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Association of Fleet Professionals
Chair Paul Hollick reveals his plan to attract new members

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Spotlight: ABM UK

We are an ESSENTIAL SERVICE

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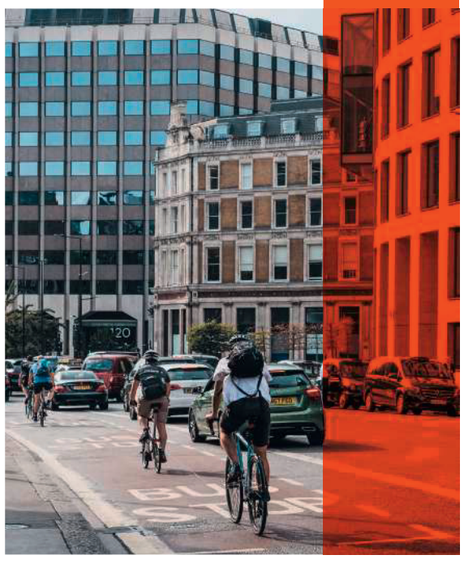

Environmental campaigners say coronavirus is providing opportunity for radical change

Conference delegates support argument for 'charge per journey' road taxation system

By Gareth Roberts

The Government is being urged to overhaul motoring taxation and replace it with road pricing as part of its plans for a 'green' recovery.

Facing a long-term decline in fuel duty from the electrification of vehicles, the change could stabilise tax revenues, while cutting congestion and emissions.

A poll taken at the Low Carbon Vehicle Partnership (LowCVP) annual conference showed a majority in favour of a new road-user charging scheme, with 60% backing the policy. Just more than a quarter (27%) voted against the measure.

The LowCVP survey also found that nine-in-10 respondents (91%) think the time is right for a more radical and rapid change in the decarbonisation of transport.

In a new report, Campaign for Better Transport also says the coronavirus pandemic has provided the Government with the ideal opportunity to overhaul the current tax regime.

It says a "new approach" to road pricing is needed that captures the impacts from use of the road space by vehicles, including congestion, air pollution and carbon emissions.

"Such variable, distance-based charging would reflect the impacts of individual journeys more appropriately and, unlike clean air zones or congestion charges, account for both pollution and congestion at the same time," it said.

The report – *Covid-19 Recovery: Renewing the transport system* – details a charging mechanism based on distance travelled, time of day, location and level of emissions.

As the pace of electrification of road transport grows, the report argues that such a regime should provide a mechanism for charging vehicles according to their environmental impact and use of the road space.

Darren Shirley, chief executive of Campaign for Better Transport, said: "As the UK begins the process of recovery, the Government must now focus its ambition on accelerating the shift to sustainable transport."

The Green Party and campaign group Greener Journeys are also making similar arguments for the introduction of road pricing.

London assembly member and Green Party local transport spokesperson, Caroline Russell, said it was "high time" the UK moved to this "modern and sophisticated" approach.

END FUEL DUTY FREEZE

Claire Haigh, chief executive of Greener Journeys, wants road pricing introduced alongside ending the freeze in fuel duty.

"The Chancellor should take the opportunity of record low oil prices to increase fuel duty," she said. "The money should be ring-fenced to incentivise the take-up of cleaner vehicles and improve public transport.

"At the very least, the Chancellor should end the freeze and increase fuel duty in line with inflation."

The fleet sector has already shown it is receptive to road pricing as a replacement of other road and fuel duties. *Fleet News* has been calling for the Government to launch a feasibility study since its Fleet Industry Manifesto report in 2015.

However, not everyone agrees.

Andrew Burn, partner and head of automotive at KPMG, told *Fleet News:* "It would be good to continue to keep fuel duty flat."

He also doesn't expect fleets to see a fuel duty reduction in the future as it does not play into the Government's green agenda and net zero ambitions.

The fuel duty escalator was introduced in 1990 as an environmental tax to stem the increasing pollution and congestion from road transport, but it has been frozen since 2011.

The Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) estimates that the failure to increase rates in line with CPI inflation has cost the Treasury £5.5 billion a year since 2010-11.

Revenue from fuel duties now stands at £28bn a year, which is 1.3% of national income. Revenue peaked at 2.2% of national income in 1999–2000. Had it remained at that level the Exchequer would currently be getting an extra £19bn.

In its Green Budget, published late last year, IFS highlighted how revenue from fuel duties had fallen since 2000 and called on the Government to consider road pricing to maintain its tax take (fleetnews.co.uk, October 4).

New analysis by the Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR) shows that fuel duty receipts stood at £2.3bn in February, but fell £400m to £1.9bn in March, £1.2bn in April and stood at just £990 million in May.

Fuel duty receipts will have increased as lockdown restrictions were eased, but the latest fuel sales figures from the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy show there is still some way to go.

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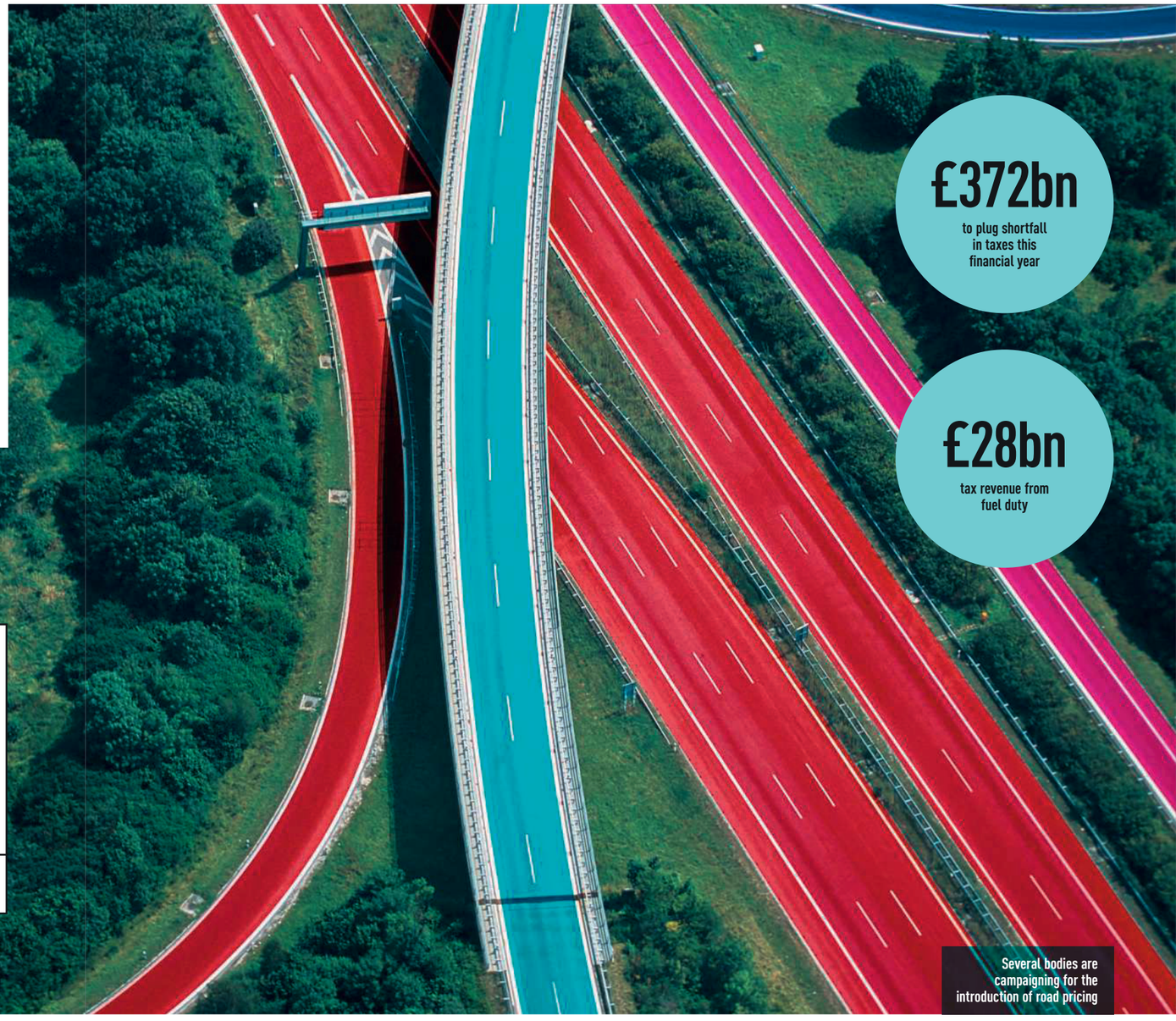
> "THE REDUCTION IN INCOME FROM FUEL DUTY IS THE ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM"
>
> **ASHLEY BARNETT, LEX AUTOLEASE**



Several bodies are campaigning for the introduction of road pricing

Fuel sales at filling stations across the UK were 23% below pre-lockdown levels at the end of June. Diesel sales were 20% lower than before lockdown and petrol sales were 26% lower than would be expected.

In the eight weeks prior to lockdown being imposed on March 23, average daily road fuel sales were 17,690 litres per filling station.

The lowest average daily figure recorded was 2,500 litres, on April 12, at the peak of the pandemic.

Ashley Barnett, head of consultancy at Lex Autolease, told *Fleet News* that even if individual mileages remain below average, there are likely to be more vehicles on the roads as people avoid public transport due to the coronavirus.

"While Treasury income from fuel duty has dropped during lockdown, an increase in vehicles on the roads would address some of this.

"Longer-term, the reduction in income from fuel duty is the 'elephant in the room' when discussing the transition to electric vehicles (EVs), but we are many years away from there being a significant reduction in the annual amount generated.

"As the momentum shifts away from petrol and diesel, there may come a time where the Chancellor feels fuel duty can be increased, to encourage drivers who are cautious about making the switch to electric.

"At the same time, when EVs become sufficiently 'mass market', a more appropriate taxation method than fuel duty may need to be considered, especially if they continue to be cheaper than petrol and diesel on a wholelife cost basis."

Tom Brewer, head of sales and marketing at Volkswagen Financial Services (VWFS) Fleet, added: "Clearly, the level of (electric vehicle) uptake now being seen will impact future tax receipts through reductions in company car tax, VED and fuel duty.

"Longer term alternatives to emissions-based taxation such as road pricing may well be viable in replacing VED and/or fuel duty.

"A debate on future taxation models is clearly going to be needed as the Exchequer looks to balance the books."

PUBLIC FINANCES

Balancing the books will prove a difficult task for the Chancellor, Rishi Sunak, with the UK economy facing its biggest decline in 300 years.

The OBR suggests that the economy will shrink 12.4% in 2020, with borrowing expected to increase to the highest peacetime level.

The latest data shows borrowing grew by 1.8% in May.

It leaves the Government on course to borrow £372bn this year to pay for the shortfall between tax revenues and public spending.

In a recent HMRC report, the impact of coronavirus on Government coffers was visible in reductions in receipts collected across a number of taxes.

Tax officials said reductions were due to a combination of changes to payment timing, responses to Covid-19 policies and the emerging economic impacts of the pandemic.

The report added: "At this stage it is not possible to fully unpick how much of the fall in tax receipts relates to changes to the timing of payments and how much relates to changes in the underlying economic activity. The effects of Covid-19 on HMRC tax receipts will become clearer over time."

The data showed total HMRC receipts for April and May 2020 were £45.2bn lower than in April and May 2019, mainly due to VAT (£25.6bn), income tax, capital gains tax and national insurance contributions (£9.8bn) and corporation tax (£5.4bn).

The OBR has also warned that the economy will not return to its pre-coronavirus size until the end of 2022, while unemployment is expected to rise to 12% by the end of this year, falling back to 10.1% in 2021.

Figures from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) show the number of workers on UK company payrolls fell by 649,000 between March and June.

However, unemployment has not yet surged, as many predict it eventually will, because large numbers of employers have put workers on the Government's furlough scheme.

The latest data shows that more than nine million private sector workers are, effectively, on the Government payroll.

It should have therefore come as no surprise that the Chancellor's summer statement failed to deliver any incentives for the fleet industry and the wider automotive sector.

So far, the Government's plans for a 'green' economic recovery have focused on jobs and softening the blow of phasing out the furlough scheme.

In a £30bn give-away, Sunak announced a VAT cut on hospitality and offered firms a £1,000 per employee bonus to keep furloughed staff (fleetnews.co.uk, July 9).

A much publicised possible scrappage scheme for electric vehicles (EVs) did not materialise, neither did a mooted VAT cut for the automotive sector.

SMMT 'DISAPPOINTED'

Mike Hawes, chief executive of UK automotive trade body, the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders (SMMT), said he was "bitterly disappointed" the Chancellor had stopped short of supporting the industry.

However, a scrappage scheme costing hundreds of millions of pounds, proved a step too far for a Government facing record debt and a dwindling tax take.

Ben Creswick, managing director of JCT600 Vehicle Leasing Solutions (VLS), argued: "A scrappage scheme would not benefit the company car market, but existing incentives such as the plug-in car grant and new company car tax rates, which allow a driver to have an electric car for just a few pounds a month, are doing the job.

"The range of EVs is increasing and the low total cost of ownership means they are finding their way on to choice lists. Availability of product is the only concern."

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Time to consider how Government will try to balance the books

PAUL HOLLICK
CHAIR, ASSOCIATION OF FLEET PROFESSIONALS

Let's start by stating something obvious, but true: the fleet industry of today is already very, very different from that of just a few months ago, to a degree that would've looked unimaginable even at the beginning of spring.

What has changed? A whole lot – but to summarise, company car use has plummeted as homeworking and video-conferencing have become the temporary norm, commercial vehicle activity has become concentrated around online and essential services, commuting has decreased and commuters themselves are moving in large numbers out of trains and buses into cars, while new vehicles have become often quite difficult to acquire and selling older ones isn't too easy, either.

There's obviously more but, frankly, we could use up the whole page.

How does all of this affect the relationship between the Government and fleets? Well, in a lot of ways, it simply means that the taxation and policy measures in place now were designed for a quite different world. While some remain appropriate, others look decidedly out-of-date.

Probably the most obvious is benefit-in-kind (BIK) taxation. There is a strong ethical argument for this to be reduced or suspended while car use remains at its current level.

Another point to consider is electric vehicles (EVs), where supply has slipped by at least six months and possibly longer, making adoption difficult for many users and promoting a need to extend the current 0% BIK taxation incentive. Also, some kind of managed process for shifts in commuting would be welcome, ensuring workers don't just move into cars, but adopt other forms of transport – from shared mobility to e-scooters – as well as staggering shift patterns to minimise congestion.

What else would it be useful for fleets to see?

On a practical level, it's fair to say that, while most people are sympathetic to the difficulties the Government faces in having to construct crucial policies to handle the coronavirus crisis in something approaching real time, it would be good to see increased clarity around social distancing and vehicle use, especially to cope with circumstances such as local lockdowns or potential second waves.

It would also be very positive to see targeted economic activity, of the kind seen in other sectors, to alleviate some of the specific problems that are affecting fleets, especially service support companies having to pay overheads while their income remains limited for the foreseeable future. We hope to see more of this kind of action from the Chancellor.

Of course, there is a very strong possibility that the concerns of fleets will be swept aside by what the Government would view as macro-economic necessities. This is an administration that has promised to set aside austerity, but has just borrowed truly enormous sums to fund its emergency programmes.

There is a good chance something will have to give and that we will all face higher taxes, fleets and their drivers included.

However, within all of this, we should not lose sight of the fact that this moment also provides an opportunity for huge and positive change. What we have just learnt is that people and businesses, in the right circumstances, can adapt very quickly.

We've already seen rapid digitisation across the sector and, with the right approach from legislators, everything from electrification to cycling to mobility could make rapid inroads in the near future.

Whatever happens, through the recently formed Association of Fleet Professionals (AFP), we are aiming to make our industry heard and to influence future policy.

If you have views that you would like to add to our discussions, we would be very pleased to hear from you.

Spotlight on the AFP – see page 34

SMMT urges agreement on full, zero-tariff deal to aid carmakers

Clock ticking on negotiations with Europe as UK bids to avoid car and van price increases

By Gareth Roberts

The Government is being warned a 'no deal' Brexit could impact vehicle costs and prove fatal to the wider UK automotive sector.

A recent Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders (SMMT) survey showed one-in-three automotive employees was still on furlough, with up to one-in-six jobs at risk (fleetnews.co.uk, June 23).

The impact of the coronavirus crisis is being felt across the sector, but jobs could also be threatened by the prospect of a 'bare bones' or no-deal Brexit, says the UK automotive trade body.

If the EU and UK do not agree a deal by the end of the year, the UK will leave the EU's single market and the customs union without any agreement on future access from January 1, 2021.

The SMMT wants a full, zero-tariff deal in place by the end of the transition period to give businesses on both sides the chance to prepare.

Chief executive Mike Hawes said: "Before Covid-19, we expected to produce 1.3 million vehicles this year; the pandemic means we're already looking at scarcely 900,000.

"A 'no deal' Brexit would wreak further long-term damage on the sector. Tariffs would add cost, custom duties and complexity, which would disrupt supply."

The SMMT suggests a 'no deal' scenario could see UK vehicle volumes falling below 850,000 by 2025 – the lowest level since 1953. This would mean a £40 billion cut in revenues, on top of the £33.5bn cost of Covid-19 production losses over the period for UK automotive.

"The industry cannot withstand the shock of a hard Brexit," explained Hawes.

"Covid-19 has consumed every inch of capability and capacity. There is not the resource, the time nor the clarity to prepare."

Almost all countries in the world are part of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) which regulates international trade. Should the UK leave the EU without a deal, its trade with the EU will be governed by WTO rules.

When joining the WTO, each country negotiates the maximum tariffs it can set on various types of goods. The tariff charged by the EU on imported cars is 10%.

Leaving without a deal would mean UK-built cars facing a 10% tariff cost and vice versa, says the SMMT's annual UK Automotive Trade Report.

£1,800

potential price increase on cars and vans imported from the EU in a 'no deal' scenario

Tariffs would result in a price increase of almost £3,000 on the average UK exported car to the EU, a £2,000 price increase on UK vans exported to the EU and a price increase of £1,800 on cars and vans imported from the EU, if fully passed on to UK consumers.

The report adds that additional customs duties, costs and complexity would significantly disrupt sourcing of parts and components from the EU.

Executive director, business transformation at Ford of Britain, Graham Hoare, said the manufacturer had implemented measures to ensure product is available for fleets.

He explained: "We've brought a lot of cars into the UK and have maintained that availability. That's really important so we don't have disruption to our supply chains as the change happens."

But he warned: "A Free Trade Agreement is necessary for the viability of our business. If you think about all the other changes we're embarking upon... another burden just makes the activities we're performing in the UK a little less viable."

JUST-IN TIME

Frictionless trade within the EU has been critical for enabling the UK car industry to develop supply chains that cross EU borders several times.

A separate report, produced by The UK in a Changing Europe on Manufacturing and Brexit, highlights how supply chains have to operate with supreme efficiency, and parts have to be delivered 'just-in-time' throughout the day.

