ENABLING OUTSTANDING FLEET LEADERSHIP

FleetNews iQ

Quarter 4 • 2025

Fleet profile: Network Rail

James Rooney reshapes the fleet team as he plots route to electric

From BBC to BVRLA

Toby Poston's journey from journalist to CEO

Running a sustainable fleet

Allianz puts drivers at the heart of its electric transition strategy

Budgeting for change

Find out what the latest Budget announcements mean for you and your fleet

Finding your voice

AFP empowers fleet managers to 'speak up and speak out'

Exclusive interview

TIM LAVER AYVENS UK

'There is no part of the market that we don't want to play in and grow'

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The range and electric consumption figures mentioned comply with the WLTP test procedure, on the basis of which new vehicles are type approved from 1 September 2018. They may vary depending on actual conditions of use and on different factors such as: speed, thermal comfort on board the vehicle, driving style and outside temperature. The charging time depends in particular on the power of the charger on board the vehicle, the charging cable and the type and power of the charging station used.

CITROËN

Welcome

It's taken 10 years, but the Government (albeit a Labour one, not a Conservative one) has finally listened.

Back in 2015, we joined forces with the British Vehicle Rental and Leasing Association and Association of Fleet Professionals forebear ACFO to launch the Fleet Manifesto, bringing together fleet operators, leasing and rental companies to discuss key topics ahead of the General Election.

One of those requests was for a considered consultation into road pricing as we predicted an imminent hole in the national budget as the sector started the transition to electric.

"We don't want a knee-jerk reaction to the reduction in fuel tax receipts by the Treasury," we said at the time. "So engage the industry and let's work through an alternative solution which is fair to all motorists."

OK, so the resulting announcement in the November Budget (see news insight, page 6) was not quite what we'd hoped for. In keeping with this Government, it was a typically ill-considered, poorly worked through announcement of a 3p per mile charge for full electric and 1.5p per mile for plug-in hybrid cars.

Yes, there is a consultation, running until March 2026, but this is about helping the Government to work out how to introduce its new policy, not about the policy itself.

It immediately raised more questions than answers.

Is this an annual self-declaration of mileage? At the end of the year? Declared online or checked during the MOT? How will it be policed? How will business mileage be reimbursed? What happens if you drive abroad – are you still taxed for UK roads? What happens with pool cars and car share – how are those fees applied? Why aren't electric vans included – they also contribute to road wear and tear?

Gareth Roberts answers some of these in his article, but we urge everyone to add their views to the consultation if you want a say in shaping the implementation of the policy.

It was an astonishing, nay unprecedented, Budget in many ways.

Never before have so many potential announcements been briefed to the press days and weeks in advance, seemingly to gauge public reaction; never before have some of the announcements been actually confirmed by the Chancellor before Budget day, breaking convention that MPs in the House of Commons are the first to hear; and never before have there been so many announcements directly affecting fleet operators.

In addition to the pence per mile tax, dubbed the eVED, we had:

- The expensive car supplement threshold rising
- Expansion of the electric car grant
- An end to the Fuel Duty freeze
- Charging funding announcements
- The (pre-Budget) 4.25-tonne vans consultation statement
- A decision to delay the much-mooted changes to Employee Car Ownership Schemes.

Enjoy issue 3 of *Fleet News iQ* in which we reveal the changes implemented by James Rooney at Network Rail which led to the company being named most improved fleet of the year and hear from Allianz about its 2030 zero-emission fleet targets.

From all at *Fleet News*, have a Merry Christmas – see you in the New Year!

Stephen Briers, group editor, *Fleet News*

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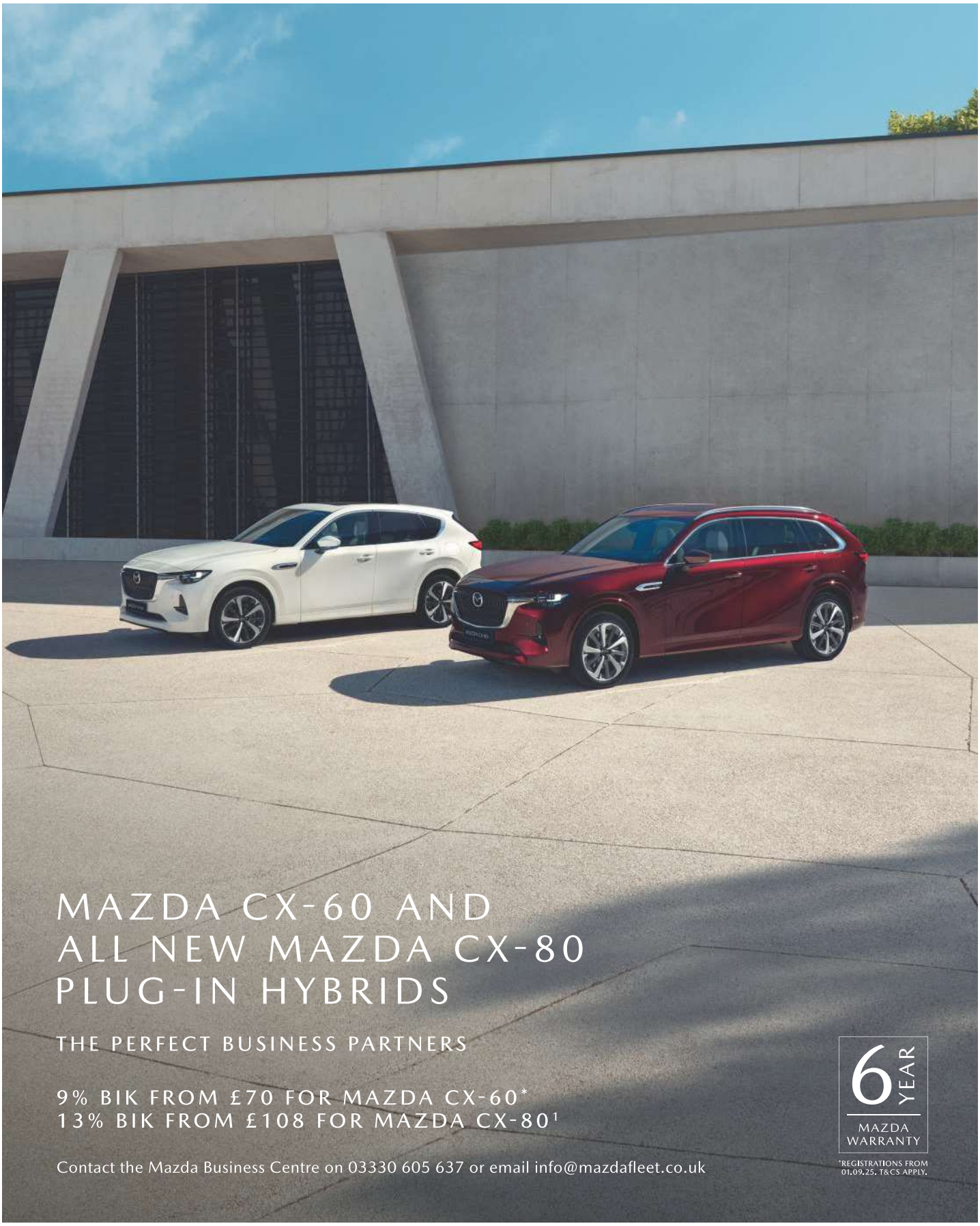

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MAZDA

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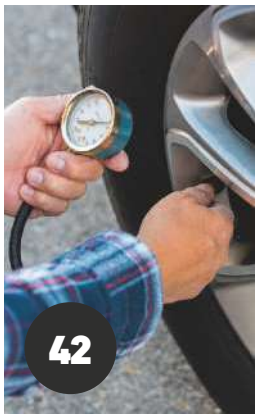

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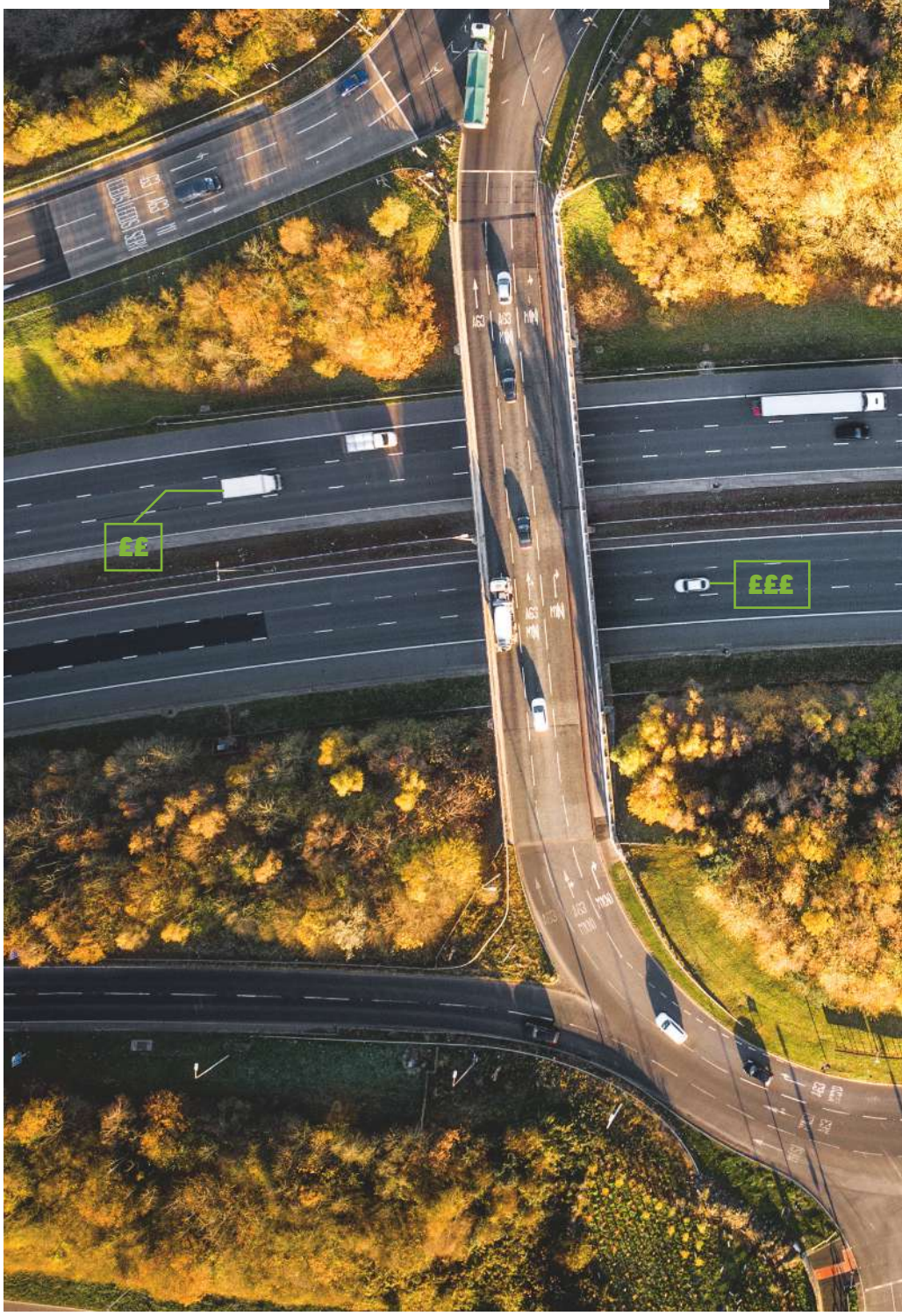
Government grasps road-pricing nettle with new EV pence-per-mile charge

New motoring tax announced in November Budget comes after 20 years of dithering. *Gareth Roberts* reports



Successive governments have dodged the issue of road pricing, abandoning plans following strong public opposition.

Dynamic road pricing, with charges based on the time of day, road and vehicle, was first considered in the early 2000s.

Now, the Labour Government has revealed plans to introduce road pricing for full electric and plug-in hybrid cars as it looks to plug gaps in the public finances.

The Chancellor's Budget announcement will go into consultation, although this will focus on how the new pence-per-mile structure will be implemented, not on the policy itself.

Two decades ago, in 2005, the then transport secretary, Alistair Darling, announced every vehicle would be fitted with a tracking device to calculate charges, with prices (including fuel duty) ranging from 2p per mile (ppm) on uncongested roads to £1.34 on the busiest roads at peak times.

More than 1.8 million people signed an online petition against the Government's plans, equivalent to 6% of the entire driving population in 2007, with 150,000 signatures added in the last day before the petition closed.

PLANS SHELVED

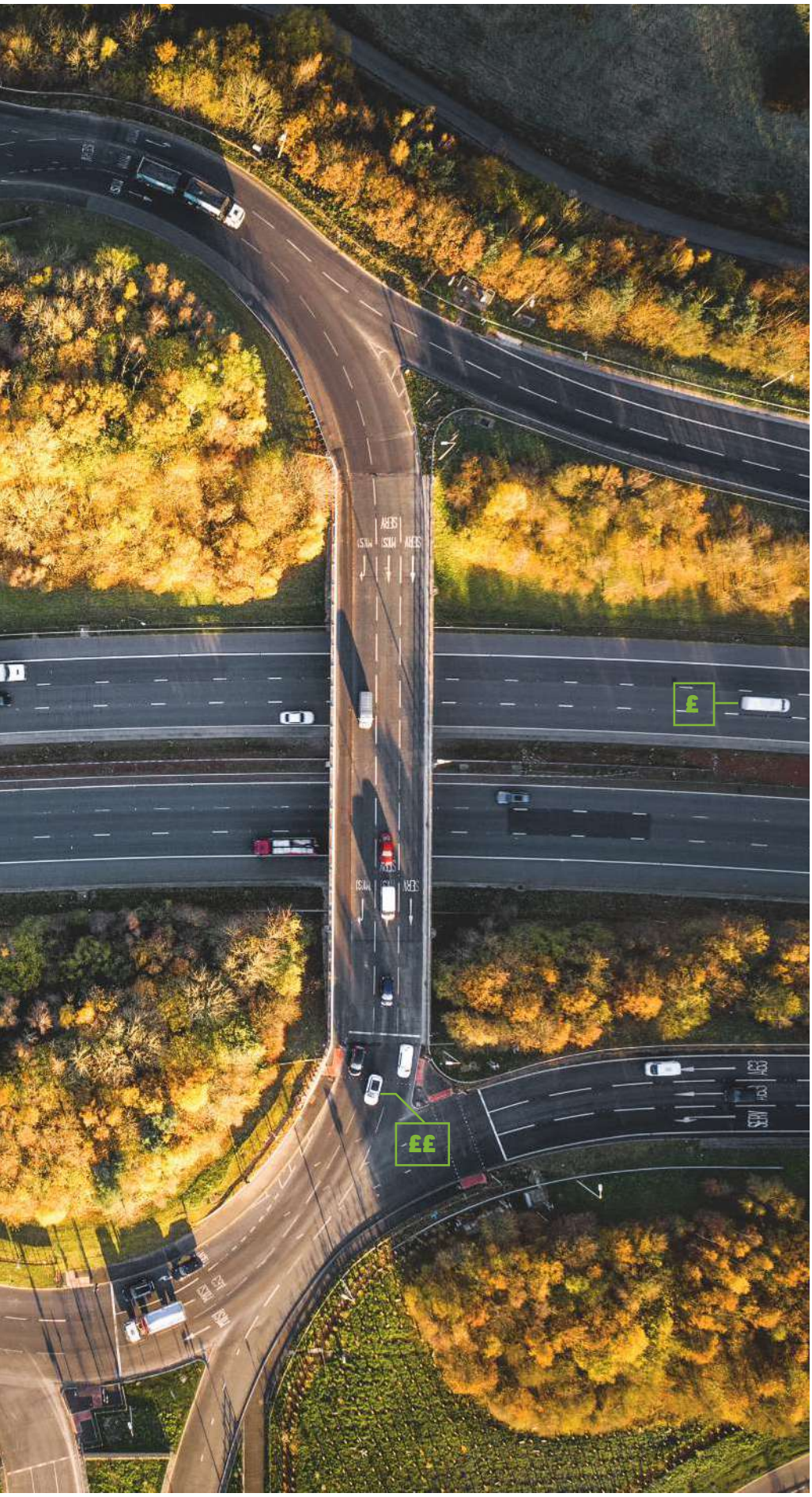
A study by the Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS), funded by the RAC Foundation in 2012, reiterated how a drive to promote green vehicles with a lower carbon footprint could result in a significant loss of revenue from motoring taxes.

It also recommended charging drivers by each mile driven, with higher pricing in congested areas at peak times, while reducing the existing motoring taxes.

Fleet News would later join forces with the British Vehicle Rental and Leasing Association (BVRLA) and the Association of Fleet Professionals' (AFP) predecessor, ACFO, to launch the Fleet Manifesto in 2015 – 10 years ago.

One of those requests was for a considered consultation into road pricing, recognising Treasury would suffer a fall in fuel duty as the sector started the transition to electric.

Following the Budget announcement,



Budget 2025: Need to know

- Electric vehicle pence-per-mile road charging introduced from April 2028
- Electric car grant receives additional £1.3bn and extended until 2029-30
- Expensive car supplement threshold for EVs increased from £40k to £50k
- Fuel duty frozen until September 2026, with a staggered increase up to March 2027
- Fuel finder introduced for fuel retailers to publish current prices
- VED for cars, vans and motorcycles will rise in line with RPI from April 1, 2026
- PHEV BIK easement introduced due to new emissions standards
- Changes to employee car ownership schemes delayed until 2031
- Extra £100m for charging infrastructure
- Extra £2bn annually for pothole repairs
- Consultation on permitted development rights for cross-pavement charging
- Business rates relief for EV charge points and EV-only forecourts
- Tax breaks available to Motability cut
- Salary sacrifice change for pensions
- Minimum wage increases

For all of our Budget coverage and more detail on the above, go to www.fleetnews.co.uk/news/budget-2025

Exchequer secretary to the Treasury, Dan Tomlinson MP, said that previous governments had "ducked the choices" needed to reform the taxation system for the long-term.

"If we do nothing, then by 2030," he warned, "around one-in-five car drivers are expected to pay no fuel duty at all, while other motorists will continue to contribute an average of £480 a year.

"Given all cars cause congestion and wear and tear on the roads, this is not a fair outcome. That's why the Government will introduce electric vehicle excise duty (eVED) from April 2028."

The Government has decided on a rate of 3ppm for battery electric vehicles (BEVs) – around half of the 6ppm the average petrol or diesel driver pays in fuel duty – and 1.5ppm for PHEVs.

The new tax will be introduced from April 1, 2028, with vehicle excise duty (VED) on fully electric cars and plug-in hybrid electric vehicles (PHEVs) continuing to apply alongside eVED on mileage, from the point of the next VED renewal.

Other vehicle types, such as vans, buses, motorcycles, coaches and heavy goods vehicles (HGVs) will not incur the mileage-based charge.

While the BVRLA acknowledges the need to replace declining fuel duty revenues, it says it's "deeply concerned" by the impact on existing EV drivers and the future impact, especially without any direct support for rental and leasing companies who have already invested billions of pounds in the EV transition.

> "What is needed now is a conversation across the fleet sector"
>
> **PAUL HOLLICK, AFP**

FUEL DUTY DECLINE

Motoring taxation is a major source of funding for public services and investment in infrastructure, including the country's roads.

It is structured around two elements: taxation on the usage of the vehicle (primarily via fuel duty) and taxation on the ownership of the vehicle (primarily via VED).

Fuel duty, payable on petrol and diesel, raised £24.4 billion in 2024/25, while VED raised £8.4bn (see graph).

The Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR) has forecast fuel duty receipts will decline to around half of current levels (around £12bn) in the 2030s in real terms. Receipts are then expected to approach zero by 2050.

The new pence-per-mile rates on BEVs and PHEVs are expected to raise £1.1bn in 2028/29, rising to £1.9bn in 2030/31.

However, the OBR warns that the yield from the tax change is uncertain as it's dependent on an uptake of EVs over the next five years.

The Government's Zero Emission Vehicle (ZEV) Mandate requires EVs to make up an increasing minimum proportion of total manufacturer sales during that period, reaching 80% in 2030.

But, with the pence-per-mile charge likely to reduce demand due to an increase in lifetime costs, the OBR estimates there will be around 440,000 fewer electric car sales across the forecast period relative to the pre-measure forecast.

However, with 320,000 of this offset by an expected increase in sales due to other Budget measures, this behavioural response to the policy, along with a small, reduction in the average mileage of an electric car, is expected to reduce the yield by around £200 million by 2030/31.

FLEETS URGED TO HAVE THEIR SAY

With the Government having already decided on this new tax, the views of fleets through the consultation will be key to its successful implementation.

"What is needed now is a conversation across the fleet sector about what we want from such a scheme in terms of its timetable and implementation," said AFP chair, Paul Hollick.

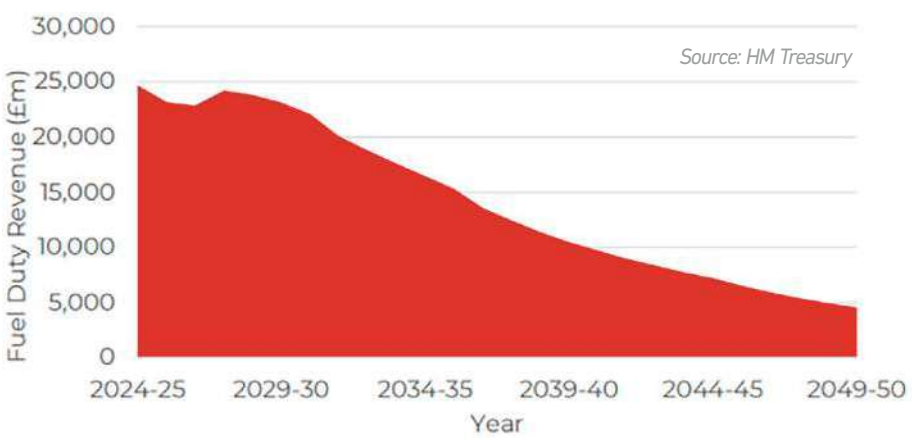
"Our main concern is that it shouldn't arrive in a form that could hamper electrification or cause any hesitation among potential business and private EV buyers.

"We're looking at a point two-and-a-half years away, which at least creates time and space for serious discussion."

There's an acceptance that BEVs will need to be taxed to plug falling fuel duty revenues, but fleet operators fear the announcement of a new charge now, risks sending the wrong signal.

Bidvest Noonan, with a fleet of more than 1,000 vehicles, is committed to making its fleet fully electric by 2035 as part of its 'Electric-First' policy.

Fuel duty revenue decline (2024-25 prices)



CEO Declan Doyle told *Fleet News:* "The Government should be incentivising companies and motorists to make the switch to electric vehicles, yet this additional charge risks doing the opposite."

He explained: "We chose to electrify our fleet because it reduces emissions and aligns with our long-term sustainability goals, however continued progress depends on policies that give businesses confidence to invest in EVs.

"At a time when the country should be accelerating towards net zero, measures like this risk slowing momentum."

Simon Reilly, CEO at last-mile electricity network operator, Aurora Utilities, says a mileage-based charge "understandably raises concerns".

"If extended to commercial vehicles, a strong possibility given the structure of the proposal, higher-mileage vans, trucks and HGVs may see annual operating costs rise, lengthening EV payback periods for certain fleets," he added.

TCO IMPACT FROM TAX CHANGE

Chief among fleet concerns will be how it impacts total cost of ownership (TCO) calculations.

Leasing.com CEO Mike Fazal says the new tax makes EV running costs a little more complicated but does not change the core financial advantage.

"For organisations operating high-mileage

electric fleets, the impact will understandably feel larger," he added.

"A vehicle covering 20,000 miles a year would face about £600 in extra annual charges and multiplied across a whole fleet that becomes a meaningful line in the budget.

"Even so, when you compare it with the fuel costs of running the same mileage in petrol or diesel vehicles, EVs are still likely to remain competitive on total running costs."

At 20,000 miles per year, it estimates EV energy and tax costs are around £2,200 per vehicle, with an equivalent petrol car costing £3,460.

That is a saving of roughly £1,250 per vehicle per year on fuel alone. Multiplied across a fleet, the numbers remain compelling.

"Per-mile charges may increase running costs, but these can be offset by lower vehicle purchase prices, more predictable energy costs, and the continued maintenance savings EVs offer, particularly for high-utilisation fleets," added Reilly.

There will also be a question of how the new tax is administered, with the Government ruling out the use of trackers in cars on privacy grounds.

This means mileage driven overseas by UK registered cars will fall into scope of eVED. However, the Treasury says that, since this only impacts a small proportion, it is right to "prioritise privacy and simplicity" over checks to deduct non-UK mileage.

The Government says that, while it recognises the large majority of EVs and PHEVs have in-built telematics that monitor various driving activities and are viewable by drivers, vehicle manufacturers, or permitted third parties in some cases, it will not mandate their use for administering eVED.

It is, however, keen to hear fleet views through the consultation on how various technologies could be used on an opt-in basis in future to simplify the system and reduce administrative burdens on drivers and businesses.

Understanding the reluctance of previous governments to grab the thorny issue of road pricing, this administration understands that protecting the privacy of drivers, as part of any new tax regime, has to be a priority.

Hence, it has also ruled that any potential technology-based solutions considered in the future will only ever be optional.

When MPs on the transport committee produced a report on road pricing in 2022, they said they had not seen a viable alternative to a telematics-based system.

DVLA TO ADMINISTER NEW TAX

User-supplied mileage reporting and payments for eVED will be integrated into the existing VED system to minimise the administrative burden, according to the Government consultation.

Integration with VED means most motorists will be required to interact with the system once a year.

VED is administered by the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA), which will also administer eVED. Alongside paying VED each year, under eVED, the mileage for the year ahead will need to be estimated, with an upfront charge paid based on the estimate, or spread across the year.

Actual mileage would be submitted at the end of the year to trigger a reconciliation, with drivers having to check their mileage annually, typically during an MOT as is already the case, or for new cars, around their first and second registration anniversary.

DVLA is said to be considering detailed plans for how the system for managing under and over payments will be implemented, including how the new regime will be policed. The Government says it will set out further details in due course.

However, commenting in the chat on the subsequent Fleet News at 10 webinar, Chris Chandler, principal consultant at Lex Autolease, said: "The system will likely be so expensive to set up and maintain, that they won't get the revenue they are expecting. What we need is a full rethink on taxation, not trying to match current/historic methods."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Overcoming the growing pains of used EVs

By Toby Poston, chief executive of the British Vehicle Rental and Leasing Association (BVRLA)

In the transition to electric cars, the used market is the teenager of the piece. Young, yet to fully mature, and facing extreme growth it isn't yet equipped to handle.

