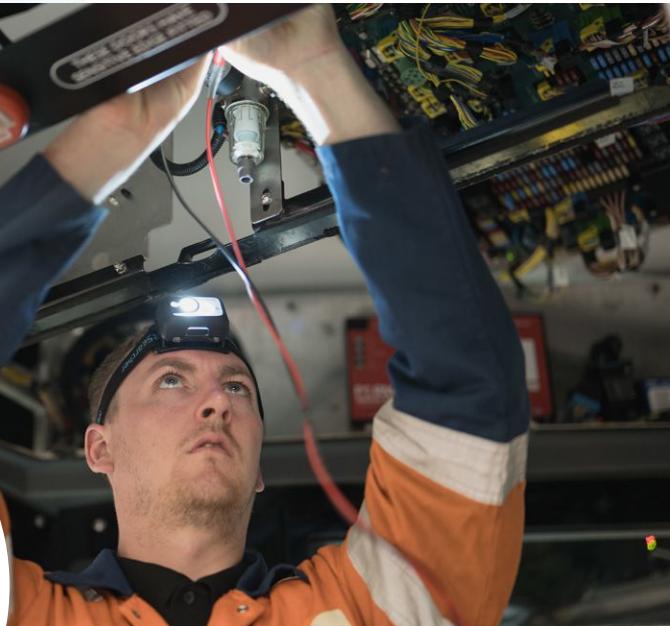
#### PREPARING FOR ELECTRIFICATION

Electrification and alternative fuels are an unavoidable part of the conversation, but both Hubbard and Belton are cautious about moving too fast.

"There's a lot of horizon scanning involved," Hubbard says. "We're aligning our roadmap with industry standards such as the BSI Flex 2072 on zero-emission workshops, but the reality is adoption is uneven."

Battery-electric buses may be commonplace in London, for example, but many rural HGV fleets have yet to see their first zero-emission vehicle. Hydrogen, meanwhile, remains highly specialised.

"There's no point building detailed hydrogen modules today if the demand isn't there," Hubbard adds. "We need



to be ready, but also realistic."

Belton echoes that view: "There is an irtec EV qualification at basic level, and over time we expect that to develop further. But first, we need to ensure the existing framework is fit for purpose across the whole industry."

#### BENCHMARK OF QUALITY

For operators, workshop managers and fleet engineers, the value of irtec lies increasingly in its national recognition.

"The key benefit is confidence," Belton says. "Traffic commissioners understand irtec. Large operators understand it. It gives reassurance that technicians are working to a recognised standard."

That recognition is becoming more influential in contract awards and maintenance agreements, particularly where third-party workshops are involved.

"If one workshop can demonstrate irtec competence and another can't, the choice becomes much clearer," Belton adds.

Hubbard points to irtec's role in supporting accountability rather than eliminating risk entirely, saying: "You

can't prevent human error, but you can demonstrate that you've done everything reasonable to assure competence. That matters in today's regulatory environment."

#### WHAT SUCCESS LOOKS LIKE

For both SOE and the irtec steering group, success is not just defined solely by licence numbers, although uptake continues to increase, with around 19,000 active irtec licence holders across the UK.

"Success is raised standards across the board," Hubbard concludes. "If we can achieve that through partnership with OEMs, training providers and operators, that's a win."

Belton agrees, particularly when it comes to higher-level qualifications. "Inspection is growing steadily, but there's huge potential for greater adoption of Advanced and Master levels. Once those are revised and employers see the value, I think uptake will follow."

In an industry under increasing scrutiny, irtec's evolution reflects a broader recognition: competence is no longer assumed, it must be demonstrated. And as the commercial vehicle landscape continues to change, the schemes that underpin safety and professionalism must evolve with it. **TE**

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De-risking Britain's fleets

# ELECTRIC DREAMS

**N**othing showcases the capabilities of new vehicles better than a hands-on demonstration. Harris Group, a supplier of Higer city and intercity buses and coaches, invited the media to test drive the new Higer V10 coach and 12-metre Azure bus at Donington Park in November, ahead of their upcoming UK debut.

The V10 is a mid-sized coach engineered for urban intercity and charter operations that combines a Cummins D6 7EVIE320 six-cylinder diesel engine with advanced safety systems. The Azure, an electric bus suitable for public, urban and commuter transport, features a low floor and is powered by advanced 352kWh lithium-ion batteries from CATL.

Sales manager James Hooker explains that the test track simulates a real-world scenario, as it features steep inclines and tight bends. He says: "We've laid the track out with cones to make the test trickier. It sharpens the

**Harris Bus & Coach showcases the new Higer V Series in action ahead of its expansion beyond Ireland. Sales manager James Hooker tells Ben Spencer how the company is positioning itself differently from its competitors**

drivers' focus on conditions that are designed to demonstrate the vehicles' capabilities."

Both the early demonstration and the upcoming launch serve as precursors to a wider move for Harris Group. Having sold over 400 Higers in Ireland, the Dublin-based company is bringing the V Series and Azure coaches to the UK under the business unit Harris Bus & Coach.

"We are offering a unique proposition that sets us apart in that we have an established dealer network of 34 sites, and we have 10 years of experience in the UK of electrifying fleets and maintaining them," Hooker says.

"This is part of a strategic move in which we want to be known as a one-stop shop that introduces customers to our partners in the charging and infrastructure space."

## DATA IS KEY

One such partner is LEVL Telematics, a company that uses Geotab hardware to provide real-time data and charging solutions. "When it comes to charging,



a key piece of advice we issue to customers is that it is essential to ensure they have the right charging infrastructure in place. We can help companies carry out the necessary due diligence for such projects."

Equipping the range with Geotab telemetry provides information on harsh braking and overly aggressive accelerating. In addition, data on kilowatts per hour can support operators in making informed decisions when selecting from three battery options on the Maxus e-Deliver 9: 77kWh (160-mile range), 88kWh (175-mile range) and 100kWh (200-mile range).

Of these options, Hooker reveals that the



77kWh battery has proven the most popular in the UK. "Some customers assume they need the largest range with the largest battery, but this will increase the time it takes for the vehicle to charge and increase capital expenditure. It is, therefore, important to think strategically because a vehicle may not require a battery with a 200-mile range if it operates on a 100-mile route."

Another benefit of Geotab telemetry is its ability to flag issues with the warning lights during maintenance. If an amber light pops up, Harris can dispatch technicians in mobile service vans (see box, p16) to fix issues before they become breakdowns.

"They can triage the issue and order the necessary parts," Hooker says. "Our customer-centric focus here is to get the vehicle back on the road as quick as possible and, by going down this route, we are easing the pressure and speeding up the time a vehicle remains off road while at a dealership."



**"We are offering a unique proposition that sets us apart in that we have an established dealer network of 34 sites, and we have 10 years of experience in electrifying fleets and maintaining them"**

James Hooker



As part of their work, the mobile service technicians use a Higer diagnostic computer to diagnose any faults. The downloaded fault code will identify the root cause of the issue, allowing them to trace and rectify the problem, or order and source any parts that need replacing.