As an example, 350 trucks arrive from the EU every day at Honda's plant in Swindon, bringing in about two million parts. Components arrive from five-24 hours after ordering. The plant is scheduled to close a year from now.

Meanwhile, a typical driveline system produced by GKN, the British-based supplier, incorporates specialist forged parts from the UK, Spain, Italy, France and Germany.

These are assembled at GKN Driveline's factory in Birmingham and supplied to automotive assemblers in the UK and EU.

The components, assembled drivelines and the final assembled car could cross the English Channel several times, says the report.

It is a similar story for BMW, which assembles engines at its Hams Hall engine-assembly plant near Birmingham.

Engine blocks come from France and are processed at the plant. They may go to Germany for further work before being assembled.

The engine may go into a Mini assembled in Oxford or the Netherlands, or into a BMW assembled in Germany.

"The final car could be sold anywhere in Europe or globally," the report says. "This close integration and the need for minimal trade friction becomes even more important as most UK car producers operate on very low profit margins (around £450 on a £15,000 car)."

BREXIT TALKS

After a meeting between Prime Minister Boris Johnson and the EU Commission president Ursula von der Leyen last month, both agreed new momentum was needed in negotiations.

Official talks resumed at the start of this month, but ended with the EU's chief negotiator, Michel Barnier, saying that "regardless of the outcome" there would be "inevitable changes" from January 1, 2021. The next round of negotiations began this week.

The commission has also told member states and businesses to revisit plans for a 'no deal' Brexit.

In a press briefing, prior to the SMMT's annual International Automotive Summit, Hawes insisted: "We must secure a comprehensive Free Trade Agreement that maintains tariff- and quota-free trade. With such a deal, a strong recovery is possible."

The UK in a Changing Europe report says the potential danger is that carmakers may simply decide that production in the UK is no longer profitable and shift their assembly plants to the EU.

Many manufacturers with plants in the UK also have plants in the EU to which they could move production. Moreover, many of these plants have spare capacity.

"Such relocations usually happen when new vehicle models are introduced, and the decisions about sites are normally taken at least two years in advance of planned production starts," it says.

'MULTIPLE CHALLENGES'

Key companies in the UK automotive sector, that account for the bulk of UK automotive production – Nissan, Jaguar Land Rover (JLR), and Groupe PSA (Vauxhall's owner) – have all planned new models in the next couple of years.

"There is a real danger they will decide to produce them in the EU, not the UK," says the report. "This would have a knock-on effect on other industries in the UK."

UK steel, for example, despite not being subject to tariffs itself, would suffer because the car industry would contract, reducing demand for steel.

"Manufacturing matters," said Professor David Bailey, senior fellow of UK in a Changing Europe.

"Much of the sector has already taken a hit through the Covid-19 pandemic and Brexit risks further disruption for manufacturers which they are keen to minimise.

"A no-trade deal is seen as the worst-case scenario for sectors like automotive given the impact of tariffs. But even a minimal Free Trade Agreement could bring disruption for manufacturers, for example via its impact on supply chains and in terms of regulatory divergence. Whatever the form of Brexit at the end of the transition

> "THE INDUSTRY CANNOT WITHSTAND THE SHOCK OF A HARD BREXIT"
>
> **MIKE HAWES, SMMT**

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E-scooter rental tests get early green light from DfT

More trials to follow as Tees Valley scheme is brought forward a year

By Gareth Roberts

Micromobility could be set to transform the way commuters and business travellers get around towns and cities.

Tees Valley Combined Authority has been named as the first local authority to host an e-scooter rental trial. The Department for Transport (DfT) expects further trials to be confirmed in the next few months.

Mayor Ben Houchen, says its pilot in Teesside, Darlington and Hartlepool will see 100 e-scooters initially being deployed.

It is working with e-scooter company Ginger, which will be responsible for the charging of scooters.

As the trial progresses, Ginger will look at introducing on-street charging and docking locations. Hire cost is £2 per 20 minutes.

At the start of the trial, each parking location will be strictly geo-fenced so users must leave their e-scooters in these locations at the end of the ride.

Houchen said: "By working together (with Ginger) we have been able to make using e-scooters cost-effective with the price of a ride competitive with other forms of public transport."

TRIALS FAST-TRACKED

The Government fast-tracked trials of e-scooters as part of a £2 billion investment in green travel solutions revealed in May (fleetnews.co.uk, May 11 – see also page 16).

They were given the green light to start from the beginning of the month – a year earlier than planned – to help take more people off public transport in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic.

The trials, which are due to last for 12 months, will test the devices' safety, green credentials and ability to reduce traffic.

The new rules around e-scooter use for the rental trials were published by the Government earlier this month (fleetnews.co.uk, July 13).

But the DfT stressed it is still against the law to use a privately-owned e-scooter apart from on private land and anybody hiring an e-scooter, involved in the trial, must hold a full or provisional car, motorcycle or moped licence.

Ministers have also said that e-scooters involved in trials will be required to have motor insurance, which will be provided by the e-scooter rental operator, and their use will be restricted to the road (except motorways) and in cycle lanes. They must not, says the DfT, be used on the pavement.

The e-scooters will not need to be registered, display registration plates or pay vehicle excise duty (VED).

Under the regulations, the use of e-scooters will be strictly prohibited on pavements while devices will be limited to 15.5mph and riders recommended to wear helmets.

> "THERE ARE APPROXIMATELY 50 LOCAL AUTHORITIES THAT HAVE EXPRESSED AN INTEREST IN DOING TRIALS"
>
> **FRED JONES, TIER MOBILITY**

SAFETY CONCERNS

The Parliamentary Advisory Council for Transport Safety (PACTS) says that there were four injury collisions involving e-scooters in 2018 and 32 in 2019, reported by the Metropolitan Police, including one fatality. One third of the incidents involved injury to pedestrians.

Dr Adam Snow of John Moores University, who has specialised in this issue, said: "The Center for Disease Control in Texas found in 2018 that the rate of KSI (killed or seriously injured) for these modes is 22 per 100,000 miles – in the UK it is about 0.5 per 100,000 for cars.

"On the face of it they are far more dangerous than current modes of travel."

Providing evidence to the Transport Committee earlier this month, Eleanor Southwood, chair of the Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB), said the conditions attached to Government trials had failed to alleviate the charity's fears.

In particular, the RNIB said it was 'shocked' by the speed limit the Government had chosen.

Southwood explained: "It's really clear that even with all of the safeguards... we do consider e-scooters to be a real and genuine threat to the ability of blind and partially sighted people to move around independently and safely.

"We were hoping that speeds would be limited, ideally to as close to walking as possible, but if not, to an absolute maximum of 12.5mph."

In response to the Government's consultation on e-scooter rental trials, PACTS says it is worried that e-scooter hire trials will be taken as a green light for people to buy and use their own e-scooters, which is already taking place to some extent.

"Many e-scooters owners will not realise – or will simply choose to ignore – any legal distinction," it said. "The police will be placed in an impossible situation and be unable to enforce the law."

SAFETY-FIRST APPROACH

Tier Mobility UK general manager, Fred Jones, who recently joined the firm from Uber, is responsible for the roll-out of its e-scooters in UK towns and cities.

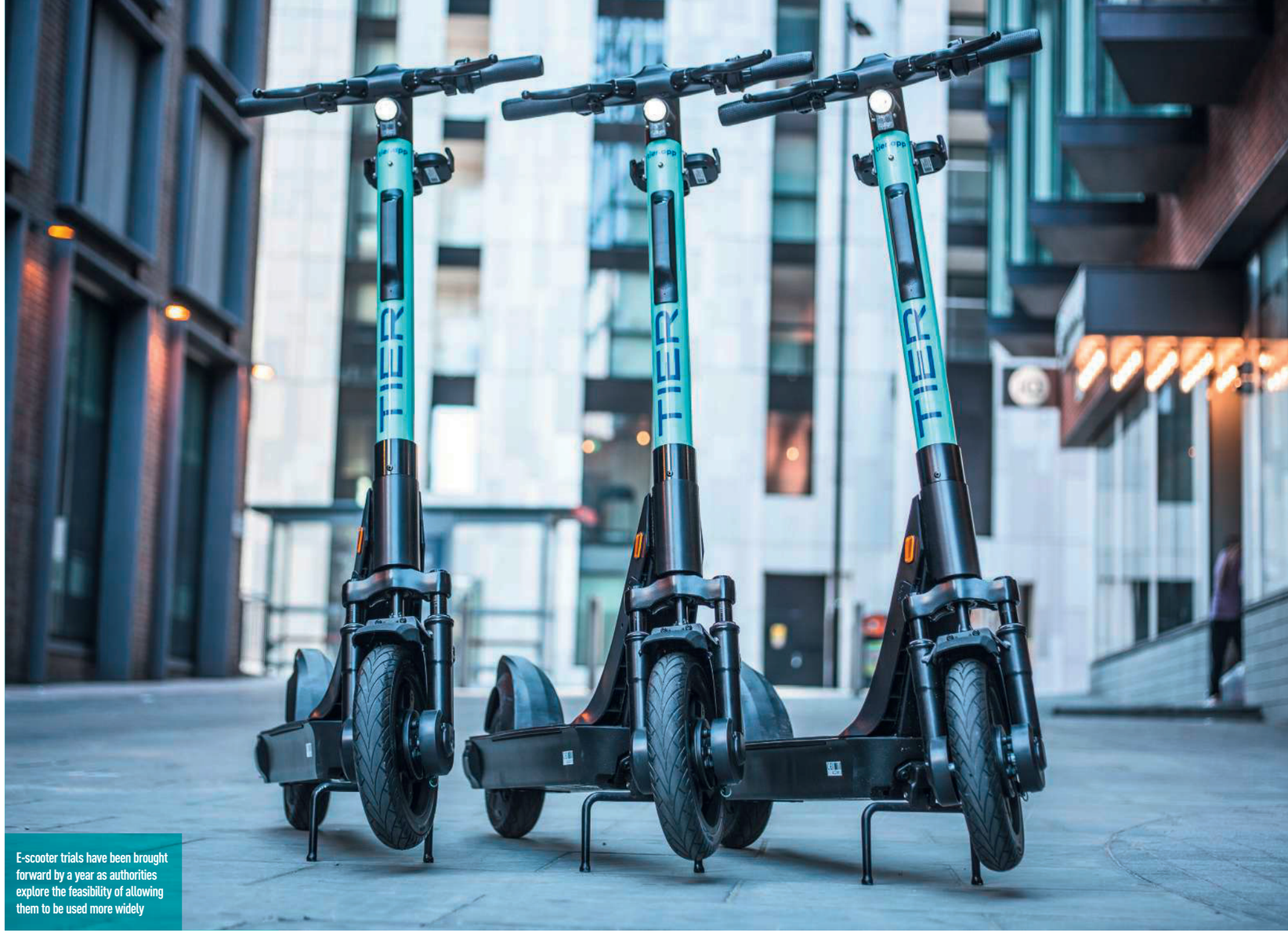
The company, which launched in 2018, already operates 40,000 scooters in more than 60 cities across nine countries, equating to 20% of the global market.

Rental rides to date are in excess of 20 million.

He told *Fleet News* that Tier's e-scooters are known for their safety-first design, with bigger front wheels, integrated helmet, wider foot plates and a double-kick stand.

But he acknowledged: "You've also got to work with local authorities and vulnerable groups, who have valid concerns about street clutter.

"It's why we've equally invested in the tools and solutions that we can give to local authorities, to help manage the deployment of the fleet and how it's operated on the streets."



E-scooter trials have been brought forward by a year as authorities explore the feasibility of allowing them to be used more widely

Through its use of geo-fencing, for example, an area can be deemed 'no go' for e-scooters and, if ignored, the technology cuts the power source.

Furthermore, he says speed restrictions can be enforced where required.

GROWING INTEREST

The level of interest from local authorities considering taking part in the trials does not appear to have been diminished by any safety concerns.

Jones told *Fleet News:* "There are approximately 50 local authorities that have expressed an interest in doing trials and we're engaging with most of them.

"Some are just investigating the market, some are into the tender process and some are looking for one operator, while others are looking for a couple."

Among those local authorities that have issued tenders to operate e-scooter trials are Milton Keynes, Cambridge and Peterborough, and the West Midlands Combined Authority. "There are others coming thick and fast," Jones said.

Mobility company Free Now has been advising a number of London boroughs and councils on the roll-out of e-scooters.

With rental schemes already operating in Poland, Portugal and Germany, it is also hoping to get a foothold in the UK market.

The firm's UK general manager, Mariusz Zabrocki, said: "We expect massive growth for e-scooter rentals over the coming years.

"We've seen first-hand how they can benefit riders, alleviate congestion and contribute to emission-reduction."

In a new report, *Covid-19 Recovery: Renewing the Transport System*, Campaign for Better Transport argues that achieving net zero carbon emissions, while keeping air pollution down, will require a "transformation of the transport fleet" to zero emission vehicles.

It is calling for a series of measures from Government, including greater use of e-scooters, with a procurement framework for hire schemes and powers for local authorities to issue permits for hire operators.

CORPORATE USE

Jones says that the typical journey taken on an e-scooter is three miles, with commuting a typical reason for travel.

"I think 60% of car trips in the UK are three miles or under, the majority with one occupant, so there's a perfect reason to switch out of the car."

E-scooters hired by the firm will operate on a pay-as-you-go basis, but there is also the option to buy bundles of minutes, with corporate packages available.

In terms of a B2B product for corporate users, Free Now does not have a specific offering for e-scooters yet.

But, Zabrocki said: "We have noticed that during the week, rides are much shorter, suggesting that people are using them to travel to meetings or commute to work. Whereas over the weekend, trips are much longer as people use them to travel round for leisure and fun."

New subscription services claim unrivalled flexibility

Manufacturers and suppliers compete to offer fleets viable alternatives to traditional leasing

Sixt is expanding into the subscription market

By Stephen Briers

Multinational rental firm Sixt is expanding its services into the car subscription market with the launch of Sixt+.

It marks the first phase in a global roll-out of services currently offered in its home German market, including car sharing, flexible leasing and ride hailing.

Sixt joins the likes of Jaguar Land Rover, Free2Move, Leasys and GB Car Leasing in entering the subscriptions market.

Stuart Donnelly, global sales director, joined the business in 2018 with a brief to develop effective and credible mobility alternatives to car ownership in the corporate market.

Development plans were knocked slightly off track by the coronavirus pandemic, but Sixt is now ready to launch its car subscription service to fleets as a "low-cost alternative to leasing".

Donnelly said: "We are seeing behavioural changes (due to coronavirus) with people working from home and improvements in technology and equipment. The productivity gains from not travelling are exceptional."

This lays the foundations for a new, more flexible subscription service targeting both private customers and businesses, he believes.

PUBLIC LAUNCH LATER

Sixt+ launched in Germany a year ago and is now available in the UK for corporate clients, with a full public launch later this year. Discussions are underway with a number of potential customers.

Two agreement terms are offered – six months and 12 months – although this will expand to include three and nine months in due course.

Sixt claims pricing is on a par with leasing, particularly for the 12-month term, with a flexible monthly termination option at no penalty charge. Everything is included except fuel.

"We've done a lot of benchmarking and we've ensured that our product is priced competitively compared with traditional leasing. And it's all-inclusive," Donnelly said.

"We are seeing demand from the younger generation, who are not driving as frequently, as well as the move towards urbanisation, the desire to reduce emissions and an increase in multimodal distribution. Covid is accelerating trends that we were already seeing."

The service, booked and managed via the Sixt+ app, is only available on cars, although Sixt has seen huge growth in its van fleet and doesn't rule out adding light commercials at a later stage.

"We are optimistic about growth – our expectation is very big," Donnelly said. "If you can get a premium car that you would've leased for four years on a subscription that allows you to change that car on a six-monthly or annual basis so you can have the latest model with the latest technology and it costs the same as leasing, why would you lease?"

The company is also piloting MobiFlex which allows customers to swap cars mid-term for a change-over fee. Annual membership has been set initially at £200 with a daily rate based on the car category.

However, in a move likely to boost the scheme's appeal with company car drivers, Sixt has agreed a special dispensation with HMRC for a benefit-in-kind (BIK) per day model instead of the usual rule that requires a period of 30 days of unavailability.

Donnelly explained: "In case you have no car for some days, you don't pay the daily rental charge and, moreover, the BIK you pay is based on the car you have – so no car, no pay. If, for example, you only have a car for 10 days of the month split across different periods in any one month, you only pay a third of the normal monthly BIK."

Sixt is piloting MobiFlex now with corporate customers to better understand the level of utilisation of users in different markets and at different times of the year. This will help it to fine-tune the pricing.

"Sixt+ could be a stepping-stone to MobiFlex if you don't need a car every day," Donnelly added. "We expect people to go from leasing to Sixt+ and then, when they understand the flexibility, potentially move to MobiFlex."

Car subscription services are gathering pace among suppliers and manufacturers keen to offer businesses greater flexibility when funding vehicles.

FCA finance captive Leasys joined with Drover last year to launch a subs service to private customers, while PSA's Free-2Move is expected to bring Car on Demand to the UK later this year after a successful 12-month trial in France.

ROLLING CONTRACT

Based on a rolling contract, Car on Demand includes one vehicle change per year, plus insurance, servicing, maintenance and breakdown assistance.

While not able to confirm any details, PSA director – fleet and used vehicles Martin Gurney said: "The ambition (for Free2Move) remains to offer a range of solutions for fleet and retail customers that are either complementary or substitutional to traditional car ownership."

Meanwhile, Jaguar Land Rover announced its Pivotal subscription service this month which, like Car on Demand, allows private and corporate customers to swap models during the year. The Land Rover Discovery and Discovery Sport, Jaguar F-Pace and I-Pace and all four Range Rover models are included, with the new Defender due to be added after its market launch together with two new plug-in hybrid electric vehicles: Discovery Sport and Evoque.

Pivotal membership costs £550. Cars are refreshed every six months, but members can swap sooner for a fee. All cars are highly specced and less than two years old.

Vehicles are placed in four categories – Blue, Indigo, Violet and Ultraviolet – with the monthly rental starting from £750 (Blue) for a Land Rover Discovery Sport, Jaguar F-Pace or Range Rover Evoque.

A Range Rover Velar or Jaguar I-Pace is available for £1,150 (Indigo) per month; a Range Rover Sport is £1,350 (Violet) and a Range Rover £1,600 (Ultraviolet).

The monthly fee includes manufacturer warranty, roadside assistance and comprehensive insurance.

Leasing brokers are also entering the fray. Caasta is GB Car Leasing's attempt to "disrupt the business car market" with an all-inclusive car subscription service which includes a sale and lease-back offer for existing company cars. It sits alongside a new salary sacrifice scheme for employees.

> "YOU CAN HAVE THE LATEST MODEL WITH THE LATEST TECHNOLOGY AND IT COSTS THE SAME AS LEASING"
>
> **STUART DONNELLY, SIXT**

All Caasta cars are less than 12 months old and will have travelled fewer than 12,000 miles on delivery. The monthly subscription includes fully comprehensive insurance, road tax, SMR, breakdown recovery, accident cover, glass repair and replacement tyres.