While we continue to see growth in new electric vehicle (EV) registrations, used values are falling victim to a supply glut that is outpacing a comparatively modest uplift in consumer demand.

Until this nascent market can sustainably fend for itself, we need timely intervention and support.

Without it, costs to acquire new electric cars will increase and the transition will stall.

The relationship between new values, lease rates, and depreciation is well established. For petrol and diesel cars, they are predictable. Businesses need predictability, they rely on it.

The volatility of EV residuals has meant no such certainty. Drops have been harder to predict and often deeper than anticipated.

With the majority of new EV registrations today coming via fleets and leasing companies, the risks associated with such fluctuations are being concentrated within our sector.

As the main adopter of new electric vehicles, the fleet sector is directly impacted by anything that influences the cost to acquire or run cars during their first life.

Stable residual values (RVs) reduce the risks and allow leasing companies to keep rates on new EVs competitive.

This enables fleets to continue their regular renewal cadence with confidence, making budgeting more reliable and supporting long-term electrification strategies.

Confidence is the critical factor in unlocking greater demand and the lack of it will hold back mass adoption.

Securing stability is the best way to keep lease rates on new vehicles as attractive as possible and give all stakeholders clarity and confidence.

The mindset shift required to make the leap looms large for many buyers.

Motorists hold second-hand electric cars to a higher standard than more familiar ICE (internal combustion engine) models. The same can be said for parts of the motor trade.

Uncertainty over how the values will change, or how easily used electric vehicles will sell, can drastically impact margins.

Dealers succeeding with used electric cars are either EV specialists or part of a broader network with greater access to data and EV-trained personnel.

Independent dealers rarely have access to such resources, leaving them cautious about carrying used electric stock and choosing to steer clear.

None of these challenges are insurmountable.

In response to this instability, the BVRLA is working to shore up confidence and generate demand.

The used market is a central part of our discussions with government officials and stakeholders, be that via roundtables and direct meetings with influential ministers and departments, or open letters co-signed by the UK's leading fleets.

> The used EV market is a cornerstone of the UK's path to net zero. It is immature and needs nurturing

These engagements are highlighting where Government can collaborate with industry to create a strong used market for electric vehicles.

Achieving this is possible via fiscal and low-cost measures. Fair benefit-in-kind (BIK) rates have played a major role in adoption of new electric cars to date.

A quirk of the current regime means a vehicle's BIK rate remains tied to its initial recommended retail price (RRP).

Adjusting these rates so they are based on the used value of the vehicle will make charges fairer and could help the company car and salary sacrifice market absorb more of the surging supply of used EVs.

Beyond that, measures that instil confidence throughout the supply chain would create a strong market that can grow in line with government targets.

These could include: a market stabilisation scheme to give investors greater confidence; transparency on battery health to give dealers a fair playing field from which to value vehicles; and a government-backed national awareness campaign to help demystify EV ownership.

Combined, this would set the market up to succeed now and tomorrow.

The used EV market is a cornerstone of the UK's path to net zero. It is immature and needs nurturing.

Without swift action we risk undermining a vital link in the EV ecosystem. We are at a pivotal moment. Together, we must seek interventions that provide security, transparency and growth.

The solutions are there. We now need a shared commitment to bring them to life.

Gurjeet Grewal appointed CEO at Octopus EV

Gurjeet Grewal has been appointed permanent chief executive officer at Octopus Electric Vehicles after almost a year as interim leader.

Since stepping into the interim position in January 2025, when founder Fiona Howarth took a step back, Gurjeet has overseen a period of rapid expansion.

This year, the Octopus EV fleet has grown from 27,000 to more than 40,000 cars, supported by £1.5 billion in funding from leading financial institutions. Further backing will give the funds to grow to more than 75,000 cars.

Octopus EV now has the scale to accelerate "strategic dialogue" with manufacturers, particularly new entrants from China, and secure bigger deals.

"We are working with them to put electric vehicles at price parity with petrol or hybrid equivalents," Grewal said.

Previously chief operating officer, Grewal has been with Octopus Electric Vehicles since its launch in 2018, giving him immense knowledge of the company and its teams.

"I want to double down on how we make it easy for people to move to electric vehicles and how we nurture individuals in a way that prompts purchasing at the right time," he said.

"We also want to investigate how we can convert people to EVs who have found it difficult to date, for example through used cars."

Octopus EV launched a used car salary sacrifice product two years ago which now accounts for 10%-15% of monthly orders. The goal is for all vehicles to go out on a second lease.

Chris Clayton promoted to fleet director for Omoda, Jaecoo and Chery

Chris Clayton will lead the fleet sales strategy for Chery, alongside the existing Omoda and Jaecoo brands.

Two years after joining the Chery International business, as head of fleet for Omoda and Jaecoo, Clayton has been promoted to the role of fleet director for all three of the company's brands.

Chery launched in September, with the debut of its Tiggo 7 and Tiggo 8 SUVs. Two further model launches are planned for the coming months. Chery operates a separate dealer network to the existing Omoda and Jaecoo brands, but fleet sales will be managed centrally.

Clayton said: "This new role will allow me to continue the unbelievable growth of both Omoda and Jaecoo, but also take learnings and develop our new Chery brand at an even faster rate.

"It allows my team to offer our customers an even stronger proposition, and provides our sales and dealer partners with one point of contact for the entire group's fleet sales."

VW announces cross-portfolio promotions

Volkswagen UK has named Simon Lynch as its new head of fleet sales, while Kevin Rendell becomes head of network sales and Owen Shepherd head of product and planning.

Meanwhile, David Hanna has been appointed director of Volkswagen Commercial Vehicles UK, having joined Volkswagen Group UK in 2014, and held positions at Audi, Volkswagen Passenger Cars and Volkswagen Commercial Vehicles.

Volkswagen Financial Services (VWFS) UK has appointed Gavin Jones as its new fleet director. He will report to CEO, Mike Todd.

The appointment completes the senior leadership team: Jonathan Glenn, head of fleet operations; James Fields-Davis, head of fleet development; and Chris Raynsford, head of fleet sales.

Aion Auto appoints head of fleet and MD

Jon Wakefield has joined Aion Auto UK as managing director, ahead of the brand's official launch next year.

He will lead the company's growing leadership team, which includes former Suzuki national fleet sales manager Lee Giddings as Aion's new head of fleet.

Wakefield brings more than three decades of industry experience to his role, including 10 years in senior positions at Volvo. He joins Aion following a two-year stint at automotive retailer Harwoods Group.

Aion is a joint venture between GAC and Jameel Motors.

The latter already distributes the electric commercial vehicle brand Farizon Auto.

Aion will be its first passenger vehicle brand in the UK.

Caller vacates role as Holman UK MD to move to the US

Nick Caller, who led Holman UK as managing director since 2019, has been promoted.

He becomes executive vice-president for sales and client relations at Holman's global headquarters in New Jersey, USA.

David Hunt, who joined Holman UK a year ago, will take the role of interim MD.

Rick Tousaw, executive vice-president for international operations, will continue to provide strategic oversight.

Hunt brings extensive industry experience, including 14 years as MD of Ryder UK.

He said: "Having worked with the team over the past year, I know first-hand the talent and commitment here. I look forward to building on our strong foundation and delivering even greater value for our customers."

Events coming soon

Our pick of must-attend fleet events over the next three months

Event	Date	From	Where	More details
Fleet News at 10	12-Dec	*Fleet News*	Online	A guest panel of knowledgeable fleet decision-makers joins *Fleet News* to dissect the biggest news announcements and industry topics. Viewers can get involved in the chat and offer their own topics for discussion in this much valued and highly popular webinar series. Learn more and register for this webinar at www.fleetnews.co.uk/leadership/fleet-news-at-10-webinars/fleet-news-at-10-december-2025
Fleet News at 10	30-Jan	*Fleet News*	Online	A guest panel of knowledgeable fleet decision-makers joins *Fleet News* to dissect the biggest news and industry topics. Viewers can get involved in the chat and offer their own topics for discussion. Learn more and register for at www.fleetnews.co.uk/leadership/fleet-news-at-10-webinars/fleet-news-at-10-january-2026
Fleet News at 10	27-Feb	*Fleet News*	Online	A guest panel of knowledgeable fleet decision-makers joins *Fleet News* to dissect the biggest news and industry topics. Viewers can get involved in the chat and offer their own topics for discussion. Learn more and register for at www.fleetnews.co.uk/leadership/fleet-news-at-10-webinars/fleet-news-at-10-february-2026
Advisory Fuel and Electricity Rates	1-Mar	HMRC	n/a	HMRC revises advisory fuel rates (AFRs) and advisory electricity rates (AER) quarterly. These rates are used to reimburse employees for business travel in company vehicles.
Fleet News Awards	18-Mar	*Fleet News*	Grosvenor House Hotel, London	Don't miss the opportunity to network with more than 1,000 fleet industry professionals in this celebration of achievements across the fleet sector. Learn more at www.awards.fleetnews.co.uk

Official fuel consumption for the Audi Q6 e-tron range in mpg (l/100km): N/A. CO_2 emissions: 0g/km.

The Audi Q6 e-tron is a battery electric vehicle requiring mains electricity for charging. Figures shown are for comparability purposes. Only compare fuel consumption, depend upon a number of factors, including the starting charge of the battery, accessories fitted (post-registration), variations in weather, driving styles and

CO_2 and electric range figures with other vehicles tested to the same technical procedures. These figures may not reflect real-life driving results, which will vehicle load. Zero emissions while driving. Model shown is Audi Q6 e-tron. Features optional equipment.

SETTING STANDARDS AT NETWORK RAIL

Full devolution doesn't work, but neither does full centralisation. Fleet boss James Rooney (right) explains why to ***Stephen Briers***

The Network Rail road fleet has been through several adaptations over the years, sometimes swaying towards outright purchase, other times favouring contract hire, but always functioning within the constant of devolution.

Decisions were taken by five regions, dispatched back to the central fleet team for execution. Each had autonomy to implement their own standards and vehicle specifications with little or no uniformity; meanwhile, the central team controlled the finances and placed the orders, but its influence on other internal factors was largely restricted.

Enter James Rooney. The former British Gas fleet engineer joined Network Rail – the UK's 10th biggest public sector employer with around 43,000 staff – in 2023 with a clear remit from the board to drive strategy and transition the fleet to electric.

His first action was to remodel the responsibilities and relationship between the central team and regional teams.

"This was essential to drive the strategy for the business, particularly the move to electric," he says.

Network Rail agreed and duly signed off his proposal. Regional teams are now responsible for ensuring compliance with the national policy, depot management and liaising with end user drivers. The central team owns contracts, vehicle acquisition and disposal, electrification targets and the compliance policy.

"We recognised that full devolution doesn't work, but neither does full centralisation," Rooney says. "The regions still have operational autonomy and are intrinsic to our success and how we work. But there were clear opportunities to do things in a better way."

He adds: "The regional teams are very good at dealing with the staff and understanding the local business needs, the geography and the budgets, but we also needed coordinated central control and that's what we now have."

Switching from a private sector role to public will always unearth challenges, either unexpected or expected. In Rooney's case, they were largely expected: getting to grips with higher levels of bureaucracy which can slow down decisions – although he also points out that sign-off for the restructure was prompt.

"That's just the nature of a public company," he adds. "But the big benefit is that, when there is a target, they stick to it, not like private companies with shareholders. It's great for planning."

DEFINED FLEET FUNCTIONS

The Network Rail central team has undergone its own reorganisation and is now shaped around three defined functions – Operational Compliance, Strategic Operations plus Governance and Assurance – while eight new roles have been created.

Five of those are in the Operational Compliance team, which oversees O-licence, vehicle compliance and MOTs, emphasising the importance of risk management to Network Rail.

The Strategic Operations team is responsible for acquisitions and disposals, EV transition, vehicle technology and conversions, and is headed by Sarah Armitage, while the Governance and Assurance team manages data, finance and contracts, and ensures Network Rail is on track to hit its mandated targets.

Armitage works closely with the engineering team and has conferred to them the right to challenge new technology, particularly as the organisation transitions to electric.

Adding greater resource to the central team has enabled Network Rail to bring key services in-house, including tyres, accident management, training plus vehicle design and build. It continues to outsource service, maintenance and repair, breakdown and leasing.

"Design and build is the big one, especially for cross-utilisation of assets across the business," says Rooney.

Working closely with the engineering teams, the goal is to reduce the current 140 van variations to 10 top lines, with five variants in each, resulting in 50 options. These include sub-specs such as Chapter 8 livery.

"We've previously had different vehicles in different regions doing the same job," Rooney explains. "We are moving to a standard vehicle for each job type with standard equipment that is built for them."

The fleet team has hosted regional user groups with drivers, managers and, occasionally, union members involved.

"If we are going to make any sweeping changes, for example, major vehicle technology, we highlight that and get union approval," Rooney says. "If you engage with them and take them on the journey, explaining why you want to make the changes, they are fine.

"Get them involved and they will buy in to the change."

PROFESSIONAL DRIVING STANDARDS

One area still under discussion is telematics. Network Rail has it, but is only accessing fuel data and charging data. It doesn't see driver behaviour – yet.

"We are bringing in professional driving standards and looking at how telematics can highlight to drivers how they can improve," Rooney says. "We want to show managers where depots are going through more tyres, more damage, etc. to identify the areas that need addressing."

He has already introduced fobbing for telematics as a driver identifier. A year ago, drivers could be identified for fewer than 10% of journeys undertaken by the fleet; by the end of this year, it will be 100%.

This is linked to the driver's daily check app which logs and reports on vehicle walkaround checks.

"It has brought in better ownership of the vehicle," Rooney says. "We get an alert if the vehicle moves without either a check or fobbing."

The new approach has helped to increase average MOT pass rates from 64% to 72% (all vehicle types), assisted by a change in policy on brake pad replacement.

"Leasing companies tend to change them at 3mm, but we have put in 5mm which has reduced the number of brake failures at MOT," Rooney explains. "The cost implication of changing earlier is minimal compared with the MOT saving."

The fleet has remained consistent in size, at 1,500 cars, 8,000 vans (including 900 4x4s/pick-ups) and 400 HGVs on the Operator's Licence, of which 290 are seven-tonne panel vans.

The one significant change is a halving of the short-term hire fleet, to around 1,200 vehicles. The objective is to halve this again as utilisation of the core fleet improves.

In addition to the unnecessary cost, the other issue with rented vans


Network Rail

From Helmsdale to Plymouth: a 1,000-mile electric road trip

As Network Rail bids to move from 1% fleet electrification to 20% within two years, and on to 100% of its cars and vans by 2030, engagement and buy-in from all stakeholders is crucial to ensure a smooth transition.

In addition to the usual toolbox talks, digital comms and meetings, the fleet team came up with the idea of travelling from Network Rail's most northerly depot in Helmsdale to the most southerly in Plymouth in a fleet of electric vehicles.

They stopped at all five regions along the way to speak to drivers, managers and senior teams about the electrification strategy.

In total, 1,050 miles were travelled during the week-long trip in a 27-tonne Mercedes-Benz eActros 400, Toyota Proace Max, Volkswagen Buzz crew cab and a Ford Explorer which Network Rail converted into a car-derived van.

A variety of drivers from the organisation undertook each of the five legs, which took in 12 depots and saw the fleet team meet around 30 people in each region.

Sarah Armitage, who masterminded the event, says: "The driver feedback was exceptional. We saw one driver who was vociferously anti-EV – he'd been dragged along and was instantly converted!"

She adds: "We had three objectives: to gain direct experience and end user engagement; to create post engagement with videos and podcasts; to have the benefit of word of mouth. Peer experience was the big thing."

The trip was such a success that Network Rail now plans to make it an annual event.

is the lack of racking, livery and tracking. "We weekly track utilisation rates and then make recommendations on the fleet size to each region," Rooney says.

FROM PURCHASE TO LEASING

Remember the comment about endless adaptations from outright purchase to lease funding? Network Rail is now transitioning towards leasing after taking stock of all the options.

"We did the analysis, and the difference (between leasing and buying) was negligible, but the value of money in hand for Network Rail is positive and leasing also means we de-risk residual values on electric vehicles," Rooney says.

Network Rail still has around 500 owned vans, mostly pick-ups, on its legacy fleet, but this has dropped from around 1,200 three years ago.

Diesel vehicles are on a five-year operating cycle while electric is on six years – currently.

Rooney explains: "We are open to change based on total cost of ownership. When we run the calculations over multi-model cycles, for example one-to-seven-years, six years seems to be the best option at the moment across everything."

With fleet centralisation firmly embedded, the focus has switched to electrification. When Rooney joined, less than 1% of the fleet was electrified; today it is almost 5% and by quarter three next year it will be 20%.

Like all public bodies, Network Rail is mandated to meet the Government's 2027 zero emission deadlines, although there are notable exceptions, such as 4x4 pick-ups and long-range small vans (with 200-plus miles range in winter) for which no suitable electric alternative currently exists.

"That alone precludes 50% of our fleet," Rooney says.

Taking that into consideration, his actual target is 30% of the fleet by 2027, although Rooney is confident of reaching 40%-50%. He expects to hit 100% for cars and vans by 2030, with HGVs transitioning by 2035 in line with Department for Transport targets.

Network Rail is the UK's biggest landowner, with a portfolio that includes 440 depots and 12 railway stations. It is also the single biggest user of electricity.

Consequently, the fleet team needs huge input and engagement from stakeholders across the organisation, including the drivers, which was one

Sarah Armitage with the vehicles used on the Helmsdale to Plymouth road trip

reason it undertook a nationwide electric vehicle road trip earlier this year (see panel, left).

"We do the policy and procedure, including vehicle ordering, target mapping, compliance and governance," Rooney says.

"The regions do the local stuff, including charging infrastructure and the people, making sure they are ready for the vehicles, and work with us to ensure they are suitable for their needs."

Network Rail is stitching the various local infrastructures together via a central charge point operating system, which will include a single number for maintenance. It will also enable the fleet team to implement billing.

This will be the precursor to a possible shared network, both with the public and other companies. Network Rail itself is likely to have to rely on others' chargers for its heavy vehicles, with 70% of the fleet depot-based.

Also under development is a company-wide dashboard that will be hierarchical in terms of what various stakeholders can see. It will bring together all data from multiple sources on every vehicle, including costings, reducing fleet admin and reporting time.

END USER AGREEMENTS

Rooney has implemented end user agreements with manufacturers which has boosted discounts – previously it was using leasing company terms – by leveraging its position as one of the UK's biggest fleets. This is saving "many millions of pounds", he says.

Such measures underline why Network Rail was named Most Improved Fleet at the 2025 Fleet News Awards. The action implemented to date equates to savings – or more accurately "spend avoidance", according to Rooney – of around 15%-20% per vehicle.

His inclusive approach has improved engagement with drivers, but it is human nature to be reluctant to embrace change, particularly when it relates to new technology.

Electrifying the fleet is only one aspect of this; drivers must also contend with new vehicle systems, such as advanced driver-assistance systems (ADAS), autonomy, Apple CarPlay, even switching from manual to automatic.

"Some of our drivers are going from a 15-plate diesel Transit into an electric spaceship," Rooney quips.

Training is paramount with both internal and external providers. Network Rail also supports drivers with FAQs and dedicated intranet sites.

"We tell them before, during and after the vehicle handover," says Rooney. "It's constant comms."

He also has EV ambassadors who know everything about the vehicles. They help to engage other team members, answering questions and assuaging concerns.

TRACK AND TRAIN TOGETHER

As the national railway hurtles towards the formation of Great British Railways, bringing together track and train under Government ownership over the next couple of years, Rooney is already looking ahead to the likely implications for the road fleet should vehicle drivers working at the train operating companies (TOCs) come under his jurisdiction.

"We are doing exercises with those TOCs that have already been nationalised, such as Southwest Trains which has around 100 vehicles (crew buses, vans and cars), to understand their fleets and how we on-board them," Rooney says.

"All our cars are job-need, but the TOCs also have perk and salary sacrifice. We will need to standardise the fleet with an agreement about how we treat them across the company."

He adds: "It will also change our estate. They sit within regional teams, but when we are looking at charging and power, that will be a consideration for us."

His vision extends even further into the future though, as he prepares for artificial intelligence (AI) and autonomous vehicles (AVs).

"We are going through five-year cycles. EVs are the next five-to-10 years, then AI and then AVs – it's fuel, then technology, then the driver," he says.

"We see it as a 25-year roadmap."

COMPANY: Network Rail
HEAD OF ROAD FLEET: James Rooney
TIME IN ROLE: Two years
FLEET SIZE: 9,900 – 1,500 cars, 8,000 vans, 400 trucks
OPERATING CYCLES: Vans – diesel five years, electric six years
FUNDING METHOD: Contract hire with some outright purchase

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New split AER welcomed, but more clarity needed

By Caroline Sandall-Mansergh, consultancy and channel development manager at Alphabet (GB)

At Alphabet, we welcome that the Government has announced new Advisory Electric Rates (AERs) for electric vehicles (EVs) being used by at-work drivers.

It was important to split the AER for home charging and public charging – to take account of people who can't do the former – because the cost differential between them is so large.

It's clear this change is going to benefit certain fleets, for example, if all drivers do high mileage and charge at home, or if no drivers can charge at home.

However, what the Government has announced lacks the detail to help employers fully understand how to apply the new AERs. There is some loose guidance on the relevant pages of the gov.uk website, but it's not as clear as it needs to be.

It doesn't illustrate enough different real-world scenarios to be useful, and so it's not the big step forward the industry was hoping for.

With rates of 8ppm and 14ppm, the new AERs side-step the significantly higher cost of ultra-rapid chargers on the UK motorway network. It also doesn't consider the large number of business drivers who are routinely using those chargers because they cover a lot of miles for work.

Drivers who mostly charge at home, but have a period where they need to charge publicly, could also be heavily impacted.

Therefore, HMRC should consider additional tiering so as not to financially disadvantage drivers that may, from time to time, need to use faster and more expensive public chargers to avoid overly interrupting their working day.

The current two-tier structure could mean they're notably out of pocket. This is pertinent to those driving light commercial vehicles too as, invariably, they don't have the downtime available to stop to use a slower, cheaper charge point.

What we also need is a greater spread of individual 'use case' examples on the gov.uk website to help businesses understand how to apply the new AERs.

We all appreciate HMRC creating these examples for different taxes and allowances, but we need more of them for the new AERs.

This will help employers be confident that they are compliant; so, in the event of an audit, they can prove they have appropriate records and are conducting adequate checks.

The other issue is that, as things stand, the lack of guidance makes it difficult for businesses to determine which rate should be used and when.

If you regularly drive long distances, you might have charged at home and set off with a full charge, but you will need to charge publicly and that will likely be at expensive motorway services for convenience.

How do fleets accommodate that in their calculations? Drivers rightly want to claim back at a rate which is relevant to the completed journey, but how do they evidence the correct rate, and how does the employer validate that?

The lack of detail and clarity currently leaves the door open for fleets to inadvertently get the repayment process wrong. It makes them nervous to pay the higher rate because they're worried that they will be overcompensating. We need the Government to be far more prescriptive in how businesses should interpret the new AERs.

> What the Government has announced lacks the detail to help employers fully understand how to apply the new AERs

Our view is that the split AERs now place a new burden on businesses. They need to have sufficient levels of resource and control to monitor the process, and this change will likely push more fleets to reimburse based on actual mileage because it's the only way to completely solve the problem.

Unsurprisingly, suppliers offering products and services which calculate actual mileage are using the new AERs as a way of promoting themselves, and that's no bad thing because there are some very good tools available. But there's a cost to using them and they're not suitable for all businesses.

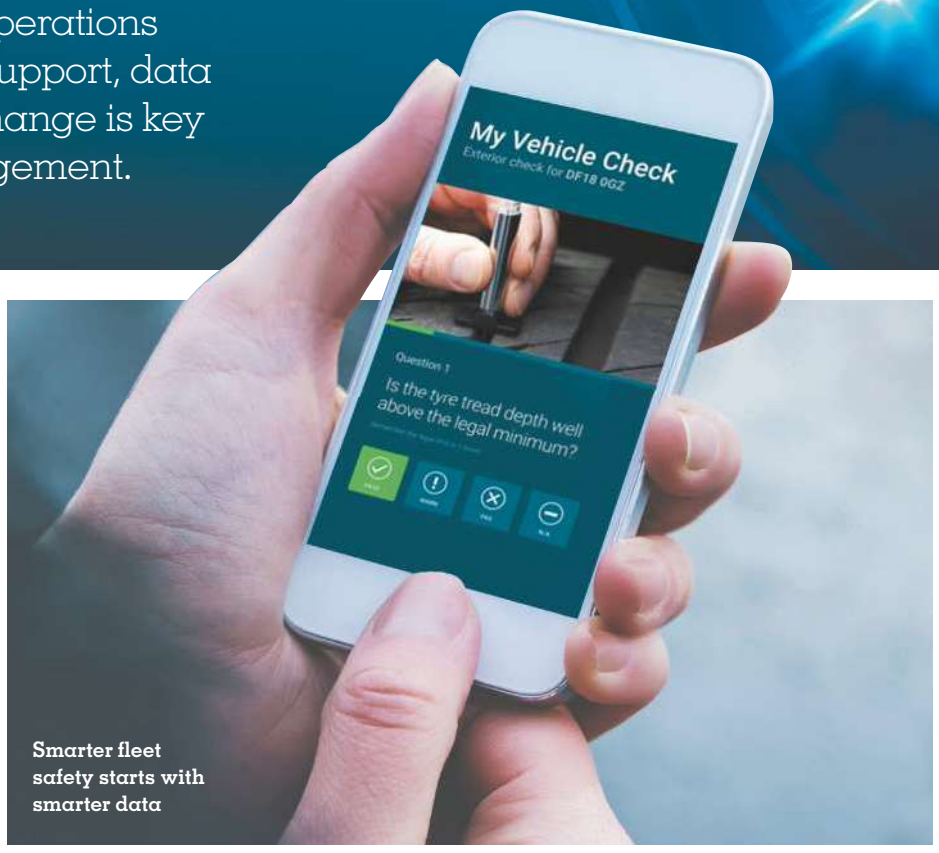
To ensure a joined-up approach, we are channelling our views and concerns through the AFP (Association of Fleet Professionals) and the BVRLA (British Vehicle Rental and Leasing Association) to make sure all feed-back is coordinated.

Our advice would be to find out who can charge at home and what everyone's business mileage profile is.

With these different data sets, managers can start to piece together what the demographics of the fleet are. With that, it's possible to start to create employee guidance, and develop an appropriate number of in-house use case examples to compensate for what the Government has not provided.

Driving a smarter approach to fleet safety

Tony Greenidge of Fleet Operations explains why a culture of support, data insight and behavioural change is key to effective fleet risk management.