Additionally, field engineers educate dealers by filming a repair carried out remotely, either through Google Glasses or a similar technology. They can also speak directly to a Chinese factory engineer who can provide guidance based on the filmed footage. All videos will be stored on a cloud-based platform for the dealers to access.

On the run-up to the launch, the mobile service team and dedicated dealer network will travel to the Higer factory in China to receive hands-on production line training. All participants will be fully trained and operational before the arrival of the first units.

#### COMPLIANCE AND CHALLENGES

Elsewhere in the business, Harris Group is bolstering its compliance focus with the launch in March of a new app that lets users upload their driver checks and resolutions to the cloud. In the event of a crash, the fleet manager can refer to this information to confirm the vehicle was fit for purpose prior to the incident.

Developed in collaboration with industry safety bodies, the app provides information on the steps a fleet needs to take to improve its FORS standard. They can tailor the driver checks to be in line with what their



business needs to exceed industry, regulatory and insurance company requirements, as the end user can amend to include additional checks.

While Harris Group certainly has big plans, Hooker recognises there are

challenges in this space, describing the electrification of coaches and trucks as the final hurdle in the switch to electric.

He believes that the technology is ready, but incentives are key: "Many coach operators are family-run businesses, and they may not be in a financial position to experiment with electrifying their fleets," he explains. "We need pioneers to take the first steps and show that it works."

Companies must also distinguish themselves as a credible option in a highly competitive market. "There is an increasing number of brands from China coming to the UK because the cost of going to market for electric vehicles is minimal compared to an ICE engine vehicle," he warns. "We have set ourselves up differently because we have an existing dealer network in place and we are a longstanding business with a big financial resource behind us."

With a complete solution that includes infrastructure planning, training and real-time data, Harris Bus & Coach may be the kind of pioneer needed to encourage more companies to make the switch to electric. **TE**



#### MOBILE SERVICE VANS

**The Maxus Deliver 9 Service van comes with lightweight crash-tested racking modules that are designed to maximise space and simplify movement.**

**The materials combine steel, plastic and aluminium. Safety, stability, lightness and noise levels are paramount in the design of these products.**

**The unique installation methods reduce time and enable units to be transferred from one vehicle to another. Racking systems come with a standard five-year warranty.**

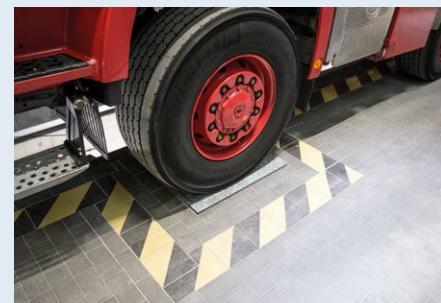
# TAKING AXLE PLAY SERIOUSLY

Axle play detection became standard on ATF lane requirements back in 2013. MAHA UK emphasises the importance of inspections and the consequences of ignoring them

**B**efore axle play detectors, workshops relied on manual techniques, like prying with levers or physically rocking the wheels to detect play. These methods were often inconsistent, time-consuming and inaccurate. With modern systems, checks are quicker, more accurate and safer. Defects are easier to identify too.

## HOW DO DEFECTS PRESENT?

- **Visible movement:** Any looseness in the wheel, hub or suspension components can indicate wear. During a test, the system detects any lateral or vertical movement that might be missed.
- **Unusual noises:** Clunking, knocking or grinding sounds when the vehicle is tested are often a sign of worn wheel bearings, CV joints or suspension bushings. The shaker plate replicates road forces, making noises more noticeable and easier to diagnose.
- **Uneven wear:** Excessive wear on tyres, brake components or suspension parts can indicate underlying axle play issues. Axle play detectors help spot and diagnose these wear patterns and the components responsible.
- **Handling issues:** Steering that feels loose, delayed or uneven often stems from play in axles or suspension systems. The axle play detector allows users to detect these handling irregularities.



Modern axle play checks are important before an HGV reaches an ATF lane because there is no individual 'pass' or 'fail' print-out for axle play detection. Testers visually assess and record defects, not measurements.

If movement is deemed safe and acceptable, nothing is recorded. If movement is excessive, it is logged as a defect (dangerous, major or advisory). The tester uses observations and accepted inspection techniques to judge what is a pass and fail.

## MAHA UK'S LMS 20.0

MAHA UK's axle play detectors feature a built-in hydraulic drive, providing a powerful but smooth and quiet movement of the test plates. They can handle a maximum axle load of 20,000kg, wheel load of 10,000kg, and the plates can move up to 50mm per second.

MAHA UK axle play detectors are DVSA-approved and manufactured by MAHA. MAHA UK's experts maintain and repair with confidence from the point of installation.



For further information please visit:  
<https://www.maha.co.uk/en/products/vehicle-testing-technology/axle-and-joint-play-tester/lms-200-p1944>

# Another turn of the wheel

Steer axles were among the last components to be electrified on heavy-duty trucks. But the pressure to reduce or remove the parasitic load caused by the need to maintain hydraulic pressure for conventional power-steering has driven vehicle designers towards using electrical assistance in its place.

The next step will be to dispense with mechanical steering altogether, removing the link between steering wheel and steering axle, and replacing it with 'steer-by-wire', just as mechanical throttle and gear-change mechanisms have been replaced by 'drive-by-wire.'

As far as heavy trucks are concerned, the first step along this road was taken by Volvo with the launch of its Volvo Dynamic Steering (VDS) system in 2014.

This uses electrical power to augment, rather than replace, hydraulic assistance. Its main selling point is that it can simultaneously reduce steering-wheel loads at low speeds, while enhancing stability and 'feel' at higher speeds. In its latest incarnation, it can even respond to tyre failures to help the driver to retain control in the event of a blowout.

In normal use, steering-wheel force is reduced by up to 85%, kickback from potholes is reduced, camber/sidewind stability is enhanced, and the truck will continue in a straight line when braking on surfaces with differential friction (for

**Electrically assisted steering is a reality on some heavy trucks, but when will the switch to full electronic 'steer-by-wire' appear on production vehicles?**

**Richard Simpson reports**

example, when the kerbside of the road is icy but the crown dry). If the truck starts to skid on acceleration, the system provides a 'guiding force' to help it straighten out.

Additional features on offer become available when the vehicle is specified with Volvo's SEM (Service and Entertainment Module): most notably, the driver can customise the steering 'feel' to a variety of settings, including 'light,' 'stable,' and 'response'.

Light has a low effort, but strong damping; stable has a higher effort and high damping; and response gives a 'sportier' feeling with a higher effort and lower damping. There is also a custom mode to enable the driver to create their own setting.

Preferences can include a 'stiff' wheel that returns quickly to straight-ahead from small angles at higher speed, a stronger self-centring action from larger angles at higher speed, or a damping setting that resists movements at lower

speeds. The truck 'remembers' the preferred settings of up to 10 drivers and will automatically activate the correct one when the driver's card is inserted into the tachograph.

VDS provides redundant electrical assistance to the standard hydraulic recirculating-ball steering system, and should it fail, normal steering control is retained.