Contracts are on 89-day (three-month) rolling agreements, with a penalty-free option of handing back the car after the first three months with 14 days' notice. Members can also swap cars every three months.

ZERO FEES IN YEAR FOUR

Annual membership fees start at £700 for compact cars rising to £1,200 for large family cars. This reduces over the next two years to become zero in year four. Monthly subs start at £495 (e.g. a Mini hatchback or Renault Captur), rising to £695 for a Peugeot 3008 or BMW 3 Series. Caasta currently operates a fleet of 50 cars.

Caasta chief executive Mike Minahan said: "Our aim is to offer businesses a realistic alternative to traditional long-term finance contracts and the big upfront payments demanded by vehicle leasing providers. In these uncertain times, the Caasta fleet solution means one less thing for business leaders to worry about – just add fuel or charge and leave the rest to us."

THE BIG PICTURE

As we move from lockdown to a relaxing of the rules around travelling, office working and social distancing, what will be the long-term impact on business transport and travel?

There are some short-term implications, including a reluctance to use shared services, from car share to public transport, and far less road travel due to people working from home (note – while Department for Transport stats show daily traffic levels now rising again, the peak congestion times remain way below usual levels, indicating new reasons for travelling during the day).

Local authorities are spotting an opportunity to consolidate new active behaviours with pop-up cycle lanes and wider pavements, but, ultimately, what does all this mean for fleets?

Many businesses are now considering new agile working practices which will allow their staff to work more often from home. Their need to commute will reduce, but will this change their need for a car?

I don't think so. If you work in the city, chances are you commute on public transport; and if not now, you may not have a choice in the future as congestion charging and workplace charging schemes accelerate across major conurbations. But you will still need a car for leisure purposes, and, maybe, the occasional business trip.

Would you rent or join a subscription scheme? Possibly, and there are plenty now on offer (see page 12). But they don't offer 'drop-of-a-hat' access; you have to plan ahead. And the emergence of electric vehicles arguably knocks all of this into a cocked hat.

This year, a company car driver will pay no tax for a pure electric car. Next year, they will pay 1% benefit-in-kind tax – or £60 a year on a £30,000 car – and for each of the three years after that, they'll pay £120 for same car.

Show me the subscription scheme that can compete with that price.

Employee demand for company cars will remain. It might drop slightly, but it might even rise as cash takers wake up to the savings. And this is supported by Fleet Intelligence research which shows fleet sizes will, on balance, increase, with much of the growth driven by electric cars.

Agree/disagree? Share your thoughts or simply watch the debate at our webinar on July 28 when a panel of experts will discuss the fleet response to Covid-19 – register here.

Stephen Briers, editor-in-chief, *Fleet News*

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EDITOR'S PICK

ROAD SAFETY

New roads police force could cut road deaths

ISTOCK.COM/THOMASFAULL

Rosco7 wrote:
Having read 'Road deaths in the UK higher in 2019 than in 2010' (fleetnews.co.uk, June 17), there is more to this data than is being reported.

Clearly, the UK made fantastic progress to reduce road fatalities over a 30-year period from the late 1980s. The advances in some of the Baltic states, and other states with massive improvements, were starting from an exceptionally poor base.

So, much of the improvement has been down to safer vehicles, than anything respective governments have done.

As someone who drives in Europe a lot, the standard of driving in some of these countries has improved immensely in this period. But they still have a long way to go to catch up with the UK.

The biggest issues now are:
1. Distracted driving
2. Increase in unroadworthy vehicles
3. Increase in foreign drivers

In terms of one and two, the biggest issue is lack of traffic and road policing. The third has no easy solution.

Police have taken the decision to abandon road safety, against the wishes of the public, and governments need ringfenced funds to address that.

I would favour a National Traffic Police Force, independent from local policing. It is too easy for local police authorities to divert attention. And this needs much more focus.

• THE EDITOR'S PICK WINS A £20 JOHN LEWIS VOUCHER

AUTONOMOUS CARS

Roads need to be right for self-driving cars

Oliver Damms wrote:
Having read 'Autonomous vehicles: how safe is safe enough?' (fleetnews.co.uk, July 10), I enjoyed reading the balanced approach of the article.

I do think that, in order for autonomous vehicles to become commonplace, the whole road infrastructure needs looking at first.

Sensory awareness to reduce accidents is one thing, but temporary hazards and unpredictable scenarios need removing from the equation in order to avoid some serious congestion when the computer doesn't know what to do.

■ Editor's note: Highways England and Loughborough University are launching a new £1 million project to understand the challenges connected and autonomous vehicles (CAVs) could face on motorways (fleetnews.co.uk, July 7).

E-SCOOTER TRIALS

Existing laws not being enforced

ISTOCK.COM/PRAETORIANPHOTO

Edward Handley wrote:
Having read 'First e-scooter trials to start from this weekend' (fleetnews.co.uk, July 1), I was driving in light traffic last week with a police car just ahead of me.

I saw a young man on an e-scooter weaving along the road and around the parked cars about three cars up. He never turned his head to check behind. He then swung up onto the pavement and continued along the pavement for a considerable distance.

There was absolutely no reaction from the police car, which did not surprise me. The police seem to have been ignoring e-scooters for quite some time now as though they think they are inevitable and it's not worth the hassle trying to stop them.

I think they may have a valid point. Somehow, I do not think this trial is going to end happily.

AIR QUALITY

Tax rises would unfairly impact isolated drivers

Steve Boucher wrote:
Having read 'Government climate advisers want vehicle tax increase' (fleetnews.co.uk, June 25), so the poorest and most geographically-isolated car owners are going to be penalised because they can't afford a newer, less polluting car and don't have ready access to public transport.

ELECTRIC VEHICLES

Misuse of statistics

Peter Martin wrote:
Having read 'High-mileage EVs "cheaper to run" than latest diesels' (fleetnews.co.uk, June 18), this is only true if you can charge overnight.

If you are really doing a high mileage, you will have to charge during the day as well and then the cost is greater than diesel.

EV is NOT there yet.

ELECTRIC VEHICLES

Charge point interoperability is key

David Beattie wrote:
Having read 'The AA to provide EV charging support for SWARCO customers' (fleetnews.co.uk, June 19), the lack of consistency across charging networks, and the lack of compatibility between manufacturers probably outstrips range anxiety as a concern for potential EV owners. As such, this is one of the biggest impediments to the decarbonisation of motoring.

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Burning question:
What did you stop doing or start to do during the recent lockdown?

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Mobility in a post pandemic world

The Covid-19 outbreak has already changed how people travel. *Andrew Ryan* looks at some of the impacts it will have on future mobility solutions

Cycling has received a Covid-19-influenced boost with sales of bikes rising sharply

ISTOCK.COM/ALENA KRAVCHENKO

The effect the Covid-19 pandemic has had on the UK's transport system has been immediate and drastic.

Car use dropped significantly when lockdown was announced in March, but has since rebounded – although not to pre-pandemic levels – while the number of people using public transport fell through the floor and has remained low.

Department for Transport statistics show that for the last week in June, the number of train passengers was just 14% of those in the same period last year, London Underground users dropped 85%, with buses seeing a 66% fall.

While this is probably to be expected as the number of people travelling to workplaces fell, people are also avoiding crowded places to reduce the risk of infection.

In its new *'Moving forward: how Covid-19 will affect mobility in the United Kingdom'* report, the McKinsey Center for Future Mobility says the necessary physical distancing requirements will permanently change the mobility mix in large cities. The impact will be more limited in non-urban areas.

"There could be a notable shift away from shared mobility solutions and public transit, especially in urban areas," the report says.

"Two factors are behind this change: reduced capacities as subways and other vehicles lower passenger limits to allow physical distancing, and reduced demand as people seek to reduce exposure by avoiding crowds.

"Shared mobility solutions, which were experiencing strong growth before the crisis, will now see slower uptake, especially over the short-term.

"Demand has already collapsed because of physical distancing requirements, and consumer fears of infection could continue to decrease car sharing."

A survey in the United States in March by Cars.com found 40% of respondents were using ride-hailing services less often than before the pandemic, while Ipsos research in China found there has also been a shift in the preferred method of transport.

Before the outbreak, public transit was a preferred mode of transport for 56% of respondents: it is now 24%. The popularity of ride-hailing and taxi has also declined significantly, falling to 12% and 15% respectively. Both had been at 21%.

PERSONAL VEHICLE USE INCREASES

The two surveys found people had responded to the pandemic by turning to their own cars. The Cars.com research found 93% of respondents were using personal vehicles more, while they were now a preferred mode of transport by 66% of consumers in the Ipsos survey. Before the pandemic it was 34%.

"It's pretty clear from the consumer survey in China that people are worried about infection and so the personal car is the way to avoid that entirely," says Rachel Binder, senior intelligence analyst at CB Insights.

Nicolas Brusson, CEO of car-pooling service BlaBlaCar, adds: "Individual modes of transport such as the personal car or bikes offer a safe haven for people as there are concerns around health and safety, and people are hesitant to share."

However, this shift is unsustainable and inappropriate for large cities. "When I think of Paris – where we have our HQ – public transport carries about 10 million people a day and if you start having even 10% of those in private cars and travelling alone then you will have the biggest traffic jam in history for the region," Brusson says.

Experts expect the number of people using shared mobility solutions, including public transport, will rebound, although McKinsey says "the pandemic could produce some permanent shifts over both the short and long term".

Brusson says his company has seen people moving from public transport into car-pooling because it radically reduces the amount of contact people have with others compared with public transport.

"Instead of our drivers offering three seats in a car, as we did pre-pandemic, we allow them to offer just one and we have seen that pretty well adopted by drivers," he adds.

"So, if you are about to choose between a plane, a train, a bus or a car pool, with a car pool you don't go through a bus station or a train station, and limiting contact with people seems to be very important."

BOOST FOR BIKES

One of the big 'winners' in the UK has been micro-mobility – bicycles and e-scooters - on both legislation and popularity fronts.

The Government has fast-tracked plans for e-scooter pilot schemes across the country due to the coronavirus pandemic. Originally, these were due to begin next year, but went live at the beginning of July with Middlesbrough becoming the first city to take part (see page 10).

The trials, which are due to last 12 months, will test the vehicles' safety, green credentials and ability to reduce congestion.

"As we emerge from lockdown, we have a unique opportunity in transport to build back in a greener, more sustainable way that could lead to cleaner air and healthier communities across Great Britain," says transport minister Rachel Maclean.

"E-scooters may offer the potential for convenient, clean and cost-effective travel that may also help ease the burden on the transport network, provide another green alternative to get around and allow for social distancing.

"The trials will allow us to test whether they do these things."

These form part of a £2 billion investment in cycling and walking aimed at encouraging alternative ways to travel.

The funding also includes the creation of pop-up bike lanes with protected space for cycling, wider pavements, safer junctions and cycle and bus-only corridors.

Other measures include a Fix Your Bike voucher worth £50 for cycle repairs, and extending the

Cycle to Work salary sacrifice scheme to cover e-bikes as well as pedal cycles.

There has already been a significant increase in the uptake of cycling: for example, in the 13 weeks leading up to July 3, Halfords – the UK's biggest cycle retailer – saw a 57.1% year-on-year increase in bike sales.

Furthermore, an updated Cycling and Walking Investment Strategy will be launched by the Government later this summer, with further measures to transform cycling and walking to deliver the its aims to double cycling and increase walking by 2025.

AUTONOMOUS INVESTMENT SLOWS

McKinsey says the pandemic will also likely slow development of automated vehicle technology through lower investment as manufacturers and investors scale back innovation funding to concentrate on day-to-day cash management issues.

This comes on the back of a general trend which has seen the hype around the technology and investment fall: a trend evident at January's CES show in Las Vegas where noticeably fewer companies were showcasing their concepts and technology.

"It's no secret that a lot of the hype around autonomy has subsided over the past two years," says Tarek Elessawi, principal at venture capital fund Plug and Play Ventures.

"We are primarily seed investors and in 2016/17 we saw hundreds of deals in the mobility and autonomous space, and then over the past two years that pace has definitely slowed.

"Last year we saw one-tenth of the deals we were seeing previously."

> "IT'S NO SECRET THAT A LOT OF THE HYPE AROUND AUTONOMY HAS SUBSIDED OVER THE PAST TWO YEARS"
>
> **TAREK ELESSAWI, PLUG AND PLAY VENTURES**

However, Danel Ruiz, CEO of the UK Government/industry-backed connected mobility organisation Zenzic, disagrees.

"Two years ago there was £11bn invested in this space around the world," he says.

"Last year it was only £4bn, but this year we are already just over £10bn – less than two-thirds of the way through the year, so this is looking like a good year with things starting to pick up.

"There is a real feeling over the past month or so – and maybe it's been helped by the intensity of our focus because we haven't been travelling as much, ironically – that there is a real sea change.

"I'm hearing far more from industry in its various guises and government in all the various departments, all picking up on the fact that connected and automated mobility is the thing to go forward with. There is a focus on freight, but that interest in investment is there."

McKinsey also says social distancing rules could lead to the temporary suspensions of testing programmes, and this was the case for autonomous vehicle software company Oxbotica, which trials self-driving cars in the area around its Oxford base.

It restarted its trials as soon as it could after 12 weeks of lockdown, but with a screen between the two occupants who need to be in the vehicle.

"It was harder work not being able to have vehicles doing the testing, but it made us shuffle our timeline and focus on simulations," says Paul Newman, co-founder and CTO of Oxbotica.

This includes using its 'deep fake' technology (see panel below) and speeding up parts of its development programme.

"We had fewer meetings and fewer introductions so we could get into the big-ticket items, and my challenge now is what do we take forward from this period as there is something to be learned from it," he adds.

'DEEP FAKE' TECHNOLOGY REDUCES REQUIREMENT FOR REAL-WORLD TESTING

Oxbotica has developed and deployed a 'deep fake' technology to help speed development of autonomous vehicle (AV) technologies.

The system is capable of generating thousands of photo-realistic images in minutes to help the company expose its AVs to near-infinite variations of the same situation without the need for real-world testing.

Deep faking, which hit the headlines when it was used to create viral internet videos, uses deep learning artificial intelligence (AI) to generate fake photo-realistic images.

The algorithms allow the company to reproduce the same scene in poor weather or adverse conditions and subject its vehicles to rare occurrences.

The technology can also switch one object with another – such as replacing a building with a tree (see image three, class switch) – while ensuring shadows or reflections appear as they should.

It then uses these synthetic images to teach its software, producing thousands of accurately-labelled, true-to-life experiences.

Paul Newman, co-founder and CTO of Oxbotica, says: "Using deep fakes is an incredible opportunity for us to increase the speed and efficiency of safely bringing autonomy to any vehicle in any environment.

"What we're really doing here is training our AI to produce a syllabus for other AIs to learn from. There is no substitute for real-world testing, but the AV industry has become concerned with the number of miles travelled as a synonym for safety.

"And yet, you cannot guarantee the vehicle will confront every eventuality, you're relying on chance encounters.

"The use of deep fakes enables us to test countless scenarios, which will not only enable us to scale our real-world testing exponentially, it'll all be safer."

DELIVERING THE GOODS

Adopting e-cargo bikes can have significant cost, environmental and efficiency benefits for fleets – in the right circumstances. *Andrew Ryan* reports

There's nothing new about transporting or delivering goods by bicycle; businesses were doing that 100 years ago.

But for many organisations, pedal power could play an important role in their fleets of the future.

Part of this is due to increasing urbanisation and congestion, the growth of home deliveries and the load-carrying abilities of electrically-assisted e-cargo bikes.

Bikes also fit in with two of the Government's current major transportation focuses: decarbonisation and a push to increase active transport.

The latter has benefits for staff welfare. Energy Saving Trust says some companies report their e-cargo bike riders take less sick leave than other drivers, while London butchers Drings of Greenwich found the four employees trained to use its e-cargo bike burned an additional 2,500 kcals collectively over a fortnight. However, these benefits are unlikely to be the major reason for their uptake.

Instead, their appeal will lay in their zero emission and traffic-busting capability in urban areas as well as to offer significant cost savings compared with operating a van (see panel on page 21).

On the surface, they fulfil many of the requirements a modern fleet demands of its vehicles, so why aren't they in more widespread use?

"We believe one of the biggest barriers to the wider uptake of cargo bikes is a level of scepticism of their capabilities among businesses," says Matt Winfield, England director at cycling charity Sustrans.

A fully-loaded e-cargo bike cannot carry as much as a fully-loaded van. Dutch logistics company PostNL says a fully-loaded truck carries the same cargo as three panel vans, which carry the same amount as 12 two-wheeled cargo bikes.

In this example, if all vans were replaced by e-cargo bikes, instead of hiring one driver an organisation would need to employ four riders, thereby increasing staff costs.

> "ONE OF THE BIGGEST BARRIERS TO THE WIDER UPTAKE OF CARGO BIKES IS A LEVEL OF SCEPTICISM"
>
> **MATT WINFIELD, SUSTRANS**

Nor do e-cargo bikes offer the speed or ability to cover long distances a van has.

But, to disregard them for these reasons means a fleet could be missing out on the potential benefits they might bring.

Instead, they should be viewed as "part of the clean transport mix that is required to keep (a) city moving, building resilience as we deal with the challenges of economic recovery, congestion, air pollution and the climate emergency", says Tom Linton-Smith, project manager at consultancy Cross River Partnership (CRP), which has just published its *Enabling Last Mile Cycling Logistics* report.

The main users of e-cargo bikes are parcel and post logistics companies, but an increasingly diverse range of businesses are exploring their possible use.

Supermarkets, including Co-op and Sainsbury's, have trialled them for home deliveries, while construction business FM Conway is using three e-cargo bikes to carry materials of various sizes and weights, including bags of sand and boxes of fixings, for its work on London's Illuminated River art project.

WHAT IS AN E-CARGO BIKE?

An e-cargo bikes is either a two-, three- or four-wheeled bicycle which uses an electric motor to assist the rider when pedalling.

Under the Electrically-Assisted Pedal Cycle (EAPC) regulations, its motor must have a maximum power output of 250W which stops providing assistance if the rider stops pedalling, applies the brakes or reaches 15.5mph. The rider can continue pedalling beyond this.

If it does not meet these requirements, it is classed as a motorcycle, moped or powered

SPONSOR'S COMMENT

David Savage, Geotab regional manager, UK&I

Adapting to a post-Covid world will pose a significant challenge. While we may not yet understand the full extent of change, the need to have a well operated and efficient fleet doesn't.

Data and telematics remain the cornerstone of improving optimisation and safety, and reducing fuel costs – directly impacting the business bottom line.

At a city level, we have seen a dramatic drop in vehicle emissions, due to a downturn in vehicle usage. A recent survey from electric vehicle (EV) charge provider Smart Home Charge found that 97% of respondents said lockdown has had a positive effect on local air quality.

Furthermore, more than half said that the introduction of a vehicle scrappage scheme (a £6,000 scheme is currently under consultation by the UK Government) would entice drivers to buy an EV.