Smarter fleet safety starts with smarter data

Modern driver risk management should be seen a strategic priority that achieves compliance whilst facilitating shapes safer and more efficient journeys.

When approached strategically, it can help control costs and foster a culture that protects both people and business performance.

For many organisations managing risk is a reactive process, which is only triggered after incidents occur. Meaningful and sustainable improvement calls for all fleet stakeholders to look deeper into the detail to better understand the contributory factors.

Driver behaviour is invariably the cause of most unbudgeted fleet costs, from accident repairs and downtime to end-of-contract wear and tear recharges.

Fleet Operations work closely with businesses to help establish and quantify the financial impact of driver behaviour. Setting this benchmark is the crucial first step in assessing the future return on investment that a proactive driver risk management programme typically delivers.

From blame to behavioural understanding

All too often the question "what did the driver do wrong?" is asked after an incident, rather than "why did this happen?"

Using holistic data benchmarked across drivers and the company as a whole, Fleet Operations helps businesses identify external factors, such as traffic patterns, unrealistic schedules or internal pressures, that can inadvertently promote risky behaviour.

Increasingly employers are taking a greater interest in the quality of the journey to a destination, as opposed to simply focusing on the outcome of the activity drivers are expected to achieve when they get there.

If an employee is struggling with a new IT system, they will usually receive support and training. Driving, one of the most complex and risk-laden tasks employees undertake, should be treated no differently.

Fostering a supportive culture means making "driving for work" a standard part of appraisal discussions, using these regular conversations to engage drivers on their safety and overall wellbeing.

Small steps, big gains

Driver training should be about incremental improvements, rather than radical transformation.

"By uniting data across drivers, vehicles and journeys, fleets can adopt a more accurate, evidence-based approach to driver risk analysis"

Regular engagement that triggers small changes in awareness and behaviour, supported by clear communication and timely feedback, are key.

Technology can also help drive change. Solutions such as Fleet Operations' MOVE platform can bring together licence-checking, e-learning, vehicle inspection and driver performance data to provide a single, real-time view of fleet risk.

Automated alerts and workflows flag issues as they arise, from documentation lapses to high-risk driving behaviours, triggering the right interventions at the right time.

By uniting data across drivers, vehicles and journeys, fleets can adopt a more accurate, evidence-based approach to driver risk analysis.

Establishing a culture of care

A driver risk management strategy that prioritises driver wellbeing, underpinned by data driven insights, is therefore paramount, shifting from managing risk as a statutory obligation to embedding safety and wellbeing into the culture of day-to-day working life.

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MEET THE TEAM BEHIND FLEET OPERATION

Tony Greenidge
Risk Manager,
Fleet Operations

Tony Greenidge is responsible for Fleet Operations' driver risk management programme, spearheading initiatives that help customers to improve driver safety and compliance, whilst controlling costs.

With a wealth of experience in the sector, Tony previously served as Chief Executive of IAM RoadSmart, the UK's largest road safety charity.

His extensive experience gives him a unique perspective into the impact of driver behaviour on operational efficiency, compliance and wellbeing.

Tony's remit at Fleet Operations includes system and product development, and the operational delivery of risk management services and strategy.

Using data insights and targeted training to deliver measurable results, he works closely with organisations to help identify and manage the often-hidden costs arising from driver behaviour.

"With the legal obligations of driving being work well defined, I prefer to focus on the benefits drivers can achieve by making small, incremental behavioural changes," he explains. "These are often realised through cost-effective e-learning modules that help build engagement and awareness."

Tony highlights the value of Fleet Operations' integrated model, which combines driver-level risk analysis with wider intelligence on fleet costs.

"The ability to capture and analyse every driver-influenced cost provides a complete picture of risk," he says.

"At a customer level, benchmarking and deep-dive analysis reveals trends that can help businesses to adapt working practices to improve safety and efficiency."

Tony's vision for the next 12 months is focused on harnessing technology to further underpin compliance, reduce cost and, crucially, to support drivers' physical and mental wellbeing whilst they undertake one of the most high-risk work-related activities.

How to avoid drowning in data

Find the answers to cleaner, cheaper, safer and more efficient fleet operations in the tsunami of data heading your way, while complying with a complex set of rules and regulations. *Jonathan Manning* reports

Fleet decision-makers could be forgiven for casting covetous eyes at NASA's Mission Control Centre, with its banks of screens and monitors and teams of analysts scrutinising a relentless flow of data for insights and anomalies.

Even modest-sized fleets now receive a tsunami of data from leasing companies, fuel card operators, electric vehicle charging operators, dealers and fast-fits, insurers and accident management companies, while generating and transmitting gigabytes of data daily from connected vehicles and telematics systems.

The twin dangers of data overload and decision distress are real, as the sheer volume of information threatens to overwhelm fleet managers.

Yet, this is a risk that cannot be ignored, given the legal importance of compliance with regulations covering data capture, processing, storage and security, plus the growing menace of cyberattacks.

Fleets that fail to rise to the challenge face the prospect of eye-watering fines, reputational damage and operational catastrophe.

However, if 21st century technology can feel like a curse, it can also be a blessing.

Bobbing in this ocean of data are the answers to cleaner, cheaper, safer and more efficient fleet operations.

The challenge is to cut through the cacophony, and focus on what really matters – the data that signals immediate action is required, and the data that provides evidence-based measures of progress towards longer-term objectives.

The encouraging news is that the rapid development of machine learning and artificial intelligence (AI) is helping fleet decision-makers to access, navigate, cross-reference and analyse data fields that have never previously been combined. Fleets that harness this information successfully could revolutionise their environmental performance, driver safety, vehicle uptime and residual values.

Today, however, many fleets are still juggling multiple IT and software systems, including basic spreadsheets, to manage data from multiple sources, says Neil Avent, CTO of FleetCheck.

And this tends to leave data anchored in siloes, which makes it difficult to exploit its full potential.

If HR and finance departments deserve dedicated software, then so, too, do fleets to consolidate workflows and provide a complete picture of their operations, says Avent.

To overcome barriers to securing this IT investment, he suggests fleet managers align fleet goals with wider business objectives, such as cost-saving or environmental commitments.

"Fleets also need to advocate that they are operationally important to the business and hold data that needs to be secure," he says.

"Fleets don't want to be the weak link in a company's functionality or security."

QUALITY OF DATA IS KEY

All data analysis depends on the quality of data, or as one IT director put it, "put *expletive* in, and you'll get *expletive* out".

With manual data entry more vulnerable to human error, the solution to better data integrity lies in automated inputs from APIs (application processing interfaces).

Avent advises fleets to include supplier API capabilities in tender documents, and to check whether suppliers charge for this facility.

"There's one fuel card company and a tachograph firm that charge every time we pull in their data," he adds.

APIs import data in a one-way flow from supplier platforms to fleet IT systems, but there is a difference between import and integration.

An import brings data from a single source into a system, whereas integration combines data from multiple sources.

This facilitates cross-reference verification. So, while an import might record that a vehicle has, for example, received four new tyres, an integration

could challenge this data if the same vehicle had received four new tyres the week before.

With seemingly limitless data available, fleet decision-makers have to select which information to capture, store and analyse, says Sarah Kennell, UK sales manager at AssetWorks.

"It really comes down to what supports day-to-day operations and compliance," she adds.

"So, we're talking about things like vehicle availability, planned versus reactive maintenance, fuel usage, driver performance and overall running costs."

To paraphrase George Orwell, all data is equal, but some data is more equal than others.

"If a data point doesn't help decide or prompt an action, it's probably not worth your time," says Kennell.

A good place to start is aligning data metrics with operational goals.

"As a fleet manager, are you focused on reducing fuel consumption, improving driver safety, achieving sustainability targets or optimising maintenance schedules?" asks Beverley Wise, regional director for Webfleet.

"Pinpoint the KPIs (key performance indicators) that support these objectives and work backwards to determine the data needed to inform them."

This data then needs to be displayed in a meaningful way, so it is instantly actionable.

"If a fleet team is spending hours pulling together reports or struggling to decipher dashboards, it's a sign the data display isn't working as it should," she says.

"A fleet management platform should be designed to make insights instantly usable. Whether it's vehicle health, fuel trends or delivery delays, the system should present information intuitively, allowing fleet managers can make faster, more informed decisions."

AIM FOR CLARITY

The unique individual priorities of different fleets dictate the data displays and KPIs they select for their dashboards, but the goal should be clarity, not complexity, says Wise.

"KPIs should be surfaced at-a-glance, with the ability to drill down when needed," she adds.

This highlights the need to separate trend data from urgent alerts.

A traffic light system that tracks categories such as average fuel consumption, CO_2 emissions, idling time or accident numbers on a weekly, monthly or annual basis needs to be twinned with notifications for more pressing issues, such as a vehicle experiencing undue delays in a workshop.

This requires fleets to know where to set their thresholds for acceptable performance levels.

Be too ambitious with fuel consumption figures, for instance, and the software will identify every driver as having a heavy right foot; be too modest and dashboard lights will all be green, thereby missing opportunities to improve.

"Data is not the most important thing, it's what you do with the data that matters," says Nigel Allsopp, fleet account director at BT Group.

"Having a really good set of data is only effective if you have the principles, the policies and the procedures to put around that.

"I want to know what I've got to do differently today or tomorrow. It's trying to articulate that data into an outcome for the business."

Building on this theme, Ray Verschoyle, head of transport compliance at Circet, says fleets have to capture data consistently in order to measure their progress towards their goals.

"You've got to be able to show what your plan is doing, why you're doing it and how it's working," he says.

"Everything needs to be trended. The question is then, what made the difference from last month to this month? And how can we use that information to be even better next month?"

Verschoyle emphasises the importance of creating dashboards that engage colleagues who only have a tangential interest in fleet, from project managers to boards of directors.

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*Model illustrated is Frontera Electric Ultimate 44kWh (113PS) auto with optional metallic paint. P11D price £27,780. **Official Fuel Consumption for the Vauxhall Frontera Electric Ultimate 54kWh (113PS) Extended Range: MPG (l/100km) Combined: N/A. CO_2 emissions (g/km): 0g/km. For comparison purposes only. Range achieved in real world may differ according to factors such as accessories fitted, battery condition, weather, driving style and vehicle load. †7-seat configuration available on GS and Ultimate Hybrid only. Please contact your Vauxhall Retailer for further information. Or call us on 0203 885 4562.

Some metrics may be specific to the fleet, but vehicle downtime that damages business operations and budgetary inflation that impacts the corporate P&L have company-wide relevance.

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

As more data fields enter the fleet arena, AI is helping fleet managers to investigate the information at their disposal for valuable insights, building bridges between data siloes that were formerly isolated from one another, and producing ever-richer insights.

Alphabet's AI Assistant in its fleet reporting system can access more than 800 unique data fields, enabling fleets to interrogate their data with simple prompts for deeper insights.

A fleet looking to electrify its operations, for example, might want to know all vehicles that cover fewer than 150 miles per week whose contracts are due to expire in the next six months.

Yet, a glance at the types of questions asked of the system in its first few months reveals how fleets' current management information can be disparate and difficult to access.

The most commonly asked questions query how many cars and how many LCVs are on the fleet, followed by an overview of powertrains on fleets and average CO_2 emissions.

These early enquiries are merely scratching the surface of how AI is primed to transform fleet management.

Cross-referencing engine diagnostic data with maintenance logs and breakdown incidents, for example, paves the way for truly preventative maintenance or targeted safety interventions.

"We apply machine learning AI to proactively highlight anomalies and automatically surface insights," says Aaron Jarvis, AVP EMEA at Geotab.

"This includes identifying potential battery failures by analysing voltage patterns, or spotting repeated hard braking events before they lead to costly collisions."

Importantly, the technology identifies these insights automatically, allowing fleet managers to act proactively rather than be constantly digging through data.

The security of this detailed data has become a pressing concern in the wake of several high profile cyberattacks on businesses such as Marks & Spencer, Harrods and the Co-op, in which customer profiles were stolen.

To avoid being a weak link in an organisation's cyber defences, fleet data needs to be end-to-end encrypted, and protected by internal controls and advanced security protocols to ensure only verified, authorised personnel can access sensitive information, says Jarvis.

He recommends that, when vetting suppliers, fleets should look for firms with ISO 27001 certification, the globally recognised standard for information security management systems.

"But security is not a one-time certification, it's a continuous process," says Jarvis.

"We constantly advance security and monitor for new vulnerabilities, provide regular firmware updates to our devices, and ensure all staff are trained in security best practices. As the volume and complexity of data grow, the ability to manage that data responsibly, compliantly and securely is paramount.

"It is the absolute backbone of trust between a fleet and its technology provider."

PERSONAL DATA

Fleet data can be highly personal, identifying where an employee lives, their driving licence details, and linking through to payroll information for benefit-in-kind (BIK) tax purposes.

Combine this with journey data that might reveal sensitive information, such as places of worship, as well as video from front- and driver-facing cameras, synced phone contact lists, biometric fingerprints, and telemetry on detailed driving behaviour, and vehicles have become mines of data.

Preventing these mines from becoming minefields, as data is shared with manufacturers, insurers, app developers, marketers and even law enforcement, demands compliance with a raft of rules and regulations, says Jonathan Armstrong, Partner at Punter Southall Law.

"Those operating in the car tech ecosystem must comply with multiple overlapping laws, including the UK Data Protection Act 2018, UK GDPR, EU GDPR, ePrivacy regulations, and the UK's Privacy and Electronic Communications Regulations (PECR)," he adds.

And if the alphabetti spaghetti of acronyms has your eyes glazing over, the risk of stiff financial penalties for non-compliance – fines of up to €20 million (£17.25m) or 4% of global turnover – should bring them back into focus.

Guidance from the Information Commissioner's Office is clear: "When the private use of a work vehicle is allowed, monitoring during private use will rarely be justified", while 2021 guidance from the European Data Protection Board (EDPB) on connected vehicles "reinforces that organisations must minimise data collection, avoid constant tracking where possible, and ensure all processing is grounded in a lawful basis", says Armstrong.

Under Article 32 of the GDPR, for example, organisations must implement "appropriate technical and organisational measures" to secure data, he says.

"These include encryption, access controls and regular penetration testing. Adherence to standards such as ISO/SAE is critical for assessing and managing risk," adds Armstrong.

And the crossover of data protection with e-privacy rules adds further complexity.

"Connected vehicle technology is revolutionising transport, but it comes with real and rising privacy and compliance risks," he says.

Fleets and organisations across the automotive ecosystem have to act decisively, as class actions, regulatory scrutiny and consumer awareness grow.

"With the right controls, transparency, and accountability, compliance can be achieved without stifling innovation. But those who ignore the risks do so at their peril," says Armstrong.

PRACTICAL STEPS FOR DATA COMPLIANCE

Jonathan Armstrong, partner at Punter Southall Law, outlines the measures fleets should implement to comply with data rules and regulations.

1. DPIAs – carry out a Data Protection Impact Assessment to identify and mitigate privacy risks, particularly when rolling out new technologies or those involving large-scale monitoring. This may be done alongside an AI Impact Assessment.

2. Data protection by default and by design – design all technologies with privacy in mind. Default settings should be the most privacy-protective.

3. Accountability – ensure clear internal policies and procedures are in place to support the use of these technologies.

4. Controller/processor status – identify all relevant parties as either data controllers (joint or independent) or processors for each processing activity.

5. Transparency – provide clear, accessible information about personal data use, including the identity of the controller, purposes of processing, retention periods and data sharing. Tailor this to the technology used – e.g. through sale or lease contracts, service agreements, maintenance manuals, on-board computers ('just in time' notices), stickers, or QR codes.

6. Data minimisation and retention – only collect the minimum data necessary for your purpose and retain it only as long as needed. Generally, avoid collecting real-time location data or continuous video, and use anonymised data where possible.

7. Accuracy and control – where appropriate, provide individuals with options to update or delete their data.

8. Purpose limitation – ensure data collected for a specific purpose isn't used for incompatible purposes. For example, data collected for maintenance should not be used by insurers to:

- Enrich driver profiles
- Set custom pricing
- Offer behaviour-based insurance
- Investigate accidents

9. Security – apply robust access controls and other measures to prevent data loss or unauthorised access. Safeguards should also protect individual driver data in shared vehicles.

10. Lawful processing – ensure all processing has a valid legal basis. If relying on consent, it must allow individuals to activate processing themselves and include easy withdrawal options. If relying on legitimate interests, carry out a Legitimate Interests Assessment (LIA) to balance organisational and individual interests.

11. Sensitive or criminal data – if processing special category or criminal data (e.g. location data that reveals religion or sexual orientation, or fraud tracing), ensure an additional legal condition is met.

12. Third parties and data sharing – ensure that all:

- Data sharing with other controllers must have a legal basis and be documented in a data-sharing agreement outlining responsibilities.
- Processing by third-party processors must be governed by a contract with the required terms.
- Systems should be in place to handle third-party and law enforcement data requests.

13. Data subject rights – ensure individuals can exercise their rights, including access and objection to processing based on legitimate interests. For example, dashcam footage should be provided within one month (unless exempt), and may need redaction to protect third-party data.

14. Consent – under the ePrivacy Directive/PECR, organisations accessing data via public communications services may require GDPR-standard consent. This applies regardless of the GDPR legal basis relied on.

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Green your repair strategy

Using recycled parts salvaged from other vehicles can have multiple benefits for fleets. *Andrew Ryan* reports

When it comes to reducing fleet emissions, the main emphasis is – quite rightly – focused on the switch away from petrol and diesel vehicles to fully-electric.

While the move to zero-emission vehicles will have the biggest impact on CO_2, there are other, still significant, ways which fleets can improve their sustainability.

One of these is the approach taken to vehicle repairs. "The principle of 'repair before replace' is environmentally-friendly and cheaper in most cases," says Christian Sahr, managing director of Allianz Centre for Technology.

"For example, repairing a defective LED headlight or a cracked windshield instead of replacing it with a new part reduces greenhouse gas emissions by around 99%.

"However, when replacement is unavoidable, used spare parts should be prioritised to improve environmental performance while maintaining energy-efficient mobility."

Used spare parts – also called green or recycled parts – are those removed from vehicles that have reached the end of their operational lives but are in a good enough condition for their components to be reused or remanufactured.

Multiple studies have shown fleets can make significant environmental, cost and vehicle downtime benefits by using green parts instead of new ones.

The Repair, Reuse or Replace study – a collaboration between the Vehicle Recyclers Association, Allianz, Synetiq, Oakdene Hollins and Metsims Environmental Consulting – confirmed the heavier the replacement part used, the greater the CO_2 saving, due mainly to the embodied emissions.

The report detailed a common accident repair scenario where just the front bumper, a single headlight, the bonnet and a front door are replaced with a UK-sourced green part could deliver a 177kg CO_2 saving per repair compared with using new parts delivered from China.

"Using green parts is a straightforward, measurable way for fleets to lower their carbon footprint and support a circular economy – ideal with ESG (Environmental, Social and Governance) or sustainability goals," says Lewis Woolnough, sales director at The Green Parts Specialists, which is part of the Copart group.

One example of the real-world environmental gains is Europcar Mobility Group UK, which was an early adopter of using green parts for repair, having started using salvaged parts in 2017.

In 2023 it saved 76,011kg of CO_2 through recycling salvaged vehicle parts from its rental and company car fleet.

Accident management repair company Sopp+Sopp says that circular recycling, especially when it comes to vehicle parts, is one of the most impactful environmental opportunities fleets can pursue.

"Not only does using green parts reduce the amount of waste sent to landfill, it also significantly reduces the carbon footprint of vehicle repairs, by reducing the need for new parts to be manufactured and shipped internationally," says Callum Langan, managing director of Sopp+Sopp.

"Across our own customer portfolio, Sopp+Sopp has managed to reduce parts-based carbon output by more than 79,000kg to date by utilising green parts – equivalent to six double-decker buses."

QUALITY CONTROL

However, the CO_2 savings are largely irrelevant if the part is not of sufficient quality to ensure there are no reliability or safety issues caused by their use.

ABP Club's research found this was a concern among the bodyshops it surveyed: 53% of respondents cited inconsistent standards as a key issue.

Resistance from policyholders and work providers further complicates adoption, with many citing misconceptions about recycled parts as inferior or unreliable.

Initiatives such as the Vehicle Recycling Association's certification scheme are helping to build trust in green parts, while suppliers to fleets are also committed to ensuring only top grade parts are used.

Sopp+Sopp says most of the green parts it uses are genuine OEM components, meaning they provide the same quality and compatibility you would expect from an off-the-shelf alternative.

Woolnough adds: "Our green parts come from end-of-life vehicles purchased via Copart.

"Once received, each vehicle is carefully dismantled and any usable parts are cleaned, tested and quality checked before being listed for sale.

"We stock a wide range of components including body panels, doors, lights, mirrors, bumpers, engines, gearboxes and interior trim.

"While many are non-safety critical, we also supply mechanical and structural parts that meet OEM standards.

"All parts are traceable back to their donor vehicle and come with a warranty, giving fleets confidence in what they're buying."

> "Green parts are often quicker to source than off-the-shelf components"
>
> **CALLUM LANGAN, SOPP+SOPP**

FMG, which began offering customers the choice of green parts two years ago, says its criteria for parts used is stringent.

"We work with some of the market's key players, such as GPS, PartsXchange and Synetiq, all of whom have standards in place for how parts are graded and processed," says John Keeton, operations director at FMG.

"We opt for bolt-on/bolt-off parts such as panels, mirrors and door skins, and only use Grade A parts, which typically require no more than one hour's labour and which preserve the repair guarantee.

"At FMG, we've automated the process, with each customer's green parts strategy driving their repair instructions to our network of repairers so there is no doubt around which parts are accepted by each customer.

"It's an efficient process, it's professionally managed and it's been something of a panacea for serious parts delays."

50% COST SAVINGS

Woolnough says perhaps the main advantage to fleets is cost savings. "Green parts can cost up to 50% less than new OEM parts," he adds. "For large fleets, this significantly stretches repair budgets and lowers total cost of ownership (TCO) without compromising on quality or performance."

Sopp+Sopp sources parts through suppliers such as Synetiq via its sister company Activate Parts and works with fleets to help them make direct use of green parts reclaimed from their end-of-life vehicles.

It also says the retail price of green parts is 50% to 70% lower than a new component when bought at market rate.

"Some fleets even opt to ring fence parts from their own end-of-life vehicles, essentially providing them with an evergreen source of OEM replacement components whenever they need them," says Langan.

"For fleets with branded vehicles, this can present even more considerable savings; their own green parts can be swapped in with the branding intact, removing the need for and cost of respraying and rebranding.

"Plus, green parts are often quicker to source than off-the-shelf components – helping fleets

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reduce repair cycle times and thus ancillary costs such as hire vehicles or losses resulting from vehicle downtime.

"To give an example, this year alone, Sopp+Sopp has managed to provide one of our customers in the utilities sector with an average saving of more than £1,600 per repair by increasing the use of green parts."

FMG says perhaps a larger benefit than the cost saving against recommended retail price (RRP) is where vehicles off-road have veered close to being deemed beyond economic repair.

"In some cases, where parts delays have stubbornly persisted, the sourcing of green parts has prevented a total loss decision and enabled a full and timely repair," says Keeton.

"Using Grade A parts ensures we don't create false economies; spending more than an hour or two painting and prepping a green part would veer towards this, where labour costs could eradicate the cost-saving benefits."

REDUCED VEHICLE DOWNTIME

As well as the actual cost of repairs, the costs incurred through vehicles being off the road is also significant – the use of green parts can reduce this.

Half of all bodyshops surveyed by ABP Club reported that parts shortages continue to affect their operations, with delays cited as a recurring issue.

The research found 80% of bodyshops turned to green parts when new parts were unavailable within a reasonable timeframe. Similarly, 69% opted for recycled parts when new components were no longer manufactured.

"Being able to access a verified supply of green parts instead of using only brand-new one has made a key difference to the speed of repairs by our network to optimise fleet availability," says Robert Shaw, fleet director at Europcar Mobility Group UK.

South Wales Police has also been able to cut the amount of time its vehicles are off the road by using green parts.

"The great price point of green parts and the quick turnaround of everyday items is brilliant, but the consistently quick supply of parts as specific as engines is even better," says Denzil Calford, fleet and transport manager for South Wales Police.

"With as little as three days turnround for such items, it means I can order on a Monday, begin repairs on a Wednesday and have a vehicle back on the road by Friday.

"It's fair to say using green parts has become a crucial part of maintaining the police force fleet."

Calford says that before South Wales Police began using green parts, a lack of rapidly available parts would sometimes see parts temporarily harvested from other vehicles to keep the damaged vehicles on the road. Given that many parts can be delivered next day, this is no longer necessary.

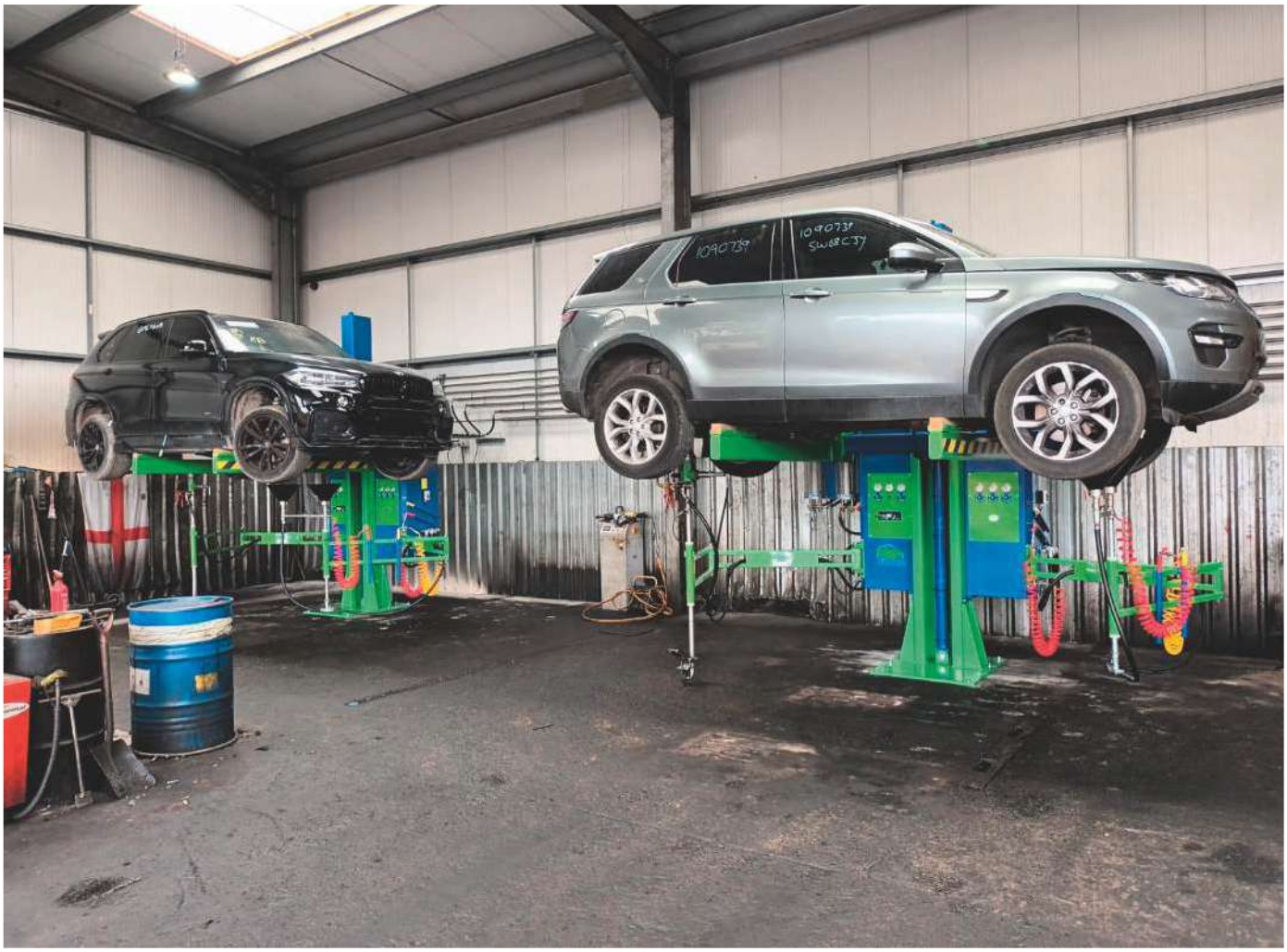
As the use of green parts has gained momentum, both the number of suppliers offering them and the stock held have grown.