## MORE SPACE AND SAVINGS

DAF introduced an electric steering system for a specific application in 2022. Electric Hydraulic Steering (EHS) has replaced the conventional drop arms and steering arms on the steered pusher axles of New Generation models.

Besides creating more chassis space (giving 40% more space for fuel tanks on 6x2 tractors), substituting an electrically controlled pump for the mechanical linkages saves around 30kg, and the lower drag can improve fuel efficiency by 0.3%, DAF claims.

EHS continuously calculates the optimal steering angle for the steered pusher axle based on speed and



**"A failure in the steering system can have catastrophic consequences.  
A steer-by-wire system for trucks must be extremely reliable"**

Grace Huang



wheelbase, guaranteeing very precise steering. The turning circle of both tractor and rigid chassis models has been reduced by 12%.

At speeds of over 45kph, the new electric hydraulic steered pusher axle locks itself in the straight-ahead position, maximising vehicle stability.

These systems will start to pay dividends as the industry moves to electric vehicles: conventional engine-driven power-steering pumps produce most output at higher speeds when they are hardly used with up to 70% of energy being wasted, whereas electric systems closely link output with demand.

Concentric Hydraulics has developed an electrically driven power-steering electro-hydraulic system (EHS) pump specifically for trucks and buses with one eye on the electrification of the heavy-vehicle industry. Mechanical parasitic losses are to be avoided on EVs, where it is much more efficient to tap directly into the vehicle's electric power.

Concentric Hydraulics' engineering director Matthias Fuchs says: "EHSs supply hydraulic pressure via a fully electronic and software-controlled electric motor, in combination with a high-performance and low-noise hydraulic gear pump unit. This does not draw power from the engine and reduces parasitic losses in steering systems."

Industry giants including Bosch, Knorr-Bremse and ZF have all now shown truck- and bus-applicable electric steering systems, with Knorr-Bremse expanding its plant for mass production of a system for an as-yet undisclosed truck manufacturer.

#### WHAT ABOUT THE FUTURE?

Is it possible to transition from a mechanical system, albeit with electrical

assistance, to a full electronic steer-by-wire decoupling of the steering wheel?

Steer-by-wire systems measure the difference between the driver-generated steering wheel angle and the Ackerman angle of the steer axle's wheels.

The difference is measured continuously and automatically eliminated by the steering execution motor: hence a 30-degree turn of the steering wheel is instantaneously met by a 30-degree change in the relative angle of the road wheels.

The system controller monitors steering motor current (which reflects road load, like a pothole or gravel). Using this, it calculates road resistance and rack force (steering system stress). This data is sent back to the steering wheel via the force feedback module, mimicking real-world feel, giving heavy steering on a steep hill, light on smooth tarmac.

#### CAN IT WORK IN REALITY?

As to whether this can work in reality, we must turn to China, which is now leading the world in heavy vehicle technology.

Grace Huang, head of design at Shanghai TRION Industrial, argues that the technology will come to heavy trucks.

She notes it is driven by the need to save weight and cost (a full electronic system will be considerably lighter and faster to install than today's technology), require less maintenance, and provide an easy interface with autonomous

driving technology. The system also dispenses with mechanical components that can limit steering radii.

Challenges to overcome include resistance to harsh operating conditions. "A failure in the steering system can have catastrophic consequences," she points out. "Therefore, a steer-by-wire system for trucks must be extremely reliable."

"This requires redundant systems to ensure that in the event of a component failure, the steering function can still be maintained. For example, multiple sensors and actuators can be used so that if one fails, the others can take over."

There are also regulatory and driver acceptance hurdles: "The regulatory bodies need to develop and approve standards for steer-by-wire systems in trucks. This process can be time consuming and complex, as it involves extensive testing and evaluation to ensure that the system meets the required safety and performance criteria."

Shanghai TRION offers a drive-by-wire steering kit which it says can be incorporated into existing truck designs and a so-called Power Steering Wire - dedicated cabling to provide power and control to the steering actuators while resisting high temperatures, vibration and electrical interference.

If the regulators can be satisfied, which chassis manufacturer will be the first to try it? **TE**



# Secure loads mean safer roads

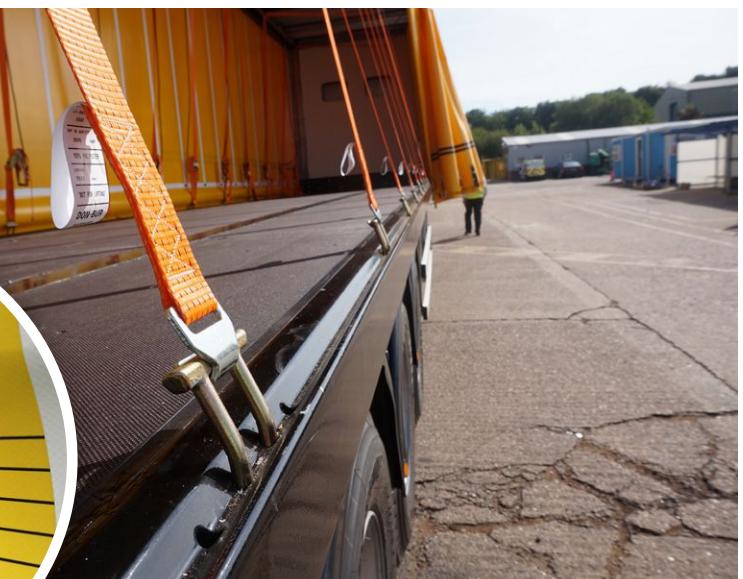
**Effective load security is essential for safety, legal compliance and financial protection. Failure to secure loads can have major consequences for operators**

For some operators, load security can be a bit of a rabbit warren due to the vast area that it covers as each load has different requirements and challenges, but getting it right is critical for business.

New guidance for load restraint requirements for securing loads on HGVs and goods vehicles was revised and updated in December 2024 by the Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency (DVSA).

The DVSA published comprehensive online guidance covering load securing methods, enforcement expectations and examples of good practice. This guidance replaced the earlier 'Safety of loads on vehicles: code of practice' and 'Load securing: vehicle operator guidance'. ([www.tinyurl.com/rywwdj92](http://www.tinyurl.com/rywwdj92))

The new guide's code of practice has six areas of guidance: responsibility for load security; the basics of load security; what to do if a load becomes unstable during a journey; ways to secure a load in an HGV or goods vehicle; how to load



different HGVs, light goods vehicles, small vans and cars; and how to carry different types of load in HGVs and goods vehicles.

## STRONGER GUIDANCE

The guide features changes to guidance with responsibilities clarified for operators, drivers and consignors, including the expectation of documented load security risk assessments, stronger links to operator licensing consequences where safe systems of work are not followed, and clearer instructions on actions required if a load shifts during transit.

Technical guidance was expanded with new and refined information on friction coefficients, the securing of tall or top-heavy loads, and how partial

unloading can reduce or eliminate a previously positive fit. The update also refined how anchor points should be assessed and used, including side raves and the need for sufficient attachment strength.

