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Risky business - why now isn't the time to cut training costs

Latest Fleet200 Strategy Network research shows businesses are under pressure to cut costs but risk management is one area where fleets need to keep investing, experts say. *Sarah Tooze* reports

Fleet decision-makers who responded to the latest Fleet200 Strategy Network research are almost unanimous about the pressures they are facing this year - the cost of fuel, vehicles and parts, and the chief concern: getting vehicles in the first place.

Given those challenges it would be understandable if risk management took a backseat (at least temporarily) or if finance directors, looking for a perceived 'quick win', decided to reduce a fleet manager's driver training budget.

But experts agree that now is not the time for that course of action.

In fact, the converse is true.

Neil Greig, policy and research director at IAM RoadSmart, says: "Safer driving delivers fuel, downtime, staff sickness and wear and tear savings, as well as mental health benefits for drivers. A cost of living crisis is actually the best time to be training drivers as the savings to be made are greater than ever."

Matt Hammond, head of fleet and plant at Altrad Services, agrees: "Especially at the moment where we're seeing extended lead times, you can't get parts for vehicles, you've got more downtime than you've ever had before, this is the time when you really want to invest in that and you want to improve it so you can reduce your vehicle off road time."

He adds that established fleets, with established fleet managers, can prove that the investment is paying dividends through reduced insurance premiums, downtime improvements and the annual cost of incidents reducing.

"If you've got a good strategy in place you should already be in a position where it [driver training] is being valued," he says. "Businesses who are new to it are probably more tempted to cut that cost back."

For Hammond, risk management comes above everything else on his priority list.

"It's got to be front and centre of everything we do," he says. "For me, fleet safety is the number one thing that we're there to do. Everybody's talking about electrifying or decarbonising their fleet - it's the biggest show in town at the moment - but for me we've got to make sure that our drivers go home safe at night. It doesn't matter if they're in a petrol, diesel or electric vehicle, they've got to be safe. And that transcends everything that we're doing, and that's where our primary focus has always been."

Rebecca Guy, road safety manager at the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (RoSPA), urges businesses not to cut back at the expense of safety because "driving is the most dangerous work activity that most people do, and contributes to far more accidental deaths and serious injuries than all other work-related activities".

Switched on businesses know that there is a huge reputational risk (and the threat of jail for the company director) if one of their drivers causes a fatality on the roads.

Platform Housing Group, which has a fleet of more than 500 commercial vehicles, understands the benefits of managing road risk. Group fleet manager Matt Neale says that when he speaks to senior management "they understand exactly what we do" and, crucially, why.

Buy-in at a senior level makes it much easier for fleet managers to implement road safety initiatives.

Neale is about to embark on Fleet Service GB's Achieve driver behaviour programme, building on the success he has already had in managing incidents.

He says: "There will be a lot more interaction with the driver and an e-learning suite of training videos that they have to complete either annually or biannually or if they have certain events the training will trigger too."

Platform Housing Group is among the majority of Fleet200 Strategy Network survey respondents with more than 500 vehicles that use e-learning to minimise road risk. Among smaller fleets (up to 100 vehicles) the take up is only half. However, the latter group does prefer this method to on-road training (44% take-up) and classroom training (31%), which is likely to be because it is easier and cheaper to implement.

More than half (53%) of smaller fleets have a risk assessment in place but that still means a significant number aren't doing the basics to reduce road risk.

With fleets of 101-500 vehicles and fleets of more than 500 vehicles, the implementation of risk assessments is, unsurprisingly, much higher (92% and 89% respectively) as there is likely to be a full-time fleet manager in place or even an individual whose job is dedicated to road safety.

Another trend to emerge from the latest Fleet200 Strategy Network research is that many more public sector fleets have a 'buddy system'

WHAT MEASURES DO YOU EMPLOY TO MINIMISE ROAD RISK? (TICK ALL THAT APPLY)

	Total	1-100	101-500	501+	Public Sector	Private Sector
Risk assessment	78%	53%	92%	89%	75%	79%
Communication programme	59%	41%	72%	66%	42%	62%
On-road training	72%	44%	80%	89%	75%	73%
Classroom training	51%	31%	68%	57%	67%	51%
eLearning	61%	50%	60%	70%	83%	57%
Buddy system	31%	16%	36%	39%	58%	28%
Other	5%	13%	-	-	8%	4%

DO YOU MONITOR YOUR CAR DRIVERS' BEHAVIOUR VIA TELEMATICS?