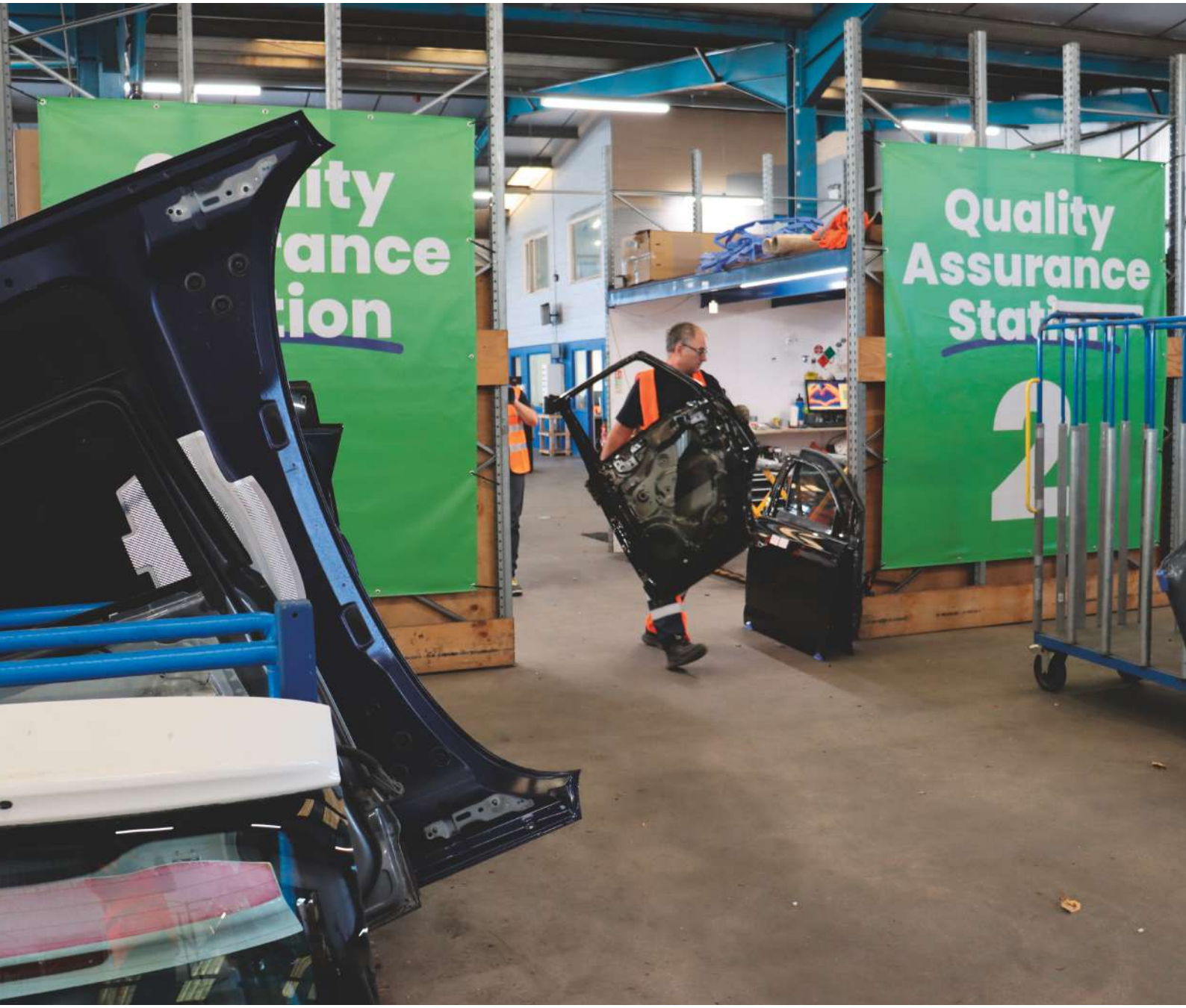
The Green Parts Specialist, for example, has around 350,000 recycled OEM parts in stock, allowing it to often deliver much faster than waiting for new or back ordered parts, says Woolnough, while FMG has a dedicated claims performance team whose focus is finding long-term solutions to challenges such as ongoing parts delays.

"They analyse claim data to identify issues and then work closely with our repair network to create solutions to get vehicles back on the road," says Keeton.

"The recent JLR shutdown has amplified the operational benefits of green parts among fleets who don't usually use them, due to the shortage of new parts in the market.

> "The recent JLR shutdown has amplified the operational benefits of green parts"
>
> **JOHN KEETON, FMG**





"We recently completed a repair on a Land Rover Discovery Sport, which had been undriveable while awaiting a front panel for four weeks.

"In our proactive search for a timely solution, we presented the customer with the option of a green part as a deviation from their usual policy.

"They accepted, the part was sourced within two hours via Parts Exchange and the vehicle was back with the customer the following day.

"The downtime benefits are clear to see, and the team proactively searches for in-demand delayed parts to help repairers prepare in advance."

FLEET USE OF GREEN PARTS GROWS

With these benefits, it is no wonder the use of green parts is increasing among UK fleets.

"It's growing fast," says Woolnough. "Fleets are facing increasing pressure to cut costs and meet environmental targets. Green parts help with both.

"We've seen strong uptake from insurance, leasing, rental, logistics and public sector fleets – many of which now include recycled parts in their approved repair policies.

"Momentum is building as more operators see the real-world benefits of cost, downtime and environmental impact."

According to the latest data by ABP Club, green parts are now a fixture in the majority of bodyshops, with 80% of respondents to its research reporting their use, a steady increase from previous years and 23 percentage points higher than five years ago.

Furthermore, 68% of bodyshops noted an uptick in their green parts usage over the past year, demonstrating a broader acceptance of recycled components as a viable alternative to new, original equipment parts.

"These practical considerations, coupled with the rising costs of repairs, have elevated the status of green parts from a stopgap to a strategic necessity in many businesses," says ABP Club.

On average, green parts account for 3.2% of total parts volume – small, but indicative of growing momentum.

Both Sopp+Sopp and FMG have also seen fleet interest grow. FMG says particular interest has been seen from LCV fleets and third-party-only insured fleets, while Sopp+Sopp says uptake as increased markedly over the past few years.

Langan adds the move has been influenced by a shortage of new OEM components in the period after the Covid pandemic, which led many fleets to adapt their parts strategies to prioritise faster turnaround.

"They're becoming particularly popular for commercial fleets who operate vast numbers of the same makes and models, thanks to the initiative of parts ring fencing and internal recycling – which enable fleets to develop their own internal parts supply."

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"IT HAS TO BE AS GOOD, IF NOT BETTER, THAN OUR ICE OFFER"

Putting drivers at the heart of its transition to an electric fleet has been key to Allianz UK's success, Bethany Thomas tells *Andrew Ryan*

Allianz UK has put the driver at the heart of its commitment to operating a 100% electric fleet by the end of 2030 – and this driver-centric approach is paying huge dividends.

The insurance giant launched its electric vehicle (EV) programme at the beginning of the year as part of its sustainability strategy, and already around one-third of its 1,100 car fleet is fully-electric, with many more zero-emission vehicles on order.

This has been made possible by the work put into developing the programme, which included forming employee panels, developing extensive vehicle choice lists, the provision of home chargers and a comprehensive communication programme.

"Fleet is a massive part of our overall operational greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions," says Bethany Thomas, head of sustainability at Allianz UK.

"At the end of 2024, it accounted for about 75% of emissions because we've got a huge population of surveyors who need to be out on the road and they require their cars for work.

"So fleet for us is an absolute must; to be quite frank, if we didn't do something, there would be no way we could achieve decarbonisation in line with what we want to do."

Allianz UK's sustainability strategy aims to reduce the UK operation's GHG emissions by 70% per employee by the end of 2030, and achieve net zero by 2050.

It has already attained a number of landmark successes: in 2024, the company achieved a 47% reduction per employee based on a 2019 benchmark, while last year it also sourced 100% renewable electricity for its buildings.

Its EV commitment also aligns with the EV100 initiative, which is a global campaign that unites companies dedicated to accelerating the transition to electric vehicles.

EMPLOYEE CONSULTATION

"In the build-up to launching the programme, we spoke extensively to our drivers and employees to make sure we could make the transition to EVs as smooth as possible," says Thomas.

"This included where adapted vehicles would be needed and then, even prior to selecting vehicles for the choice list and getting to the nitty gritty, we canvassed employee views and input from various stakeholders across the business, including our drivers. That was fed in, really from day one of starting to think about this as a programme.

"The feedback we got was that support in making the transition was really essential and taking away obstacles to help our employees make the switch was something we would want to look into doing."

Thomas says employee concerns would have matched those of the general population, such as range anxiety, the cultural shift and so on.

"Eighty-seven per cent of our drivers are tool-of-trade drivers, so use their cars for their jobs," she adds. "The key part of it was 'what impact is this going to have on me doing my job?', so our aim was to get to zero negative impact, or, hopefully, a positive impact."

> "Drivers in a lower banding actually have more vehicle choice with EVs than they previously had"

The employee panel was also used to provide feedback on what was required from vehicles offered through Allianz UK's choice list, covering considerations such as boot space for tools and equipment.

"The range of feedback was fascinating," says Thomas. "For a lot of people, their company cars are their family cars as well as a work tool, so we took their family considerations into account as well.

"We've always prided ourselves on giving employees a really wide and flexible choice of cars, so we wanted to make sure they continued to have that.

"We put a lot of emphasis on making sure that the offering would be as good, if not better, than the panel of ICE (internal combustion engine) vehicles they could previously choose from.

"In fact, drivers in a lower banding actually have more vehicle choice with EVs than they previously had with non-EVs, which demonstrates the wider access that we were keen to provide."

The employee panel members were also able to test drive EVs, as well as provide clarity on how far they drive on a daily basis to ensure the cars available all meet operational requirements.

All cars on the choice list are battery-electric and Thomas says the number of brands offered through the car scheme is in double figures, with vehicles leased on four-year replacement cycles.

This means the transition to EVs is organic, with drivers able to switch when the agreements come to a natural end, although there has been some flexibility.

"We did give the drivers whose leases were expiring just before the programme launched a three- or four-month grace period where we extended their leases a little so they could go into the new programme," says Thomas.

"Equally, we have allowed people to finish leases a little bit early where we could, but we haven't been able to give everybody the chance to terminate now and switch over.

"However, where we have been able to give grace periods, we've really tried to make it so people can proactively switch."

> "Where we have been able to give grace periods, we've really tried to make it so people can proactively switch"

PROVISION OF HOME CHARGERS

Making it as easy as possible for drivers to adopt EVs is a key theme running through Allianz UK's company car scheme, with Thomas pointing to the company's decision to provide home chargers to drivers as an example of this.

"The business case stacked up from an employee perspective for EVs because of the benefit-in-kind (BIK) tax they pay, but the numbers were there for us as well," she adds.

"Providing charge points became a bit of a no-brainer honestly, and I think people really recognise it as us going above and beyond, as well as demonstrating our commitment to our sustainability ambitions."

Allianz UK has partnered with home charge point provider Indra to supply and install the chargers, with the company working with drivers to assess their ability to have a unit installed.

"That was an addition to the process and really kicked it off: it's worked incredibly well," says Thomas.

Allianz UK has also introduced a new driver app, which is available to all company car drivers and their line managers.

This allows employees to log their charging and their business mileage to make reimbursement easier: the company pays the HMRC-approved advisory electricity rate (AER).

"I use it myself as a company car driver and it's a really slick app for getting reimbursed for business mileage," says Thomas.

"It also helps me and my team to do all of our sustainability reporting, because we get the accurate mileage data as well."

Allianz UK has also installed workplace charging at its sites with, for example, its Guildford office having around 20 charge points. This enables all employees to charge their EVs if they have them, not only company car drivers.

SUSTAINABILITY STRATEGY

Thomas joined Allianz in 2014 on its underwriting graduate scheme, and held a number of roles throughout the organisation before being appointed into the then newly-created role of head of sustainability around 18 months ago.

Her responsibility is to develop and lead the implementation of Allianz UK's sustainability strategy, which includes its entire multi-brand portfolio including Petplan and LV=.

"I think my background is probably summed up in two ways: technical underwriting – so an understanding of our customers and policies, including commercial fleet policies – and then strategy," says Thomas.

"A lot of the time I've spent supporting strategic leadership roles so, for me, sustainability is that perfect combination of strategy coming together with technical commercial underwriting awareness.

"While the topic is new, I think it's really a nice marriage of my background.

"Operations and fleet and things are just one part of our overall sustainability strategy, so that provides me with diversity to also get involved in a lot of growth on the underwriting and investment side. It also manifests itself through our claims processes, where actually there are nice connections through what we do as a business to then looking at our motor claims, repair services and use of green parts and repaired parts."

The organisation's full sustainability strategy is covered in the Allianz Net-Zero Transition Plan, with key actions set out in this document including setting quantitative emissions, strategically steering its portfolios, engaging with clients and investee companies, scaling support for renewable energy and other low-carbon technologies, restricting fossil fuel activities, and improving energy efficiency across its operations.

For motor retail insurance, for example, it aims to reduce absolute carbon emissions by 30% by 2030, with actions including increasing the share of battery-electric vehicles in its portfolio.

At Allianz UK, other sustainability achievements reached by the end of last year include a 60% reduction of energy consumption in office buildings per employee and a 48% reduction of business travel (excluding fleet) GHG emissions per employee, while it also has a 93% employee completion rate of its sustainability training modules.

The strategy also includes a roadmap of progress and milestones, and this is key to meeting Allianz UK's overall ambitions.

"Gone are the years of people making bold claims and target setting. Now, at least from my perspective, it's about getting your head down and delivering," says Thomas.

"I see it a bit like a running race. We all talk about the race to net zero; well, you don't really get cheered when you sign up, it's about making progress and delivering tangibly on the commitments and targets we've set."

ORGANISATION: Allianz UK
HEAD OF SUSTAINABILITY: Bethany Thomas
FLEET SIZE: 1,100 cars
CAR FUNDING METHOD: Contract hire
REPLACEMENT CYCLE: Four years

Cutting wider transport emissions

Allianz's efforts to cut transport emissions stretches far beyond its company car fleet.

"Fleet is a big part of our travel, but it is just one part," says Bethany Thomas.

"We're actively looking to reduce our air travel and monitor that on a monthly, very granular basis.

"We've seen really good progress in reducing air travel by pushing trains. Our property footprint is reflective of the train network in the UK, so we encourage and make it easy for our employees to travel by train.

"We also utilise digital virtual meetings and look to embrace hybrid and flexible working where we can.

"We are constantly looking for ways to provide sustainable options for employees; when an employee is booking their travel on the system they can see the CO_2 of their chosen method, which is a nice behavioural nudge as well.

"We've got cycle capabilities in most of our offices, and offer the cycle-to-work scheme. So just trying to really look at everything we can do for all the different methods that we provide."

Allianz also offers employees who are not in the company car scheme the chance to access new EVs through salary sacrifice.

Launched in 2023 in partnership with CBVC Vehicle Partnership, it includes the provision of home chargers as well as all the other benefits usually offered, such as maintenance and insurance.

"It's embedded within our company benefits and is one of the popular options that people take on," says Thomas.

Embrace vehicle technology to keep your drivers safe

Using the latest advanced driver assistance systems can help fleets significantly reduce risk. *Andrew Ryan* reports

Keeping employees safe continues to the top priority for the vast majority of fleet decision-makers, with around one-third of road crashes involving at-work drivers.

And, although human error is estimated to be a factor in 90% of collisions, organisations can make inroads into the remaining 10% – still a significant proportion – by ensuring their vehicles are as safe as possible.

As well as checks to ensure they are roadworthy, they should make the most of the latest advanced driver-assistance systems (ADAS) available on new vehicles.

"Whoever we are and however we travel, the safety of the vehicles we use is critical," says Ross Moorlock, chief executive of the Brake road safety charity.

"When we look back at the introduction of seat-belts and airbags, for example, the impact they have had on reducing road deaths and injuries is staggering.

"We know that modern vehicle technology, with automated assistance systems, has the potential to have the same transformational impact."

There is plenty of evidence to show ADAS is already having a meaningful influence.

Studies by US-based organisation Partnership for Analytics Research in Traffic Safety (PARTS) have shown that autonomous emergency braking (AEB) reduces vehicle-to-vehicle rear end collisions by 49%. It also provides impact mitigation where a collision cannot be avoided, thereby reducing the severity of injuries.

REAL-WORLD EXAMPLES

There are also numerous real-world examples of its success in the UK, including at Kelly Group.

"It's very hard to quantify that safety equipment has stopped a collision, but we have had five on-camera incidents in the past few months where we know the van – not the driver – has stopped a crash," says Dermot Coughlan, fleet director of Kelly Group.

"The in-cab camera shows that the driver's foot doesn't move, and you can see the vehicle braking.

"In one of them we had someone driving down the road and he started drifting into the middle lane coming up to a roundabout.

"However, there was already a car stopped in that lane and our vehicle just stopped; so we didn't have a collision, but we may have done.

"We could see from the internal camera the driver didn't move his foot and when we spoke to him later he said he hadn't seen the car, so we know the safety equipment is definitely helping."

RECOGNITION OF ADAS IMPACT

Coughlan is not alone among fleet decision-makers in recognising the benefits ADAS systems can bring.

Research of 200 fleet managers carried out by Webfleet earlier this year found 61% of van operators believe vehicle OEM safety features have been effective in preventing collisions in their fleets.

Its UK Fleet Safety report also found 92% agree that autonomous driving safety features will have a significant impact on their fleet safety over the next decade, with 38% seeing driver fatigue monitoring technology as the system which will have the biggest impact in the next 10 years.

Further to this, a survey commissioned by Thatcham Research and conducted by the Centre for Economics and Business Research found 82% of UK drivers feel safer thanks to ADAS, with 55% saying the technology helped to prevent a collision in the past year.

"These findings validate the critical importance of ADAS technology in modern vehicle safety," says Yousif Al-Ani, principal ADAS engineer at Thatcham Research.

"Crash avoidance is the future of automotive safety. Modern vehicles are very good at protecting occupants in the event of a collision through passive safety features, such as airbags and crumple zones, but these have limited benefit to vulnerable road users.

"With more than half of drivers reporting that these systems have actively prevented collisions, it reinforces what we see in or own testing: ADAS is reducing collisions and improving road safety, despite early implementation challenges leading to driver dissatisfaction."

Last year, the EU introduced the second phase of its General Safety Regulation 2 (GSR2), which mandates the fitment of a number of ADAS technologies on all new vehicles, including intelligent speed assist (ISA), advanced driver distraction warning (ADDW), emergency lane-keeping system (ELKS) and AEB.

While these systems are already widely fitted on modern vehicles, GSR2 introduces minimum performance standards for each, ensuring that all vehicle manufacturers are not only fitting this safety technology, but ensuring that it performs its function well and operates consistently.

Although it applies only to EU countries – as

well as Northern Ireland – Thatcham Research says all volume cars sold in the UK will adhere to the regulation because manufacturers will not produce UK-specific ADAS software-disabling features.

CALL FOR CHANGE TO THE LAW

To cement their inclusion, however, Brake is calling for the technology to be mandated for all new vehicles sold in the UK in line with GSR2, which, it says, could prevent more than 1,700 deaths and 15,000 serious injuries over a 16-year period if the package of measures were fully implemented.

With the backing of more than 45 other road safety organisations and individuals, Brake has sent a letter to Secretary of State for Transport Heidi Alexander asking her to act with urgency to deliver a new strategic Road Safety Framework and adopt GSR2.

"The latest government casualty data, revealing that 59% of road deaths in 2024 involved speed, is a case in point," says Moorlock.

"Safety features such as intelligent speed assistance and automated emergency braking can play a crucial role in preventing crashes and reducing the risk of death and serious injury on our roads, but only if we keep them switched on."

Although GSR2 requires all safety features to be active each time a vehicle is started, they can be switched off afterwards; research by Brake found more than a third of respondents (35%) admitted to having turned off at least one.

This reflects the criticism often levelled at the technologies, with drivers saying it unpleasantly interferes with the driving experience, either through over-intrusive interventions or over-enthusiastic beeping.

"Striking a balance between safety, performance and integration to create systems that co-operate with drivers is a real challenge for manufacturers," says Al-Ani.

Some fleets also have concerns over the distractions potentially caused by the multiple systems and alerts.

"We definitely need the safety technology, but I think having too much of it is causing a bigger issue as well," says Aaron Powell, fleet and logistics director at Speedy Hire.

"I think it can have a negative effect. Because you've got four or five cameras in the car, you've got buzzers going off left, right and centre.

"All these things are going on around you while you're trying to concentrate on driving.

"I think collisions, especially in company cars, have gone up because we're becoming lazy drivers.

"Because we're expecting the technology to do the work for us, when something does happen, we're quite slow to react because our brains are switching off."

To counter this and to ensure organisations get the most impact from the technology, fleet decision-makers should provide familiarisation training to drivers to ensure they know what safety equipment their vehicle has, what it does and how to best use it, says RoSPA (Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents).

FAMILIARISATION TRAINING

"Driver training should include the safe use of any technology provided with the vehicle," it says.

"Training should include the risk of relying too much on vehicle technology, and ensure that drivers understand they are responsible for remaining alert and making safe decisions."

RoSPA says that organisations should ensure drivers read the vehicle handbook and understand the features and technology in the vehicle.

Managers should receive similar tuition, as well as training on how to manage their drivers, including the importance of good, two-way communication and consultation, it adds.

A recent survey of 300 UK drivers by Venson Automotive Solutions found only 42% of respondents received instruction on how to use safety systems or were warned about the risks of switching them off when being handed their new vehicles.

Engineering consultants Hoare Lea operates from offices throughout the UK. It includes the use of ADAS features in its driver handbook. "We request drivers don't turn off the ADAS, such as lane-assist, unless it's causing them a distraction or potentially going to cause them a problem," says its senior fleet coordinator Sarah Wellstead.

"With some vehicles, the lane-assist is a little bit too keen and certainly where I live, there are lots of rural lanes and you might need to navigate around a pothole, for example.

"It may be that it's actually better in that scenario to turn the lane-keeping assist off, but we advise when drivers get their new cars to really familiarise themselves with them.

"Then, before they make any journey, to make sure that they've got their entertainment sorted, that they've got their sat-nav route plugged in, and that they've got their heating and cooling set so they don't touch anything other than the steering wheel while driving."

INSIGHT AND FEEDBACK

As well as vehicle OEM safety features, fleets are increasingly using 'add-on' technologies such as telematics and dashcams to improve safety.

Telematics collects data from vehicles on how

IMPORTANCE OF VEHICLE CHECKS

While the technology included in a vehicle has a vital role in improving road safety, it is also important drivers carry out regular walkaround checks to ensure a vehicle is safe and roadworthy.

These checks should include tyres, windscreen washers and wipers, registration plates and dashboard warning lights.

"The foundation of any good vehicle roadworthiness policy is to ensure drivers are carrying out competent pre-use checks and reporting any issues, which the fleet manager is then recording, either in writing or using one of the many apps available," says Simon Turner, engagement manager at Driving for Better Business.

As drivers may be tempted to skip the checks to save time, it is important fleet managers ensure they are carried out. Bromford housing association, for example, does not give its reactive repair drivers their jobs each morning until after they have done their safety checks.

Vehicle checks have been traditionally recorded on paper forms, but it is increasingly becoming common for fleets to use apps instead.

These ensure drivers have to record all required data to submit the check, and also provide photos if needed and evidence that they have been carried out.

Safety charity Tyresafe stresses the importance of focusing on tyres in these checks. "Tyre safety is not just about maintenance; it's about responsibility," says Stuart Lovatt, chair of Tyresafe. "Every under-inflated or worn tyre adds to a business's costs, carbon footprint and legal exposure."

Tyresafe recommends drivers should check that tyres and wheels are secure, that the tread depth complies with the minimum level set out in an organisation's fleet policy, that the tyres are correctly inflated and there is no damage.

they are being driven and this can be analysed to identify areas which increase risk such as speeding and harsh acceleration, cornering and braking, allowing fleet managers to introduce training to address those issues.

Some systems use an in-cab traffic light system to provide instant feedback to a driver: 97% of respondents to Webfleet's research said real-time, in-cab driver behaviour feedback plays an important role in their road safety strategies.

Driver-facing cameras are also becoming increasingly popular.

Many of these use artificial intelligence (AI) to deliver proactive support that helps drivers self-correct risky habits by alerting the driver and fleet manager to certain behaviours, such as using a mobile phone or not wearing a seatbelt.

For example, in a trial of its Go Focus Plus dual-facing dashcam, Geotab says the voice coaching functionality helped reduced tailgating by 90% and phone use by 95%.