The section on securing methods was updated to give clearer distinctions between containment and restraint, together with revised advice on straps, chains and internal nets. This included new weight thresholds, correct usage requirements, and explicit warnings about incompatible combinations of equipment.

## SAFER LOADS

Richard Owens, technical support specialist and marketing manager at Don-Bur, believes the new online guidance has helped to "tighten up" the

***"The onus is always on the operator and the driver, but it wasn't really clear in the guidance. I think the most recent iteration was to say the operators are just as responsible, or consignor is just as responsible, as the driver"***

Richard Owens

loading of vehicles and has put to bed any confusion and discord that might have existed between the DVSA, the Health and Safety Executive and operators.

He says one of the main issues that drove some of the changes was that operators were sealing vehicles but not giving the drivers the option to check the loads.

"The onus is always on the operator and the driver, but it wasn't really clear in the guidance," he says. "I think the most recent iteration was to say the operators are just as responsible, or consignor is just as responsible, as the driver."

Owens says the operator is responsible for making sure there is adequate equipment for the load to be secured properly, and providing things such as manifest documents, giving the option to view or understand what the load is, and if it's sealed.

#### CLEAR AND CONCISE

While the guidance is not legally binding, it has been altered and firmed up, Owens notes, and rather than saying you "should do this", it now states you "must do this".

This guidance has helped if there is an issue or a driver gets pulled over as there are clear lines: roadside enforcement officers and the traffic commissioner can say, 'Well, it says here in this guidance you must do this and you didn't'. They can then hold operators in breach of the legal aspect of creating a danger on the roads.

Owens adds: "I think that was quite an important move, and a good one to make. The other thing that was really improved was the development of a lot



of imagery to demonstrate a lot of the things that they should be doing."

He explains Don-Bur has received fewer enquiries since

the new guidance was introduced: that indicates there has been an improvement in the standard of industry knowledge about load security, specifically noting its value for guidance about specific loads.

"Prior to that we used to do quite a lot with people like the DVSA, and do tours and talks with different operators," he says. "I think, as there are not as many enquiries, operators must be finding answers or at least finding a satisfactory answer within the guidance online, or they are becoming more educated as a result of the work that we did prior to the guidance."

He believes the different standards that underpin load security are working well, with the understanding of the key standards improving. These standards are EN 12642-XL, EN 12195 (parts 1 & 2) and EN 12640.

Owens adds: "If there is anything we could improve an understanding of, it would be EN 12195 (parts 1 & 2) as, typically, the industry understands straps in terms of its tonne capacity, but they don't really understand what the label on the strap means - if it's even got a label on it. It would be good to educate the operators about exactly

what they need to be looking for."

Of note, Don-Bur has launched a system, which was first developed for an operator that wanted to apply straps from inside a curtainsider. The new Delta load restraint solution has been developed as an alternative to eliminate rave hooks and to provide a strong and flexible strap anchor point suitable for rave-to-rave lashing.

#### BETTER UNDERSTANDING

Owens says 10 years ago there was a need to educate people but now a lot of specialist operators know load restraint well, largely because many have a specialist in-house, who will reach out to the OEMs for guidance if they have an odd load to transport.

"The problem ones the DVSA are looking at are those carrying awkward loads, such as scaffolders," Owens says. "The other one is general hauliers and the problem with general haulage is they don't know what they are going to get, day to day, so it's up to them to plan for any eventuality. That means spending some money, and sometimes they don't want to do that."

"The large FMCG operators have got contract-specific load restraint, so they know what they are going to put on. They invest up front and maintain the equipment to make sure they comply, whereas a general haulier might not."

"Typically, a general haulier will go out and buy a cheap trailer, and they may not necessarily buy the right load restraint for every eventuality. They are the ones that may fall foul." **TE**

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# COOL RUNNINGS

**T**he green issue continues to loom large for transport operators and, despite the recent government grants, widespread adoption of electric trucks isn't a viable option for many. Those fleets running refrigerated units are therefore forced to look elsewhere to boost sustainability.

Hydraulic drive refrigeration system manufacturer Hultsteins focuses on diesel-free solutions to temperature control. Specifically, it cuts out the secondary engine and uses the truck or tractor unit engine to power the chilled unit - an approach that comes with its challenges. "Within Hultsteins, sustainability is everything to us, but there are some bigger questions customers are asking around this area. Everybody is interested in doing something, but very few companies are doing very much," reasons Graham Usher, managing director, Hultsteins UK.

"When you look at refrigeration per se, there is certainly enough evidence now that operators are moving in reasonable numbers away from diesel refrigeration - and that will continue to happen over the next five to 10 years. So, hydraulic drive is a viable solution, if you have the architecture and framework to be able to run the product when it is based on electric."

"But a lot of businesses operate from depots that don't have the electrical output capability to be able to plug in electric fridges during the night for them to run and maintain temperature."

The company offers two main products. The first is Ecogen, a truck-driven hydraulic electric generator powered via the engine drive PTO that replaces the diesel engine in a diesel transport refrigeration unit (TRU). The



**Sustainability is increasingly critical when operators are making decisions on investments in new temperature-controlled transport technology. What are the latest trends and developments in the market? By John Challen**

second is Ecofridge, a hydraulic-drive truck-mounted refrigeration unit that uses a standard engine-mounted PTO to provide constant power when the truck engine is running.

Usher says despite making inroads into the market, more needs to be done to help people move in the right direction. "We are seeing an uptick in operators taking more interest in hydraulic drive because there is a considerable amount of money and carbon to be saved, but it does come with some caveats," he says.

"We are seeing more enquires with Ecofridge and we are taking on more customers, year on year. We are not

growing as fast as we would like, but we doubled the size of the business last year and doubled it the year before, so we are moving in the right direction. Ecogen's volumes are interesting and it partly comes back to operators sitting on their hands and not acting, and partly because there is no legislation forcing them to change."

## KEEP ECOOL

Carrier Transicold offers a range of products based around an electric refrigeration system, with decarbonisation and sustainability at the heart. The company was also the pioneer of the industry's first all-electric trailer refrigeration system to use batteries and axle regeneration technology - the Vector eCool. This system converts kinetic energy generated by the trailer axle and brakes, which would otherwise be wasted, into electricity, which is then stored in the battery pack to power the fridge unit.

To expand the electrification capabilities across its portfolio, Carrier

Transicold has recently unveiled the eCoolDrive - a 20kW power module that converts a tractor's high voltage DC into the AC required to run a refrigeration unit. This enables any temperature-controlled trailer to be paired seamlessly with a 100% electric towing vehicle and, uniquely, lets fleets electrify existing diesel Vector units without replacing current equipment.

According to Scott Dargan, Carrier's MD for UK and Northern Europe, the system was co-developed with leading vehicle manufacturers to ensure optimal integration with electric truck chassis across both low- and high-voltage platforms. "This collaborative approach guarantees full compatibility with current industry standards, enabling seamless deployment across diverse fleet configurations," he says.