	Total	1-100	101-500	501+	Public Sector	Private Sector
Yes	52%	57%	54%	48%	60%	52%
No	48%	43%	46%	53%	40%	48%

DO YOU MONITOR YOUR CAR DRIVERS' BEHAVIOUR VIA ON-BOARD CAMERAS

	Total	1-100	101-500	501+	Public Sector	Private Sector
Yes	26%	9%	33%	33%	30%	27%
No	74%	91%	67%	68%	70%	73%

DO YOU MONITOR YOUR VAN DRIVERS' BEHAVIOUR VIA TELEMATICS?

	Total	1-100	101-500	501+	Public Sector	Private Sector
Yes	73%	68%	58%	85%	44%	76%
No	27%	32%	42%	15%	56%	24%

DO YOU MONITOR YOUR VAN DRIVERS' BEHAVIOUR VIA ON-BOARD CAMERAS

	Total	1-100	101-500	501+	Public Sector	Private Sector
Yes	47%	25%	53%	59%	56%	45%
No	53%	75%	47%	41%	44%	55%

in place than private sector fleets (58% versus 28%). This could be linked to public sector fleets having more job-need shared commercial vehicles while private sector fleets might have a greater 'perk' company car drivers.

Platform Housing Group has a buddy system as part of its apprenticeship programme, with apprentices holding a full UK driving licence teaming up with a fully skilled operative to drive a company van.

£1 MILLION SAVING FROM TELEMATICS

Platform Housing Group recently introduced Lightfoot telematics, which provides in-cab feedback to drivers.

To establish the return on investment, for the first month after installation, the devices recorded data but gave no real time feedback to drivers. The following month the feedback was switched on, with impressive results.

During the blind phase 40.3% of drivers were classed as 'elite' (meaning they consistently scored 85% or higher for efficient driving) but during the live phase this rose to 91.2% of drivers.

There was also a 14.9% per 100 miles reduction in harsh driving (accelerating, braking and cornering) and a 28.3% reduction in idling, with fuel economy improving by 9.2%.

Over the next five years, Platform Housing Group expects to save just over £1 million in reduced fuel costs, accidental damage, downtime and end of lease contract damage charges, and more than one thousand tonnes of carbon emissions.

Proof, if it's needed, that investing in making the fleet safer is worthwhile.

Yet findings from the Fleet200 Strategy Network research suggest many fleets are missing out on these kind of potential savings with more than a quarter (27%) of respondents yet to fit telematics to their van fleet. Among respondents from the public sector more than half (56%) don't

have such devices.

Car fleets lag even further behind. Overall, 48% don't have telematics.

RoSPA's Guy is surprised that more fleets don't monitor driver behaviour via telematics.

"Telematics offers a number of key benefits to employees and employers," she says. "These include helping companies to: risk assess drivers and journeys; monitor and analyse the real driving behaviour of your staff; provide tailored, personalised feedback to help improve their driving; identify driver training and education needs of each driver; identify other ways of reducing their risk such as changing journey schedules; incentivise improved driving; reduce crash rates and 'risky' driving; improve accident investigations; reduce costs, with savings paying for the investment in the technology."

However, she acknowledges that a proportion of company car drivers might be concerned about real-time tracking, data security, personal privacy or that managers may use the data in "a punitive way".

"If you are planning to introduce telematics in your fleet, be clear and transparent about why and how you propose to use telematics and the benefits it will provide the company and the staff," she advises.

"Explain how individuals' data will be protected, who is allowed access to it, and for what purposes.

"Also, be clear about whether drivers and vehicles will be monitored in real-time. Many types of telematics only download their data at the end of the day, so the vehicle is not monitored in real-time. However, some systems do provide real-time tracking, which can be very useful in the delivery and logistics industries. If this is the case, staff should be informed, and the reasons explained. RoSPA recommends creating a process for staff to challenge any conclusions drawn from the data about their driving, or to explain the circumstances of any instances of apparent poor driving."

IAM's Greig adds that telematics can deliver safety and cost benefits but without senior level support for it and "complete understanding" as to why it's being used it will "never reach its full potential for drivers and employers".