> "Collisions, especially in company cars, have gone up because we're becoming lazy drivers"
>
> **AARON POWELL, SPEEDY HIRE**

Kelly Group introduced AI-powered driver-facing cameras to tackle driver distraction, which is "our biggest concern and our biggest reason for having collisions", says Coughlan.

The company has set its system up to provide notifications when an incident has been detected, such as not using a seatbelt, smoking, use of mobile phones or fatigue.

"We only look at the footage when the system sends us a notification," says Coughlan. "We use it purely for safety.

"When we're sitting down with the ops guys, the board or whoever we need to talk to, we explain that the vans are work tools and we need to make these tools as safe as possible for whoever is driving them – and not hurt anybody else while they're at it."

Optimise your fleet with a robust SMR strategy

A successful service, maintenance and repair strategy is vital to minimise costs and vehicle downtime while maximising fleet efficiency. *Ben Rooth* reports

A robust service, maintenance and repair (SMR) strategy is at the heart of any efficient and effective fleet operation.

It minimises costs, avoids expensive and inconvenient vehicle off-road (VOR) time, and improves safety and reliability.

There are many aspects to a putting together a successful strategy – from choosing whether to manage SMR yourself to ensuring there is an easily accessible network of approved garages – and it all begins with having a comprehensive understanding of your fleet.

This includes knowing its exact composition, the way it is utilised and the daily operational challenges faced by drivers.

Fleet Assist's managing director Vincent St Claire says: "In honesty, there are so many aspects to a successful SMR strategy – ranging from building and managing a garage network you wish to use that's fit for purpose to managing compliance.

"To summarise, the key considerations to building a successful SMR strategy are balancing cost, uptime, compliance and operational efficiency, while leveraging data and predictive maintenance coupled with proactive supply chain relationship management.

"To my mind this is not an easy task and, unless you have scale and are committed to dedicating resource to this, it should be entrusted to a fleet management or leasing company to support you."

The majority of fleets do use fleet management or leasing companies to look after their SMR – the 2025 FN50 report shows an average proportion of around two-thirds (63%) of cars funded through the UK's largest leasing companies have maintenance included in their agreements, a similar level for the past four years.

This proportion falls slightly to 60% for vans.

FIXED PRICE OR PAY-AS-YOU-GO?

One of the major decisions a fleet needs to take – as well as who is managing SMR – is whether to opt for a fixed price deal or a pay-as-you-go solution.

When it comes to taking on a fixed price SMR plan or opting for PAYG instead, the right approach will depend entirely on each fleet's circumstances and risk profile: there are pros and cons for each.

"With fixed cost, you get exactly that – the peace of mind that you will pay the same amount each month irrespective of what work is needed on each vehicle," says Lee Brown, managing director at Grosvenor.

"However, it is fully understood that, as with any fixed cost model, the leasing or fleet management provider has to build in an element of buffer. In other words, some vehicles will incur very little cost while others may go over budget.

"With PAYG, you are taking that risk yourself. If you choose a PAYG model, our advice would be to have your fleet managed by a professional fleet management specialist so every cost is scrutinised and challenged by an experienced technician."

Christopher Caddick, head of business development at JCT600 Vehicle Leasing Solutions (VLS), adds that the primary consideration is your business's appetite for budgetary certainty versus flexibility.

"Fixed-price arrangements offer predictability, which is invaluable for organisations requiring tight budget control," he adds.

"However, PAYG models can deliver increased control and flexibility – both in location and decision-making.

"But fleet diversity is a factor – the more varied your fleet composition, the greater the operational complexity and required knowledge.

"However, this diversity also supports risk mitigation, as poor performing models or increased spend have less of an impact."

Scale plays a decisive role. "Larger fleets may have sufficient volume to absorb risk variations under PAYG, while smaller operations might find a fixed cost offers more security," says Caddick.


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Rory Mackinnon, commercial director at Holman, is a firm advocate of PAYG. He says: "We've been delivering PAYG solutions in the UK for more than 35 years and have seen the long-term benefits first-hand. PAYG gives a business flexibility by adapting to actual vehicle usage on fleet, rather than sticking to pre-ordained packages. This avoids the risk of over-paying for unused services.

"Secondly, it gives a business transparency and control because costs are visible and manageable, with no hidden premiums.

"Our longevity in the market and consistent cost savings for clients speak volumes.

"While fixed-price models offer budget certainty, they can lack adaptability.

"At Holman, we help clients choose the model that best fits their operational and financial needs, often finding that PAYG delivers superior value over time."

Miles Tetlow, head of service management at Alphabet (GB) asserts that building SMR into the leasing costs enables fleets to benefit from "budgeted, predictable running costs, along with the advantages of a fleet provider's service level agreements (SLAs) – whether through the main dealer or an independent".

He maintains this partnership between the fleet provider and the service provider can also result in any SMR issues getting remedied more quickly.

"While each fleet's business requirement and size are different, lead-time, customer satisfaction and cost-management are all commonplace in the decision-making process," adds Tetlow.

"Customers are rightly cost-conscious, so it's important for them to understand the whole in-life cost of maintaining the vehicle allowing them to budget accordingly.

"Context and transparency are important, whether you're managing 10 vehicles or 1,000."

EVs SHIFT THE SMR GOALPOSTS

Electric vehicles (EVs) fundamentally shift the SMR equation. While maintenance, generally, occurs less frequently, issues are typically more complex and consequential when they do arise.

> "Context and transparency are important, whether you're managing 10 vehicles or 1,000"
>
> **MILES TETLOW, ALPHABET (GB)**

Fleet decision-makers need to prepare for potentially higher costs, extended downtime and more intensive engagement with manufacturers and warranty providers.

"Understanding warranty programmes becomes paramount with EVs," says Caddick.

"Fleet managers must thoroughly comprehend what's covered, the terms and conditions and, crucially, how manufacturer warranty provisions align with their operational requirements.

"Misalignment can leave significant gaps in protection or create administrative burden that negates some of the maintenance advantages EVs can offer.

"The support infrastructure for EVs, while improving, is also materially different.

"Fleet managers need to map out coverage availability – both geographically and in terms of specialist capability – to ensure their vehicles can be maintained effectively wherever they operate.

"This is particularly important as the pool of technicians qualified to work on high-voltage systems remains more limited than for conventional vehicles, potentially impacting turnaround times and service accessibility."

Alex Crane-Robinson, regional director UK & Ireland at Webfleet, says the increasing prevalence of EVs in fleets places an even greater emphasis on the need for accurate data to be placed at the heart of SMR strategies.

"When vehicle data, defect reporting and service schedules come together through a single digital platform, managers gain end-to-end visibility over fleet health, cost and compliance," he adds.

"This makes it easier to plan maintenance efficiently, reduce downtime and maintain high safety standards.

"With the advent of EVs, this data becomes even more vital. Insights into battery health, charging cycles and regenerative braking patterns allow managers to better tailor maintenance.

"Harnessing vehicle intelligence in this way enables fleets to optimise total cost of ownership (TCO) and ensure drivers stay safe and supported on the road."

HOW DO TYRES FIT INTO SMR STRATEGIES?

According to Bridgestone's commercial business director David Almazan, tyres are one of the "most critical and often underestimated" components of fleet SMR strategies.

"Fleet managers should look beyond the purchase price to TCO, considering performance, durability, fuel efficiency and environmental impact," he says.

"It's essential to make regular inspections and partner with a trusted supplier who can provide a consistent service."

The first decision to be made is whether a fixed-price or pay-on-use approach to tyres better suits a fleet's operational model and appetite for risk.

"Tyres are a critical component of both safety and cost management and they should be incorporated into the broader SMR strategy to ensure performance, safety and cost efficiency," says Mackinnon.

"Tyres must be fit for purpose, matching both vehicle type and the usage profile, with a focus on durability, fuel efficiency and replacement intervals, not just up-front costs."

Availability and accessibility are also critical operational factors. Fleet managers need to evaluate the practical implications of different supply models – from fixed-location fitting to mobile services and emergency replacement capabilities.

"Each option carries different cost and convenience trade-offs that should align with your operational priorities," says Caddick.

"For fleets with specific operational demands, or with geographic challenges, spare tyre availability becomes important – both in vehicle, if available, and potentially managing additional spares.

"The choice between like-for-like replacements, alternative brands or budget options requires careful evaluation beyond simple cost comparison.

"Similarly, the use of cross-climate or winter tyres – and the associated logistics of seasonal swapping and storage – should be considered in the context of your fleet profile and operating environment."

Tetlow says the complexity of tyres and wide range of sizes now available mean that forward planning is required regardless of how they're incorporated into SMR strategies.

"This will ensure we have the right tyres in the right place at the right time," he adds.

"Taking a proactive approach can be the difference between a vehicle being off the road or a delayed changeover.

"Therefore, it's always best to pre-book in line with the expected lifecycle of the tyre, which is something that should be built into the maintenance of the vehicle."

PREDICTIVE MAINTENANCE – THE FUTURE OF SMR?

Recent technological developments and trends show that predictive maintenance will become increasingly central to competitive SMR strategies.

The principle of this is straightforward – enhanced data capabilities directly enable better predictability which, in turn, aims to facilitate improved outcomes. This translates into increased uptime and reduced costly downtime.

> "It's essential to make regular (tyre) inspections and partner with a trusted supplier"
>
> **DAVID ALMAZAN, BRIDGESTONE**

"Through the advent of connected vehicle technologies, it's becoming much easier to know when a vehicle requires a service," says Tetlow.

"As more vehicle information becomes available, it means we can notify fleet managers and their drivers when a vehicle requires a service to remove any guesswork.

"Customers are issued with an invitation to book online – it's that easy. The customer also has the option to change the service date online or via a customer support agent if the original service date is not convenient."

Tetlow adds that 90% of its Alphabet Rent fleet cars now have in-built connectivity, while the commercial vehicles it pilots are fast catching up.

"The advancement in telecommunications and informatics will continue to be a game-changer in the customer journey and the service experience they receive, particularly relating to service bookings," he says.

"For example, in some cases where the data is available, we will know if the brake pads are 80% worn and tailor the booking accordingly.

"This all plays into making the service and maintenance journey as easy and seamless as possible."

St Claire says predictive maintenance is ushering in far "greater connectivity between the car and the garage" which, in turn, is enabling "proper proactive scheduling".

"The output of this will require a mindset change," he adds. "For example, long lead times are currently being caused by workshop congestion, but imagine if the industry gets to a position of proactive service and MOT scheduling. Four- to six-week lead times would then signal SMR excellence.

"If you then extrapolate the benefits further this will reduce vehicle failures, allow workshops to better forward plan and even potentially open the door to smart delivery of parts in advance of the work being undertaken. It's a win-win for everyone."

Caddick agrees the business case for predictive maintenance has strengthened as technology has become more accessible and data analytics more sophisticated.

"Rather than reactive maintenance that addresses failures after they occur or time-based preventative maintenance that may be unnecessarily cautious, predictive approaches enable intervention at the optimal moment," he adds.

"This prevents failures while maximising vehicle use. However, successful implementation still returns to core fundamentals: understanding your fleet composition, usage patterns and operational predictability.

"Predictive maintenance delivers the greatest value where you have good baseline data, consistent operational patterns and the organisational and partnership capability to act on insights generated. Without these, even sophisticated predictive tools will struggle to deliver their full potential."

Samsara customers prevent 250,000 accidents with real-time AI insights

With modern artificial intelligence-powered tools, fleet operators can spot problems before they happen, helping to save lives and cut costs

Samsara customers prevented 250,000 accidents in the year to January 2025, thanks to the company's AI-powered safety platform and a growing culture of proactive coaching among operators.

This sobering data – which spans all the regions where Samsara operates, including the UK and Ireland – highlights how real-time driver alerts and video-based insights are helping fleets take preventative action before incidents occur.

Pivotal to fleet safety are AI dashcams that don't just record what happens on the roads but intervene in real-time to detect drowsiness, driver distraction, phone use and seatbelt non-compliance.

And, when technology is coupled with a programme of targeted coaching and positive reinforcement, it can combine to create a new level of safety awareness.

Everyone benefits from smarter safety systems

One example is Vp Brandon Hire Station, which operates 500 vehicles across 125 locations in the UK. They're also the winner of Samsara's 2025 Connected Operations Award for Safest Operator.

Facing high accident costs and limited visibility into driver behaviour, they implemented Samsara AI Dash Cams, Vehicle Telematics and the Driver App, transforming their safety programme and moving from a reactive to a proactive approach backed by data.

As a result, they saw a 93% cut in mobile phone usage while driving, an 88% reduction in speeding incidents, a 63% fall in harsh driving events and a 10-point improvement in average driver safety score (83 to 93) and all within eight months. And thanks to AI detection and personalised driver coaching, the company saw a 78% reduction in inattentive driving and a 90% drop in following distance violations.

"Samsara has totally transformed the way in which occupational road risk is managed within our business," said Antony Draper, Director of HSEQ, Vp Brandon Hire Station.

He added: "The difference between this system and the previous one is night and day. We wanted the absolute truth about our safety performance. When you know where you stand, you can achieve more tangible, long-term benefits."

Good safety is good business

Not only did the investment in Samsara boost safety, it also made a big impact on the bottom line. As a result, third-party accident costs plummeted from £522,000 in 2023 to £330,000 in 2024, a 40% reduction that saved Vp Brandon Hire Station £192,000 in just one year.

The overall fall in safety events has played a key role in minimising incidents and associated costs.

"What we've learned is that when you have trusted data, you can make confident decisions," said Draper. "Samsara is the enabling tool that highlights inefficiencies, areas of focus, and priorities moving forward. It's transformed how we approach safety across our entire operation."

By combining intelligent technology with a structured coaching culture, fleet operators can shift from reactive damage control to proactive risk prevention. To find out more, contact Samsara on 020 3965 2700 or email us at: sales-uk@samsara.com. You can also see more at our website: www.samsara.com/uk

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FROM BBC TO BVRLA: TOBY POSTON'S EVOLUTION FROM JOURNALIST TO CEO

As he nears his one-year anniversary, Toby Poston outlines his strategy to champion the industry and boost capabilities to meet members' needs. Stephen Briers reports

Once the fleet sector grips you, you rarely escape. Former BBC journalist-cum-PR Toby Poston initially saw his appointment at the British Vehicle Rental and Leasing Association (BVRLA) as merely another step on his media journey. That was 17 years ago.

In January, he was promoted to chief executive at the fleet industry heavyweight, whose 1,000-plus members manage a combined fleet of 4.3 million cars, vans and trucks – equating to one-in-10 cars, one-in-six vans and one-in-six trucks on UK roads.

Poston (pictured above alongside BVRLA chair Lakshmi Moorthy, MD at Arval UK) takes the reins at one of the most tumultuous times in fleet history as the sector transitions wholesale to a new powertrain technology, welcomes a torrent of new market entrants, most notably from China, faces up to a regulatory backlash on retail motor finance and an FCA redress consultation, and battles against used market indifference to electric technology.

That he takes the reins at all is testament to a meteoric rise through the association ranks, from head of PR to director of corporate affairs and now to the top job.

Poston assumes an extensive to-do list incorporating used EV campaigns, electric van lobbying and rebuilding relationships with manufacturers, underpinned by a relentless getting-to-know-you tour of members.

By his own admission, he doesn't have the corporate experience of predecessors; he's not run a big organisation or graduated with a degree in accountancy. Was he surprised, therefore, to get the nod?

"Over the 17 years I've been here, we've had to deal with so much change and that has been about analysing and researching it, to put it into perspective for the diverse membership while, at the same time, making sure that we're representing the sector to the politicians, to the media, to other stakeholders," Poston says.

"So, yes, I guess I had a relevant grounding, and the circumstances helped ensure that my particular skill set was useful."

TRANSFERABLE SKILLS FROM JOURNALISM

It wasn't his intention to climb the career ladder at the BVRLA, although his years as a business journalist brought obvious transferable skills in communications and assimilating and disseminating information, as well as high level understanding of economics and politics (the latter, arguably, a fundamental skill at any trade association).

And he made a considerable impact, amplifying the BVRLA's voice with both trade and national media, in print and broadcast.

> The BVRLA invested in me, and I went on the course with people my age who were running businesses; I thought 'if they can do it, why can't I?'

A move into public affairs followed, further exploiting those core skills only now with ministers as well as journalists, as the BVRLA strengthened its involvement in lobbying.

"I'm proud of what I've done, whether it's growing the policy and public affairs function, our research function, or our events," Poston says.

His epiphany came on a management training course.

"The BVRLA invested in me, and I went on the course with people my age who were running businesses; I thought 'if they can do it, why can't I?" he says.

"It opened my eyes to the fact that I had the right attitude, the right approach and the potential. At that point, I started to think differently about my career options."

Nine months into his new position, using the BVRLA's own penchant for GAR (green-amber-red) scorecards, how does he rate his performance?

"I'd say it's a green. So far, I've delivered where we need to in terms of communicating more with members and leading from the front," Poston says.

"I want to make us a more responsive organisation to members, but also ensure that the BVRLA is a healthy, energetic place to work."

THE RIGHT PEOPLE, SKILLS, SYSTEMS AND PROCESSES

His promise during the interview process was to grow the BVRLA's capabilities and capital by ensuring it has the right people, skills, systems and processes that support the sector and respond to members' needs, as well as ensuring it is sustainably funded for the future.

More specifically, he wants to continue being a champion for the industry by ensuring its voice is heard in the right areas with government, regulators, other stakeholders and the media.

"We also need to be prepared for future challenges because they aren't going to stop coming," he adds.

"And it's important that we continue to uphold the best standards and even raise them where possible."

With such a broad and contrasting membership, from global corporates such as Ayvens, Arval and Athlon, to small family-owned leasing companies, as well as rental firms, brokers and fleet management companies, the BVRLA appears to be juggling myriad viewpoints and considerations, presenting a tricky task to gain unified consensus on strategic direction and key priorities.

Does Poston see it that way?

"At the highest level you can (gain consensus) and that's where our vision and mission come in, to unite industry and government in delivering zero emission motoring that is sustainable and affordable," he replies. "That is something that everyone in the industry can get behind."

The sector committee structure also plays a fundamental role, as do the ad hoc working groups which give the association its mandates.

A DIVERSE MEMBERSHIP

Nevertheless, Poston concedes that the membership has become increasingly diverse, and not just in size of individual operations. There are the car, van or truck specialists (and those funding a mix of all three), the B2B funders and the regulated B2C lenders, and asset owners versus non-asset owners.

"We have big corporate businesses, but the majority of our members are SMEs. That's a very different profile in terms of what they value and what they want, and how you communicate," he says.

"But the main challenge is the value proposition and how we, as an association, speak to people."

It explains his recent one-man roadshow, highlighted by a flurry of LinkedIn posts this year from member offices across the country, particularly smaller companies. Their concerns are less about lobbying and more about how the association can help to ease their day-to-day lives on issues including handling penalty charge notices and cost of insurance.

Their feedback could result in the BVRLA launching new services, such as training and support; it's one of the areas under consideration as it consults on its future business plan.

The plan, due for launch lby year-end and enacted from 2026, will put in place a strategy that ensures the BVRLA truly represents the whole sector. It will also divert more investment to lobbying and regulatory support.

The immediate priority is to stem losses in membership from the smaller companies. Some are out of its control; for example, brokers going out of business due to regulatory pressures or the challenges of decarbonisation for local rental companies.

"But it may also be – and we definitely get some evidence of that in our data – that it's because people don't see enough value in what the BVRLA does for them," says Poston, candidly. "We have to get to grips with that if we claim to represent the whole sector."

He adds: "The other area where we need to invest more is in our lobbying and regulatory support. We have been working at full capacity reacting to Government and dealing with all the consultations."

And the pressures are only going to intensify. The BVRLA has mapped out some key events over the next two-to-three years, which include the ZEV Mandate review, due for completion by Q1 2027, the future of taxation (benefit-in-kind, VED pricing, fuel duty, capital allowances) and the new pence-per-mile EV/PHEV charges, ESG, Consumer Credit Act and digital markets reform.

"It's an absolute continuous wave, a suffocating wave of regulation and legislative change," Poston says.

> We've been banging this drum for three years to highlight what a fundamental pillar of the industry the used market is

NUMEROUS SUCCESSES FROM LOBBYING AND CAMPAIGNS

While the case for investment in skills and resource is readily accepted by his board, Poston can underpin the argument by demonstrating the association's numerous recent successes from lobbying and campaigns.

The BVRLA has developed a model based on market and technical research to build evidence, supported by events and media engagement which can be applied to multiple situations.

"It's very effective. We can look at our track record of policy wins or where stuff hasn't happened and we know it works."

The ability to present a united front with a single voice has also strengthened the BVRLA's position with Government ministers, which is where its blossoming relationship with the Association of Fleet Professionals (AFP) is paying divided for both bodies.

"It's in the best state it's ever been. We catch up with them regularly," Poston says.

"Their strategy is much clearer, and their membership has grown. They're getting better engagement from their members, and they've done wonders in terms of getting the right people supporting in the right areas with the right expertise.

"And we have the relationship where we can be frank with each other and have a mutual respect where we do occasionally agree not to agree."

Relationships elsewhere still need a bit of attention, but they form part of Poston's longer-term themes – albeit 'longer-term' doesn't look much beyond three years.

"Anyone who claims to be able to look further than that is kidding themselves," he states.

He wants to replicate the BVRLA's strong relationship with the Department for Transport (DfT) across other Government departments, including Department for Business and Trade, and Department for Energy Security and Net Zero, which also have a crucial role to play in helping to resolve some major fleet sector challenges.

INDUSTRY CHAMPIONS

But action also needs to take place at a more local level.

"When I look at the large trade associations that have consistent long term success over decades, they're really good at mobilising MPs," Poston says. "I want to grow our industry champions, those members who get in touch with their constituency MPs and invite them for visits. We've started with a couple of dozen over the past 18 months, but that's the thing we really want to invest in and grow because MPs feel different about their constituency than just any old business that's coming to them. They can be really good allies."

One of his concerns is the profile and influence of the DfT within a Government where money is short. He points to the Electric Car Grant, which committed funds of £650m (plus an additional £1.3bn in the recent Budget), as an example of "a missed opportunity".

He explains: "We've been banging this drum for three years to highlight what a fundamental pillar of the industry the used market is. The lights are flashing red and that's eroding the risk appetite of some big players who could stop funding them or big fleets can stop buying them."

The situation is exacerbated by "mixed signals" from an industry talking up the growth in used electric vehicle sales and rising enquiries.

"I completely understand why they're giving that message – you need to build confidence," Poston says.

"But they're not telling the other part of the message, which is while demand for used BEVs is growing, supply is growing much faster.

"So you've still got a fire sale in that sector, and prices may not be falling as much, but they're still falling year-on-year with billions of pounds being lost."

IMPROVING RELATIONSHIPS WITH MANUFACTURERS

Another priority is to work more closely with the motor industry, particularly the manufacturers themselves, where relationships have "fallen away".

"We used to have an OEM working group. We used to have more of them getting involved – coming to our events, doing our training and it's just dropped away," he says.

"I see them as an absolutely vital part of our sector – we have manufacturer captives in membership. There's an ongoing invitation for them to attend our operational working groups, whether it's our RV Committee or our vehicle fleet management one.

"We know they want to have direct contact with fleets, but there are times when it's better to work for the sector as a whole.

"It doesn't stop us doing our job but it's a bit of a gap that our members have highlighted could be improved."

The final item on his wish list is stability – which could be viewed as something of a pipedream given all the forthcoming challenges the BVRLA has itself already highlighted.

"Every week you're seeing another story about net zero plans being unsustainable or what's happening in other countries or in the in the EU," Poston says.

"We don't want them changing the BIK regime, although we would like them to change the expensive car supplement and the increasing VED that's particularly impacted rental."

He adds: "But really, we're asking Government to keep as much stability and certainty as it can."

Telematics makes a difference on so many levels

How Lanes Group boosted driver engagement and improved safety scores by 72% in eight months

Lanes Group is the UK's largest provider of wastewater solutions. With 4,000 vehicles nationwide maintaining critical drainage infrastructure, it's essential the company can ensure its drivers operate safely and efficiently. But disparate systems and a lack of visibility into driver performance and vehicle health made it difficult to identify risk areas, ensure compliance and provide consistent service nationwide.

With existing vehicle tracking systems offering little insight into driver behaviour behind the wheel, Lanes Group was unable to systematically coach its drivers. Risky behaviours remained unmitigated and good practice went unrewarded.

The end result? Driver safety scores remained stagnant and poor on-road habits worsened vehicle wear and tear – bumping up operating costs.

92%
decrease in mobile phone usage in seven months

180%
increase in number of drivers with a safety score of 90 or above in eight months

A full view of risk to empower safer habits

Lanes turned to the Samsara Connected Operations Cloud to gain full visibility and insights into its fleet operations with AI Dash Cams, Vehicle Gateways and Digital Workflows.

"With Samsara, everything is in one place, as opposed to across multiple platforms, which was a problem we had faced in the past," said Amber Kirkby, Fleet Systems Team Leader at Lanes Group.

"It makes things easier knowing everything is stored on one standardised system."

The dual-facing AI dashcams capture footage during safety events such as harsh braking or distracted driving, and upload it automatically to a centralised inbox for review – making paper-based processes a thing of the past. This new digital model allows Lanes to access key data far more easily, and better pinpoint driver safety challenges such as speeding, mobile phone use and vehicle camera obstruction.

Actually changing these behaviours, however, required strategic change management in order to win over drivers and break bad habits.

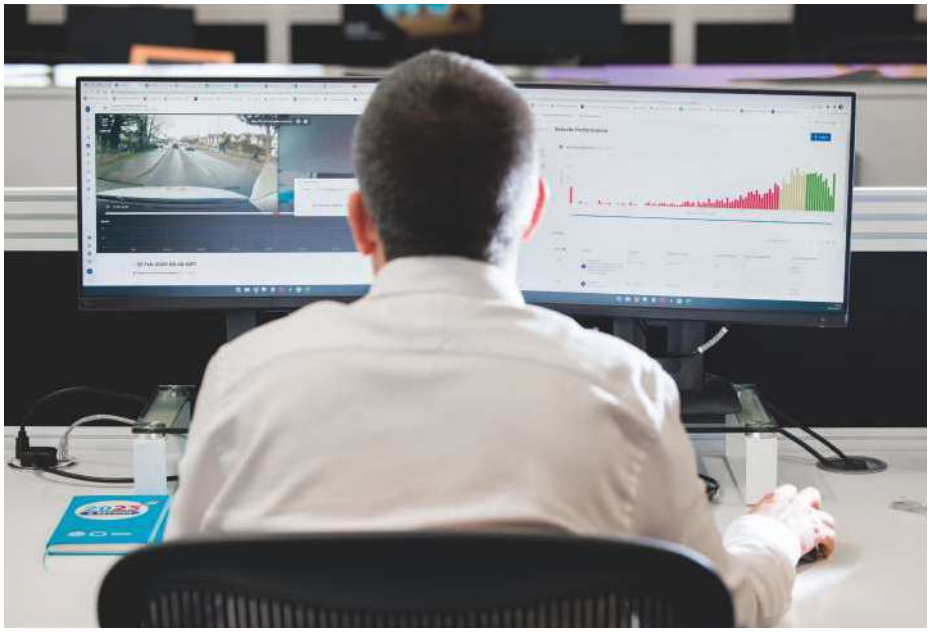
Lanes Group took a two-pronged approach: educating drivers on Samsara's capabilities through meetings and resources, while also launching targeted incentive programmes to steer them towards safer practices.