"Additionally, our telematics and connected technologies platform, Lynx Fleet, has also been enhanced with new sustainability functionality to deliver real-time insights into carbon emissions and fuel consumption. This new feature enables fleet managers to monitor their estimated CO<sub>2</sub> emissions and fuel costs in real time, with reporting aligned to regulatory frameworks such as the Vehicle Energy Consumption Calculation Tool (VECTO). This visibility supports compliance and gives managers a clear view of vehicle performance."

While not every company has the capital to invest in new trailers or refrigeration systems, Carrier offers the [R]eCool, a retrofittable battery system that can convert existing Vector trailer units into an ultra-efficient, sustainable, all-electric solution.

"With the system mounted within the chassis of their existing trailers, operators can transfer the [R]eCool battery to



another trailer when required, returning the original back to a standard diesel

trailer for resale or replacement," says Dargan. "The [R]eCool's battery system is designed to be installed quickly and easily, delivering outstanding reliability with minimal maintenance costs.

"Because of our pioneering E-Drive technology, the existing Vector units are already notably more efficient when operating on electric power than traditional belt-driven systems. The [R]eCool's battery power simply taps into this electric architecture to operate the refrigeration unit with minimal operational impact."

#### WEBBED FLEET

Webfleet's Cold Chain solution helps refrigerated fleets transport goods at the right temperature and it is mindful about efficiency as demands rise on operators to be more sustainable. "Sustainability is increasingly influencing the investment decisions of cold chain operators, many of whom are under pressure to reduce waste and energy consumption across what are often complex supply chains," says Alex

Crane-Robinson, regional director UK & Ireland, Webfleet.

"In the past, fleets have relied, almost exclusively, on manual spot checks. Today, they are harnessing power technology, with real-time temperature monitoring solutions, incorporating configurable thresholds and automated alerts, fast becoming the go-to option."

By continuously capturing data, argues Crane-Robinson, fleets can identify temperature issues in real time and address problems before product quality might be compromised. This helps to cut waste by minimising rejected loads and avoiding unnecessary re-runs.

"More fleets are also looking at how they can integrate temperature data with other vehicle and asset information," he adds. "Combining temperature readings with location data, door status and cooling unit activity provides important context when trying to diagnose the root causes of problems. This can help to distinguish between equipment faults and door openings during deliveries."

Webfleet Cold Chain shows how greater visibility can help mixed fleets manage maintenance and refrigeration systems more effectively. In terms of compliance, automated record keeping is now vital. Having access to past temperature data helps fleets to meet audit requirements and provides proof the cold chain has been maintained. **TE**

# KERNOW AND CASTROL GROW TIES

Kernow Oils has been appointed Castrol's UK official partner for the commercial vehicle lubricant portfolio

The appointment builds on more than 30 years of collaboration as a Castrol Industrial Official Partner and Distributor, and recognises Kernow Oils' capability to support fleet engineers and transport operators with lubricant selection, application advice and condition-based maintenance strategies. Under the programme, Kernow Oils' technical teams receive ongoing training and direct access to Castrol specialists, ensuring alignment with OEM approvals, emissions requirements and current lubricant performance standards.

For commercial vehicle operators, the partnership provides early access to selected Castrol CV lubricants, closer



technical collaboration to support extended drain intervals and fuel efficiency, and improved commercial terms designed to reduce total cost of ownership while

maintaining compliance.

The expanded portfolio covers a broad range of applications including HGVs, buses, construction equipment and specialist machinery, where increasing engine complexity and longer service intervals place greater demands on lubricant performance.

Marc Perkins, Sales Director at Castrol, said the expanded partnership combines Castrol's newly launched commercial vehicle product range with Kernow Oils' technical expertise and supply chain capabilities to support Castrol's growth ambitions in the UK CV market.

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# Electric drive

Sales of electric vans in the UK rose by a hefty 36.2% in 2025, according to figures compiled by the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders, with 30,169 registrations. It's a market Kia is determined to capitalise on, with a new range of battery-power-only, zero-emission light commercials marketed under the PV5 (Platform Beyond Vehicle) banner.

The first to arrive in Kia's 63 British van outlets is the PV5 Cargo L2/H1. Based on Kia's new, purpose-designed E-GMP.S skateboard-style platform, it grosses at 2.65 tonnes. With a 4.4m<sup>3</sup> load area and a payload capacity of from 665kg to 790kg depending on the variant selected, it can tow a trailer grossing at up to 750kg. Power comes via a lithium-ion polymer battery mounted beneath the floor at either 51.5kWh or 71.2kWh. The smaller of the two contains 78 cells and weighs 283.5kg, while the bigger boasts 108 cells and is 384kg.

Both batteries drive a front-mounted permanent magnet synchronous motor which delivers 89.4kW/120hp if you opt for the 51.5kWh battery, rising to 120kW/160hp if you choose its stablemate instead. At 250Nm, the torque level is identical in both cases.

**The number of battery-powered vans is steadily increasing on the UK's roads and Kia's new PV5 Cargo is one of the latest entrants.**

**Steve Banner reports**

The former can deliver a range between recharges of up to 184 miles while the latter should be good for 258 miles, says Kia. The ranges it cites are on the WLTP (Worldwide Harmonised Light Vehicle Test Procedure) combined cycle.

Both batteries can be recharged from 10% to 80% of their capacity in under half an hour if they are plugged into a 150kW charging point, the manufacturer contends. When hooked up to an 11kW AC charger, the less powerful of the batteries charges from 10% to 100% in four hours and 45 minutes, while the more powerful takes six and a half hours.

Two PV5 Cargo L2/H1 trim levels are listed: Essential or the more upmarket Plus. Service intervals are set at two years/20,000 miles - whichever is first - and PV5 Cargo L2/H1 has a seven-year/100,000-mile warranty (eight years/100,000 miles for the battery).

A crew van derivative is on its way for this year as is an L2 chassis cab. It is set to make its British debut at the Commercial Vehicle Show at the NEC

from 21-23 April, although it will not go on sale until November.

Other PV5 Cargo models - L1/H1 and L2/H2 - will be arriving as well, creating a line-up with two lengths and two heights. Kia is hoping to sell more than 3,000 vans by the end of December.

Likely to gross at up to 3.5 tonnes, the bigger PV7 will follow PV5 in 2027. It will in turn be followed by the PV9 in 2029, expected to weigh up to 4.25 tonnes or thereabouts when fully laden.

PV5 Cargo L2/H1 qualifies for the government's Plug-in Van Grant, with all models in line for the maximum £5,000 discount. It has been awarded the top five-star rating in the 2025 Euro NCAP Commercial Van Safety Assessment.

I drove the 71.2kWh Cargo L2/H1. With no lack of performance, it is quiet, handles well and is highly manoeuvrable at around-town speeds. It offers a ride equal to any light commercial of comparable size, and ahead of most.

A stalk on the steering column features controls that allow you to start the van, select drive, reverse or park, and release the handbrake. None of it is complicated and the 12.9in touchscreen on the dashboard is user friendly, which makes a change. It is the most impressive new van I've encountered for sometime. **TE**

# BUS GARAGES TAKE THE LEAD

The bus industry has taken a lead in the move to digital working, with mobile data devices now commonplace on the 'shop floor' amongst Britain's major bus operators. Technology is helping to improve safety.