Altrad has telematics in both its 85 company cars and 911 vans, although different systems are in place in each.

Telematics in the car fleet provides 'high level' information, Hammond explains, such as vehicle mileages, if a driver has been driving for a long period of time and harsh events, which are followed up by emails and e-learning, if required, whereas the telematics system on the van fleet gives drivers real time feedback.

When he first introduced telematics to vehicles almost a decade ago he had some "kickback" from drivers but won them over by explaining that if they drove "normally" they "wouldn't be hearing from him" and he says he hasn't needed to speak to a large proportion of the drivers.

"Over time they've seen what we do with the data," he says. "We tend to use it for understanding the trends and then directing drivers on the relevant training course. So we use it as an improvement tool as opposed to a stick."

Hammond has yet to introduce cameras as he doesn't believe his fleet's risk profile "demands it".

And he's not alone.

More than half (53%) of survey respondents say they don't fit on-board cameras to their van fleets and almost three-quarters (74%) don't fit them to their cars.

For tools and equipment provider Speedy Services, however, cameras along with telematics, are standard fit across its 1,200 commercial vehicles.

Speedy Services is upgrading its camera system from front and rear cameras with a hard drive to access the data to a system with four or five cameras (depending on vehicle size), including fitting side scan cameras which can identify whether a person is near the vehicle and warn the driver.

Data is instantly downloaded which helps fleet director Aaron Powell and his team to have a 'live' view of incidents and be able to look at near misses (see panel).

Incidents are defined under the fleet as a collision involving a vehicle and/or coming into contact with another vehicle, person, animal, or prop-

erty on both public and private sites. All incidents are reportable, regardless of whether any damage has been caused, Powell says.

Speed Services' total incident rate for the period November 2021 to November 2022 was 33%. This was a 1.1% increase on the same period the previous year, which Powell says is due to an increase in the number of vehicles acquired and more journeys taking place post-Covid.

Most of the incidents are slow speed manoeuvring ones and Speedy Services has support from its insurer for additional training, starting with drivers with the most reversing incidents.

Drivers also benefit from live in-cab feedback from telematics, e-learning courses and one-to-one driver training.

"We're not producing a league table of the 'worst offenders,'" Powell says. "We're just trying to provide the right training to stop incidents from happening."

A driver of the year competition based on incidents, telematics scores and even Trustpilot scores from customers, provides motivation for drivers to improve.

SAFETY INNOVATIONS

Powell recently held an 'innovation day' with all of Speedy's vehicle-related suppliers.

"It was not just about what we want, it was about what innovations they have got coming and also what they could do for each other," Powell explains.

Among Speedy Services' suppliers is FHOSS, which has developed a warning system for cyclists before they cycle on the left side of a vehicle.

"When the driver puts their indicator on to turn left it beams a line along the side of the vehicle to show where the vehicle is turning and at the very back it says 'caution' so the cyclist doesn't want to go past that line because they know the vehicle is going to be turning," Powell explains.

Speedy Services is also fitting in-cab cameras to its HGVs, which can detect if a driver is falling asleep at the wheel.

It's part of a growing recognition from businesses that driver wellbeing is a fundamental part of road risk management.

Platform Housing Group has a number of dedicated health and safety professionals that work directly with the drivers to see if there are any issues getting in and out of the vehicles and adaptations will be made to the vehicles, if necessary.

Driver wellbeing also underlies conversations Neale has with drivers,

"We tend to use it (the data) for understanding the trends and then directing drivers on the relevant training course. So we use it as an improvement tool as opposed to a stick"

Matt Hammond, head of fleet and plant at Altrad Services

MISSED OPPORTUNITY TO IMPROVE ROAD SAFETY?

The latest Fleet200 Strategy Network research suggests there is a whole area of risk management which many businesses aren't addressing.

Almost half (49%) of the fleet decision-makers surveyed don't measure near misses. For private sector fleets with 500 vehicles or less, the proportion was slightly higher, while public sector fleets and large fleets of more than 500 vehicles are getting to grips with the issue. About two-thirds (67%) of public sector fleets measure near misses while 57% of large fleets do.

Although what is classed as a near miss can vary, RoSPA's definition is: "A dangerous occurrence that had the potential to result in personal injury to a staff member or another person, or to result in property damage."