"We get a lot of pushback on change," said Kirkby. "So we had to be very transparent about how the technology would work and ensure drivers understood it was about protecting, not policing, them.

"That process takes time, which is why we started by testing Samsara's safety solutions, communicating changes to drivers, and then activating features such as the in-cab alerts across the entire fleet. This way, we were able to empower drivers to self-coach and foster a culture of continuous improvement."

Key incentives include rewards and recognition for drivers who exhibit the highest safety scores, or achieve the greatest improvement over time.

Additional awards such as "Speed Limit Superstar" and "Most Improved Driver" offer cash prizes to top performers based on the metrics and data provided by Samsara.



25%
reduction in severe speeding incidents

Improvements in efficiency and safety

Equipped with the data to identify and address on-road risks – and shape incentive programmes – Lanes has seen a dramatic improvement in driver performance in just eight months. The number of drivers achieving the 'elite' safety bracket of 90 or higher soared by 180%, with nearly a third of Lanes' 4,000 drivers now earning the highest safety score month after month.

This uptick in performance is reflected in safety improvements across Lanes Group's wider operations. Mobile phone usage dropped by 92%, and severe speeding incidents decreased by 25% as drivers remained more focused on the road. In addition, obstructed camera rates fell by 67% as drivers understood the importance of capturing clear footage which can exonerate them in the event of a claim.

67%
reduction in obstructed camera events

> **"Samsara allows us to showcase driver behaviours and reduce incidents, leading to happier, safer drivers"**
>
> **Amber Kirkby, Fleet Systems Team Leader**

"Crash footage coming through to the safety inbox allows us to determine fault quickly and send evidence to third parties in real time," said Kirkby. "This has made all the difference: our average claim value has decreased by £3,000 since we implemented Samsara."

Samsara's impact extended beyond just driver coaching, however. Digital workflows enable employees to spend less time dealing with paperwork, and more time prioritising tasks such as urgent vehicle repairs. Vehicle walkarounds, driver documents and defect reports are now all managed through 65 different templates in the Samsara system – centralising information and improving communication across departments.

Striving for optimal safety and service

Looking ahead, Lanes Group plans to build on its success with Samsara. By continuing to connect systems on one platform and further digitise workflows, the organisation aims to achieve its goal of a hyper-efficient, fully paperless workforce by 2025.

"We've made such great strides, but there's still room to get even better," said Kirkby. "Samsara's insights and tools are crucial for monitoring our progress and finding new opportunities to enhance safety and service for communities across the UK."

£3,000
reduction in average claim value

Visit our website: www.samsara.com/uk

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Operate Smarter™

‘NOT JUST BIGGER, IT’S BETTER’

Ayvens UK managing director Tim Laver explains how capability and capacity will deliver growth post ALD/LeasePlan integration. *Stephen Briers* reports

History is littered with examples of leasing mergers that have resulted in substantial shakeouts and customer losses amid portfolio and product duplication and restructure.

ALD Automotive and LeasePlan feels different. The two FN50 stalwarts – No5 and No4 at the time – announced their merger in May 2023, bringing together diverse companies with different cultures and capabilities, and minimal overlap within their product portfolios.

Renamed Ayvens a year ago, the new organisation became the UK’s largest leasing company (subsequently toppled this year briefly by the Lloyds Transport integration of Lex Autolease and Tusker) with a funded fleet of 276,981 vehicles – 178,199 cars, 98,298 vans and 484 trucks.

In two years, the fleet size has dipped by 11.5%, from the hurriedly aggregated 313,149 assets (200,237 cars, 112,912 vans, 952 trucks) listed in the November 2023 FN50. That equates to a loss of just 36,168 units, an impressive performance during a period of inevitable internal and external uncertainty and change.

For context, the benchmark comparison is the 2009 merger of Lex Vehicle Leasing and Lloyds Autolease which created Lex Autolease. Its fleet shrank by 25% over the following three years, from 360,000 to a low of 268,000 in 2012, before subsequently recovering.

Tim Laver, the former ALD UK managing director who was appointed Ayvens country managing director in September 2024, isn’t anticipating further reductions.

In his first media interview, Lavers describes the performance as a “strategic reset” resulting in Ayvens exiting some lower margin indirect business as it realigned its core sales channels. The objective now is “retain and win” as part of a long-term growth aspiration.

So what strengths did each leasing company bring to the table and how will Laver ensure Ayvens capitalises on what he calls the “breadth and depth” of resource and expertise?

ALD’s history is entrenched in partnerships, with dealers, manufacturers, brokers and digital partners, providing white-label finance products, but typically operating below the radar.

“Within the DNA is a culture of thinking long-term,” Laver says. “We are stewards looking after the customer for someone else; we didn’t care so much for the profile of our brand. We think long-term.”

In contrast, LeasePlan was “bold and out there”. It had a distinct identity among its broker partners and a huge presence in the corporate market.

“It was strong in its consultancy and LCV capabilities, working with some of the most complex fleets in the country,” Laver adds.

The merger has resulted in a richer, more complete product portfolio. LeasePlan contributed its insurance product and salary sacrifice; ALD added its advanced total cost of ownership (TCO) model.

“One organisation had the depth of resource and knowledge; the other had the breadth,” Laver says. “Put that together and we have a smorgasbord of capabilities – not just bigger, it’s better.”

> “There is no part of the market that we don’t want to play in and grow”
>
> **TIM LAVER, AYVENS UK MANAGING DIRECTOR**

He’s careful not to drive the integration process too aggressively, though, especially on the corporate side.

“There is so much tacit knowledge within those accounts; if we move too fast there is a real risk of dropping the ball,” he explains.

However, the ultimate goal is to have one team pitching for business, with the customer not knowing whether they are based in Bristol (ALD’s home) or Slough (LeasePlan’s HQ).

“It will be an Ayvens mentality and culture,” Laver says.

His growth strategy encompasses all sales channels and all sizes of fleet, building on existing business and consolidating in other areas.

This includes white label and indirect, strengthening its broker, manufacturer and partner channel relationships and ensuring it has the capability for growth.

“There is no part of the market that we don’t want to play in and grow,” he says.

A fundamental part of the proposition will be to share the best practice and operational excellence of the largest, most complex fleets, with the smaller organisations, many of whom do not have dedicated internal fleet resource.

“We have to share the lessons if we have that capability,” Laver says.

Capability and capacity are two recurring themes during our conversation. Both are essential to delivering the business plan while Laver simultaneously focuses on his immediate priority of completing the total business integration.

He points to three ubiquitous elements that will not change during the integration: people, customer, culture.

“It’s about giving customers certainty, people making the difference

How AI-driven Fleet Optimisation Is Unlocking Enhanced Productivity

With rising operating costs, driver shortages, and growing pressure to meet environmental targets, fleet operators are looking for smarter ways to maximise operational efficiency and productivity. AI-enhanced fleet management systems are increasingly becoming central to that effort.

Trakm8's AI Fleet Optimisation solution is at the forefront of this. It is already delivering significant gains for some of the UK's largest commercial fleets; improving delivery efficiency, reducing fuel and labour costs, and helping operators achieve sustainability targets without compromising service quality.

Driving Efficiency Through Real-time Intelligence

Trakm8's AI optimisation analyses dozens of operational data points and continuously runs in real-time to create the most efficient schedules and optimal routes for large fleets. This includes traffic congestion, customer/site locations, differing vehicle capacities, driver availability, and more.

By minimising mileage and maximising vehicle utilisation, fleets can complete more jobs using the same assets. For one major UK supermarket, Trakm8's AI Fleet Optimisation delivered a 17% improvement in miles per drop, equating to £15 million in annual savings across fuel and labour costs. The same operation recorded up to 200,000 fewer miles driven each week.

Impactful Fuel and Maintenance Savings

Through advanced route optimisation at scale and reducing miles driven, AI fleet optimisation is able to dramatically reduce fuel spend and wear and tear on fleet assets (ultimately decreasing maintenance costs). One national retailer saw a 20% improvement in vehicle fuel efficiency following the deployment of the solution, with further gains projected through an extended rollout.

Dynamic Adaptability for the Real World

Unlike static routing software, Trakm8's AI system continuously refines routes based on live conditions. It automatically adjusts for traffic congestion, road closures, and unplanned changes to job or delivery schedules, ensuring that each vehicle remains on the most efficient route available.

The AI algorithm can also be focused to optimise for best distance, best cost, or best balance of the two – to cater to operational priorities.

Scalability for Growing Operations

Operating via cloud-based architecture, the system is capable of processing thousands of jobs or deliveries simultaneously and can scale to meet fluctuating volumes.

The platform also supports scenario planning, enabling fleet managers to test the impact of potential changes, such as fleet expansion, shift adjustments, or altered delivery zones, before implementing them.

Enhancing Sustainability

Beyond cost efficiency, Trakm8's AI technology contributes directly to sustainability objectives and reducing Scope 1 emissions. By reducing unnecessary mileage and fuel consumption, fleets can make measurable progress towards decarbonisation and corporate ESG goals – with one fleet operator cutting approximately 4,000 tonnes of CO_2 emissions annually.

The Future of Fleet Optimisation

For fleet managers under increasing financial and operational pressure, AI-powered fleet management tools offer a clear route to greater productivity and control. The environmental benefits are matched by tangible commercial outcomes: reduced operating costs, improved vehicle utilisation, and enhanced customer satisfaction. These combined benefits underline Trakm8 AI Fleet Optimisation's growing role as a critical enabler of effective fleet management.

Ready to take your fleet performance to the next level?
Discover AI fleet optimisation from Trakm8.
Visit: www.trakm8.com
Email: info@trakm8.com

Trakm8
Data driven insights

Company: Ayvens
Main offices: Bristol and Slough
Managing director: Tim Laver
Time in role: 15 months (September 2024)
Funded fleet size (FN50): 276,981 (cars – 178,199; vans - 98,298; trucks - 484)

(having the best talent, knowledge and agility to deal with change) and the culture (transparency, doing the right thing)," Laver says.

"We are a bank, and we have a position of responsibility with it comes to ESG and compliance."

The Ayvens PowerUp strategy, with its four priorities of customers, efficiency, ESG responsibility and profitability, launched in 2023 and runs to 2026. However, with a new group CEO (Philippe de Rovira, appointed in July), work is underway to establish the next five-year mission.

And it's a crucial period, according to Laver, which will "see as much change in the fleet sector as any other period".

He sits as a beacon of stability, a man whose LinkedIn profile reveals just three job titles since joining ALD as director of finance and risk in 2005, and only two other roles – auditor at EY and then Arval – after attaining a BA in Business/ Managerial Economics in 1996.

Viewing the UK in the context of Ayvens's global business, he marks out the differences and the similarities.

"The UK is very mature and heavily regulated, but the services that fleets consume are fragmented with lots of fleet management companies," Laver explains.

"It's a unique market.

"But when all the country MDs come together, there is a real sense of Ayvens in how we work and the culture."

The fragmentation in fleet services gives Ayvens an indicator of customer loyalty based on the level of uptake from its broad product menu.

"Service penetration is good; we see it as a measure of how much our customers value us if they take the additional services," Laver says.

Two big opportunities for service growth are in uptime and EV charging.

"Minimising vehicles off road is so important. It was elevated during the pandemic as people become more conscious of the cost and impact on customers' businesses, especially LCV fleets," Laver says.

> "We are a bank, and we have a position of responsibility with it comes to ESG and compliance"

"There is also a need to support customers on EV charging, with data, who, how and where, and the cost – it's a big thing to be solved."

Insurance is another growth opportunity, with Ayvens working alongside international insurer Ayvens Insurance which launched in the UK last year.

The aspiration is to offer a holistic one-stop shop fleet management service, bringing insurance into the mix alongside financing, fleet management, driver and fleet risk solutions. It is also available on Ayvens's salary sacrifice contracts.

"Having all the services under one roof means the management of the repair will be easier and quicker," Laver says.

"It was a need of international key accounts who were keen for the UK to be able to offer insurance. It's being driven by customer appetite."

Customer appetite for more services and greater levels of insight is changing the relationship between fleets and leasing companies. Electrification has been a catalyst as part of a broader theme of decarbonisation and ESG, with demand for consultancy increasing.

As an example, Laver points to the work Ayvens is doing to support the fleet electrification of vans. Customers are keen to embark on the journey, sometimes with additional pressure from their boards who are eyeing their ESG targets, but they simply don't know where to start.

Ayvens calculates the TCO, including charging locations and downtime – what Laver calls TCO+ – to evaluate the pace of change and the impact on cost of different timeline models.

"This is some of our most rewarding work – solving a genuine problem," Laver says.

"We were increasingly being seen as a commodity but now customers need us. We offer the insight that makes a real difference and helps them to set a long-term strategy."

Proelium Intelligence enters UK fleet market with 'carrot, not stick' driver rewards

Founder spells out the positive benefits of ditching punitive measures. *Tom Seymour* reports

A new player has entered the UK fleet market, promising to turn driver data into positive motivation rather than punishment.

Proelium Intelligence, founded by public transport technology veteran Ashley Murdoch, has launched a data-driven engagement platform that rewards safer, more efficient driving.

Rather than competing with existing telematics or fleet management systems, Proelium positions itself as an add-on layer that works with the data fleets already collect.

The company launched in May this year and is initially targeting car and van fleets, along with telematics partners.

Murdoch, who previously founded Corethree, a digital ticketing pioneer later acquired by Modaxo in 2022, says Proelium's mission is to make telematics human again by inspiring better behaviour through recognition and reward.

Fleet News: What problem is Proelium setting out to solve?

Ashley Murdoch, Proelium Intelligence founder and chief executive: Fleets already have plenty of data showing how drivers perform, but what's often missing is the human connection. How do we turn that information into motivation?

Proelium's goal is to use the data operators already collect to encourage better behaviour rather than punish poor performance. It's the carrot rather than the stick approach.

FN: How does the platform actually work?

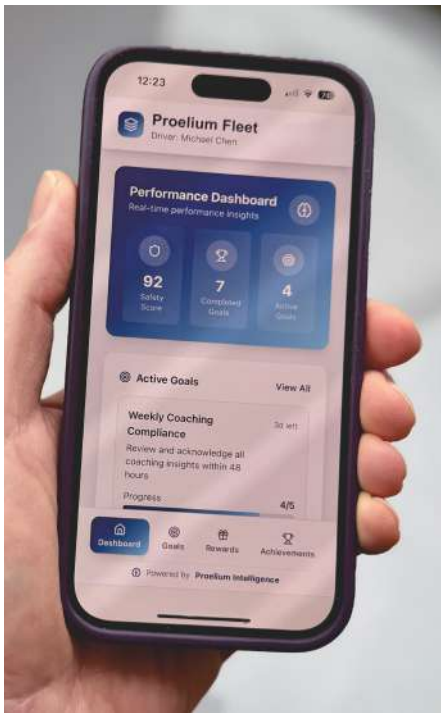
AM: The Proelium system ingests telematics and other operational feeds, translating them into behaviours using its own model. It then serves targeted challenges and incentives to drivers, designed to build engagement and improve performance.

Rewards can be small 'micro perks', such as coffee vouchers or branded merchandise, or larger quarterly financial bonuses set by the operator. Gamification features, including progress bars, badges and optional social sharing help to keep drivers returning to the app.

The platform is API-first, allowing telematics providers to embed Proelium directly into their existing driver apps. Fleets can also opt for a white-label version to get started more quickly. There is no hardware involved, and integration is handled by Proelium to reduce barriers to entry.

FN: How is Proelium's approach different from traditional driver scoring?

AM: Unlike traditional scoring systems that focus purely on telematics data, Proelium is data-agnostic, meaning it can draw from a wider range of sources. Alongside driving data, fleets can feed in vehicle safety checks, HR context such as attendance or probation status, and even external inputs such as weather conditions or major events.



> "My aim is to help fleets unlock more value from the systems they already use"
>
> **ASHLEY MURDOCH**

Fleet managers can either approve automatically generated engagement programmes or design their own.

Driver segmentation is a key feature, allowing operators to create challenges for specific groups or individuals.

Urban delivery drivers, for example, can be given different targets from rural engineers, helping to keep goals realistic and relevant.

FN: Why focus on rewards rather than penalties?

AM: I don't think the traditional 'stick' approach works any longer, especially with younger drivers. Punitive measures tend to drive disengagement, whereas recognition and small, achievable rewards build morale and retention.

By giving drivers clear progress cues and regular positive feedback, fleets can still improve safety and fuel efficiency while avoiding the resentment often associated with standard telematics reporting. The way we put it is, 'if you lean on the stick, the driver will quit'.

FN: What's the commercial model for fleets and partners?

AM: We plan to work both directly with fleets and through telematics partners, with discussions already underway with providers such as Lytx and PowerFleet.

Pricing follows a per-driver, per-month subscription model starting at around £4 per driver, with an introductory 45% discount for the first 25 fleets.

There are no integration fees, and telematics partners can embed the API at no cost. We're also expecting to introduce enterprise tiers and feature-based pricing dependent on the level of service required.

FN: What's next for Proelium Intelligence?

AM: We have a core team of five from our previous venture, so we're aiming to stay small and agile as we grow. The company retains full equity for now, but we are considering outside investment to accelerate further expansion.

The short-term goal is to secure at least six fleet customers within the next 12 months, alongside formal partnerships with telematics providers.

Longer term, my aim is to help fleets unlock more value from the systems they already use.

We're not another black box. Our role is to create new value from existing investments by turning data into timely and relevant motivation for drivers.

If challenges are achievable and recognition is tangible, behaviour moves in the right direction.

A SPECIAL REPORT BROUGHT TO YOU BY FleetNews

HOW TO CHOOSE YOUR FLEET WITH CONFIDENCE

The path to decarbonisation with Toyota & Lexus Business

In association with

The route to decarbonisation is not a straight one

Simply buying zero emission vehicles is not the solution for most fleets, says Neil Broad, general manager, One Toyota Fleet Services

We speak to fleets every day, and in our conversations it's increasingly clear that decarbonisation is one of the biggest challenges – perhaps *the* biggest – they face now and in the next few years.

"Simply reducing the carbon footprint of a fleet by buying zero tailpipe emission vehicles is not the solution for most. To achieve successful, demonstrable vehicle decarbonisation requires a number of different elements of the fleet operation to align and develop, creating the right political, operational and financial conditions. The path is not a simple, straight one. Which is where we come in.

"The perceptions in companies of some of the challenges of decarbonisation need to be addressed, too. Our research* shows that around half of fleets think a lack of charging options and high up-front costs are a barrier to electrification, while a third cite operational constraints as an issue.

"Allied to these are regulatory requirements and Government policies around taxation, the Zero Emission Vehicle (ZEV) Mandate and purchase grants which can add complexity and require extra consideration.

"We hear these concerns, and we provide a variety of solutions to them. Toyota's multi-path fuel strategy includes hybrid electric vehicles (HEVs), plug-in hybrid electric vehicles (PHEVs), battery electric vehicles (BEVs), and hydrogen fuel cell electric vehicles (FCEVs), providing fleet managers with a myriad of options suited to their own operational needs.

"One size does not fit all, which is why we offer such a range of fuels and vehicles.

"But it's not just about the supply of vehicles. At Toyota we recognise that each business has its own path to take, and each journey is different. So we help provide the solutions you specifically need, across every facet of decarbonisation."

"WE RECOGNISE THAT EACH BUSINESS HAS ITS OWN PATH TO TAKE, WE HELP PROVIDE THE SOLUTIONS YOU SPECIFICALLY NEED, ACROSS EVERY FACET OF DECARBONISATION"

NEIL BROAD, ONE TOYOTA FLEET SERVICES

The four powertrain paths

1 Hybrid electric vehicles (HEVs)
Best for: Fleets requiring fuel efficiency without infrastructure investment.
Benefits: Lower CO_2 tailpipe emissions, no charging downtime and reduced fuel dependency.

2 Plug-in hybrid electric vehicles (PHEVs)
Best for: Businesses needing the flexibility of electric and petrol power.
Benefits: Electric-only driving for urban routes and petrol hybrid performance for long haul.

3 Battery electric vehicles (BEVs)
Best for: Company cars, low- to mid-mileage LCVs with charging, regular routes and urban running.
Benefits: Zero tailpipe emissions, lower maintenance costs, Government incentives.

4 Hydrogen fuel cell electric vehicles (FCEVs)
Best for: Fleets requiring refuelling in up to five minutes, long-range capabilities or heavy-duty haulage.
Benefits: Quick refuelling, long driving range, zero tailpipe emissions.

The multi-fuel pathway

The vast majority (96%) of fleets see a multi-fuel pathway as important in the next one-to-three years. But what do they see as the key drivers of change?

1. Financial and budgetary planning
72% report economic benefits from multi-fuel mix
2. Infrastructure readiness
65% of fleets already provide workplace charging and 27% plan to invest in it
3. Operational continuity
68% see no operational constraints from electrification
4. Data-driven decision-making
40% use total cost of ownership to assess EV/HEV/PHEV costs
5. Politics and policy
83% say tax and incentives significantly influence powertrain and funding decisions

***Based on an online survey conducted by FleetTrends with 200 UK fleet decision-makers during July 2024 to understand influences on their future fuel, funding and cost strategies. The sample profile was a mix of car and van fleets from different industries, representing SMEs (50%), mid-size (30%) and corporate fleets (20%).**

Five key pillars for a Better Business fleet

❶ Strategic planning

For large businesses, mandatory emissions reporting makes decarbonisation essential, directly supporting Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) commitments and long-term corporate resilience.

Our research found that 64% of fleets have an ESG policy with commitments to cut their carbon footprint by a set date.

A robust decarbonisation strategy should begin with clear decisions around vehicle and powertrain selection. BEVs are increasingly viable for company cars and commercial fleets with lower mileages, urban operations or regular routes, while hybrid solutions may suit heavy-duty, less predictable or long-distance operations.

Because this is a longer-term pathway, hydrogen will come into the mix too, especially for heavy duty fleets.

Careful mapping of duty cycles, journey profiles and infrastructure availability is essential to ensure operational feasibility.

❷ Costs and operational considerations

Total cost of ownership (TCO) is key when evaluating the financial viability of vehicles; around 40% of fleets already use TCO for decision-making on the cost-effectiveness of electric or hybrid powertrains.

Many factors need to be considered when putting together a TCO analysis. These include:

- Operational (congestion charges, low emission zone charges)
- Fuel and energy (home, workplace and public charging)
- Depreciation (if outright purchased or finance leased)
- Service, maintenance and repair (SMR)
- Tax (VED, national insurance)
- Funding (including interest)
- Grants (where available)
- Insurance

There are cases where EVs have been shown to deliver lower operating and maintenance costs compared with petrol or diesel vehicles. They are generally simpler to service, and if charged at home or on cheaper public networks, can deliver lower pence-per-mile costs.

Conversely, there are cases where EV have had higher depreciation and tyre wear than internal combustion engine (ICE) alternatives. But, until you have assessed the TCO situation for your own particular circumstances, and created accurate, proven cases none of this is a given.

Leveraging data, telematics and analytics can help you move beyond assumptions and gain a clearer picture of how vehicles operate in a range of conditions and lifecycles.

There are tools which can predict key parameters, such as energy consumption, charging patterns, route efficiency and driver behaviour to model what will happen even before a wheel turns.

This can be backed up by telematics data from real world operation, and even predictive SMR analysis. Then you can identify trends from initial deployments and optimise future roll-out, ensuring that scaling decisions are backed by evidence, rather than estimates.

❸ Engaging stakeholders

Management teams, customers, suppliers and employees each have distinct priorities that must be recognised when they embark on decarbonisation.

By addressing operational concerns, highlighting cost and sustainability benefits and creating feedback channels, organisations can build trust and alignment. Engagement should be ongoing, ensuring all groups feel ownership of the transition and confidence in its long-term success.

❹ Your management

Securing leadership buy-in is critical to embedding decarbonisation into your fleet strategy. Decision-makers require assurance that the transition aligns with corporate goals, delivers competitive advantage and supports ESG reporting.

Building a compelling business case grounded in TCO, regulatory compliance and reputational benefits strengthens the argument for investment.

Demonstrating potential returns, such as lower running costs and improved stakeholder perception, ensures management will view decarbonisation as a driver of business growth and resilience.

Your customers

For customers, fleet decarbonisation offers visible evidence of sustainability in action, and operating a low-carbon fleet can be a differentiator in competitive markets. Communicating the environmental benefits can reinforce brand credibility and strengthen client relationships.

The adoption of the correct low-emission strategy can also mean you are serving your products and services to customers more cost-effectively too, while also making the supply chain more resilient in the longer term.

Your employees

Employees, particularly drivers and operations staff, play a critical role in the success of fleet decarbonisation. Engaging staff early and addressing practical concerns, such as charging access, range anxiety or vehicle performance encourages acceptance, confidence and enthusiasm.

By using a multi-fuel strategy, including full electric, hybrid, petrol and diesel, you can bring employees along at the pace they need, giving them the tools to do their job, while minimising the carbon impact of their driving.

Your suppliers

Suppliers are critical partners in enabling the decarbonisation of a fleet and wider supply chain. Collaboration should focus on aligning sustainability goals, ensuring access to low tailpipe emission vehicles and the roll-out of charging or refuelling infrastructure.

Open dialogue helps identify shared challenges, such as technology readiness, cost pressures, or infrastructure gaps and co-develop solutions, while integrated data and solutions can help reduce administration.

By working closely with leasing companies, energy providers and logistics partners, organisations can accelerate innovation, build resilience and create a more sustainable, future-proof supply chain.

Infrastructure resilience

Electrification (either full or partial) offers significant cost advantages, particularly through home charging, but also presents new challenges.

Employees charging at home are using their domestic supply to power business mileage, so fair and consistent reimbursement is vital.

The HMRC Advisory Electric Rate provides a baseline, but it may not always reflect actual costs, dependent on the efficiency of the vehicle, or where it was charged and the resultant costs.

Alternatives include monitored charging systems that calculate precise business usage and reimburse directly. Public charging also requires robust processes to ensure costs are captured and repaid accurately.