**S**afety is paramount for anyone carrying passengers, so technology that helps improve safety is vital. Bus operators also need to provide authorities with proof of compliance and evidence of operational performance.

However, industry consolidation has seen the arrival of more commercial, often multinational, passenger transport conglomerates. This has led to a renewed focus on improving efficiency, productivity and cost control. All of this relies on the availability of accurate, current data - and the tools to utilise that data properly.

In 2016, Freeway launched the first fully integrated mobile working and fleet management system, providing a seamless flow of data and updating the central management system in real-time. This development gives fleet managers - both bus and truck - with a level of visibility they didn't have before, giving them real insights into every facet of the engineering operation - increasingly aided by AI.

To manage the increasing amount of data, Freeway has developed dashboards - screens that show data in a simple, graphical way. In London, First Bus has equipped 150 engineers with tablets to provide real-time data from 10 garages. Daily updated information is displayed through dashboard graphs and charts, showing the performance of every aspect of fleet maintenance at each location.

The dashboards are continually



updated and can show the status of everything from inspections to defects, MOTs to vehicles off-road, stock issued and mechanical lost mileage. "Freeway's dashboards are simply brilliant, as they provide complete management oversight of the performance of each garage," says Chris Tong, Engineering Director at First Bus. "We can simply click on a graph and drill down into more detail to see what's behind the figures and immediately see what's going on."

In the workshop, engineers can now check maintenance histories, spot recurring defects, and identify and issue parts instantly from their mobile device. Scott Nicholetti, Engineering Manager at Cambridgeshire bus operator Whippet, says: "We now have a proper insight into our costs - something we just didn't have before. We can then undertake cost analytics to minimise

wastage, streamline stock, and, with maintenance histories, identify recurring defects, manage warranties, and use parts more efficiently."

Karl Hutchison, Engineering Director at Warrington's Own Buses, says: "Freeway drives improved compliance, and the standout benefit is quality control. We can instantly see what has been done, supported by photographic evidence."

System integration means real-time data from driver walk-around checks becomes instantly visible to the workshop, and operations can be fully informed of vehicle availability. At Nottingham City Transport, the real-time visibility of defects allows the workshop to operate more dynamically, improving vehicle turnaround times and labour utilisation, resulting in significant productivity gains.



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# Creating the balance

**GYS is helping commercial vehicle operators to improve operational efficiency, while helping to cut downtime and costs with its cutting-edge technology. Justin Burns finds out more**

Technology is constantly moving at a rapid pace and adoption of some of the latest advancements in all sectors can bring about profound gains for both operational efficiency and the bottom line.

A company at the forefront of enabling commercial vehicle operators to reduce costs and time in a safe manner is GYS – an industry leader in the design and manufacture of welding machines, battery chargers and vehicle body repair equipment.

Founded in 1964, GYS is headquartered in Laval, France, and operates at a soon-to-be upgraded site in Rugby, UK and in Italy, Germany, China and Spain. The company's strapline is 'invest in the future' and for the last three decades, its strategy has been focused on continuous investment in research and development (R&D).

## BALANCING ACT

A common problem experienced in commercial fleets is that 24-volt battery systems often experience imbalance due to uneven charging rates, ageing differences between the batteries and environmental conditions such as temperature and placement, as the two 12-volt batteries in series do not always charge evenly.

This imbalance can lead to higher costs, shorter battery life and

unexpected vehicle downtime that costs operators time and money, while in a world where sustainability is so important, it helps to cut waste from batteries having to be replaced.

GYS is helping overcome this challenge with its GYSFLASH PRO that was launched last year. The 24V battery balancing system delivers 100 amps of balanced charging power across both batteries. According to GYS, it achieves a balanced charge in two to three hours – enabling battery balancing to be completed alongside routine servicing.

The GYSFLASH PRO uses connected (CNT) technology that allows for software updates. The external interfaces, USB and DB9 socket, enables both input and output of data to and from the charger. New or bespoke charging curves can be uploaded; it can be connected to a printer, keyboard and barcode scanner.

Jim Spencer, commercial vehicle specialist at GYS UK, explains: "I have been into commercial vehicle workshops, and you always see a pile of batteries heading to the scrap heap. We have usually been able to recover at least 50% of those batteries.

"We have conducted a battery balancing trial with a couple of big bus companies in the UK and noticed with one that in a six-week period over the winter where they would normally be buying 10 to 15 batteries a month



minimum, they haven't had to replace any."

Marketing controller Theo Esterhuizen notes the system has made such an impact that truck manufacturer DAF Trucks has mandated the GYSFLASH PRO to be used across all of its dealerships.

Spencer adds: "DAF wanted to cut down on how many batteries they were throwing away for multitude of different reasons, and it has brought that down to an almost negligible."

"If a manufacturer puts a truck on the road and the battery fails within a few months, it's because they have not done anything with the battery before it went out on the road. They are now trying to encourage their dealerships to make sure these batteries are all topped up."

GYS is also the largest player for battery chargers, and it has gained extensive knowledge on battery



charging through its continued R&D.

The company manufactures a range of battery starters and boosters that are proving to be indispensable for commercial vehicle operators, with the technology continuing to grow at pace.

GYS supplies a range of three technologies including traditional booster packs to lithium booster packs and supercapacitor boosters.

#### POWER PACK

Esterhuizen explains: "The lithium booster pack is much smaller and lighter, but still extremely powerful and these are becoming more popular. They deliver massive power in a small form factor and lots of companies are picking up on this technology."

The supercapacitor booster range uses battery-less supercapacitor

technology to provide instant starting power. The vehicle booster uses energy from a vehicle with the engine running, to automatically charge itself and then uses this energy to start another vehicle. This device is fully autonomous and does not

need to be connected to the mains.

"The technology is incredible. You could start a car or a small truck with this from its own dead battery," Esterhuizen enthuses. "You can connect this to a vehicle that's got a flat battery. It will charge itself up to 100% in about two minutes from zero, and then you can boost it so you can use the dead

battery to start the vehicle."

Spencer notes it is perfect for recovery and breakdown operators as they are never going to be without power - they just hook it up to their own vehicle - whereas traditional booster packs must be maintained, charged and kept in good condition.

GYS says it has done the maths: if you used this booster 200 times a day on unlimited vehicles, it would last 25 years and it can do one million start cycles. Effectively, it never dies.

GYS is seeing demand for all three technologies, but Spencer also believes there will continue to be market for the traditional booster. "People still want a big, powerful booster that will do everything that they do, and that you can carry it around in your hand," he notes.



#### BODY REPAIRS

Another innovation that GYS has developed to improve operational efficiency in commercial vehicle workshops is its Powerduction machines.

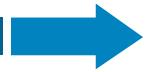
Powerduction has evolved from offering coil induction heaters to a broader range of heat induction machines, addressing the need for safer, cost-effective alternatives to volatile oxy-acetylene gas, something that is seen as a safety risk.