From a policy perspective, the push to improve air quality could, indeed, be a catalyst in moving away from internal combustion engine vehicles. In Europe, both France and Germany have introduced stimulus packages to support the uptake of EVs. The UK has an opportunity to do the same.

One of the greatest barriers for fleets moving to electric is building the business case to where it makes sense to electrify. Geotab helps build that case, by leveraging fleet data to understand what vehicles can effectively go electric based on the total cost of ownership, daily range requirements and environmental impact. We know that moving to electric isn't easy, Geotab can support you every step of the way.

Geotab securely connects commercial vehicles to the internet, providing advanced web-based analytics to better manage your fleet. Processing billions of data points per day, Geotab leverages big data and machine learning to improve productivity, enhance driver safety, achieve a more integrated compliance strategy and help fleets transition to electric.

GEOTAB.

light vehicle (PLV) and needs to be registered and taxed.

However, if it qualifies as an e-cargo bike, riders do not need a driving licence or to legally use safety equipment, although helmets, appropriate clothing and training are highly recommended.

E-cargo bikes can travel up to around 50 miles per charge, with a full charge taking between three-and-a-half and five hours from a standard three-pin plug socket.

Dependent on the design, a two-wheeled bike can typically carry a maximum payload of 100kg, increasing to 250kg for three- and four-wheeled versions. A trailer can transport up to 300kg.

"The carrying capacity of our extra-large e-cargo bike is equivalent to a small van, which makes them very flexible," says Doug Hutchinson, head of sameday at London-based courier Absolutely.

He says the bikes help solve a number of issues for the company. "Recruiting van drivers was becoming a real challenge and once they were out on the road they were getting delayed in traffic, receiving parking tickets and facing further delays trying to avoid road closures," he adds.

"We still need to maintain our four-wheeled fleet, so we're continuously investing in vans of all sizes.

"However, we are augmenting this fleet with a very strong backbone of e-cargo bikes. A small van can approximately make 12 deliveries in a single day; an e-cargo bike can do 30."

This increased efficiency is due to a number of factors, he says, such as an e-cargo bike's ability to cut through traffic easily, while parking has become "basically a non-existent issue".

"We know time isn't being wasted from collection point to delivery location," adds Hutchinson.

This is also a key finding in other trials, such as those by Drings and Sainsbury's. Drings used its e-cargo bike for 95% of deliveries below three miles while Sainsbury's delivered up to 100 orders a day with five bikes from its Streatham Common store. Both reported faster journeys with less congestion and shorter doorstep times by being able to park closer to the delivery location.These

SWITCHING CAN SAVE £6,000 A YEAR

Switching a small diesel van for an e-cargo bike could save an organisation almost £6,000 a year on operating costs on a like-for-like basis, according to calculations from Energy Saving Trust (EST).

As the table below shows, the biggest beneficiaries would be London fleets which could eliminate the congestion charge by switching from a diesel van to either an electric model or an e-cargo bike.

Parking fines – in this example, EST has used a calculation based on FTA and FORS figures – are also a huge saving, while fuel bills could also be cut significantly.

The purchase price of an e-cargo bike is also substantially less at around £4,100, while an e-cargo trike is £7,500.

While the comparisons are on a vehicle-for-vehicle basis, there are still substantial savings should several e-cargo bikes be required to replace one van. However, the cost of additional 'drivers' is not taken into consideration.

However, while organisations are able to lease vans, no similar funding method exists for e-cargo bikes at the moment.

Absolutely says cost savings is one of the big advantages of operating e-cargo bikes.

"All of our fleet vehicles incur an initial outlay, which is, essentially, another expense," says Doug Hutchinson, head of sameday at Absolutely.

"A van, for instance, has to factor any costs of the congestion charge, fuel and other consumables, servicing, potential parking tickets and general running expenses.

"With e-cargo bikes, the initial outlay is smaller and the ongoing servicing and maintenance costs are more modest.

"They do not pay the congestion charge or the ULEZ daily charge. Charging the batteries is virtually an insignificant expense – it costs very little to charge a bike – and there aren't any parking fines to deal with."

ANNUAL RUNNING COSTS OF LAST-MILE DELIVERY VEHICLES

	e-cargo bike	e-cargo trike	small electric van	Small diesel van
Fuel cost	£24	£47	£494	£855
Insurance	£135	£135	£800	£800
Servicing	£160	£160	£173	£239
Parking penalty charge	£0	£0	£1,500	£1,500
Congestion charge	£0	£0	£0	£2,625
Vehicle excise duty	£0	£0	£0	£150
Totals	£319	£342	£2,967	£6,169

**Example assumes vehicles cover 7,500 miles a year, electricity price of 15.75kWh, diesel cost 132.74pp. Source: Energy Saving Trust*

"WE ARE AUGMENTING FLEET WITH A VERY STRONG BACKBONE OF E-CARGO BIKES"

DOUG HUTCHINSON, ABSOLUTELY

experiences support findings of the Cycling Logistics Study, produced for CRP, which says e-cargo bikes can offer a 25% to 50% cut in journey times in London compared with a van.

This is largely due to them being able to access cycle lanes, allowing them to bypass traffic and take more direct routes, offering more reliable delivery timings and, therefore, improving customer satisfaction.

IMPROVING AIR QUALITY

E-cargo bikes can often be unloaded safely on the pavement, compared with a van which requires a parking space or, in practice, is often parked in such a way which restricts access for other road users and pedestrians while unloading.

These also help reduce congestion, which helps improve air quality. CRP says replacing a diesel van with e-cargo bikes in Central London saves six tonnes of CO_2 and at least 14.1kg NOx and 21g of particulate matter each year, based on daily mileage of 50 miles.

Courier CitySprint (see case study alongside) says each of its 31 e-cargo bikes which has replaced a van saves four tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions each year.

One of its services is for Guys and St Thomas's Hospitals in London, where it now uses e-cargo bikes instead of motorbikes to transport samples between clinics and laboratories.

With nine trips taking place each day, the switch has removed 3,200 motor vehicle trips, covering 13,600 miles a year.

It is clear that in the right circumstances (see panel, also alongside), e-cargo bikes can offer a variety of benefits to organisations.

Their fortunes also depend on future consumer trends, influenced by factors such as increasing pedestrianisation of city centres, as well as the Covid-19 pandemic.

"The pandemic may change what we buy and where those goods come from," says Linton-Smith. "There could be a trend to more local sourcing or an acceleration towards more home delivery by vans, especially from supermarkets or restaurants.

"While we cannot be sure what will change and how, we know that two priorities will remain: decarbonisation of our supply chains still needs to occur, and air quality must improve rapidly from pre-lockdown levels."

CASE STUDY: CITYSPRINT

Introducing e-cargo bikes has had a "remarkable" impact on CitySprint's operation in London.

The courier now has 31 e-cargo bikes in the capital after introducing its first five new-age cargo bikes in 2017. It aims to grow its fleet further over the next 12 months including trialling them elsewhere.

"The impact that cargo bikes have on A to B same-day logistics in London is remarkable – average time from booking to delivery using our cargo bikes is just 54 minutes," says Mark Footman, operations director at CitySprint.

"The fast turnaround means our bikes fulfil more than 4,000 jobs monthly. And from a sustainability perspective, each cargo bike that replaces a van saves more than four tonnes of CO_2 per annum.

"This is a win, win, win situation: the customer receives items faster and their satisfaction increases, couriers complete deliveries faster and can complete more jobs, and the obvious winner is the environment, as cargo bikes have zero emissions and cause less congestion.

"The benefits of cargo bikes cannot be ignored by fleet operators in urban environments."

Footman says CitySprint has found cargo bikes are a fantastic sustainable alternative to small vans in cities as they can carry a similar load, but can complete journeys up to 50% faster at peak times on weekdays.

They are approximately twice the length of a normal pushbike and the rider sits a few feet behind the front wheel, meaning they are not as straightforward to ride as a conventional pushbike, he adds.

New riders, therefore, go out with CitySprint's cargo bike manager for a test ride to ensure they are able to handle the machine.

They are also put on a nursery circuit for their first few weeks to help them adjust to the fast-paced delivery work carried out in the capital.

The bikes undergo regular condition checks and maintenance due to the miles they are doing to ensure they are safe for the road and rider.

"It's also important to keep the brakes, chains and sprockets in the best condition," says Footman. "For instance, we change bike brake pads every four to six weeks to ensure ultimate safety and also protect the bike, as if this isn't done regularly it can cause long-term damage."

RIGHT VEHICLE FOR THE RIGHT JOB

For an e-cargo bike to be a success, organisations need to ensure they are used in the right circumstances.

As a general rule, Energy Saving Trust says the following criteria should be met for e-cargo bike deployment:

- **Small and light goods as vehicles have a relatively limited space capacity and payload.**
- **High density network with many stops in a short distance as this is most profitable and vehicles have a limited range, but can be parked easily.**
- **Time-critical deliveries as small vehicles are less affected by congestion, making them more reliable.**
- **Congested or access restricted areas as e-cargo bikes are cheaper to use in clean air zones and easier to move around in pedestrianised zones.**

The Department for Transport's latest position on e-cargo bikes is they are best suited to urban areas as they offer few advantages over electric light vans for rural areas due to the distances and, hence, time involved and reduced density of deliveries.

SSE

Utilisation data helps SSE save £250,000 in hire costs

SSE examined which vehicles weren't being used during lockdown to help meet demand for 150 extra vehicles by adding just a dozen hire vehicles. As told to *Tom Seymour*

Energy company SSE helped the UK to keep the lights on during the coronavirus pandemic by leveraging its data to keep its substantial fleet of thousands of vehicles and engineers on the road.

Simon Gray, SSE head of fleet and travel, says maintaining a consistent level of service has always been a priority and would be for any energy company, but this was brought into even greater focus due to Covid-19.

He tells *Fleet News:* "The lockdown period shifted our priorities to focus initially on the reactive requirement. Have we got enough spares? What do we have as back-up if vehicles cannot be repaired? What is the latest Government communication that affects the operation of the fleet? That has now become the initial priority every day.

"Then we look at standard operations such as replacement schedules and there is always a project in flight to keep operations fresh and up-to-date, so those elements continue as they did before the pandemic."

As well as managing the fleet and travel for SSE, Gray also has responsibility for an internal leasing operation to supply and manage 1,200 large and more than 2,000 smaller plant assets used to maintain the UK's national power infrastructure.

SSE has 11 workshops – five in Scotland and six in England – where 16 plant mechanics and two calibration engineers are based.

The company also has its own mobile repair, maintenance and 24/7 breakdown service to keep downtime to a minimum and keep the frontline teams operating.

During the lockdown period, routine servicing was maintained where possible and, due to the geographic spread of SSE's workshops, there was already a good set-up for digital communications with regular team briefings through all levels of the team.

Gray says: "We believe preventative maintenance saves cost and inefficient downtime in the long run.

"Those vehicles that have been parked up or had such things as MOT extensions will be brought up-to-date as soon as possible, but such considerations are minimal."

CLOSE TO FULLY OPERATIONAL

Vehicles required to maintain national infrastructure, whether networks supply lines, hydro power or renewable energy supply, have been close to 100% operational throughout the lockdown.

As SSE has a mix of businesses, some vehicles and employees remained at home with the contracting repair and maintenance business standing down and phasing their return to work as restrictions are lifted.

Gray says: "Following the implementation of lockdown, the commercial fleet mileage reduced to 52% of standard and, as at the end of June, we had only increased to 84%, as we continued to ensure it was safe for our colleagues to return to work."

Gray believes data has proved its worth.

As the lockdown was announced, Gray was immediately approached to secure 150 extra hire vehicles to allow SSE's engineers and drivers to be ready to operate individually in each vehicle.

Using fleet data, Gray was able to identify each week which SSE vehicles were being underutilised due to the lockdown and use those instead of hiring more.

Gray says: "Using the data available and working with the business teams we only added 12 hire vehicles to meet this demand, saving in excess of £250,000 in additional hire costs. This is proof that utilising some of the data we take for granted when we are in ordinary times proves how we operate on a normal basis to be good practice."

Gray's typical day during lockdown started around 8am with internal updates before actions were prioritised into ensuring fleet, travel and plant operations could be delivered to enable the group to keep the lights on.

"There is no typical end time to the day," he says. "Prior to the lockdown period, I was working on two large fleet-related projects, so, while I try and end the day by 6pm, it doesn't always work out like that."

Gray had already been regularly working from home (WFH) to cut down on travel, so the move to full-time WFH was easy.

SSE has always had a WFH solution within its business continuity plan, which placed it in a strong position when the crisis hit.

Gray says: "When lockdown was announced the reaction of the group and my teams was nothing short of exemplary.

"The team was set up to work from home within three days including diversion of group phone lines, changes to mail services and delivering IT equipment and furniture directly to home addresses, mostly within one day.

"The lockdown has prompted the fleet team to commit to a minimum of 50% reduction in travel once we return to some form of normality."

Gray continues: "I am an advocate of working at home as there is no point in travelling to sit in an office and answer emails, which can be done at home in the same way.

"While video conferencing does have some limitations, it should allow us to question our own travel arrangements to cut costs and reduce our environmental impacts."

SSE did not furlough any staff during the pandemic, even those that could not physically complete their work outside of the office environment were given other roles or just supported with full pay to remain home and stay safe.

Supplies of personal protective equipment and hand sanitiser were ordered and the stock was distributed as soon as available.

Members of the maintenance team were encouraged to work remotely and to leave assets in a position that would allow for pre-arranged service bookings.

WORKING IN REMOTE AREAS

Some engineers work in quite remote areas so in some ways it has been business as usual for single person jobs, other than the need to follow relevant Government guidelines.

SSE was also keen to share its learnings from moving to a wholelife cost model for its company car scheme and, before lockdown, it shared these with two other large corporate fleets, one in a face-to-face conversation, the other over the phone. During the lockdown, a third fleet was included via electronic means.

Gray says collaboration in the utilities sector has been strong due to working in similar environments and safety cultures.

As the lockdown continues to lift, Gray says that more of its contractual-focused work will return to normality, "if there ever will be that again".

He adds: "The roads will be busier as people avoid public transport, so safety will be key in the way that we operate the vehicles and look after our employees and those around us."

One question Gray thinks will be raised more frequently after lockdown is around the future of company cars.

Anecdotally, Gray says he has seen younger generations not taking company cars and the pandemic will put new initiatives like mobility allowances into greater focus and will give schemes a boost where they may have experienced slower traction before.

He adds: "If we start asking ourselves these kinds of questions when we come out of this and take a look at how we have operated, what has worked and what hasn't, then we could finally see the future world of mobility potentially earlier than would have been the case.

"There will always be a place for commercial vehicles in some guise, even well into the future but to move people, that may very much change."

Factfile

ORGANISATION: SSE
FLEET SIZE: Cars 1,800, vans 3,800, HGV 220 (2,500 cars and vans recently transferred on sale of energy services business to OVO Energy)
FLEET LIFECYCLE: cars four years/60,000 miles; vans five-seven years/82,500 miles; HGV 10 years
NUMBER OF STAFF THAT DRIVE AS PART OF THEIR JOB ROLE: 7,500

COMCAB

‘I’ve never experienced anything like this’

ComCab operations director Jan Kozlowski has seen the impact of transport disasters before, but Covid-19 was at a different level. As told to *Tom Seymour*

ComCab has one of the largest black cab fleets in London and it has gone from seeing a sharp decline in demand as the Covid-19 lockdown measures came into force to a gradual return as restrictions have eased.

The black cab fleet, which is part of CityFleet Networks group, has around 2,500 vehicles in the capital where professional taxi drivers take “The Knowledge” – the in-depth understanding of a number of pre-set London street routes and all places of interest that taxicab drivers in that city must complete to obtain a licence to operate a black cab.

All drivers are self-employed and rent vehicles through ComCab or buy them directly.

The company manages the drivers, the fleet and offers maintenance, bookings and controller support. ComCab funds its taxis through a mixture of outright purchase or through leasing agreements.

Jan Kozlowski, ComCab London operations director, told *Fleet News* that all public transport and travel took a big hit, particularly at the end of March and into April.

Transport for London (TfL), which regulates and licences ComCab, saw its own passenger volumes on the Tube and buses drop by up to 95% in April.

Kozlowski says: “I’ve worked in the transport industry for the past 20 years and previously in aviation so I’ve seen the impact disasters like 9/11 and the Icelandic volcano eruption can have on transport, but I’ve never experienced anything like this.”

Initially, some of ComCab London’s fleet team of 45 had to be furloughed due to the drop in passenger numbers. Some self-employed drivers have used the Government’s Self-Employment Income Support Scheme to help mitigate lost fares and wages.

ComCab’s parent company ComfortDelGro Corporation is based in Singapore, which had experienced the pandemic earlier than the UK, so advice on measures and best practice such as trends on fluctuating demand, personal protective equipment (PPE) and managing drivers, was shared early on.

Jan Kozlowski has worked in transport for more than 20 years

During the first week of lockdown, ComfortDelGro supplied PPE to ComCab and Kozlowski secured sanitisation equipment through a contact in Italy (which was also further ahead in managing its own outbreak).

The fleet team worked hard to make sure all taxi controllers and those working in its Aberdeen-based central call centre had the IT support they needed to work remotely.

PPE was delivered within four working days and the support teams were working from home within the week.

While its corporate business had reduced as a result of many companies in central London shutting offices due to the pandemic, ComCab pivoted to continue to help with transport for key workers, to make medical supply deliveries, including equipment to help measure oxygen levels for Covid-19 patients, to collect prescriptions and to drop off food packages for those in need.

ComCab also continued to offer its transport services to disabled passengers under the Taxicard scheme for London councils.

BUILT FOR LOCKDOWN

Black cabs had a unique selling point as a transport option during the lockdown due to them already having built-in screen partitions between the driver and the passenger.

All vehicles are able to take contactless payments, so cash is never exchanged between the driver and the passenger.

With drivers kitted out with PPE and hand sanitiser, Kozlowski introduced a vehicle cleaning service at ComCab’s single workshop location through valeting supplier Assured Group.

This solution is able to eliminate 99.9% of bacteria and contaminants on the inside and outside of vehicles. This service was offered to all drivers that needed it at any time.

Kozlowski says: “This gave the drivers the confidence they needed to make sure they were protected and could continue to carry out their job.”

He is expecting demand to be relatively healthy as taxi journeys are more likely to be taken with single occupants in the back and those travelling around London are unlikely to be returning to cramped tubes or sitting closely together on buses any time soon.

PANDEMIC RESPONSE PLAN

A full return to normal passenger volumes is expected to build gradually over the second half of this year and into the start of 2021, although Kozlowski knows there is the threat of a second wave and even future pandemics.

He says: “I think all fleets now have to have a pandemic response as part of their contingency plans.

ComCab is part of the CityFleet Networks Group which has 2,500 vehicles in the capital

PPE was supplied by ComCab’s Singapore-based parent company which experienced Covid-19 before the UK

“You can see in the past that viruses like Swine Flu or Sars have flared up before. I think it would be naive to assume there will never be another virus in the long term and the threat of a second wave of Covid-19 means our contingency plans will remain in place for the foreseeable future.”