Rebecca Guy advises fleets to maximise near miss reporting by introducing a 'no blame' reporting policy which makes it clear that the purpose is to learn from near miss experiences and not to penalise those involved.

Aaron Powell has adopted this approach at Speedy Services and views a near miss as "anything that's not an actual hit".

Telematics and cameras help identify incidents as well as drivers self-reporting.

The fleet team at Altrad trialled a week of noting the number of times they had to take evasive action in their own driving which, Hammond says, revealed the "magnitude" of near misses and was a reminder that not every incident of harsh braking recorded by telematics reflects 'bad' driving.

Consequently, Matt Hammond's fears that recording every near miss could mean the team is "inundated" with information that may not give them the full picture.

In truth, so many fleet managers are too busy tackling the incidents that do happen to investigate the ones that don't.

IF A DRIVER IS INVOLVED IN A CRASH INCIDENT, DO YOU CARRY OUT A POST-ACCIDENT REVIEW?

	Total	1-100	101-500	501+	Public Sector	Private Sector
Yes	88%	88%	84%	93%	100%	87%
No	12%	13%	16%	7%	0%	13%

DO YOU MEASURE NEAR MISSES?

	Total	1-100	101-500	501+	Public Sector	Private Sector
Yes	51%	47%	48%	57%	67%	48%
No	49%	53%	52%	43%	33%	52%

WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING SKILLS DO YOU FEEL ARE MOST IMPORTANT FOR FUTURE FLEET MANAGERS

	Total	1-100	101-500	501+	Public Sector	Private Sector
Greater market knowledge on products/services	48%	38%	68%	45%	58%	47%
Advanced technical knowledge/abilities	44%	31%	68%	39%	50%	43%
Energy management for EVs	55%	38%	72%	61%	42%	57%
Increased ability to make cost-efficient decisions	36%	38%	28%	39%	50%	34%
Openness to change	43%	41%	28%	52%	42%	43%
Driver care and wellbeing	44%	47%	28%	50%	42%	44%

particularly post-incident.

He always strives to have meaningful conversations with them and understands the work pressures they may be under while getting the message across that they are not only skilled trades professionals but drivers too.

"They need to be mindful of their own wellbeing and their own safety as opposed to worrying about getting to a job," he says. "And it's our duty of care as a business to make sure they get to that job safely."

Hammond agrees that fleet managers need to be alert to work pressures.

"I don't believe any of our drivers actually go out and deliberately damage the vehicles and if we can make things easier for them hopefully they'll pay me back by looking after the vehicle and working with us."

Hammond's latest driver communications campaign seeks to address low speed manoeuvring incidents.

"We're hitting parked cars and other stationary objects so we're putting together a campaign that says 'a parking bollard is one metre tall so is a child,'" Hammond says.

The idea is to stop drivers from thinking "I only hit a post" and instead think "I could have hit a child".

Hammond is considering getting that message across to drivers through a video and poster campaign using a silhouette of a child, and may create a lifesize cutout to be used at locations.

The results of the latest Fleet200 Strategy Network research suggests that many more fleets need to consider innovative campaigns like this to communicate with drivers. About two-fifths (41%) don't have a

communication programme and among public sector fleets this rises to more than half (58%).

However, 100% of public sector fleets that took part in the research carry out a post-accident review versus 87% of private sector survey participants.

Altrad's approach to risk management is working - Altrad's overall annualised incident rate for 2022 was 9% and the aim is to keep it in single figures.

Aside from the campaign targeting low speed manoeuvring incidents, Altrad has developed an in-house virtual reality (VR) training programme, which is being rolled out to all drivers.

"It's designed around hazard perception and distracted driving," Hammond says. "You can have six people in the scene and you can be a driver, you can be the passenger, you can be an onlooker. And it shows all of the scenarios and what the driver has missed, but it also tracks where they're looking at any time. So we do a video with a driver and then go through each scenario with them so they understand how a distraction can happen."

Hammonds adds that many of the drivers have never used VR headsets before so it helps to keep Altrad's risk management programme "fresh".

He is also keen to focus on the drivers who are performing well according to the telematics data, not just the 10% where there are issues.

"Previously we would have looked at a 'green' driver and said 'they are good, leave them alone'. Now we say 'they are good, let's make them better,'" Hammond says.

It's an approach that ideally all fleets should take to risk management.

58%
of public sector
fleets don't have a
communication programme