Payment systems for home, workplace and public must be simple, transparent and supportive, covering charging to ensure driver buy-in. When employees feel supported, adoption becomes easier and more effective.

❺ Charging at home, workplace and on the road

A successful fleet charging strategy requires combining three approaches, to create a resilient, adaptable ecosystem:

Home charging

This provides convenience for drivers who take vehicles home, enabling overnight charging at lower electricity rates and reducing demand during peak business hours. However, it requires careful planning for reimbursement, infrastructure support and monitoring energy usage.

Workplace charging

At work charging adds another layer of flexibility, allowing vehicles to top up during the day or when off-duty, minimising downtime. This approach is particularly effective for fleets with predictable schedules or vehicles that return to base regularly with 65% already providing workplace charging and 59% expecting it to be the default solution. Centralised workplace charging also gives managers greater visibility and control over energy usage.

On-the-road charging

Public charging is essential for long routes or unexpected trips. Using public rapid charging networks ensures drivers maintain productivity without range anxiety. But it can be more costly than home and workplace charging – often by a significant amount – and requires planning ahead to identify the chargers which combine the right price and speed for a driver's needs.

Ready to make smarter fleet decisions?
Want to choose your fleet with confidence?
Download the Better Business white paper:
www.toyota.co.uk/fleet-business/sustainable-fleet

How Toyota & Lexus can help support decarbonisation

At Toyota & Lexus we provide diverse multi-path options: hybrid electric vehicles (HEVs), plug-in hybrid electric vehicles (PHEVs), battery electric vehicles (BEVs), and hydrogen fuel cell electric vehicles (FCEVs), and we also provide the 'fleet know-how' to help businesses make confident, strategic decisions.

This includes:

- Partnering with businesses to fully understand their needs and operational challenges, and then working with them to define a strategy to transition to EVs when it's right for them
- Using an array of tools and software that help support fleet planning by modelling out different scenarios – optimum fleet mix, predictive maintenance, route optimisation – to ultimately give them a roadmap to transition effectively
- Listening to customers and walking them through the TCO calculation so they can see the figures for themselves – before they purchase – to give a clear demonstration as to why TCO is important. It's not just about the upfront purchase price, fleets should be considering the whole-life costs, especially when it comes to BEVs
- Partnering with a number of suppliers to support businesses with EV infrastructure – depot, workplace and home charging, and billing and reimbursement
- Piloting EV driver training with the Toyota Experience programme for business customers to help maximise efficiency on vehicles they purchase. The programme consists of one-to-one driver training sessions where trainers go out with drivers and collect real-time data by monitoring their driving style and habits. They then analyse this data and create a bespoke guide to help each driver improve their EV driving style, to help with efficiency and battery range

Choose fuel types based on available infrastructure

HEVs: No charging downtime and simple integration.
PHEVs: Charging only when it doesn't impact adversely on work.
BEVs: Overnight, off-duty or planned charging, ultra-rapid charging can take minutes.
FCEVs: Offers rapid refuelling, much like petrol or diesel.

Remove any nervousness and handle finance with confidence

Finance can be a thorny subject at the best of times, but a meeting with a finance director can make it even more daunting. The AFP Fleet Academy explains how to prepare

"Fleet professionals sit in the middle of such a complex world. I can't think of any other asset like a vehicle. It has so many tentacles spreading into so many different financial areas of the business. You're talking financial statements, VAT, national insurance, corporation tax, benefit-in-kind (BIK), HR and more."

That pleasantly sympathetic take comes from Association of Fleet Professionals (AFP) trainer Paul Miers, who supports the finance content of the organisation's courses.

He admits his delegates are often nervous on arrival, daunted by the prospect of being presented with lots of figures, but loosen up when they discover they work in groups, not as individuals.

The same cannot be said of a one-to-one with the finance director or a presentation to the board containing pound signs. Considering the complex economic, taxation and operational factors involved, fleet managers may feel they need a qualification in accounting before attending such a meeting.

Mercifully, they don't, because a handful of key facts and a grasp of terminology can go a long way to bolstering both your case and your confidence. Besides, plain English and concise information often go down well with board members.

ONE FOR ALL: WHY WHOLE LIFE COST IS ALWAYS A WINNER

"They were often referred to as rate jockeys," says Miers, "people who were obsessed with getting a pound a month off a lease rental, but totally missed the bigger picture of fuel consumption, fuel costs and everything else."

That is both a good example of what not to do when making a financial case and why one figure trumps all. The industry has long-championed the benefits of whole-life cost because it does what it says on the tin – it incorporates every significant number that contributes to running vehicles.

As Miers explains, he teaches fleet managers a series of relevant terminology and core basics, which then funnel into whole-life cost calculations.

"We work through various mini modules – a few minutes on national insurance, a few minutes on corporation tax, and so on. We're giving them the building blocks they need. Then we spend quite a long time actually putting together examples of whole-life costs, having talked delegates through the concept of all the elements that go into it.

"Light bulbs come on, because they all know what whole-life cost is, but they often don't know how to calculate it. What we are doing is creating the confidence that allows them to have an educated conversation with directors and other senior managers."

He adds that whole-life costs are often essential for fleet managers campaigning for electric vehicles (EVs), the headline price of which can easily negate their case.

"If you're trying to make a commercial case for EVs, you cannot do it without whole-life costs. If you just look at the sticker price or a lease rate, they're way more expensive than an ICE (internal combustion engine) car.

"As soon as you switch to whole-life costs though, it helps make the economic case for EVs and prove that they're often actually cheaper."

LEASE OR BUY? THE SCIENCE BEHIND FUNDING

The widespread tendency of organisations to stick with the inherited status quo, combined with the web that is fleet finance, means a proper understanding of funding often gives trainees pause for thought.

"We spend quite a lot of time on funding," says Miers, "working through a matrix of contract hire, hire purchase and other acquisition methods, and what costs you can and can't recover.

"We furnish them with the knowledge and the financial implications of choosing leasing over purchase.

"Once they understand that, delegates start to say, 'now I understand why our organisation has opted for outright purchase or contract hire'.

"It may also be that no one has asked that question for a long time, and they say, 'we've always used outright purchase, but maybe we should be looking at contract hire or something else'."

As with whole-life cost, a greater understanding enables fleets not only to challenge their traditional funding methods, but also raises the question of how best to acquire EVs, all of which feeds into a confident finance conversation.

"We go around the table and people explain how they fund their vehicles," adds Miers.

"On every course I've run, there are usually two or three people from the public sector. Although they use a smattering of contract hire, they have traditionally outright purchased, being given a lump of money at the start of the financial year.

"I'd say it's almost the exact opposite with people from large, private companies – they pretty much all use contract hire.

"What's interesting is that even organisations that have always been wedded to outright purchase are increasingly putting any EVs they operate through contract hire, because there's a feeling of comfort. It's like, 'we can see all these articles about EV residual values, and we feel a bit nervous – so let's de-risk it by using a different finance method'."

Fleet finance: key terminology

Capital and writing down allowances: the amount of capital expenditure a business can deduct from its taxable profits, supplanting whatever depreciation was recorded in the financial statements.

Lease rental restriction: limits the amount of tax relief a business can claim on car lease payments.

National insurance contributions: employees and employers pay NICs on their earnings. But employers also pay them on certain benefits-in-kind provided to employees, including company cars. These are known as Class 1A NICs.

VAT recovery: the extent to which input VAT charged on supplies can be reclaimed.

VAT block: 50% of a lessee's recoverable VAT on finance rentals is blocked. This accounts for the assumed personal use of a company car.

Vehicle funding features: the impact of the fleet's chosen funding method on the presentation of the financial statements and ratios, as well as availability of cash, tax allowances, VAT recovery and vehicle ownership.

Weighted cost of capital: The average rate an organisation expects to pay to finance its assets, critical to determining the optimal funding method.

Whole-life cost: funding of a company vehicle or cash allowance, including all in-life costs such as finance, maintenance, business fuel plus all direct and indirect tax costs.

Empowering fleet managers to 'speak up and speak out'

Sarah Tooze discovers first-hand how the AFP's Your Voice in Fleet course boosts confidence and equips you with the tools to maintain it

What do you think happens on a training course which promises to tackle a fear of public speaking?

My preconceived idea was that I would be delivering a PowerPoint presentation to a roomful of strangers – and I wouldn't enjoy it.

Thankfully, that didn't happen on the Association of Fleet Professionals (AFP) Your Voice in Fleet course I attended last month.

In fact, it was the complete opposite. I presented throughout the two days – without even realising I was doing so – and the course made me, and the fleet managers who attended, feel fantastic.

As trainer Kerri Hollick, who has worked in learning and development for the past 24 years, explains: "The idea is to take you out of your comfort zone, but not so far that you never want to repeat the experience."

The course launched in 2023 as Women's Voices in Fleet, with the aim of giving women working in the fleet industry the confidence to have their voices heard – be it in a meeting, one-to-one, at a conference or taking part in a webinar.

It has since been opened up to everyone working in fleet as Your Voice in Fleet, and both courses are available to AFP members and non-members.

Women's Voices in Fleet has also been delivered to members of the British Vehicle Rental and Leasing Association (BVRLA).

Hollick has seen just as much emotion during the Your Voice in Fleet sessions as she has during Women's Voices in Fleet.

"There have been tears, but there's been a lot of out-and-out laughter and jubilation too," she says.

YOUR VOICE IN FLEET ISN'T JUST FOR INTROVERTS

Another preconceived idea you might have is that a confidence training course is aimed at introverts.

Not so.

"Sometimes the more courageous, outspoken people who turn up ready to present end up leaving with a different view," Hollick says. "They learn to recognise the power of *not* speaking when they're presenting – the power of the pause – and that can make them more engaging with their audience."

She adds: "I can't think of anyone in any job role in any function that this course wouldn't help."

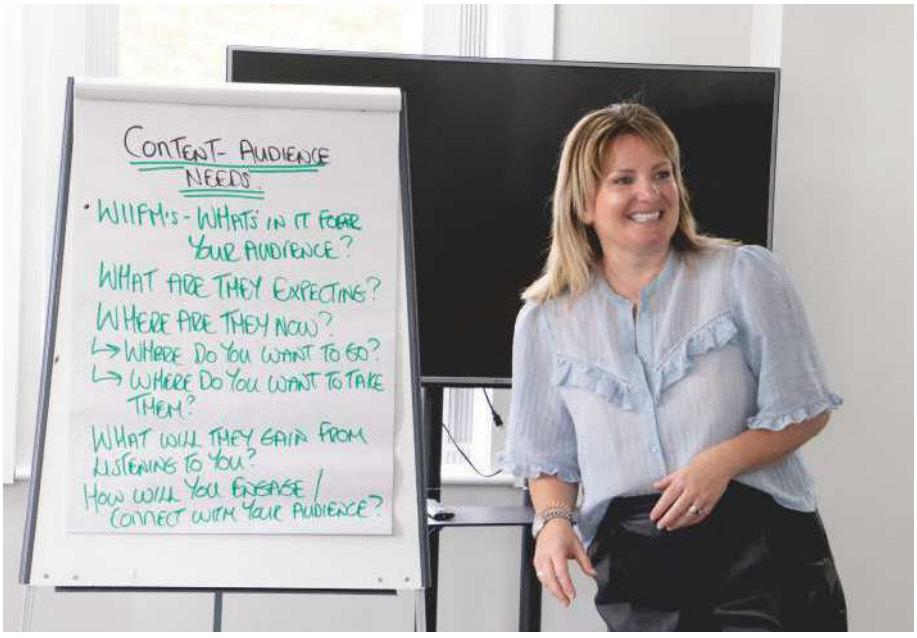
The course is particularly beneficial for fleet managers as they have to deliver tough, sometimes unpopular messages to drivers, as well as being able to communicate at board level to get buy-in to initiatives or to protect their fleet budget from being cut.

"Fleet managers have a tough job, they have to be able to speak up and speak out a lot," Hollick says.

During the course she highlighted the importance of thinking about different personality types that you might have in a meeting.

"You might have extroverts who can't wait to tell you everything, you might have compassionate people who step in to help out if they see someone struggling, and you might have people who are more reflective and go at a slower pace," Hollick says.

Equally, there may be people who want numbers in a presentation and those who prefer visuals.



The skill is being able to adapt your message to suit the audience.

"In the training world we need different styles - so time for reflection, time to get up and do something, and time for questions," Hollick says.

And during the two days she did that. There were activities where we worked in pairs, swapped seats, worked as a group, went outside, and had time to write silently, on our own, in our notebooks.

THE IMPORTANCE OF BODY LANGUAGE

One activity which resonated with me was standing tall and focusing on feeling the ground beneath my feet to feel confident when presenting.

This was done as part of understanding how important body language is when communicating. Psychologists suggest it accounts for 80% of communication, with the actual words we say making up only 7%.

"Before a presentation people focus on their speech, but they should be focusing more on their body language," Hollick says.

She challenged us to strike a 'power pose' and contrasted that with how we felt when we rounded our shoulders and looked at the floor.

This helped prepare us for an activity at the end of the first day where we had to take turns reading out loud as a group. While each person read the rest of the group had to write positive feedback on a Post-it note.

Normally I would have opted to stay seated for an activity like that, but I pushed myself out of my comfort zone, stood up and focused on feeling grounded. To my surprise, everyone wrote how confident I was.

We were a small group, but the course can be run

Sarah Tooze, left, takes notes along with other course participants

with up to 16 people, and, as Hollick points out, it can be pretty nerve-racking if you're the sixteenth person waiting for your turn.

"I've had people physically struggle with that activity and want to leave but when they finish, they're so proud and so glad they stuck it out," she says.

SILENCING THE INNER CRITIC

Aside from body language, we spent time silencing the 'inner critic' – the negative voice in your head that can affect your confidence.

"We have up to 35,000 thoughts a day - and some might be sabotaging you," Hollick says. "Imagine if you could go 'shhh' to your inner critic."

We went through a number of exercises to make us aware of our inner critic and to quieten it, including developing our 'inner coach'.

Throughout the course Hollick also challenged us to think positively. One technique she used which struck a chord with me was to add 'yet' to the end of a sentence to help develop a 'growth mindset' i.e. 'I haven't achieved that...yet.'

WILD CARD THINKING

While day one was about looking inwards and thinking about what can hold you back from feeling confident, day two focused on what we could achieve with our new-found confidence.

Hollick shared a technique we could use to navigate a conversation or deliver a message quickly when you're suddenly asked to speak in a meeting or to make a business case for something, such as additional resource in a fleet department.

We then each spent time with a blank piece of paper from a flipchart, and lots of Post-it notes,

> "Before a presentation people focus on their speech, but they should be focusing more on their body language"

mapping out a plan for something we wanted to achieve. That ranged from a driver communication strategy to a job role handover to briefing suppliers for a tender and my own personal goal of speaking confidently in product review videos.

Hollick also encouraged us to do some 'wild card thinking' where we could be as creative as we liked, and it was fantastic to see how this enabled Sarah Nicholson, fleet manager – cars at the Environment Agency, to take her driver communication plan to the next level.

She and my fellow attendees were full of praise for Your Voice in Fleet, and previous attendees have experienced a long-term impact.

Brooke Smith, customer delivery partner – fleet at Severn Trent, attended Women's Voices in Fleet in September 2024 and says it has enabled her to trust her gut instinct and to speak up when something doesn't feel right.

For Leah Lindsay, fleet and employee benefits manager at MWH Treatment, attending Women's Voices in Fleet in October 2023 was, in her words, "truly a turning point", having struggled with confidence for much of her career due to being diagnosed with dyslexia at a young age.

"I struggled to articulate my thoughts in the way I wanted. It often left me feeling anxious and hesitant to speak up, even when I had valuable ideas to share," she says.

The course helped her to see her "inner demons" through a different lens and gave her the tools and the confidence to set new challenges and goals for herself.

She has since been shortlisted for industry awards and become a board member of Empowering Women in Fleet.

"None of this would have felt achievable without the foundation and confidence that this course gave me," she says."The Women's Voices in Fleet course didn't just help me find my voice, it helped me truly believe in it."

That's a statement I wholeheartedly agree with.

The next Women's Voices in Fleet takes place in March 2026, while Your Voice in Fleet follows in June 2026. Each course costs £650 for AFP members and £750 for non-members.

FleetNews

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New cars coming soon

BMW iX3

BMW's all-new iX3 is the first car built on its next generation Neue Klasse platform.

The fully electric SUV has a 500-mile range and 400kW rapid charging, making it among the most capable electric cars on the market. It will go on sale in March 2026, priced from £58,755.

Under the skin, the new iX3 premieres BMW Group's sixth-generation eDrive technology, which comprises highly efficient electric motors, new high-voltage batteries with cylindrical cells, and 800-volt technology.

The BMW iX3 50 xDrive is powered by two electric motors, which, together, generate an output of 469PS and 645Nm of torque. The vehicle accelerates from 0 to 62mph in 4.9 seconds and reaches an electronically limited top speed of 130mph.

With the sixth generation, BMW claims energy losses are reduced by 40%, weight by 10% and manufacturing costs by 20%.

New powertrain technology is introduced alongside a fresh version of BMW's iDrive infotainment system. Panoramic iDrive uses a display that runs the width of the windscreen, at the top of the dash. It works in conjunction with a central touchscreen.

Measuring 4,782mm in length, 1,895mm in width and 1,635mm in height, the iX3 is proportioned to compete in the mid-size premium SUV segment. Storage can be increased from 520 litres to a maximum of 1,750 litres by folding the rear seats.

Kia EV5

Kia is launching a new fully-electric family SUV that will sit alongside the existing Sportage.

The EV5 has a range of up to 329 miles thanks to an 82.4kWh battery.

It is based on Kia's bespoke E-GMP platform, matching the rest of its EV model range.

Prices start from £39,295, with order books now open and first deliveries due to start at the end of the year.

All variants use the same 217PS electric motor, which provides 0-62mph acceleration in 8.4 seconds and a top speed of 102mph.

Using 400v technology, the battery can charge from 10%-80% in 30 minutes at a 150kW charger. AC charging at up to 11kW is also supported.

With all seats upright, the EV5's boot capacity is 566 litres, extending to 1,650 litres with the second row folded. For charging cable storage, the EV5 also has a 44-litre under-bonnet cargo compartment ('frunk').

Nissan Leaf

Nissan is introducing an all-new third generation Leaf, which is set to arrive on UK roads in early 2026.

The new model, which is built in the UK, promises a range of up to 375 miles and features a bold new look.

It qualifies for the Government's full £3,750 electric car grant, bringing the starting price down to £32,249.

At the car's official unveiling, Nissan said it is ushering in a new chapter for the Leaf, which has been re-designed and re-engineered to meet the needs of modern EV customers, while remaining true to its innovative roots.

The body has been designed to maximise aerodynamics, while the interior prioritises space and passenger comfort.

The interior features dual 14.3-inch displays, powered by a Google-based operating system. While it has a minimalist layout, there are still physical controls for the climate settings and audio system.

Under the skin, the Leaf sits on the same platform as the Nissan Ariya.

Two versions will be available: Standard and Extended. The Leaf Standard has a 52kWh battery and can cover up to 270 miles between charges. The Leaf Extended uses a 75kWh battery and has a 375-mile range.

DC fast charging is supported at up to 150kW, enabling a 260-mile range boost in 30 minutes.

Key models that will be available to order in the coming months

Omoda 7

Omoda is expanding its model line-up with the new Omoda 7, a mid-size SUV with petrol and plug-in hybrid powertrains.

The new car is set to arrive in January, with petrol versions priced from £29,915 and plug-in hybrid models starting from £32,000. It will sit between the existing Omoda 5 and the Omoda 9, as part of the brand's expanding line-up.

The Omoda 7 features a Super Hybrid System (SHS), which combines an 18.3kWh battery with a 1.5-litre petrol engine. A self-charging function ensures it never runs out of charge. The car is capable of travelling for more than 700 miles – including 56 miles in EV-only mode.

The powertrain produces 204PS and 365Nm of torque, giving a 0-62mph time of 8.4 seconds. The battery is capable of fast charging at up to 40kW and includes Vehicle-to-Load (V2L) via a 3.3kW port. CO_2 emissions are 23g/km, placing the car in the 9% benefit-in-kind tax bracket.

Omoda will also offer a 1.6-litre TGDI petrol engine that delivers 147PS.

Inside, the Omoda 7 provides a 15.6-inch central touchscreen and a 10.25-inch digital instrument display. Standard equipment includes a heated steering wheel and dual-zone air-conditioning, alongside Apple CarPlay and Android Auto connectivity.

Polestar 5

Polestar will continue to expand its line-up in 2026, with the launch of the Polestar 5. Prices for the five-door 'grand tourer' start at £89,500.

It is based on the Polestar Precept concept and has a range of up to 416 miles.

Two versions are available – Dual Motor and Performance, in Launch Edition Trim.

The Polestar 5 Dual Motor has a power output of 748PS and 812Nm, enabling 0-62mph acceleration in 3.8 seconds. The Performance version has 884PS/1,015Nm and can hit 62mph from rest in 3.1 seconds. Both versions are electronically limited to 155mph.

A 106kWh (useable) battery gives a range of 416 miles in the Dual Motor and 351 miles in the Performance. An 800V electrical architecture – the first of its kind on a Polestar vehicle – allows the Polestar 5 to charge at up to 350kW on a suitable DC charger. The 10%-80% battery charge can take as little as 22 minutes.

The 5 is the first Polestar model to built from the ground up by the brand, rather than utilising a platform shared with other Geely group models.

Using a hot-cured bonded aluminium platform, the structure is light and rigid. Polestar says the 5 has torsional rigidity higher than that of a supercar. It also consists of 13% recycled aluminium and 83% aluminium from smelters utilising renewable electricity, substantially lowering the car's carbon footprint.

Toyota bZ4x

Toyota has updated its electric bZ4x model for 2026 and confirmed a new estate bodystyle will be offered.

The latest model benefits from significant technical upgrades, increased customer choice, new equipment features, refreshed design and enhanced dynamic performance and ride comfort.

Prices start at £39,995, which is £4,000 more than the outgoing version.

The line-up now offers a choice of two batteries – 57.7kWh and 73.1kWh – to suit different customer performance and budget priorities.

Combined with new eAxles, these provide greater power with higher efficiency, extending the car's driving range to up to 352 miles. A new battery pre-conditioning function and the provision of a 22kW on-board AC charger (Excel grade) contribute to improved battery charging times.

Entry level models have 170PS and a 274-mile range. The larger battery boosts power to 224PS and range to 352 miles. There's also an all-wheel drive option with 342PS and a range of 292 miles.

The bZ4x Touring is 140mm longer and 20mm taller than a bZ4X, boosting boot space by 148 litres to 600 litres.

Its body provides a more rugged appearance with a grained black finish for the wheel arches and black wheels.

Another Touring-specific feature is the roof rails.


OV25 NNW
LF25 BJH

Family business

Compact SUVs are gaining popularity as company car drivers gravitate toward affordable and practical EVs. *Matt de Prez* assesses five of the best

The company car parc is vastly different to a decade ago. Rows of shiny saloon cars have been replaced by more practical sport utility vehicles (SUVs) and diesel engines are all but a distant memory as electric powertrains grow in popularity.

It's no longer a BMW 320d or an Audi A4 that's hustling people out the way on the M4 corridor. The most popular rep-mobiles are now Audi Q4s, Tesla Model Ys and VW Tiguans.

This year, seven of the top 10 best-selling fleet cars are SUVs; and four of them are electric. While premium brands have dominated the electric company car segment for a while, mainstream marques are now catching up.

Prices are falling, not least as a result of the influx of Chinese models that have caused competition to heat up. Where electric models used to be reserved for higher earners, it's now possible for more people to get into a zero-emission model without having to make major compromises.

That's where the compact SUV really shines.

It's the natural progression of the family hatchback, offering a raised driving position and additional practicality without the high running costs of an off-roader.

We've assembled a selection of the best electric crossovers that can fit the needs of modern families, while also offering the creature comforts, refinement and performance of a typical business car.

Crucially, all the cars in our test cost less than £40,000, making them more accessible to a wider pool of drivers and thus avoiding the 'premium car tax' supplement.

There's no shortage of options in this segment. Among our group are two reigning Fleet News Award winners – the Hyundai Kona and Kia EV3. They're competing alongside the all-new Mini Countryman, which is electric for the first time, the Škoda Elroq and Volvo's EX30.

Hyundai Kona

Now in its second generation, the Kona has gone from strength-to-strength. It's a practical and spacious family car with a decent range, impressive technology and a refined drive.

Not everyone will be drawn to the styling. It sits somewhere between Hyundai's conventional look and that of its new Ioniq range. There's a lot going on at the sides, but the front and rear are quite soft and bland.

Prices start at £35,000, rising to £39,400 for the top-spec Ultimate model that we're testing here.

The interior has a premium feel, with softer materials and contrasting colours used throughout. An impressive twin-screen array is fitted to all Konas, combining the infotainment touchscreen

with the digital instrument cluster. The system has crisp, clear graphics and is easy to use.

There's an abundance of switchgear to reduce reliance on the screen, which means you can adjust the audio system and climate controls using just the physical buttons.

The rear seats aren't the most spacious, but the Kona does have one of the largest boots.

Hyundai fits one powertrain to all Kona Electrics. It uses a 218PS electric motor and a 65kWh battery. The set-up suits the car well, providing decent acceleration and a reasonable range.

As the lightest car in the group, the Kona manages 0-62mph in 7.8 seconds and has decent mid-range punch despite its modest power output. The power delivery is reined in to avoid wheelspin, although in the wet the front tyres can be made to scrabble for grip.

In our efficiency test the car returned 3.2mi/kWh, putting it mid-table.

The smaller capacity battery means overall range is limited to 210 miles of real-world driving, based on our figures.

Charging speeds of 102kW mean a 10%-to-80% charge will take around 34 minutes, which is the slowest in this group.

Kia EV3

We're not the only ones to recognise the EV3's impressive capabilities; it was named World Car of the Year at the start of 2025. It's also the best-selling model of the five we're testing.

The EV3 is one of the smallest cars in this group, but it doesn't look or feel like it. The chunky bodywork gives it road presence, while the smart interior layout benefits passenger space.

Unlike the Kona and the Mini Countryman, the EV3 is only available with an electric powertrain. As such, its platform isn't compromised by the need to fit an engine, exhaust and fuel tank on board. The floor is flat and the dashboard is minimalist, giving the sensation of a much larger car.

Lots of the materials are recycled and sustainable, so don't expect lashings of leather and tactile finishings. Everything feels high quality and robust, which is ideal for families, if a little utilitarian.

While there aren't many buttons inside, Kia has thought about day-to-day useability. You can toggle the cabin temperature and control the audio system volume manually. The climate controls are also housed in a separate touchscreen neatly placed between the main infotainment display and the digital instrument cluster.