Like many other companies, ComCab has embraced video conferencing with regular catch-ups across the business.

Kozlowski was also attending daily video conferences that TfL was hosting for operators, alongside taxi associations to help with how to operate in line with Public Health England guidance. These sessions have now reduced to once a week as the industry has settled into the ‘new normal’.

ACTIVE TRAVEL PLANS

Part of the Mayor of London’s plans this summer to ease restrictions includes pedestrianising certain roads in the capital and widening cycle lanes.

Both of these measures are to help create more room between pedestrians and cyclists as lockdown measures are lifted and more people return to work and to shop.

Areas between London Bridge and Shoreditch, Euston and Waterloo, Old Street and Holborn will all be limited to buses, pedestrians and cyclists.

Kozlowski applauds an increase in active travel, but says there is still a lack of clarity on how the business can continue to operate on the roads that have been closed, particularly for the work ComCab does with providing transport for the vulnerable and visually impaired.

He says: “I can appreciate why these measures are in place, but we would like to see some more clarity on how we can still operate our services effectively.

“We are currently working on seeing how our cabs can still gain provisions to access these areas.”

Kozlowski thinks there will be a gradual reduction in passenger numbers in central London in the future, just simply down to the number of companies that have introduced working from home policies.

VIDEO CONFERENCING

He thinks there will naturally be some that favour video conferencing over a lengthy commute into the capital.

It’s something ComCab London will continue to do, too, but Kozlowski says, while there will be an increase in working from home, the teams will relocate to a new office in Acton (plans were also put on hold in April), when it’s safe to return to the office environment.

He thinks that if a vaccine and immunity are established next year, business will start to return to a relative normal.

London is a huge city and there will always be demand for a cabby who knows their way around the capital.

The next steps for ComCab are to continue to bring back staff and drivers as demand increases and to continue its plans to electrify its fleet.

It already has 208 LEVC TX electric taxis and had been working on the business case to add 50 more before the lockdown.

Kozlowski says: “We have a network of trained drivers that have studied hard for four years and chosen to do this as their profession. We’re not part of the gig economy.

“I’m proud of how the team and drivers have dealt with all this.

“The level of professionalism has really shone through in what has been an extremely challenging period.”

Factfile

ORGANISATION: ComCab London
FLEET SIZE: 2,500 black cabs (including 208 LEVC TX electric taxis)
FLEET LIFECYCLE: Mix between outright purchase and lease
NUMBER OF STAFF THAT DRIVE AS PART OF THEIR ROLE: 2,500

‘We’re not just wheels, we’re an essential service’

Denise Hawkins, fleet manager at ABM, believes Covid-19 has put the spotlight back on fleets within the facilities industry, highlighting the vital role they play. *Sarah Tooze* reports

As a facilities management provider working across more than 15 industries with a host of job roles, including cleaners, engineers and security officers, ABM has experienced both challenges and opportunities from the Covid-19 pandemic.

“It has been extremely tough on quite a few of our clients because some of them are in the retail industry and aviation sector. This has really hit them hard,” says fleet manager Denise Hawkins.

“But we’ve got clients in the public sector and transport industry who have been non-stop and there has been a lot of pressure on them to keep all of their employees safe as well as any members of the public. So it’s been an odd time with having to make cutbacks in some areas and having to boost capacity in others.”

Where possible, ABM has reallocated staff to keyworker sectors and has taken advantage of the Government’s Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme to furlough some employees.

ABM’s 230 light commercial vehicles remained busy throughout the crisis due to supporting keyworker sectors, with only a 12% reduction in operation, even during the height of lockdown. It is now close to being 100% operational again.

However, it’s the opposite situation with ABM’s 70 company cars. The majority are used by managers who have been working from home during lockdown and having virtual meetings using Microsoft Teams or other technology rather than driving to face-to-face meetings. The drivers have continued to have private use of the vehicles rather than the vehicles being mothballed, but mileages have, naturally, reduced.

The vehicles are contract hired and while none has reached end of contract yet, Hawkins plans to extend those that do on a case-by-case basis, with some going onto an informal, monthly rolling extension and others potentially being extended for four or six months.

Hawkins is also keeping an eye on which vehicles may need an MOT – not normally an issue as vehicles are, typically, kept for three years.

Service, maintenance and repair (SMR) is not a big headache for her as those vehicles which have been operational during lockdown have benefited from keyworker status and drivers have been able to access garages, although in some cases they have had to travel further to a repairer or wait a few days longer rather than having same-day or next-day availability.

The commercial fleet’s drivers have had to adapt in other ways during the crisis.

“There have been changes that have needed to be made from an operational level, but everyone has been extremely compliant,” Hawkins says.

NO MULTIPLE OCCUPANTS

Teams have been restricted so there are not multiple occupants in vehicles and pool vehicles have been limited to a single driver.

The pool vehicles are based on a site and, previously, anyone who needed to drive one during the shift to move things around on the site or to move from site to site was able to, with a log kept of who had been driving. During lockdown each vehicle was permanently allocated to one person.

Field staff were already used to wearing PPE such as gloves but there has been increased usage, as well as face masks when social distancing isn’t possible.

All employees, including those who were previously office-based, have been issued with a reusable face mask.

“We’ve been issuing new guidance and training on cleaning processes, making sure people are keeping the upmost cleanliness of their driving space – pointing out the key touchpoints and things like that,” Hawkins says.

“We’ve been having toolbox talks via mobile phones and Teams on mobile phones about those, as well as documentation filling out.”

The fleet team – Hawkins, road risk champion Edyta Idzior and junior fleet analyst and support Anthony Gaylor – have all been working from home, using Teams for a daily catch-up call. Hawkins says this serves as a “welfare check” as well as talking about any fleet-related issues.

“The company has been massively supportive of the remote workforce with a lot of advice and support on employee wellbeing,” Hawkins says.

Although ABM’s offices have been closed, it is in the process of re-opening them for people to use on a case-by-case basis, following deep cleaning and other safety measures.

“Not everyone has a perfect set-up at home,” Hawkins says. “There have been difficulties with not having access to all the phone systems or printing equipment and things that people require on a day-to-day basis. We have been able to find workarounds, but they are only workarounds so people that need to access equipment or for health and wellbeing reasons will be allowed back in.”

However, those who can work from home will continue to do so.

At clients’ sites, ABM has assisted in putting measures in place to operate safely such as sanitising stations, markers on the floor, barriers and one-way systems.

> “CLEANING IS NO LONGER JUST SOMETHING THAT GETS DONE; IT’S SOMETHING PEOPLE ARE ACTIVELY PAYING ATTENTION TO”
>
> **DENISE HAWKINS, ABM UK**

It has launched a new service called Enhanced Clean (essentially a deep clean), which staff have been trained to carry out using specialist machinery and chemicals.

“A lot of our clients have already taken it up and fleet is going to be providing the facilities to do those services,” Hawkins says. “It’s the world we’re in now, cleaning is no longer just something that gets done; it’s something people are actively paying attention to. As a cleaner, we’ve been pushed to the forefront.”

She adds: “In the past few years there has been a slow decline of fleet usage, within the facilities industry at least, but I feel like in this new world that we find ourselves in, fleet is starting to become a focus again. There is a general shift away from fleet being seen as just a cost. We’re not just wheels, we’re an essential service.”

ACQUISITIONS AT SHORT NOTICE

One of the challenges of operating a fleet in the facilities industry is that the fleet size fluctuates dependent on contract wins and losses. Acquiring vehicles for a new contract is often done at short-notice. Replacement cycles run in line with contracts, typically three years.

On one occasion, Hawkins had to mobilise 210 vans with only two-and-half weeks’ notice.

It was combined with putting the fleet out to tender and one of the key factors was whether the lease provider could mobilise fully fitted-out vans within that timescale.

Arval won the tender and the majority of the vans were ready in time.

A very small percentage of the fleet is outright purchased – again dependent on contracts. For instance, vehicles that will be used only at a certain site tend to have low mileage and it is more economical for ABM to buy them. If the contract is not renewed, the client often buys the vehicles. Conversely, ABM may win a contract where the client already has vehicles and simply wants ABM to manage them.

NEW COMPANY CAR POLICY SET TO SAVE £100,000

Like all professional fleet managers, Hawkins aims to make the fleet as efficient as possible and ABM is set to introduce a new fleet policy next month, with anticipated savings of £102,800.

The bulk of the savings (£45,500) comes from removing 'free' fuel, after calculations showed that it was not a benefit to drivers and was costing them more in tax.

The second biggest saving (£35,800) comes from grey fleet management and mileage reimbursement, with cash allowance drivers being paid the advisory fuel rate for business journeys rather than the 45p per mile AMAP rate as their allowance covers the cost of insurance, servicing and maintenance.

The third biggest saving (£13,500) is from switching the company car choice list from being based on monthly lease costs to wholelife costs, and thereby allowing electric and hybrid vehicles into lower bandings.

The remainder of the savings are expected to come from stipulating that drivers use a daily rental vehicle for business journeys of more than 100 miles rather than using their personal car..

The rental requirement has been introduced as part of a revised travel hierarchy, which has been altered, again in light of Covid-19.

"We have restricted travel to essential journeys only, in line with the Government guidelines," Hawkins says. "We have also shifted the use of public transport down the list due to there being a higher risk of infection, and moved rental up.

"We've had virtually no travel, but as we move out of total lockdown for the short-to-medium term, rental will be the preferred use of travel within the hierarchy."

Company car drivers have been able to order electric vehicles (EVs) from the start of the year and ABM is set to exceed its target of 10% of the car fleet becoming EV. Six are already on the fleet (three Jaguar I-Paces, a Hyundai Kona Electric, a Kia e-Niro, and a Tesla Model 3), and two more Tesla Model 3s are due to arrive before the end of the year.

There are also four hybrids (a Toyota C-HR Hybrid, Mitsubishi Outlander PHEV, Volkswagen Golf GTE and Hyundai Ioniq Hybrid).

Three of the pure EVs were ready to be delivered in March, but got stuck at dealerships when the lockdown came. They arrived last month.

Current lead times on vehicles are a mixed bag, according to Hawkins.

"On one hand, a lot of dealers and manufacturers have got vehicles sitting around that they would have sold over the past few months, and haven't, so they have extra stock. Then other manufacturers, which only do factory orders, have orders going way into next year. So, it depends on what you want and from whom," she says.

Hawkins isn't able to encourage company car drivers to choose vehicles that are available sooner as "we don't have a distinct list of what is available and what isn't".

"It's a very unknown, uncertain time at the moment," she adds.

ABM's van fleet is proving more difficult to electrify

Despite the uncertainty, she is confident ABM can meet its target of average CO_2 emissions for the entire fleet being 100g/km or lower by 2023. Currently, the average is 139g/km (the car fleet has an average of 104g/km while vans are 153g/km).

Like many businesses, environmental concerns are high on the agenda and ABM has appointed a sustainability manager, Lara Coutinho.

"She has helped drive a lot of initiatives and we work together to ensure our agendas match up," Hawkins says.

VANS HARDER TO ELECTRIFY

However, the commercial vehicle fleet is harder to electrify than the company car fleet. ABM has one charging point at its Ruislip office in west London and the landlord will be installing more at the business park where the office is based next year, which should benefit company car drivers. But it is more complicated for van drivers.

ABM has trialled electric vans a number of times over the past four years, with limited success.

"On paper, London is the ideal place for an electric van but every single one of my drivers that has tested one has said "it's a brilliant van, I love it but I can't charge it anywhere'," Hawkins says. "They'll check the apps to see where a charge point is and whether it's free. Then, when they get there, there's no one plugged in, but there's an EV parked on the spot."

In one instance last summer, a driver collected a van from ABM's Ruislip office, fully charged, did a few jobs and then tried five different charging points that were shown as available, without success.

"He had to drive all the way back to Ruislip from central London to charge and he had to abandon his jobs in the afternoon," Hawkins says.

"It would be different if we had depots or the vehicles could be charged overnight. The infrastructure or the technology itself just isn't there yet for our commercial fleet."

Denise Hawkins has been in fleet for six years, but believes that skills acquired while working in retail have stood her in good stead

ORGANISATION: ABM UK
FLEET MANAGER: Denise Hawkins
TIME IN ROLE: six years
FLEET SIZE: 300 (70 cars, 230 vans)
FUNDING METHOD: contract hire
REPLACEMENT CYCLE: three years
AVERAGE CO_2 EMISSIONS: 139g/km

> "WE HAVE SHIFTED PUBLIC TRANSPORT DOWN THE LIST DUE TO THERE BEING A HIGHER RISK OF INFECTION, AND MOVED RENTAL UP"
>
> **DENISE HAWKINS, ABM UK**

MANAGING RISK

RAC telematics was introduced to the commercial fleet in December last year and work had started to install it in company cars when lockdown started.

"That is starting back up again now and we're about 50% through," Hawkins says.

While van drivers have full behaviour-based telematics, car drivers have a basic version which is used to record mileage.

Road risk champion Idzior, who took on the newly-created role last year, monitors and assesses all drivers involved with road traffic collisions or incidents, in conjunction with motoring and parking fines, and telematics reports.

With this combined information, she compiles a risk register of all drivers and assigns risk level of low, medium, high or critical. This risk level determines the frequency of licence checks, e-learning training packages and, in extreme cases, removal of company vehicle privileges and disciplinary action.

"The efficiency scores from the telematics generally go hand-in-hand with the number of penalty notices and road traffic incidents," Hawkins says. "When we looked at the top 10% of drivers there wasn't a single motoring offence or road traffic incident. So we took those drivers and buddied them up with the bottom 10%."

A trial took place with five pairs spending one day a week together for three weeks. The pairs were chosen from different divisions to minimise any impact on operations.

Feedback has been positive with the drivers saying it was "more rewarding" than e-learning or being told by their manager what to do.

Hawkins intended to roll out the buddy scheme but the Covid-19 restrictions have prevented her from doing that. She plans to look at it again in the new year.

ABM was also aiming for FORS silver accreditation in quarter two (it already has bronze and Van Excellence) but that has had to be pushed back to quarter four.

FORS is important for ABM as one of its clients is Transport for London (TfL) and, in turn, ABM encourages its supply chain to become accredited.

Hawkins says that a lot of work Idzior has done will help towards silver accreditation.

She also made the case for ABM to create the junior fleet analyst and support role, which includes analysing driver compliance and key performance indicators, cost management and performance benchmarking.

Gaylor and Idzior work together because "as we know, inefficient driving is both a risk and cost", Hawkins says.

The fleet team use SQL Server rather than dedicated fleet management software, which Hawkins says is useful as it has the HR information and job systems, allowing the vehicles to be matched directly to the people and for the finance team to distribute costs accurately.

Hawkins believes data will become more important in fleet, and to the business in general.

"We want to make the fleet department something that is an asset to the business," she says. "It's going to be integral that all the managers out in the field use us, use our data and help drive the business. Pun intended."

HAWKINS ON....

...becoming a fleet manager

Hawkins has worked in fleet for the past six years, having taken it on alongside mobiles, phones, IT and office management responsibilities at Westway Services, which was acquired by ABM in 2015.

At the time, the fleet was less than 100 vehicles, but within a few months it had trebled in size due to contract wins.

"It was a baptism of fire, learning about fleet, sourcing vehicles, getting them all fitted out and dealing with suppliers," Hawkins says. "The other tasks started to fall by the wayside and new people were brought in to take those on. My role became predominantly fleet within about a year."

Hawkins believes her previous skills from working in retail, such as working to budgets and people management, stood her in good stead to take on the fleet.

She also did "lots of reading" (whitepapers, information on websites etc.), and leant heavily on her lease provider (GE Capital Fleet Services, which was acquired by Arval in 2015). She also spoke to managers within ABM about their vehicle requirements and how things could be made easier.

"It was a very busy, but rewarding, first year," she says.

‘There’s a real desire by fleets to be a part of this…’

The Association of Fleet Professionals is attracting new members as it sets out its stall to educate, train, lobby and share best practice, chair Paul Hollick tells *Stephen Briers*

The strength and potency of a trade association can typically be measured in two fundamental ways: size of membership and the willingness of members to engage in operational activities, such as joining committees that help to shape policy.

For the newly created Association of Fleet Professionals (AFP), the latter has been amply illustrated by the speed with which it has filled important positions on five new committees. Size of membership has previously been an Achilles heel, but progress is being made as more fleets join, while the ultimate aspiration is simple and ambitious: for every fleet in the UK to be a member.

AFP was formed in March from the merger of trade body ACFO (formerly Association of Car Fleet Operators) and training body ICFM (Institute of Car Fleet Management). The move was, in many ways, inevitable, but also a long time in the making.

As far back as 2010, the two organisations outlined plans to work together. Then, in 2016, came the statement announcing “closer links” which led to representation on each other’s boards and shared membership initiatives.

But it was to be another four years – and copious discussion – before a formal coming together was finally agreed. So why now?

“It took a meeting of minds,” says Paul Hollick, AFP chair. “With Caroline (Sandall) taking on the role of (ACFO) chair and Stewart (Lightbody) coming in as deputy, there was real momentum to make this happen.”

Conversations had frequently been hampered by over-complication when “we just needed to make it happen”, Hollick adds.

“We said ‘let’s not worry about the detail’. Let’s create a simple structure with the top co as AFP rather than trying to do a full-on merge at the same time,” he says.

“So, we keep ICFM as an operating association, but, in the medium term, turn it into the Fleet Academy for the AFP. This meant we could bring it together at speed.”

AFP co-chair Sandall has since stepped away from the association for personal reasons leaving Hollick as sole chair, aided by deputy Stewart Lightbody and 11 other board members. There is an additional sub-board for ICFM which focuses purely on education and training.

> “WE WANT TO MAKE SURE WE CREATE A SUSTAINABLE INDUSTRY FOR OURSELVES AND THE NEW TALENT COMING THROUGH”
>
> **PAUL HOLLICK, AFP CHAIR**

Lightbody was one of the main catalysts. Co-opted onto the ACFO board at the end of 2018, he made it clear from the outset that he wanted the two organisations to be one.

“I put a lot of my success down to the ICFM, so I couldn’t understand why it hadn’t been done before,” Lightbody says. “We use the phrase both sides of the same coin and there is more vested interest than ever.”

For now, members can join AFP or opt only for ICFM, but, ultimately, there will be just one membership as ICFM is rebranded as AFP Fleet Academy. The board still needs to iron out these details – as well as articles of association and memorandum – and might retain the MICFM (member) and FICFM (fellow) lettering.

Lightbody adds: “We didn’t want to drop the brand too quick; it’s a badge I wear with honour.”

Hollick is mindful that some ICFM students pay for training out of their own pocket – Lightbody, himself, was one – so AFP is likely to introduce a student tariff of £70 to encourage “new blood to join the industry”.

In the coming weeks, ICFM members will receive an invitation to join AFP with corporate fees set at £299 a year. Supplier packages also start at £299 (bronze), rising to £2,000 (platinum).