The technology provides a safe and fast alternative as it heats metal from the inside outwards, offering precise control and significant savings over time. It will do every workshop job such as expanding a bearing to get it off the shaft, but not cut metal.

The 220LG induction heater provides immediate heating power for de-scrambling and heating steel and aluminium. With no flame, its heating is precise, instantaneous and safe for the working environment. Thanks to its liquid cooling, it can work without interruption at its maximum power of 22kW and is designed for intensive use on a 32A socket.

Spencer says GYS' 110kW and 220kW units have proven to be safer, more efficient, and cost effective, with the 110kW model reportedly paying for itself within 18 months for some operators due to reduced insurance costs, and as it costs only 15% of the price of gas to run.

With R&D such a major facet of the business, GYS has set its sights on further developing its technology as it looks to continue being a major supplier to commercial vehicle workshops and operators. **TE**



## Perth & Kinross turns to Harsh

Harsh has secured a new order from Perth & Kinross Council, which has added a Harsh hookloader and two Harsh tractor wet-kit installations to its multi-purpose fleet.

The council has specified Harsh equipment for the first time, fitting the systems to three new Volvo chassis. The 32-tonne 8x4 FMX features a Harsh hookloader, while two FH 6x4 tractor units have been equipped with Harsh wet-kit packages for use with walking-floor trailers

transporting bulk waste to recycling facilities.

Allison Brown, assistant fleet manager at Perth & Kinross Council, said Harsh was chosen for its strong reputation with truck operators in Scotland and for the reliability and durability of its products in arduous applications such as waste handling and environmental services.

She added: "Harsh and Volvo have worked closely together to give us optimum vehicles that meet



our requirements exactly. Both companies also have premium levels of aftersales support, which gives us full confidence for a long and highly productive service life."

Colin Hayes, business development manager for Harsh in Scotland, said: "It's been a pleasure to supply these new trucks to Perth & Kinross Council,

and in particular to work closely with Euan Tolson, key accounts manager at Volvo, to get the specifications exactly right." He added that the tractor wet-kit installations were individually configured, with bespoke tank sizes and a simplified pipework layout designed specifically for walking-floor trailer operation.

## Unitruck expands operations

Unitruck Services has expanded the capabilities of its new Birmingham workshop with the installation of an 18,000kg in-ground brake tester with tachograph supplied by Totalkare.

Unitruck has added the in-ground brake tester to support more efficient vehicle testing and diagnostics across a range of commercial fleets. The system offers an 18,000kg axle load capacity and integrated tachograph calibration, enabling the workshop team to complete compliance checks and in line with DVSA requirements while reducing vehicle downtime.

Alongside the brake tester, the company has invested in a set of T8DC cable-free mobile column lifts, replacing its previous S6CF units. The T8DC lifts provide faster setup, improved manoeuvrability and



greater operational flexibility for varied maintenance tasks.

The upgrade follows the earlier purchase of a heavy-duty four-post lift for another Birmingham workshop, as it strengthens its service offering.

"As our Birmingham operations continue to grow, it's essential that we equip our workshops with reliable, industry-leading technology," said Kevin Brown of Unitruck Services.

George Georgiou, area sales manager at Totalkare, said: "Unitruck Services has always been committed to investing in quality equipment to support its expanding operation, and we're delighted to continue supplying them with solutions that enhance productivity and capability."

## RE Davies welcomes customised Iveco S-Way

RE Davies has expanded its fleet with a customised Iveco S-Way 530 low-cab tractor unit.

The operator, known for delivering refrigeration equipment to supermarkets, opted for the special edition model available as a factory order. The vehicle features a 6x2 axle configuration and a distinctive red and white livery, complemented by a series of bespoke enhancements.

Among the upgrades are aluminium side skirts, stainless steel roof racking and custom Truck-Maxx exhausts. Lighting improvements include full LED headlights, fog lamps, perimeter lighting and cluster boxes, while additional details such as aluminium air tanks, pneumatic air horns and a Dutch-style nameplate complete the exterior.

The conversion allows the truck to operate at a maximum weight of 44 tonnes, with a lifting mid-axle to reduce wear when running below 40

tonnes. A rear infill with hinged access and a chequer plate catwalk adds practicality to the design.

Powering the vehicle is Iveco's xCursor 13 engine, delivering 530hp through a 12-speed Hi-Tronix gearbox. Inside, the cab mirrors the exterior colour scheme and includes leather trim, high-comfort seating and a premium fridge.

Richard Davies, director at RE Davies, said a truck is "not just a method of transporting goods from point A to point B, it is a giant billboard for business", so every effort is made to have the best looking trucks.





# ICL adopts engine cleaning technology after trial success

Chemical manufacturer and distributor Industrial Chemicals Ltd (ICL) has agreed a three-year contract to adopt Engine Carbon Clean (ECC) technology across its fleet.

The move follows successful trials aimed at reducing emissions and improving fuel efficiency.

ECC uses patented hydrogen generator technology to remove carbon deposits from internal combustion engines. The process involves piping oxyhydrogen gas into the air intake, allowing the engine to draw in what it needs on demand. This method has been shown to improve fuel economy and cut harmful emissions, including CO<sub>2</sub>, CO, NO<sub>x</sub> and N<sub>2</sub>O.

ICL initially tested the system at the Millbrook Proving Ground in Bedford, recording measurable gains in emissions reduction and fuel efficiency. The company then



extended trials to one-third of its 90-vehicle fleet based at West Thurrock, achieving more than a 7% reduction in both emissions and fuel costs. Plans are now in place to roll out the service nationwide.

"Over the course of the contract, we expect to see measurable improvements in fuel economy and emission reductions across the fleet,"

said Steven Swaby, chief financial officer at ICL. "It's a practical and effective way for us to reduce our carbon footprint while ensuring our logistics remain reliable, efficient and environmentally responsible."

Ben Kattenhorn, chief executive of ECC, added the trial results have been "very encouraging and delivered tangible improvements".

## Fenwick Bros deepens ties with Mandata

Fenwick Bros has adopted the Mandata TMS as its new transport management system to support nationwide operations and growth.

Fenwick Bros, based in Grimsby, Lincolnshire, operates a fleet of 35 vehicles, including curtainsiders and tippers, providing UK-wide transport services. The company runs its operations from a transport office in Beelsby and employs ADR-trained drivers to manage collections and deliveries across the country.

The business previously used the

Stirling TMS platform but reassessed its software requirements as part of a wider review of available transport management systems. Having identified opportunities to streamline processes and enhance both its general haulage and bulk activities, Fenwick Bros chose to continue its relationship with Mandata by moving to the Mandata TMS.

Jonathan Fenwick, owner and director at Fenwick Bros, said: "After many years of using Stirling TMS,



upgrading to Mandata feels like the right move. Having seen first-hand how the system works, we're confident it will drive us forward and help us achieve our operational goals."

Mandata said it looks forward to supporting the company through this next phase in its operational development. Last March, Mandata partnered with AI route optimisation specialist Optimize.