The EV3 has two battery options, but only one motor – a 204PS unit powering the front wheels.

When paired with the 58kWh battery it provides a range (WLTP) of 270 miles. With the larger (81kWh) unit, the EV3 has a 375-mile range.

In our test, the long-range EV3 was returning closer to 260 miles and it wasn't quite as efficient as we'd hoped, returning 3.3mi/kWh on our test route. Part of the problem is that Kia doesn't fit a heat pump as standard, so on colder days a lot of energy is lost keeping the cabin warm. You can spec one on the range-topping GT Line S, only, for £900.

On-road manners are very good. The EV3 is set up for comfort and it delivers. The ride is smooth and the car remains quiet at higher speeds.

It does feel a little sluggish, however. The EV3 has half the torque output of the Mini and it's noticeable in mid-range acceleration.

While it's not the last word in agility, the EV3 feels competent enough in the bends to give reassurance that it can handle quick and unexpected manoeuvres.

Mini Countryman

This year has been quite an exciting one for Mini. The brand kicked off with a renewed line-up, bringing electric powertrains to the entire range.

The Countryman is available in many guises, including two electric variants. There's the Countryman E and the Countryman SE, the latter of which we've reviewed here.

Both models use the same 64.4kWh battery, but the more expensive SE uses a dual motor arrangement, giving all-wheel drive. While the single motor car would be sufficient in this test, the SE is available well within our £40,000 price cap.





"That's the beauty of this segment – there's such a wide range of different and distinct models to suit a variety of needs"


COUNTRYMAN S
YA25 ZZM
KY25 OUW

It's the most powerful car here, unsurprisingly. Total power output is 308PS, making the Countryman brisk. It's also the best car to drive, with a sportier chassis set-up, excellent steering and keen handling.

Total claimed range is 269 miles, but in our test the car was achieving just 206 miles. Efficiency was 3.1mi/kWh, which isn't great but also not miles away from the single motor competition. The problem is the Countryman's battery is just a bit too small for a two-tonne family car.

The Mini's interior feels the most upmarket, with tactile fabric-like coverings on the dashboard and door panels setting it apart. They even light up at night. There's clear inspiration from BMW, when it comes to perceived quality, but plenty of Mini identity. Not least, the central round touchscreen that replicates the speedometer on classic Minis.

During our test the Countryman was the car that left drivers the most perplexed. Simple tasks such as turning the car on are not immediately obvious. All the controls are consolidated into a small panel beneath the screen, including the on/off switch and gear selector.

Refinement is impressive and the silence of the electric powertrain is supplemented by noise generator that pipes in a futuristic Jetsons-like sound as you accelerate. We were expecting the Mini to have a hard ride, but it's surprisingly comfortable. There's a sense of firmness and no significant body roll, but it remains supple even on rough roads.

Škoda Elroq

As Škoda's latest electric car to launch, the Elroq offers a smaller and cheaper alternative to the popular Enyaq. It uses the same base as VW's ID3, but with a Škoda-specific body and interior.

The Elroq is easily the best option for those that want range. It was the most capable car in our test, returning 3.4mi/kWh and a projected range of 262 miles. You also get impressive charging speeds and strong performance.

The 282PS motor is attached to the rear axle, meaning power delivery is managed better than in the front-driven Hyundai and Kia. There's no scrabbling for grip when pulling away in wet conditions and has great stability on the move.

At 2.1-tonnes, the Elroq is almost 350kg heavier than the Kona, however. It does help with refinement – the Elroq feels the most planted on the motorway – but it lacks the nimbleness that the other cars in this group offer.

It's not only the heaviest car here, either. It's also the largest. Even if the Mini looks the most visually imposing, the Elroq will fill more of a parking ➲

	Hyundai Kona Ultimate	Kia EV3 GT Line	Mini Countryman SE All4 Exclusive	Škoda Elroq 85 Edition	Volvo EX30 Extended Range Plus
Price (P11D)	£39,335	£39,340	£38,940	£38,595	£39,795
BIK %	3%	3%	3%	3%	3%
BIK @ 20%	£236	£236	£234	£232	£239
BIK @ 40%	£472	£472	£467	£463	£478
VED (4yrs)	£595	£595	£595	£595	£595
Residual (4yrs/80k)	£11,200	£13,575	£14,775	£13,050	£12,325
Depreciation	35ppm	32ppm	30ppm	30ppm	34ppm
SMR	4.2ppm	3.4ppm	3.3ppm	4.5ppm	4.8ppm
Fuel cost	4.5ppm	4.2ppm	4.7ppm	4.1ppm	4.6ppm
Running cost	44ppm	40ppm	38ppm	38ppm	44ppm
Battery useable	65.4kWh	78kWh	66.5kWh	77kWh	65kWh
WLTP range	282mi	350mi	269mi	330mi	293mi
WLTP efficiency	4.3mi/kWh	4.5mi/kWh	4.0mi/kWh	4.2mi/kWh	4.5mi/kWh
FN test range	210mi	257mi	206mi	262mi	189mi
FN test efficency	3.2mi/kWh	3.3mi/kWh	3.1mi/kWh	3.4mi/kWh	2.9mi/kWh
Max charge AC	11kW	11kW	11kW	11kW	11kW
Max Charge DC	105kW	135kW	128kW	175kW	158kW
Charge time 7.4kWh	10.5hrs	12.5hrs	10.5hrs	12.25hrs	10.5hrs
Charge time 22kWh	7hrs	8.5hrs	7hrs	8.25hrs	7hrs
Max DC Charge time 10%-80%	34mins	33mins	30mins	28mins	25mins
Power	215PS	201PS	308PS	282PS	268PS
Torque	255Nm	283Nm	494Nm	545Nm	343Nm
0-62mph	7.8secs	7.7secs	5.6secs	6.6secs	5.3secs
Max speed	106mph	106mph	112mph	112mph	112mph
Drivetrain	FWD	FWD	AWD	RWD	RWD
Length	4,355mm	4,300mm	4,433mm	4,488mm	4,233mm
Width	1,825mm	1,850mm	1,843mm	1,884mm	1,837mm
Height	1,575mm	1,560mm	1,656mm	1,625mm	1,549mm
Weight (unladen)	1,773Kg	1,885Kg	2,075Kg	2,115Kg	1,850Kg
Boot volume seats up	466l	460l	460l	470l	318l
Boot volume seats down	1,300l	1,251l	1,450l	1,580l	904l
Towing capacity	750kg	1,000kg	1,200kg	1,000kg	1,600kg
Infotainment screen	12.3-inch	12.3-inch	9.4-inch	13-inch	12.3-inch
Heat pump	Y	N	Y	£1,100	Y
Heated front seats	Y	Y	£2,500*	Y	Y
Adaptive cruise	Y	Y	£2,500*	Y	Y
Blind spot monitor	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Keyless entry	Y	Y	£2,500*	Y	Y
Apple Carplay/ Android Auto	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y/N
* part of Level 1 pack					

space. That pays practicality dividends. The Elroq's boot capacity is the biggest and it will accommodate the largest amount of flat-pack furniture.

Simply clever features, such as a reversible boot mat that is rubber on one side and carpet on the other, bring added value and make day-to-day life a little easier.

The central infotainment screen has a user-friendly interface and incorporates key controls. It's not too difficult to use on the move, with climate controls confined to a strip along the bottom of the display. You can also customise the quick access icons at the top of the screen to control functions such as lane-keep assist and speed limit warning.

Volvo EX30

When the EX30 launched it set the scene for Volvo's new electric model range. It's a bespoke EV-only platform that uses clever engineering to maximise space and minimise cost.

The EX30 is more compact that the other cars here, so it's a little less family friendly with a more cramped back seat and a smaller boot.

Existing Volvo customers will likely be shocked by the sparse interior, which utilises a lot of cheaper-feeling materials. There's also a distinct lack of switchgear. You don't even get a volume knob for the sound system.

The central touchscreen is relied upon heavily, even for displaying the vehicle's speed. Volvo has produced a slick and responsive interface, but there's simply too many functions in there to make the menu structure simple. From headlights and wipers to driver assistance and heated seats, everything is in controlled via the screen.

For this test we've got the Extended Range version, which uses a 65kWh battery. Official range is 293 miles. The EX30 is rear-wheel drive and its 268PS motor packs a mighty punch. It's the fastest-accelerating car of the group, managing 0-62mph in 5.3 seconds.

Sadly, it was also the least efficient car in our test. Average efficiency, when driven bumper-to-bumper with the other cars in the group, was only 2.9mi/kWh. That results in a real-world range of 189 miles. In separate tests the EX30 has proven more efficient, achieving 3.6mi/kWh.

The EX30 makes up for its shorter range with the fastest charging. A DC fast charger can replenish the battery from 10% to 80% in 25 minutes.

After the Mini, the Volvo is the most enjoyable car to drive. It's nimble and eager without compromising ride quality. The smooth ride and quiet cabin make up for some of the less tactile interior pieces.

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Verdict

Every car in this group has its merits. The Elroq is both the cheapest and the largest car here, making it excellent value. The Kona comes with a great specification, has a premium feel and is user-friendly. The Mini is fun to drive, has the best interior and offers the reassurance of all-wheel drive. Volvo brings performance to the table, along with a modern, minimalist design.

Then there's the Kia. It might lack performance, but for space, range and value for money it's a clear winner. Running costs are competitive, at 40p per mile over a four-year cycle. We've managed to squeeze 4.0mi/kWh out of it with some eco-friendly driving, which is enough to get more than 300 miles from a charge. And the boot is only four litres smaller than the one in the Škoda, making it almost as practical.

It's not the best choice for keen drivers; they're better off with the Mini or Volvo. And if range is the absolute priority, then the Škoda offers the best real-world efficiency. But that's the beauty of this segment – there's such a wide range of different and distinct models to suit a variety of needs.

China speed

From rapid development to rapid production, Chinese carmakers are taking the market by storm. Here are two of the very best. ***Matt de Prez*** investigates

There's no slowing the influx of new brands and models coming to the UK from China. Three new marques have launched this year alone and last year's entrants, Omoda and Jaecoo, have reached close to 3% market share in just 12 months.

While these newcomers are largely targeting the more budget-friendly segments with cut-price, high-spec models, there's really no limit to the capability of these brands.

The term 'China speed' refers to the rapid pace of development achieved in the country, be it with regard to infrastructure, technology or manufacturing. China does it faster than anyone else.

In automotive, new car development by Chinese brands takes around half the time of their European competitors.

It's why Renault set up a Chinese R&D centre to speed up the launch of its new Twingo and why BMW shipped production of the Mini out to China.

But China isn't just good at making cars quickly. It's also good at making quick cars. We've not been treated to many Eastern performance cars yet, but think of the electric production car Nürburgring lap record – that's held by the Xiaomi SU7. And the world's fastest production car? That would be the Yangwang U9 Extreme, which tops out at 308mph.

So, where do these two unassuming-looking black saloon cars fit into the equation? Well, let me introduce to you the BYD Seal Excellence and the MG IM5 Performance.

Price first. They both cost a shade less than £49,000. That's a proper four-door executive car, for less than fifty grand. A BMW 330e costs £47,000 and a 5 Series could easily be north of £60,000.

But these aren't 'cheap' Chinese cars. There's no Linglong tyres, hard scratchy plastics or comedically bad infotainment system graphics here.

This duo can hold their own against the best in the business.

I guess now is as good a time as any to mention performance. The Seal manages 0-62mph in 3.8 seconds. In fact, it's so proud of it that it wears a little '3.8s' badge on the back.

Then there's the MG. The 'Performance' moniker here really is deserved, because the IM5 can hit 62mph from rest in 3.2 seconds. That's quicker than an Audi R8 V10.

Aside from the BYD's silly badge, though, you'd never tell. This duo look as business class as it gets. Slick bodywork, high-spec interiors – they're the automotive equivalent of a tailored navy blue suit.

And let's not forget, these fully electric saloons attract just a 3% benefit-in-kind (BIK) tax rate.

It's super car motoring for mid-range crossover money.

BYD Seal Excellence

Inspired by the popularity of the Tesla Model 3, BYD introduced the Seal saloon in 2023 as the second car in its aquatic mammal themed 'ocean series'.

The Seal was developed entirely in-house by BYD and utilises a clever cell-to-body construction whereby the battery becomes part of the car's structure. This increases torsional stiffness, which makes the car handle better, and helps to achieve a lower floor for greater passenger comfort.

The battery itself is an 82.5kWh unit with a rated range of 323 miles. The powertrain consists of two electric motors, giving all-wheel drive. Total power output is 523PS, with 670Nm of torque.

With a low-slung driving position, sculpted sporty seats and seemingly limitless power beneath your right foot, the Seal feels every bit like a sports saloon. It's poised, well-balanced and fun to drive.

Throttle calibration favours a progressive drive, so it's easy to moderate the car's output. You can also switch between Eco, Normal and Sport drive modes, to tailor the experience.

The steering is quick and feels nicely weighted. Not too heavy, but certainly not light and lifeless. The small diameter steering wheel adds to the positive driving experience, as do the sharp and consistent brakes. On a country lane it's not quite ↻

The small diameter steering wheel adds to the BYD Seal's positive driving experience

The IM5's steering gives just the right amount of feel without making the car too fidgety

as fun to drive as a BMW i4, but it's not far behind.

This particular Seal is part of our long-term test fleet and over the past 5,000 miles it's returned 3.2mi/kWh and, incidentally, that is also exactly what it returned in our test loop. That's enough for a real-world range of 264 miles.

Charging speeds are a little on the slow side in this test. At just 150kW you'll be sitting at a rapid charger for almost 20 minutes longer than an MG IM5 driver to replenish a similar amount of range.

MG IM5 Performance

When we were conducting this twin test my two colleagues were fairly taken by the BYD. Both had driven it previously and remarked that it was "probably the fastest thing" they'd ever driven.

And the Seal is flippin' quick, but the IM5 frankly laughs at its '3.8s' boot badge.

Because the MG doesn't have 523PS. Oh no. It has *seven hundred and forty-two*. That makes quite a difference.

The MG isn't just 'quick'. It's gut-wrenchingly, mind-warpingly fast. Acceleration is immediate and relentless. You feel yourself fusing with the seat as it does its thing.

Yet, inside the IM5 is the most serene and relaxing place to be. It's whisper quiet, thanks to extra thick glass and an active noise cancellation system built into the stereo. The seats are soft and supportive, the carpets have a deep pile and all the interior materials are upmarket and premium to touch.

It glides along the motorway, absorbing just about everything its tyres encounter. On country lanes, the four-wheel steering system makes it nimble and the steering gives just the right amount of feel without making the car too fidgety.

The way the IM5 handles its ridiculous power output is a marvel. It puts a lot of European car makers to shame.

You're not short-changed on spec either. There are heated and ventilated seats, surround-view cameras, keyless entry, adaptive LED headlights and a 20-speaker audio system.

The 96.5kWh battery gives a range of up to 357 miles, officially. We only managed 270 miles, achieving a rather disappointing 2.8mi/kWh when driving bumper-to-bumper with the Seal. A separate motorway run netted a slightly more palatable 3.3mi/kWh, although we've seen more than 4.0mi/kWh from our Seal on occasion.

The Seal's boot has a volume of 400 litres with the seats up

The IM5 boot holds a little more with a capacity of 457 litres

	BYD SEAL ULTIMATE	MG IM5 PERFORMANCE
Price (P11D)	£48,640	£48,430
BIK %	3%	3%
BIK @ 20%	£292	£291
BIK @ 40%	£584	£581
VED (4yrs)	£1,870	£1,870
Residual value (4yrs/80k)	£17,575	£18,275
Depreciation	39ppm	38ppm
SMR	5.2ppm	5.9ppm
Fuel cost	5ppm	5.4ppm
Running cost	49ppm	49ppm
Battery usable	82.5kWh	96.5kWh
WLTP range	323mi	357mi
WLTP efficiency	3.9mi/kWh	3.7mi/kWh
FN test range	264mi	270mi
FN test efficiency	3.2mi/kWh	2.8mi/kWh
Max charge AC	11kW	11kW
Max Charge DC	150kW	369kW
Charge time 7.4kWh	13.25hrs	15.5hrs
Charge time 22kWh	9hrs	10.5hrs
Max DC Charge time 10%-80%	36mins	18mins
Power	523PS	742PS
Torque	670Nm	803Nm
0-62mph	3.8secs	3.2secs
Max speed	112mph	168mph
Drivetrain	AWD	AWD
Length	4,800mm	4,931mm
Width	1,875mm	1,960mm
Height	1,460mm	1,474mm
Weight (unladen)	2,260kg	2,298kg
Boot volume seats up	400l	457l
Boot volume seats down	1,440l	1,290l
Towing capacity	1,500kg	1,500kg
Infotainment screen	15.6-inch	26.3-inch
Heat pump	Y	Y
Heated front seats	Y	Y
Adaptive cruise	Y	Y
Blind spot monitor	Y	Y
Keyless entry	Y	Y
Apple Carplay/ Android Auto	Y	Y

Verdict

While the Seal and the IM5 cost almost exactly the same, they do have distinct differences.

The BYD is smaller overall, with a saloon body, while the larger MG has a hatchback. Boot space is bigger in the MG, perhaps unsurprisingly.

The BYD looks and feels sportier, even though neither car really shouts about its capability. That makes the MG a better choice for those that want comfort and refinement, rather than sharper driving dynamics.

MG offers a more up-to-date infotainment system, with a large panoramic screen that seamlessly incorporates the infotainment and instrument cluster displays into one giant unit.

A second touchscreen, mounted in the centre console houses all the car's settings and controls. The upshot is you can leave your sat-nav map on the upper screen and still adjust your audio or climate controls on the lower one.

BYD's set-up feels less integrated, as the display juts out of the dash and the user interface isn't as slick. You can rotate the screen, electronically to either a portrait or landscape configuration, however.

Both the BYD Seal and the MG IM5 highlight just how rapidly China is progressing, as they are realistically as good as any European offering. Then consider the two-year gap between the two cars. Look how far MG has taken the IM5 over and above the Seal. It's much more powerful, has a longer range, more advanced technology and faster charging. All for virtually the same price.

For that reason, the MG is a clear winner here. It really is an excellent car.

10 of the best...

...COMPANY CARS FOR TOWING

We've assessed the running costs, practicality and drivability of some of the segment's most popular models to create our top 10 list

Ford Kuga PHEV

If big budgets are out of the question, the Kuga is the most financially appealing model in this list. Prices start at less than £40,000, making it accessible to more drivers while also avoiding the 'premium car' tax. The Kuga PHEV's 2.5-litre petrol engine offers ample grunt and impressive real-world fuel economy. Combined power output is 243PS and the car has a maximum towing capacity of 2,100kg. The 14.4kWh battery enables more than 40 miles of zero-emission driving, so BIK is 9%.

Ford Ranger PHEV

Until recently a pick-up would be the go-to choice for anyone that needs to tow. But recent tax changes make diesel-powered models very expensive for drivers. Ford thinks it has the solution with its Ranger PHEV: a plug-in hybrid pick-up that has no compromise when it comes to capability. It offers a 3,500kg towing limit and has more torque (690Nm) than the V6 diesel version. The Ranger PHEV is priced from £40,840 (CV OTR), returns up to 90mpg and has a 19% BIK rate.

BMW X5 xDrive 50e

The current generation X5 has been around for a few years, but it's still one of the most capable models in its class. Powered by a 3.0-litre six-cylinder petrol engine and electric motor, this plug-in hybrid powerhouse serves up an impressive 489PS and 700Nm of torque. It has a maximum towing capacity of 2,700kg and a Trailer Assist system that helps with reversing. The 25.7kWh battery gives a zero-emission range of 62 miles, meaning company car drivers will pay just 9% benefit-in-kind (BIK) tax. Prices start at £82,000.

Land Rover Defender 110 P400e

The Defender was re-invented with the objective of being both an appealing road car and a capable off-roader. With its plug-in hybrid engine developing 404PS and 640Nm, the Defender offers impressive performance in all conditions and a towing capacity of 3,000kg. The car has a rugged appearance both inside and out and is available in a commercial variant for those that don't need the rear seats. Four-wheel drive comes as standard and the Defender P400e attracts an 18% BIK rate. Prices start at £69,625.

Kia EV9 AWD

Since launch, the EV9 has been lauded as a game-changing EV. It has a long range of up to 349 miles, very fast charging and seating for seven. When it comes to towing, the EV9 is one of the most capable electric cars on sale. It has a maximum towing capacity of 2,500kg and its sheer bulk provides plenty of stability when you have a trailer attached. Two electric motors serve up 378PS and 700Nm, while also providing all-wheel drive. For drivers, the prospect of 3% BIK is likely to make this £74,000 SUV very appealing.

Kia EV6

In the mid-size electric car segment, the Kia EV6 is the most capable tow car available. A large footprint aids stability and it can handle an 1,800kg trailer load in both single- and dual-motor guise. The RWD Air model has a range of 349 miles from its 84kWh battery and delivers impressive efficiency in day-to-day driving, making it the ideal company car. Prices start at £45,520 and BIK is just 3%, thanks to the car's zero-emission powertrain.

Mazda CX-60 PHEV

There are plenty of mid-size SUVs that can tow up to 2,000kgs, but few that go beyond that capability. The CX-60 PHEV, however, manages 2,500kg. Its powertrain generates 328PS and 500Nm, enough for 0-62mph in less than six seconds. With all-wheel drive the CX-60 has no issues with traction when a trailer is attached, either. A 2.5-litre petrol engine is paired with an electric motor, while the 17.8kWh battery manages a 40-mile zero-emission range. Prices start at £46,775 and the car sits in the 9% BIK band.

Škoda Superb Estate TDI

Plug-in solutions might not fit the needs of all drivers, so for those who need a large towing capacity and long-distance practicality the Superb TDI is worthy of consideration. Using a 2.0-litre 150PS diesel engine, the Superb is rated to tow up to 2,000kg. It's a large and spacious car that makes light work of lengthy journeys. Standard specification is impressive, and the engine should manage more than 50mpg. Prices start at £37,235 and BIK is 31%.

Volkswagen Tiguan e-Hybrid 272

The Tiguan is 2025's best-selling company car, and it brings many benefits to the table as a practical, well-equipped and refined SUV. The eHybrid model is particularly impressive as it combines a 272PS power output, a 2,000kg towing capacity and just a 6% BIK tax rate. Priced at £48,315, the Tiguan eHybrid 272 features a 19.7kWh battery and has an official electric-only range of 70 miles. The optional Trailer Assist system will take over the steering while reversing to simplify manoeuvres.

Volvo XC90 T8

The XC90 T8 is ideal for families. It's large, safe and seats seven. A 455PS plug-in hybrid powertrain provides a 2,400kg towing capacity. The XC90 also rides on air suspension, which helps to keep the car level when there's a heavy trailer attached. Starting at £72,696, the large SUV offers low tax bills thanks to its 9% BIK rate. It has a zero-emission range of 44 miles and, when unladen, can sprint from 0-62mpg in less than six seconds. Trailer Stability Assist helps you maintain control should the trailer begin to snake.

Evata brings shared charging to life with data-led solution

New energy trading platform links charge points to fleets prompted by demand-based telematics evidence

Evata co-founder Shakeel Ali has experience with complex energy and engineering projects

A new energy trading platform is offering fleets an opportunity to collaborate and transact with peers, charge point operators and landowners, thereby introducing the proposition of a viable shared charging network which offers both operational and commercial gains.

Evata believes its software will accelerate the transition to electric for fleets by clarifying the reality of switching fuel types while providing a charging solution which reduces cost and downtime.

The platform is co-founded by Shakeel Ali, who worked on some of the world's most complex energy and engineering projects before moving to the world of agricultural start-ups.

Evata has been appointed the preferred partner for the Association of Fleet Professionals (AFP) as part of the professional body's aspiration to link members via a shared charging network.

The company claims that its approach sets it apart. Basing its business proposition on three services – charge card, discounted public charging and shared depot charging – Evata uses fleet telematics data to create bespoke solutions.

"We saw an opportunity to build a tool which took telematics data and reassembled journeys for a year, looking at mileage, downtime and infrastructure requirements," Ali says. "But the commercial cases were poor because of the availability of chargers and the prices.

"No one had sight of the data to make the business case for shared chargers that generate income – nothing glued it together."

Evata launched its pilot proposition in conjunction with Welch's Group, the Cambridge-based haulier. It had some success, but Ali quickly recognised that the model was broken because the proposition was based on waiting for people to come to the site.

"It was a charger with no connection to fleet needs," he said.

"We realised we had to define the charging requirement for the fleet and then procure offers that meet those needs, including discounts, and then have a way of handling the payments."

While the outcome is a service resembling a traditional fuel card, the secret lies in the fact that it is customised to fleet's individual needs.

It offers access to rapid chargers at cost price, but when it has identified the fleet's charging requirement, it pushes the charge point operator for their best price. This can be up to 50% cheaper than the standard price thanks to the demand-based evidence on usage provided by Evata.

"We act as a conduit between the needs of fleet operators and CPOs, giving both the opportunity to collaborate," Ali says.

This infrastructure is overlaid with a closed loop private charging network, with sites identified based on fleet needs.

"We have built a database of thousands of private charger locations, and we have spoken to the businesses," Ali says. "We have sight of their use which means we can add something to each individual fleet that they can't get elsewhere. It's a targeted process; we matchmake fleets with chargers."

Some of the solutions are for overnight trickle charging, where a driver who doesn't have home charging parks up in a secure compound and leaves their vehicle; others are for rapid daytime charging.

Telematics data shows popular destinations for a fleet's vehicles and average dwell times. Evata's holistic view reveals how the vehicles fit into the wider supply chain to unlock demand.

High demand areas are marked as a virtual hub to enable Evata to re-run the fleet's journey scenarios and identify the impact on the electric vehicle business case.

"It's a complex modelling tool that calculates the annual operational impact cost," Ali says.

"The fleet can then make a decision with confidence."

All chargers can be booked via Evata's app which also includes key information about site health and safety rules, periods of charge point availability and video tours of the site for new drivers.

It raises a 3.5% fee from each charging transaction, while the bespoke solution is based on a monthly subscription.

Around 30 companies are at different stages in the pipeline to participate in shared charging, from leasing companies looking for a white label solution to SMEs, according to Ali.

"But we don't focus on the number of companies; we focus on the needs of the companies," he adds.

On the flip side, with depot infrastructure typically running into six-figure investments and no guaranteed return, Evata's solution can help companies to make the case based on data-based revenue forecasts.

"That's the only way to make money; there has to be the demand in an area for your charge point and we have that data," Ali said. "But it's not about making a killing; it's to get to a working infrastructure."

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