The merger will see membership numbers exceed 900 – almost 700 from ICFM and just less than 300 from ACFO – of which 60% are fleet decision-makers and 40% service providers. The overlap between the two membership bases was less than 20% thanks to different demographics.

ICFM consisted of the “new guards coming through the ranks”, the newcomers, junior staff and those with a handful of years’ fleet experience, while ACFO had the senior decision-makers, the stalwarts with 10 years-plus knowledge.

“The tie-up bringing both sets together has been pretty awesome and we are already seeing some of the senior guys starting to think about putting their own team through training because they are aware of how it all links together,” says Hollick.

“That will help our drive to make this industry a proper vocation and also to give fleet operators a voice in the marketplace.”

Hollick’s original aspiration for AFP core membership – “fleet decision-makers, our DNA” – was to hit 1,000 “because it starts to feel like a proper movement” (it will stand at more than 500 if all members are retained during the amalgamation). However, he now believes AFP could exceed 1,500 in the medium term due to an “untapped opportunity”.

“I’m meeting people that weren’t aware of ACFO or the ICFM,” he says. “Since we started the call to arms about the committees, there have been people in FORS or FTA that haven’t been aware of our existence, which I find a bit mind blowing; they just don’t know the industry holistically.”

Beyond the core, AFP is keen to attract more members from procurement and travel, which also opens up mobility management.

AFP’S DUAL MANDATES

- **To give a voice to policy-setters for fleet managers and corporates operating vehicle fleets within the UK, protecting their interests and driving their agenda to ensure organisations can adequately run fleet vehicles within the UK and abroad.**
- **To train, educate and develop fleet professionals, to raise the standards of corporate fleet operators and associated support service providers, promoting best practice and developing the current and future generation of fleet professionals.**

ORGANISATION: Association of Fleet Professionals
FORMERLY: ACFO and ICFM
FORMED: March 2020
CHAIR: Paul Hollick
DEPUTY CHAIR: Stewart Lightbody
MEMBERSHIP: approx. 900, 60% fleet, 40% supplier

Lightbody adds: "While 1,500 sounds achievable, for me it's about making sure we have the right people from the right organisations that are in it for the right reasons and want to play their part."

Ultimately, for both Hollick and Lightbody, it is less about setting fixed targets and more about a mindset of wanting "every fleet operator in the country being a member", but within a principal goal of offering value through learning, sharing ideas and best practice.

"If our membership is gaining insight and the support they need in getting their questions answered that they can't get elsewhere, then we've succeeded," Lightbody says.

He recognises that some sections of ACFO membership became "frustrated" that the association didn't fully deliver on their expectations and the new AFP would have to "show that we are doing things differently" to re-engage them.

The committees are a crucial part of this strategy (see panel, right) and they are already providing a fillip to membership, bringing in many first-time members.

"We are pushing at an open door – there's a real desire to be part of this," says Hollick. "Lobbying is hugely important, making sure we are representative holistically all of their needs. That's why we set up the committees, but out of them also needs to come best practice advice for other members. Thought leadership is really important."

The Light Commercial Vehicle (LCV) committee is a real nascent moment for AFP. LCV fleets are embracing the fact they finally have something dedicated to them. LCV remains, according to Hollick, a gap in the market, despite previous attempts by both ACFO and FTA to engage.

"It's been really encouraging, and they see us as a complimentary body beyond FTA and FORS – it's not about competing with those guys," he says.

Lightbody adds: "Although ACFO was inclusive, I think just in the title (Car Fleet Operators), a lot of LCV operators thought it wasn't for them. Now, with the neutral position of AFP, they feel like they've got more of an opportunity to contribute.

"And a lot of those operators run both car and vans, so we can have a single voice for both."

This single voice will be important when it comes to representing fleets within Government. ACFO tended to rely on forming bonds with other trade bodies, including FTA and BVRLA, when lobbying, although it did enjoy solo success, notably with its campaign for the electric vehicle advisory fuel rate in 2018.

> "IT FEELS VERY DIFFERENT FROM THE OLD ACFO SET-UP IN THAT IT ISN'T JUST DOWN TO THE BOARD TO FIX THE ISSUES"
>
> **STEWART LIGHTBODY, AFP DEPUTY CHAIR**

Will AFP have the strength and weight of voice to go it alone if and when necessary?

"When there's no conflict between us and the BVRLA in terms of what we want to achieve, we will throw our hat in the ring and join up," says Hollick. "We should stand shoulder-to-shoulder with them over core activities that mutually benefit both bodies. But, with the creation of the new organisation, we are our own people as well and we do have our own links into Treasury, into Whitehall and into local government, so we will represent ourselves in the right way even if it causes conflict with others, because we have to be properly independent."

Lightbody adds: "There was always perceived to be a 'them and us' between BVRLA and ACFO, although I don't think that was ever intentional, and in certain areas we should be representing both sides of the argument collectively otherwise we just waste everyone's time. But, we are not afraid to stand on our own two feet – we prefer side-by-side, but we could go toe-to-toe."

ACFO has been part of the global fleet community since 2017 when it helped to establish the Global Fleet Consortium Network as part of its "thinking internationally" outlook. Last year, it joined Fleet and Mobility Management Federation Europe (FMMFE).

With a growing number of UK fleet managers taking on pan-European or global fleet responsibilities, having a high level of insight into the challenges that impact different markets at different times enables the association and its members to stay ahead of global trends.

In addition, AFP is working with FMMFE to jointly create an international fleet training programme where, for example, a German fleet manager with UK fleet responsibility can go on an ICFM course to learn about the fleet minutiae in the UK, and vice versa for a UK fleet manager with German responsibilities.

AFP is also benefiting from shared learning with its American counterparts, where training is MBA-based, enabling it to deploy best practice.

"It will probably be next year when we see some of this thought leadership coming through," says Hollick.

As the former deputy chair of ACFO, Lightbody is perfectly placed to pass comment on the contrasting nature with the new AFP. And he returns to the structure of the committees which can play a vital role in supporting the main board.

"It feels very different from the old ACFO set-up in that it isn't just down to the board to fix the issues," he says. "There is a collective responsibility among like-minded operators out there to become involved and help spread the load.

"It also becomes a natural breeding ground for board members in the future as well. So, we don't become stale and predictable; we have succession planning from active and engaged committee members."

The Association of Fleet Professionals has carefully set out its intentions: it wants to offer fleet operators a strong voice with national and local government policymakers and share best practice and solutions with its members.

So, what do Hollick and Lightbody believe will be the measures of success for the integrated organisation when they look back in years to come?

"Every fleet operator is a member of the AFP and everyone knows about it," shoots back Hollick without hesitation.

He adds: "Also, if we've managed to make a couple of good changes to the marketplace with central and local government to improve the way companies operate fleets. But it's about talent generation as well. We want to make sure we create a sustainable industry for ourselves and the new talent coming through the training courses."

And Lightbody? "Our industry is changing all the time; technology is changing all the time and our future success is dependent on us embracing the new people coming through who are not afraid to challenge convention or to try something different."

Back to Hollick for the final word: "This phase for us is a real call to arms to the industry. Fleet operators need to get involved with this; it's not just the responsibility of the AFP board members. We've got a real opportunity to be able to improve the vocation of fleet operators in the UK market – and now's the time."

FAB FIVE – AFP'S NEW COMMITTEES RING THE CHANGES

The five committees announced by AFP in mid-June have an important role to play in shaping policy and positioning with Government and local authority policymakers, but also in deriving best practice to share across the membership.

The topics clearly struck a chord with fleets; within two weeks, the 12 available places were filling fast with one of the committees – EV/alternative fuels – already full. The ideal mix is eight fleets, each of which is representative of their industry sector, and four suppliers.

"It's not been difficult to get people involved; no one has said they aren't interested," says Stewart Lightbody, who chairs two of the committees – EV/alternative fuel and LCVs. "None of them can wait."

Paul Hollick adds: "We've had people phoning us up asking how they can get involved. We could've filled some of them three times over, especially the EV and LCV committees."

The five full committees and fleet members to date are:

1. **EV/alternative fuels:** Steve Cuddy, Close Brothers; Ken Needham, Foxtons; Lorna McAtear, National Grid; Simon King, Mitie; Dale Eynon, Defra; Eric Bristow, Schindler; Denise Lane, Capita; Duncan Webb, Royal Mail
2. **Light Commercial Vehicles:** Steve Winter, Centrica; Cliff Lewis Interserve; Matt Hammond, Altrad; Steve Openshaw, Eric Wright; Denise Lane, Capita; Duncan Webb, Royal Mail; Jo Hammonds, Sanctuary; Lee Rossall, BES Utilities; Glenn Ewen, Clear Channel
3. **Future Roads:** Debbie Floyde, Bauer; Nigel Grainger, Plumbase; Colin Jones, Cancer Research; Colin Hutt, Clarion
4. **Risk, compliance & health:** Marie Jarrold, BCA; Colin Knight, Amazon; Tony Murphy, Murphy Plant; Ted Sakyi, Euro Car Parts; Matt Hammond, Altrad; Eric Bristow, Schindler; Ryan Coles, Aviva
5. **Future Mobility:** Wayne Warburton, Siemens; David Oliver, Specsavers; Mandi Nicol, Schneider Electric; Lorna McAtear, National Grid; Andy Leedham, Astra Zenica; Debbie Floyde, Bauer; Joe Carierra, MSD

AFP also has an additional committee run by the board: Government Bodies and Trade Associations.

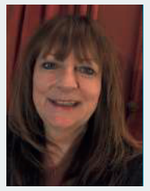
THE AFP BOARD MEMBERS


Paul Hollick, AFP chair


Stewart Lightbody, AFP deputy chair


Denise Lane, Capita head of group fleet


Rick Baird, Marshall Leasing new business development director


Julie Summerell, TR Fleet managing director

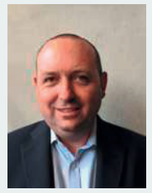

Peter Eldridge, ICFM director


James Pestell, IFC Group national sales manager


Debbie Floyde, Bauer Media group fleet manager


Martin Evans, Jaama managing director


Marie Jarrold, BCA car fleet controller


Peter Milchard, Aviva Broker risk consultant


Chris Joyce, 360vs business consultant


David Brown, Applied Driving Techniques head of business development

Hybrid and electric vehicles start to dominate fleet conversations

Audi's strategy to become CO_2-neutral by 2030 remains on course. *Stephen Briers* reports

James Buxton has been Audi's head of fleet for 18 months

Zero per cent benefit-in-kind (BIK) tax, corporate social responsibilities and new attitudes towards driving shaped during lockdown are accelerating demand for electric vehicles (EVs).

Leasing companies report more orders taken in the first quarter of 2020 than during the whole of 2019. The switch has been flipped.

Audi is cresting the wave of corporate interest with a product launch plan that will result in a line-up of five plug-in hybrids and four full electric vehicles by the end of the year.

From a near standing start a little more than six months ago, electric product is already accounting for around a quarter of orders and "could rise to 40% and even further as we go into next year", according to head of fleet James Buxton.

"It's accelerating quickly as we had the customer conversations over the past nine-to-12 months on the e-tron," he adds. "It was relatively niche; now that car is dominant on the meeting agendas. I can see parity between our alternative fuel vehicles and ICE (internal combustion engine) order bank happening pretty quickly."

The lockdown caused by the coronavirus pandemic has stymied demand, but not erased it completely. Pent-up demand is high, and even during the depths of lockdown Audi took more than 1,000 fleet orders.

The carmaker took the decision to delete many of the stock orders it had in the system to ensure that any customer order would take priority. As a result, Buxton does not anticipate any extended delivery times due to global production pauses during Covid-19.

"The number of customers still operating has been quite significant," he says. "Our primary focus has been ensuring our customers and dealers know what's going on regarding our product, logistics and shipping and that we know what's going on from their perspective – we have to work in partnership."

He recognises and accepts the widespread uncertainty among companies which may still have staff on furlough and are not yet sure of when they will return to work. Audi has told them it will hold cars that have been ordered if necessary, as it strives to "be flexible where we can to deliver a solution that works for the customer".

Audi's expectations for the balance of 2020 are in line with general market sentiment: that the final six months will see demand return close to original forecast levels. True fleet registrations in the first half of the year fell by 48% on 2019 and some of that business is lost across all manufacturers. "How much is the big question," Buxton notes.

Demand has fluctuated by industry sector – healthcare stayed high, hospitality was low, for example – but, while corporate interest evaporated during April and May, it started to return in June with electric product topping the list of enquiries.

"This was the trend pre-lockdown and, if anything, that has accelerated post-lockdown," says Buxton.

"How that market develops over the next 12-18 months will be interesting. Does lockdown have a direct impact due to (people) working from home and less mileage? It could be a tipping point."

Buxton remains "excited" about the rest of the year with the new PHEV (plug-in hybrid engined vehicles) and BEV (battery electric vehicle) models which are being priced with fleet in mind.

"We have the e-tron and the e-tron 50 which we introduced with a lower entry price with a view on fleet. The order take is superb and the order bank for the rest of the year is fantastic," he says.

"We've seen some customers allowing their employees to upgrade to the e-tron, which they wouldn't allow for ICE. It's because of their commitment to reducing CO_2."

He adds: "This is an area where we can work with customers to make these vehicles more accessible. The acquisition price can be higher, but we are trying to equalise that position, and this will happen over time."

While the e-tron is an important milestone, all Audi eyes are really fixed on the plug-in A6 saloon, "a big car for us". Quoting has started, with early feedback from leasing companies suggesting the car is well positioned in the segment.

HEAD OFFICE: Milton Keynes
HEAD OF FLEET: James Buxton
TIME IN ROLE: 18 months
TRUE FLEET SALES (H1): 15,338 (DOWN BY 52%)
TRUE FLEET MARKET SHARE (H1): 7.6% (DOWN FROM 8%)

> "IT (THE E-TRON) WAS RELATIVELY NICHE; NOW THAT CAR IS DOMINANT ON THE MEETING AGENDAS"
>
> **JAMES BUXTON, AUDI**

With BIK of just 10%, 34 miles of electric-only range, 35g/km of CO_2, 188mpg and a charging time of 2.5 hours, it's little surprise Buxton predicts it could account for "at least 70%" of corporate registrations – potentially around 4,500 units, based on the A6's sales performance last year.

Other PHEVs now available to order include the A8 TFSIe (recently tested in *Fleet News*), Q5 e-tron (expected to account for more than 30% of Q5 sales) and Q7 TFSIe, with the A3 "in the pipeline".

Then, towards the end of 2020, possibly falling into 2021, comes the Q4 e-tron full electric compact SUV.

Electric product provides Audi with a short-term opportunity over the next 12-18 months to exploit its inherent brand appeal with drivers, particularly those who have opted out of the company scheme but could be enticed back thanks to the preferential BIK position.

"Brands with strong desire and product range will benefit from people returning to the company car scheme," Buxton says. "It's also great for employers because they will have greater insight of the cars their employees are driving.

"And, while you could argue that PHEV is a stepping-stone, there is a growing number of customers that are comfortable moving straight to BEV because of BIK, NIC (national insurance contributions) and sustainability measures."

Audi is supporting those moves by providing a free home charge kit with each vehicle, plus £150 pre-paid credit for public charging. It has also launched an e-tron concierge service, giving drivers access to a WhatsApp group with a 24/7 customer contact centre for an instant response to any enquiry.

"This takes away a lot of the concerns for fleet managers, especially regarding driver enquiries such as how to plug the car in," Buxton says.

He adds: "Twelve months ago, the conversations were more us telling corporates (about the product); this has reversed. They know the benefits, it's now about how do they make it work for them."

The PHEV/BEV model launch plan all plays into the Volkswagen Group master strategy to become CO_2-neutral by 2030; by the middle of this decade, Audi expects to have reduced its emissions by 30% versus a 2015 baseline.

However, as he did during our meeting a year earlier when he was fresh in the role, Buxton is keen to stress that "while it's easy to talk exclusively about PHEV and BEV, there is still a considerable ICE market, especially for essential users and job-need fleets".

He points to the A3 Sportback and A3 saloon, launched during lockdown, which have taken more than 500 fleet orders. Their frugal engines will ensure drivers pay up to 6% less on BIK.

Following will be "the final part of the jigsaw": RDE2-compliant engines, starting with the 2.0-litre diesel Q5. Audi is a little late to this party – Mercedes-Benz launched its first RDE2 engine 18 months ago – but is expected to quickly roll out the engine to its other core fleet models, including the A4 and A5 where diesel "is essential".

Buxton adds: "Overall, the back end of the year is looking really strong. Then we plan on corporate growth in 2021."

Order take on Audi's e-tron 50 is 'superb'

'UNPRECEDENTED' LEVEL OF INVESTMENT IN NEW BUSINESS UNIT FOR AUTOMATED VEHICLES AND EVs

Audi has recently created a new business unit called Artemis to fast-track development into highly automated and electric vehicles. The timeline for the first product is 2024.

While few details are available, James Buxton said this "unprecedented" level of investment was a clear indication of Volkswagen Group and Audi's desire to transform its business, with a focus on digitisation, mobility and model development, in particular, electrification.

"From an Audi point of view, the UK is a significant market, so any proposition we would have input into is to ensure it is fit for purpose and offers value for our customers," he says.

However, he is also mindful of his customers most pressing priorities, adding: "ACES (autonomy, connectivity, electrification and shared services) do come up, but the majority of the conversations (with fleets) are on electric, support with charging infrastructure and how to manage an EV fleet, for example qualifying their driver for suitability.

"Autonomy is not detailed yet, but it's likely to be over the next couple of years."

Oxford outlines its plan to be UK's first zero-emission city

Pandemic may have delayed the introduction of a 'red zone' in city centre, but it will happen. *Stephen Briers* reports

London is often touted as the UK leader when it comes to addressing emissions from road transport. In 2008, it became the first city to introduce a low emission zone, targeting truck diesel emissions, then last year it became the first to set its sights at pre-Euro 6 diesel and pre-Euro 4 petrol vehicles of all types with the stricter ultra-low emission zone (ULEZ).

But the city, arguably, setting out the most ambitious plans to tackle the climate crisis is Oxford, which has outlined its blueprint for a zero-emission zone in the city centre by summer 2021.

While that's a Covid-19-enforced delay from the original December 2020 launch date, it's also the first phase of a two-stage plan that will cover the entire city centre by 2022.

Part one, dubbed the 'red zone', covers a small central area of the city and will charge all non-zero-emission vehicles £10 for entering between 7am and 7pm; part two, the 'green zone' will encompass the rest of the city and offer discounted charges for vehicles that comply with the London ULEZ (see panel overleaf for more).

But those are simply the headlines. Oxford City Council has a far-reaching strategy to improve air quality and reduce carbon which includes support for local businesses, investment in active travel and public transport, and an overhaul of its own fleet.

Tom Hayes, recently appointed deputy leader at the council, has been Oxford's cabinet member for green transport and zero carbon since 2017. He's also a transport policy board member at the Local Government Association and well versed in the need to address the climate agenda.