## VTS upgrades workshop via Stertil

Staffordshire-based Vehicle Technical Services (VTS) has enhanced its workshop operations with the installation of a new Stertil-Koni four-post vehicle lift. The lift is expected to improve the efficiency and reliability of VTS's fleet maintenance services.

The ST4250 electro-hydraulic lift replaces an older ramp, reducing downtime and ensuring smoother operations for the busy facility. Designed for quick drive-on inspections, the lift also provides engineers with improved access to the underside of vehicles.

With a lifting capacity of 25 tonnes and a nine-metre platform, the ST4250 is suited to the range of commercial vehicles serviced by VTS. Its surface-mounted, crossbeam-free design offers unobstructed access along the full length of the vehicle.

To support routine maintenance, the lift includes LED lighting for clearer visibility during inspections. A low drive-on height simplifies positioning for low-clearance vehicles, while adjustable platforms accommodate those with narrower axle widths.

The system uses an electronically controlled hydraulic mechanism to deliver smooth and precise lifting cycles, even under uneven loads. Safety features include a patented mechanical locking system that operates independently of the hydraulics and engages automatically by gravity.



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# STRAPPED IN

A range of innovations to secure loads on commercial vehicles

## 1 TITAN LOAD RESTRAINTS (UK)

Titan Load Restraints (UK) provides ratcheting cargo stay bars, which are the ideal solution for stabilising cargo and preventing shifting during transit. With their adjustable length and secure ratcheting mechanism, these bars can be customised to fit various load sizes. They provide superior tension and stability, keeping cargo securely in place, even on rough roads or during sudden stops. The cargo stay bars are useful tools for maintaining the integrity of shipments. They are designed to withstand heavy loads with up to 600 kg capacity and provide reliable support. The bars are manufactured with high-quality materials, ensuring durability and long-lasting performance.

[www.tinyurl.com/4dnbzmmmt](http://www.tinyurl.com/4dnbzmmmt)



## 2 DON-BUR

Don-Bur offers transverse high-strength load restraint nets designed to prevent longitudinal load shift during transit. The nets wrap around the rear of the cargo and are secured to the side ravel using ratchet straps, preventing movement under braking or acceleration, improving operational safety and protecting the load. Transverse nets are suitable for both full-load and diminishing-load scenarios, and are particularly effective in multi-drop operations, where the shape and mass of the remaining load changes between delivery points. Each net is constructed from either solid PVC or mesh, reinforced with heavy-duty webbing for strength and durability.

[www.tinyurl.com/3aa52z2j](http://www.tinyurl.com/3aa52z2j)



## 4 SYSTEM EDSTRÖM

System Edström's FleetLane service is designed to accelerate fleet conversions by carrying out racking and storage installations at the port of entry, transforming how businesses get their vehicles on the road. By reducing delivery miles and minimising vehicle handling, FleetLane promises to offer a faster, greener and safer solution for fleet operators. With efficiency, sustainability and durability at its core, FleetLane aligns with System Edström's commitment to quality and reliability. The company says it sees FleetLane as a natural evolution of its mission to help businesses streamline their operations.

[www.tinyurl.com/3vr3e6bx](http://www.tinyurl.com/3vr3e6bx)



## 3 KRONE

Krone's Multi Safe system is helping transport operators across the UK and Europe to stay compliant, safe and efficient, offering a solution for trailer load securing that it says is widely adopted and proven. According to Krone, the system is compliant with EN 12195-1, VDI 2700, and DIN EN 12642 Code XL, which cover European and German standards for safe cargo securing, lashing practices, and reinforced trailer construction. The system is designed to help fleets meet legal and insurance requirements while reducing liability and downtime. With floor-mounted Multi Rail and ergonomic Multi Strap technology, Krone says it allows virtually any type of cargo to be secured safely, supporting driver safety, helping prevent road incidents and streamlining loading operations.

[www.tinyurl.com/595mscdj](http://www.tinyurl.com/595mscdj)

# LEGAL UPDATE

This page is brought to you by Backhouse Jones Solicitors, which runs a frequent series of podcasts – see [www.tinyurl.com/2xbv3jzv](http://www.tinyurl.com/2xbv3jzv)

## The Employment Rights Bill

### LEGISLATION

The Employment Rights Bill has successfully completed its passage through parliament and as of 18 December 2025, it is officially the Employment Rights Act 2025.

The Act progressed through the legislative process with some difficulty, with the most recent concerns raised in the House of Lords regarding the removal of the statutory compensation cap for unfair dismissal claims. However, following assurances from the government and requests from business organisations to conclude the legislative process, peers withdrew their final amendment, allowing the Bill to pass in its current form.

The removal of the cap on compensatory awards for unfair dismissal is one of the most significant changes introduced by the Act. During the Lords debates, the government confirmed it will publish an impact assessment examining the consequences of removing the cap before the relevant provisions come into force.

David Pannick KC made a notable contribution to the debate, arguing that concerns around uncapped compensation are overstated. He highlighted that discrimination claims have long been uncapped without leading to excessive or disorderly awards, suggesting there is no reason to expect



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a different outcome for unfair dismissal claims.

For employers, the Act confirms that substantial reform is on the horizon with the removal of the compensation cap increasing potential financial exposure, particularly in cases involving higher earners. However, assessments suggest there may be a lead-in period before the changes take effect, giving employers time to prepare, review policies and monitor developments around

commencement and implementation.

We now await further details of the expected consultations and impact assessment for the removal of the unfair dismissal compensation cap.

*Do you need any advice on how the Employment Rights Act 2025 could affect your business? If so, get in touch with the Backhouse Jones' team: [www.tinyurl.com/3699jrf](http://www.tinyurl.com/3699jrf).*

### FINANCIAL

#### Inheritance tax changes for agricultural property

Shortly before the festive break, the government announced changes to inheritance tax relief for agricultural property, increasing the threshold for 100% relief from £1m to £2.5m from April.

Under the revised arrangements, farms owned by spouses or civil partners with a combined value of up to £5m may be passed on without an inheritance tax charge. Above this level, inheritance tax will apply at a reduced rate of 20%, with up to 10 years available to

pay before interest is charged.

Although the changes apply specifically to agricultural property, they are relevant to the transport and logistics sector, where many businesses are family-owned and asset-heavy.

The announcement highlights the importance of succession and estate planning for transport operators, particularly where business continuity relies on passing assets to the next generation without disruption. Policy developments in this area may also be of interest to owner-managed transport businesses

reviewing their long-term planning arrangements.

### HEALTH AND SAFETY

#### Look after your employees during the cold snaps

As temperatures plunge and winter bites, working conditions can quickly become challenging. During cold snaps, employers have a vital role to play in protecting their teams, ensuring comfort, safety and productivity don't drop along with the temperature.

Helpful advice is available from the HSE to help employers take practical steps to protect their workforce.

Guidance includes:

- advice on how to protect workers in low temperatures
- clarity on what the law says about temperature in the workplace
- how you can assess the risks and manage workplace temperatures to protect workers

In addition, the HSE's workplace temperature checklist will help employers carry out a basic risk assessment and you can read guidance on preventing slips and trips in winter weather.

For advice, call Backhouse Jones on 01254 828 300.



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