"When the city council declared a climate emergency in January 2019, we recognised we had to take unusual measures to tackle an unusual situation," Hayes says.

The biggest challenge would be to "bring people along with us – we have to have zero-carbon citizens".

CITIZENS' ASSEMBLY

Consequently, Oxford became the first UK city to hold a citizens' assembly on climate change to gauge the views of residents and businesses. This looked at the main causes of carbon emissions in the city, of which transportation contributed 19%, and asked for their recommendations.

Active and sustainable transport topped the list, with widespread support for a zero-emission zone and segregated cycle lanes. But they also wanted Oxford City Council to lobby central Government for a change in the framework, including bringing forward the ban of petrol and diesel vehicles from 2040 to 2030.

The announcement of a zero-emission zone (ZEZ), first mooted by the council in 2017, has nurtured an environment for innovative suppliers to begin trialling sustainable transport solutions,

Oxford City Council plans to electrify at least 25% of its 330-vehicle fleet by 2023

Deputy leader Tom Hayes is aware Oxford City Council must lead by example. He is seen getting into a Co-Wheels car club vehicle

> "WE RECOGNISE WE CAN TRY TO SHIFT THE MARKET, SHOWCASING TO OTHER COUNCILS WHAT IS POSSIBLE"
>
> **TOM HAYES, OXFORD CITY COUNCIL**

while Oxford recognised its responsibilities lay in creating the infrastructure to facilitate behavioural change among business and the public.

"We've committed a £19 million budget to the zero-carbon agenda," Hayes says. "But we've also seen investment come into the city."

Among new sustainable transport businesses springing up in the city are Pedal and Post, which delivers mail, including medical supplies, to one of the universities, and Oxwash, a laundry cleaning service. Both use cargo bikes, e-bikes and push bikes to make their deliveries.

Meanwhile, Co-Wheels' Oxford business has become one of the largest EV car clubs outside of London, tapping into an EV-savvy demographic.

Coronavirus, while having a terrible impact on lives and the global economy, has given the city council and the public a glimpse of an ecosystem where personal transport is far less essential.

"What we are looking at is a real-world experiment of what would happen if you took private cars off the road, seeing the benefits in terms of quieter streets, reduced air pollution and cleaner air to breathe, but also looking at the future of social distancing when we are on the street," Hayes says.

"We are looking at widening the pavements in core parts of the city, giving roads over to buses so they have priority or to segregated cycle lanes. We're looking at how we increase the number of bike journeys (push bikes and e-bikes) within the city, but we are also looking at how those new segregated cycle lanes connect into the villages and towns of the county."

TWEAKS AND FINE TUNING

Much of this work will be a continuation of the Connecting Oxford policy, with some tweaks and fine-tuning to adapt to the Covid-19 pandemic. The policy includes a £300m proposal to develop a cycle greenways initiative serving the city and neighbouring districts, which saw the city council work closely with the county council, as it did on the ZEZ proposals.

Electric vehicle (EV) uptake by local business and the public is critical to the success of the zone, and fundamental to that is the charging infrastructure.

The £41m Energy Superhub Oxford (ESO) rapid charging project is a three-year joint initiative led by Oxford City Council and Pivot Power (an EDF Renewables company) which includes Habitat Energy, Invinity Energy Systems, Kensa Contracting and the University of Oxford.

Aided by £10m from the Government, ESO will install an 8km (five mile) private wire network around the south of Oxford connecting public charging facilities at Redbridge Park & Ride to the national grid.

It has capacity to expand with EV adoption and provide power for local businesses seeking to electrify their fleets.

The first stage will see installation of 20 charge points ranging from rapid (50kW+) to ultra-rapid (150kW+), capable of charging a car in 15-50 minutes, and 30 fast charge points (at least 7kW) which can charge a car over a period of hours.

ESO will have the world's largest hybrid energy storage system, which will share the grid connection with the private wire network to facilitate mass-scale charging while minimising peak demand on the local grid.

The council is now looking into the number of charging points it might, ultimately, need in the city, and the best locations, to deliver wholesale migration to electric, and whether those facilities should always be clustered in hubs or focus more on individual charge points.

To gain the confidence and trust of the business community, Oxford recognised it needed to set an example by electrifying its own fleet. It has placed an order for 33 EVs – a mix of cars, vans, a street sweeper and an excavator – with funding unlocked via the ESO project. It will take the council to 40 EVs by the end of the year, almost halfway to its target of electrifying "at least 25%" of its 339-vehicle fleet by 2023.

"We are doing this not just because we want our own fleet to be completely right, but we recognise we can try to shift the market, showcasing to other councils what is possible," Hayes says.

He's excited about supplementary opportunities offered by electric, such as alternative hours for refuse collection vehicles (RCVs). As electric is silent, why not collect rubbish at 4am when the roads are quiet, rather than the traditional 8am, for example. "We could have a much smoother operation as a result," Hayes adds.

Oxford has just started trials with a Dennis Eagle electric RCV; if it replaced all 27, it would save almost 750 tonnes of CO_2 a year.

The ESO project will also fund a 'try before you buy' scheme for Oxford's Hackney Carriage taxi drivers with Electric Blue, enabling drivers to trial one of two models – an all-electric Nissan Dynamo or an LEVC – for a two- or four-week period. From 2025, drivers will only be able to get a licence if they have a zero-emission capable cab.

Overall, ESO aims to save 10,000 tonnes of CO_2 per year by 2021, rising to 25,000 tonnes by 2032.

ADDITIONAL CO-BENEFITS

While Oxford is focused on achieving zero carbon, the strategy has a multitude of additional benefits which weren't initially appreciated by the council and its advisory group.

Hayes went into the first citizens' assembly, a representative cross-section of the local population, thinking he'd be discussing trade-offs on council priorities. What he hadn't considered were the co-benefits.

"People were saying if you have fewer vehicles on the road, then you not only achieve a reduction in air pollution, but you improve public health," he says. "You improve safety. You allow for more spaces to be taken over for trees which improves the scenery. You make it a more walkable city.

"So, now we focus on the co-benefits. And that's a big learning for us and other councils."

Pretty as a picture – Tom Hayes asked a local artist to brighten up the appearance of some of the city's charge points

Tom Hayes engages with local schoolchildren in their clean air campaign

BUSINESS CONSULTATION KEY TO ZEZ INTRODUCTION

Oxford City Council took the decision to delay the introduction of the zero-emission zone 'red zone' from the end of 2020 to summer 2021 following an attempt to consult with businesses that coincided with the outset of the coronavirus pandemic.

"The businesses we needed to consult were clear that they were just trying to keep their businesses afloat and couldn't contribute," says Tom Hayes.

"So, to make sure we launched the zero-emission zone in a way that didn't damage the local economy at a time when it is already on its knees, we delayed the zone until summer next year. That allows for the necessary consultation with business."

Currently, proposals will ban all non-zero-emission vehicles from entering the red zone between 7am and 7pm, including vans and HGVs which are delivering goods and services to local businesses. The inevitable response from the trade associations was that it was unfair to penalise operators when there were no compliant models available in those vehicle segments.

Hayes is dismissive of such suggestions: "It's a zero-emission zone within a 12-hour period – you can shift your deliveries outside of that. We've seen businesses make even bigger changes to respond to the pandemic."

He adds: "The overwhelming thing that business wanted was certainty. If it's going to cause us to incur extra cost, at least we know and can start planning for it."

Communication with local companies has helped the council to gain their trust in delivering the red zone, taking their concerns into consideration. This will be even more important when the zone extends to the green zone in 2021/22.

The move will be "sensitive to business considerations, but not defined by them", Hayes says. "We will reflect on the hours of operation, whether they are seven-to-seven, and the vehicles types that are best responding to the red zone. Its important to incorporate learning and not just rush in to have a clear air zone or zero emissions."

Geoffrey Bray (far left) and son Marcus (far right) celebrate the customer service award win with members of the Fleet Service GB team

COMPANY: FLEET SERVICE GB
FOUNDED: 2014
EXECUTIVE CHAIRMAN: GEOFFREY BRAY
NUMBER OF STAFF: 24
VEHICLES MANAGED: 8,500

'It's the people that matter', says customer service award winner

Fleet Service GB's experienced team believes in looking after drivers, reports *Matt de Prez*

Fleet management is about more than just 'ticking boxes'. It needs a personal touch. Someone who will pick up the phone and sort out a problem before it affects your business, your drivers or, ultimately, your customers.

While vehicles and data are an important aspect of any fleet, it's the people that matter. That's why Fleet Service GB puts customer service at the heart of everything it does.

The business is relatively young, founded just five years ago. But it is managed by an experienced team that has decades of fleet experience.

Its focus on giving customers what they want has enabled it to establish a robust customer base in a short space of time. The company manages 8,500 vehicles and 5,000 drivers for its 35 clients.

Executive chairman Geoffrey Bray has been in the industry for almost 50 years. As a Fleet News Hall of Fame inductee, he is widely recognised for his achievements.

His former business, Fleet Support Group, grew to become the largest privately-owned driver and vehicle management company in the UK before being sold to ARI in December 2011.

Son Marcus Bray has spent his working life in fleet, with 35 years of experience. He, too, worked for Fleet Support Group and stayed until a year later when he left to set up Fleet Service GB.

A number of Bray's Fleet Support Group clients decided to follow him to his new venture. In the past five years, the business has welcomed back 30 of the fleets he previously worked with.

Among the high-profile names that joined from the outset were Autoglass and Stannah, enabling the business to 'go live' in 2015 with more than 1,000 vehicles.

Marcus Bray says: "Our USP as a company is we listen to the customer, we understand what they want and what we want to do is deliver for them."

The fleet management provider's aim is always to manage and reduce fleet operating costs, but it says to do this, it – and its employees – must completely understand its clients, their businesses and requirements.

It does this through a combination of personal relationships, a detailed knowledge of the fleet industry and technology.

The company's efforts were recognised earlier this year at the Fleet News Awards, where it picked up the Best Customer Service award.

Fleet Service GB does not use traditional matrices to monitor customer satisfaction. Instead it has in-depth relationships at both senior management and employee levels.

FleetNews AWARDS 2020

CUSTOMER SERVICE AWARD
WINNER: FLEET SERVICE GB

JUDGES' COMMENTS:
Fleet Service GB takes the time to understand how your fleet works and what it needs – everything the company does reflects that. It works in an open and transparent way to build a partner relationship, not simply a client relationship.

It believes that without those relationships and the ability to analyse and exchange ideas, a business has no knowledge as to whether it is successful and delivering on the aims and objectives of clients.

"With fleet management it's your vehicles, your money and your drivers. If we don't look after them as per your expectations, you're going to sling us out. We don't lock any clients in with contracts. They can leave us with 24 hours' notice," Bray says.

The company develops its own software in-house and the system enables it to integrate with any customer or third party.

Bray says: "What we're doing, it's not new. None of our service propositions are new, but the technology and platform to deliver it is better. The current platform is fully integrated and is extremely cost-effective."

As a co-ownership company, the senior management team are all shareholders and all staff have the opportunity to acquire shares to give them a stake in the organisation.

As a result of this 'individual ownership', Bray says employees take responsibility and have a deeper commitment to deliver what customers require.

The company provides a 24/7 service support via a single telephone number and promises to answer every call within 20 seconds with a human response – there is no automated answering technology. As a result, Fleet Service GB has achieved 100% customer retention.

DRIVER FOCUS

Fleet management services come in a variety of different shapes and sizes from various sectors in the market, including leasing companies.

Bray believes that many of these services fall short of expectations because they are too heavily focused on costs. Instead, he thinks it's paramount that the driver is at the centre of any fleet management solution.

"We don't outsource anything. We let the driver decide where they want to go. If they have a puncture and they are outside Kwik Fit, then they can go there.

"It's all about service to the driver. Sending him to the other side of town to get a puncture repair is going to end up costing you more and defeats the point," Bray explains.

He says leasing companies can be inflexible because they often rely on outsourced suppliers to provide services, meaning a driver can only go to a specific tyre outlet for example.

> "IF YOU MANAGE THE DRIVER, YOU WILL MANAGE YOUR COSTS IN ONE DIRECTION – AND THAT'S DOWN. IF YOU DO THAT, YOU'LL ALSO ACHIEVE YOUR COMPLIANCE"
>
> **MARCUS BRAY, FLEET SERVICE GB**

Drivers should also be the focus when a fleet is looking to cut costs, which is why Fleet Service GB launched its Achieve Driver Programme.

Bray says: "I believe the future of the fleet management industry is the driver. If you manage the driver, you will manage your costs in one direction – and that's down. If you do that, you'll also achieve your compliance.

"Some fleet operators are stuck in their ways, but you absolutely have to manage the driver. Servicing a car is easy and so is replacing the bumper, but you have to question why you are changing the bumper. If you want to spend money letting your drivers do whatever they want, we aren't the right partner for you."

Using its software package, Fleet Service GB is able to collate data from across an organisation and generate a Live Driver Score.

The score allows drivers to achieve up to 48 points, based on initial risk assessments, licence checks and training needs.

Points are deducted when drivers do something wrong, such as have an accident or get points on their licence. But the system can also identify other factors, such as not replacing a tyre until it is illegal or getting minor parking dings – factors that, Bray says, add risk.

If the driver's score drops below 30% of the company average, an alert is sent to their manager. The driver can regain points through attending training or improving their telematics score.

One of Fleet Service GB's clients, VPS, saved £365,000 in one year using the programme, which required an investment of just £18,000.

"It's a continuous performance management programme," says Bray. "Every day it tells a story. If the company wants to save money, it's a no-brainer."

While the fleet industry appears to be constantly evolving and changing, Bray says, in reality, nothing has changed: "It is all about getting a vehicle from A to B at the lowest possible cost with the maximum compliance.

"Nobody like spending money on maintenance, nobody likes having accidents and everybody wants to be safe. Our remit is to work with the customer to help them achieve those objectives."

50 YEARS IN FLEET

STEWART WHYTE

Whyte helped fleets through the contract hire and leasing minefield. *Matt de Prez* reports

Two-time Fleet News Award-winner and Hall of Fame member Stewart Whyte celebrated his 50th year in the fleet industry in May.

During his career, Whyte has been at the forefront of the sector.

He has held influential positions at both ACFO and the BVRLA (he's an honorary life member of the former), witnessed the meteoric rise of the contract hire and leasing market, seen numerous shifts in fuel types and helped countless businesses run more efficient fleets.

Having started his motor industry career working for Scottish dealer group Arnold Clark in May 1970 – initially looking after a small fleet of rental cars – Whyte quickly got to grips with contract hire and was soon handling around 400 contract hire cars and 100 rental cars for the group.

In 1973, BVRLA proposed a committee for Scotland and, at the inaugural meeting, Whyte found himself appointed the membership secretary for the country, as one of the few people in the region that had experience of contract hire and rental.

"That was very helpful to widen my horizons in terms of what the rest of the industry was doing in the bigger dealerships down south," he says.

By the late '70s, Whyte was looking after a fleet of more than 1,000 finance lease cars and around 400 Motability cars for British Leyland-based dealer group Wadham Stringer in south-east England.

The dealer group had not been in contract hire before and Whyte set up, from scratch, a complete contract hire operation.

Whyte says: "I had to start from zero and work my way around the dealership to convince them of what I wanted to do. Contract hire and leasing was getting a lot of press at the time – I mostly had a good reception and we built up business quite well."

He was headhunted numerous times and held a number of roles in the rental and leasing sector between the late '70s and early '80s.

In 1982, he decided to branch out on his own and launched Fleet Audits. Using the wealth of knowledge he amassed over more than a decade, Whyte set out to help fleets understand the minefield that was, at the time, contract hire and leasing.

"I knew there was a lot of uncertainty about what contract hire and leasing could do and people still had no idea about the wholelife costs on fleets. I thought the best way to do it was to sell my big fleet expertise to smaller fleets."

He set up Fleet Audits with that in mind, but it quickly became apparent that there was a market beyond his initial expectations. Whyte's fourth client had a fleet of more than 1,000 vehicles.

Thirty-eight years later, the business is still providing, essentially, the same service.

"We ask the senior management what they think should be happening, we then go and look at what is actually happening and then we give an interim report of the difference between them," Whyte explains.

"Once we find out where the business wants to be in five-to-seven years' time, we build a migration plan to get the fleet or transport system right to get the business where it wants to be."

A lot of the work the company did in its early days was helping fleets get a better fit for the services they wanted, and needed, in the changing times of the mid-80s to 2000s.

"Contract hire changed," says Whyte. "Fleets wanted more choice. The old days of giving everyone a diesel Astra were changing."

Cost reduction was a key priority for most of Whyte's customers. He says the business would focus on two "quick wins": accidents and fuel.

As an early proponent of safe driving, Fleet Audits would help companies understand both the societal and cost benefits of reducing collisions.

It also played a part in the 'green revolution' of the early '90s by highlighting the benefits to fleets of driving down fuel costs and reducing emissions.

Whyte joined ACFO in 1985 and was appointed director in 1993 – a role he held for 17 years.

During his tenure, Whyte has played an instrumental role in the introduction of both company car tax schemes: the list price-based system in 1994 and the CO_2-based system we still use today.

"I was heavily critical of SMMT and manufacturers who were dragging their feet about releasing CO_2 information," Whyte says. "If you look now at what happened with WLTP, it's exactly the same!"

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

As the country recovers from the coronavirus pandemic, Whyte believe more fleets will look to 'go electric' as the public realises the benefits of cleaner air.

But, he warns, the path to electrification is not as simple as some make out. He says: "Far too many people talk in black and white about fuel type and autonomy. This is a very slow migratory path. Nobody gets rid of all their fleet of one type of vehicle to get another type of vehicle, unless they are determined to commit financial suicide."

He predicts that replacement cycles will become longer as average fleet mileages fall in the wake of the pandemic and companies face financial pressures while the economy recovers.

Stewart Whyte picked up Fleet News Awards in 1992 and 2008. He was inducted into the Hall of Fame in 2008

FleetNews AWARDS 2020

WINNER: JOHNSONS FLEET SERVICES

HEAD OF FLEET OPERATIONS: Louise Baker
NUMBER OF DEALERSHIPS: 47
NUMBER OF FRANCHISES: 15
FLEET SALES (2019): 26.5% of all vehicles sales; 41% of all new vehicle sales

JUDGES' COMMENTS

Ensuring its staff understand the needs of fleet customers helped Johnsons Fleet Services secure the Fleet Dealer of the Year award. The team in Tamworth has an average length of service of seven years, with expertise in all sectors. The head of fleet is continually evolving the operation to adapt to changing customer needs, while the national leasing manager develops and improves its service to contract hire companies.

WINNING A FLEET NEWS AWARD MEANS ...

"There's no greater recognition of a team's success than winning a Fleet News Award. It's important my staff's contribution is recognised publicly and, as such, winning one was a career goal" – Louise Baker.

'Every question was answered within one working day'

Covid-19 meant there was no shortage of customers needing answers. JFS staff stepped up to the plate. *Jeremy Bennett* reports

Covid-19's impact on Johnsons Fleet Services was, in common with every other UK business, considerable. New ways of working were required overnight as staff were furloughed, while those remaining had to fill their shoes, learning new skills and quickly absorbing knowledge to ensure they could answer the multitude of questions posed by concerned customers.

This response meant the business didn't have to close during the pandemic.

While it has been difficult to maintain service levels, the pressure on staff extreme and the circumstances unprecedented, head of fleet operations Louise Baker said she and her team managed to cope because of their dedication to customer service, their industry experience and, most-telling, their understanding that fleet is in a constant state of change. While extreme, the pandemic is another hurdle to overcome.

Johnsons Fleet Services is part of dealer group Johnsons Cars. The retailer holds 15 franchises managed from its head office in Redditch. Based in Tamworth, the fleet operation was founded 10 years ago and supplies about 11,000 cars per year, accounting for approximately 26% of all vehicle sales in the group (including new, used and Motability).

Fleet represents 41% of all new vehicle sales. Ninety-four of the 691 accounts held by JFS grew in volume in 2019, compared with 2018, with the largest customer representing just 8% of the operation's total.

With volume spread across so many clients, customer care is essential from each of Baker's 50-plus team. It includes a national leasing manager, major account sales staff, local business sales staff, SME market account managers, preparation centre, the demo team, deliveries and accounts.

With each team member having an average length of service of nearly seven years with JFS – despite growing the team in the past three years, including the acquisition of four Volkswagen dealerships from Sytner in November – the business was well set to deal with Covid-19, Baker believes.

Just before lockdown the team won Seat and Škoda fleet retailer of the year awards for 2019. It had a lot to live up to.

We spoke to Baker about the challenges, how the business is coping, the near-future of fleet – and the benefits of winning a Fleet News Award.

Fleet News: When did the pandemic first impact the business and how did it adapt?
Louise Baker: I'd struggle with the exact timeline as we made so many changes so quickly. During the week of March 16, before the lockdown, a couple of staff began to work from home who hadn't previously, but, on lockdown, we retained nine operational staff from a headcount of more than 50. The rest were furloughed. Despite the reduction, we've a very broad spectrum of knowledge among the operational team and so we retained all the necessary skills to be able to offer the full-service requirements. Regardless of the query, we had someone who could help customers. It was challenging to ensure that, but it's been incredible how the staff who have worked through lockdown – and those that returned to work in the interim – have stepped up to the plate. They adapted their roles to meet business needs. Every question was answered within one working day. No one was doing their 'normal' job. The work ethic has been amazing.

FN: Did this adaptation come naturally or did it take your leadership to ensure it happened?
LB: To a large extent it came naturally. We have low staff turn with the consequence that we are very passionate about what we do, and very loyal. As far as the team was concerned it was essential to keep the business going, not damage anything we'd spent the past 10 years building since the start of the fleet operation, or let customers down. Everyone did everything at some point.

FN: What areas of the business did you prioritise as being essential post-lockdown?
LB: The first was having people available to answer questions. There was considerable concern from customers around scheduled vehicle deliveries that needed cancelling, delayed orders that had been made, or were due to be made. Additionally, some things didn't change. The lockdown period included the switch to WLTP (Worldwide harmonised Light vehicle Test Procedure) CO_2 values, plus a hefty increase in the road fund licence which came into effect on April 1. Being able to answer questions about the WLTP changes was a vast task, particularly from leasing company customers, all of which appeared to have some level of staffing. At some points, all nine of my team were dealing with this issue, under considerable pressure and over long working hours.

Louise Baker celebrates the Fleet Dealer of the Year award with members of the team

FN: How did you and your team cope with the workload and the longer hours?
LB: We've used online meeting platform Zoom a lot to ensure we maintained team interaction, both for working staff and those furloughed.

FN: When did it become apparent that Covid-19 had brought about a change to business operations and that you needed to adapt to maintain service levels?
LB: You couldn't draw a line in the sand for that moment. We're in a continuous period of adjustment and making changes all the time. When we couldn't deliver cars, our focus was on talking to customers about existing contracts, and, since, we've continued to sell cars, new contracts. Now, despite the supply chain being a bit clunky, in the past three-to-four weeks manufacturers have been delivering cars to us. There isn't a new normal. Changes and adaptation simply continue.

FN: How have you responded to the easing of lockdown restrictions?
LB: Thirty staff have returned to the office. I don't know whether we'll see everyone back, but we're assessing the need to all the time. If we see there's a need for more support in a particular area we will bring staff back. Deliveries stopped with the introduction of lockdown at the end of March, but we're now back to normal.

FN: How were service levels during lockdown and have customer expectations lessened?
LB: We continued to adhere to our SLAs since we reacted very quickly to meet the new challenges. Expectations have changed, particularly around car delivery which is now contact-free with the car fully sanitised. But, on the other hand, they remain constant, delivering a good service with clear, relevant information. The lack of predictability is a challenge, but, since that is the same for everyone, it's less of a specific issue.

FN: How has the vehicle delivery process changed?
LB: We've taken the needs of every customer into account and taken the strictest of their own codes and made it our process. Masks, gloves and the use of disinfectant go without saying, plus we use gearstick and steering wheel covers. Sanitisation is most important. We don't want to put staff or a customer at risk under any circumstances. June saw delivery volumes return to near-normal, but had restarted in May with a focus on key workers.

FN: Do you expect to see a positive response in customer satisfaction levels as a result of your efforts since the March lockdown?
LB: I would like to think we've secured some additional loyalty. I don't think we could've done any more to make ourselves available to our customers. For example, one customer emailed me at six o'clock one evening distraught because she and her husband had had both their cars stolen and ordered replacements just before lockdown, but we weren't able to deliver them initially. So, theirs were the first cars we had delivered when we were able to. We spoke on a Thursday, they got the cars on the Monday. The additional measures needed to ensure a handover is safe has added to the emotional significance of the handover. I've had more emails complimenting my staff since March than I would have received in a year. It makes the effort worthwhile. And unusually during this time, customers have noticed the efforts of those they wouldn't normally come into contact with, such as the administration team because they are handling the work of the sales person who is furloughed.

FN: The business has had to change under duress, but what has been the most positive outcome of the pandemic to the way you work?
LB: The realisation that you don't need to be physically with someone to have an effective meeting. There will be changes in the business concerning flexibility of working from home and meetings over video rather than in person for internal and external meetings. Doing business is now on a path of continual involvement.

It was on this theme that Baker put Covid-19 into a wider context. Having worked in fleet for 24 years, she cannot recall a period of more than six months when processes remained unchanged.

"There's always new technology, new thinking, challenges in the market, such as measuring CO_2 or taxing vehicles," she says. "The business has always to adapt. This is no different."

Lockdown has also normalised the use of video conferencing that many would have been nervous about and resisted using. For example, videos explaining a car's technology are now employed more comprehensively than before the pandemic as part of handover.

Baker sees a potential reduction in the importance of the company car as a result of employees only able to work from home and adapting video conferencing technology.

Job-need cars may be used less, she acknowledges, but to say they won't be needed is a "stretch" and the popularity of the perk cars is likely to be unaffected, she feels.

SPREADING THE BENEFITS OF TELEMATICS

Kent and Essex Police has received global recognition for its innovative telematics initiative. *Andrew Ryan* reports

At a *Fleet News* roundtable a few years ago, one of the participating fleet managers described the use of telematics in their organisation as "like an octopus".

He went on to say the data the technology produced was like the creature's tentacles, spreading throughout the business, influencing how it operated as a whole.

It was a striking simile which applies to how telematics has worked for Kent and Essex Police. Its use of telematics led it to becoming a finalist in the most recent World Class Policing Awards.

Its citation reflected the transformational effect the technology has had on the forces' operations. It read: "Exploring new technology, the forces have jointly implemented a telematics fleet system based on a leading commercial monitoring/tracking solution to ensure vehicles are utilised to the best operational capacity.

"The result has been less bureaucracy for officers, reduced wastage, enhanced repair and maintenance scheduling, greater efficiency of vehicle use and improved vehicle availability."

So, has the overall impact of telematics surprised the police forces' transport services team?

"One of our struggles had been trying to get chief officers and the police forces to understand the value of knowing where all your vehicles are and how they are being used, and that was a hard sell because policing is a very traditional function," says John Gorton, head of transport for Kent and Essex Police.

"We funded our telematics on the basis that all of the benefit from this will come from efficiencies and savings from the fleet.

"We knew damn well they were going to realise that telematics has got real operational benefits and our experiences have actually proven what we already knew.

"Operationally, they are now saying 'this is brilliant, this is a really useful bit of kit. Can it do this, can it do that?'."

Gorton says the outcome has been made more rewarding as instead of opting for L&A Consulting's iR3 fully-integrated control room, it took the fleet management part of that system and adapted it to its needs, saving a significant amount of money.

JOINING FORCES

The transport services departments of Kent Police and Essex Police were merged in 2011 to create a single operation, serving both forces.

As they had been managed separately, there were differences in the way they operated: for example, Essex Police used incident data recorders in its vehicles which captured information 20 seconds before and 10 seconds after an incident, while Kent Police used more sophisticated journey data recorders.

"The problem with (the journey data recorders) was there was lots of data that was quite difficult to analyse and it meant we were probably holding information about driving practices but not able to do anything with it because the reporting wasn't sophisticated enough," says Gorton.

"Both of those systems got to the point where they needed to be replaced, they were at the end of their lives, and our approach was we wanted to drive some fleet efficiencies."

This was needed as the police – like all public sector organisation over the past decade – has faced Government austerity measures.

"Fleet efficiency is obviously very important," says Gorton. "Are we getting maximum utilisation and availability from our vehicles?"

The Kent and Essex Police transport services team, which was named most improved fleet of the year in the 2016 Fleet News Awards, received Home Office funding through an Innovation Grant and installed its first 500 telematics units in 2015.

From January 2018, this rose to 1,400 vehicles. Certain vehicles, such as covert vehicles, are not fitted with telematics for operational reasons.

Before setting off on a journey, drivers scan a fleet card on a card reader in their vehicle so journeys are allocated to the correct officer. This, itself, has resulted in efficiencies.

Tony Petts, fleet manager at Kent and Essex Police, says: "Drivers used to have to fill out a logbook and you may think this may take only 10 or 15 seconds, but when you are doing more than a million journeys a year, that's a pretty significant time saving."

The telematics system displays relevant data in a simple-to-use dashboard, using a green, amber, red traffic light system.

The dashboard has six panels including utilisation, accidents and damage, driver behaviour ➲

"We funded our telematics on the basis that all of the benefit from this will come from efficiencies and savings from the fleet" – John Gorton

and the use of grey fleet, says Gorton, with the user able to drill down into the data if they need to.

"It gives an indication of how well we manage our resources," he adds. "That's important for our divisional commanders and senior leadership teams because they are, traditionally, entirely focused on front-line operational policing.

"We need them to concentrate on keeping people safe. Our job is just to make sure they are aware of the resources in a very simple way."

KEY OBJECTIVES

The transport services team introduced its telematics system with the objectives of:

- reducing the number of miles travelled
- reducing fuel costs
- reducing the number of blameworthy collisions
- reducing grey feet use
- improving driver behaviour
- reducing bureaucracy
- improving vehicle availability

"Those objectives haven't changed in the past five years," says Petts. "What has changed is that, while the system was introduced for its fleet management benefits, the technology has proved to be an invaluable asset in many operational parts of the forces."

Gorton says vehicle utilisation is an example. "Suddenly, we were able to see the utilisation of the vehicles we had, where they were and the length of time they were spending at locations," he adds.

"It was always the case when speaking to divisional commanders that there would be pressure from their officers that they needed more vehicles, but using telematics, we were quickly able to understand that they didn't.

"In fact, lots of vehicles tended to spend time in a yard, sat there waiting to be used because an officer somewhere had got the keys in their pocket.

"The issue was actually that the vehicles we had weren't accessible and available to the people who needed to use them.

"By knowing this, we were able to move away from a vehicle being 'owned' by a certain section or department, to them being at a location where they could be used by a number of teams."

This, potentially, could have led to a smaller fleet, but, as both forces increased in size by 600 officers, it meant they didn't need to add any vehicles.

"We've just absorbed that growth within the fleet we had and are not getting the feedback that we don't have enough vehicles any more," says Gorton.

"We can see – and more importantly divisional commanders can see – where the assets and resources are."

In fact, the fleet has reduced by 10 vehicles since telematics was installed, while 49 vehicles have been redeployed with no loss of service.

Before telematics was introduced, force control rooms could locate only those vehicles which had their radios switched on, meaning they did not accurately know where other vehicles were due to officers carrying out duties with their radios off.

"One example where this has helped is when we had an incident in Dartford where a mechanical digger had dug out a cash machine from the front of a shop," says Gorton.

"The force control room used the telematics so they could see all the police vehicles that were near, even the ones with the radios turned off, and they could work out the route and contact the drivers on their mobile phones and tell them ' position yourselves', and they got them."

Officers stopped the digger by putting a stinger across the road.

"Telematics is a very effective tool when it is being used in that way," adds Gorton.

GEOFENCING GAINS

The Kent and Essex Police transport services team has also used the telematics system as part of an initiative to reduce fuel costs: this includes diverting drivers away from using the more expensive filling stations.

"We've probably got 12,000 drivers across both forces and getting this number to change their habits when they've always used certain filling stations has been a real challenge," says Gorton.

"But for a fleet that is doing upwards of 30 million miles a year, a seven or eight pence per litre difference adds up to tens of thousands of pounds.

"With our telematics system, we geofence those expensive filling stations, so if a driver goes to them to fill up, the system will automatically drop them an email to ask 'why did you go there?'."

This ability to geofence areas also has operational uses. When an incident occurs, the surrounding area can be geofenced and checked to see if any police vehicles, perhaps with their camera systems on, drove through the area at that time.

"You can also do it forwards and officers could be asked to patrol certain areas because they've had a lot of crimes there, so we can geofence the area and the system will tell you if they are where they should be," says Gorton.

Petts adds: "Another example is we had complaints in Ashford that police officers were sounding their sirens.

"Normally we had to go to the logbook to see who was driving and do lots of investigation in that. But within five minutes we geofenced that location and identified there wasn't a police vehicle in that locality.

"We could report back to the member of public that, sorry, it must have been another agency and we apologise for that.

"What could have been a lengthy investigation is now five minutes and it is sorted."

The introduction of telematics has resulted in significant savings for the fleet operation. Petts says the team has saved £359,000 in cash and £584,000 in non-cashable savings, but the true figure is likely to be much larger.

"When you look that we've also redeployed 49 vehicles that's potentially 49 times the capital purchase of vehicles as well," he adds.

POSITIVE APPROACH

Key to the successful implementation of the telematics system has been the transport services team's positive approach throughout the process.

"We haven't looked at the telematics as being a punitive tool, we've looked at it as an encouraging tool," says Petts.

Gorton adds: "It's never used proactively to criticise someone's driving or to discover poor driving activity. In fact, it's the other way round: we use it quite proactively to identify the very best drivers and those that drive to a high standard, but are also good thief takers.

"When something happens, or there's an unfortunate accident, then we will not only look at the incident, but we'll look at the driving leading up to the incident and probably at that driver's performance before that as well.

"If there is an incident, nine times out of 10, the telematics acts as a positive, independent defence for our officers' activities."

He adds: "Being in the fleet profession, we've always got a fairly dubious view of the quality of driving and how our vehicles are treated but, actually, the telematics has reinforced the level of professionalism of our officers."

The telematics system has also increased vehicle availability (see panel): it now stands at 97%, up from around 92% before the technology was introduced.

While most of the efficiency improvements telematics has brought to Essex and Kent Police's fleet operation is familiar territory for the technology, Petts says it is important to keep an open mind on its potential for all organisations.

"Don't limit yourself on what telematics can do," he adds. "The chief constables in both forces have an infinity principle which tells you not to limit your thinking.

"We adopted that with telematics and found different opportunities that we were never expecting.

"Everything we look into we are finding ways and opportunities to do things differently or more efficiently and it's been a real surprise to us in some cases."

Gorton adds: "The other mantra that we kept up throughout this was to keep it simple.

"It's easy to get carried away with a dozen different reports, etc.; you can look at this, you can look at that, but if you keep it really high level, really simple and do one or two things really well, you can take it from there."

Petts agrees: "That's a good point around keeping it simple. There are only three things telematics does and that's tell you where you are, where you've been and how you've driven, and those three pieces of information have driven everything we've done."

VEHICLE AVAILABILITY INCREASES TO 97%

Kent and Essex Police's transport services team has seen vehicle availability increase to around 92% before the telematics was installed to 97% now.

The technology has allowed the forces to move to "much more of a just-in-time system" for SMR, says John Gorton.

"Previously, an officer would book a vehicle in because it was due a service," he adds. "We wouldn't know it was coming because it relied on the officer to prompt the service for us.

"This meant the vehicle may have to wait three or four days and then we've got to buy parts etc.

"Now, because we've got the data flowing from telematics, the vehicle comes in, we've got the parts, it gets worked on and it goes straight out again.

"The average time for a vehicle in our workshop is 1.2 days – most vehicles are in and out the same day – because a lot of our vehicles need some additional fettling as well as the servicing.

"That's pretty good for any commercial workshop, let alone some of the stuff we have to deal with."

The telematics system also allows the fleet team to switch high-use and lower-use vehicles to balance out the wear and tear, which has helped make SMR regimes more precise.

"The mantra that we kept up throughout this was to keep it simple," says John Gorton

THE IMPACT OF COVID-19

John Gorton believes the forces will be making even greater use of telematics data to bring efficiencies in light of the economic impact of the Covid-19 pandemic.

He says: "There's not much more we can do to reduce the operating costs for a standard vehicle so efficiencies and savings will come from using telematics to make sure police officers have access to the right vehicles and that they've being used in the most effective way."

For advice from Gorton on managing the Covid-19 crisis from a fleet perspective, visit http://www.fleetnews.co.uk/fleetnews.co.uk/the-people-behind-the-frontline-fleets

SEAT LEON

Leon emerges from the shadow of VW's Golf to offer much the same, but in a prettier package

By Matt de Prez

There's no denying that 2020 has been a bit odd thus far. Notwithstanding the major unprecedented global health crisis, the automotive industry has seen something of a tidal shift in the humble C-segment, whereby Seat has managed to produce a car that is, in some ways, better than the ubiquitous VW Golf.

The Leon has previously sat in the shadow of the Golf, borrowing the majority of its components, but lacking that feeling of completeness that the VW-badged model achieves so effortlessly.

However, with the latest Leon, it's a different story. VW's Spanish colleagues have the taken the latest MK8 Golf and made it quite a bit more interesting.

When we drove it at the end of last year, we thought the latest Golf was all a company car driver could ever need from a hatchback. But, since experiencing the Leon, it has become apparent that the platform had more to give.

With the two cars sharing pretty much everything under-the-skin, the new Leon has all the same benefits that the Golf provides. It just does it in a prettier package.

Seat has also tuned the car's chassis so the handling is more engaging than the Golf's, so in fleet-friendly trims, at least, the Leon is a bit more fun to drive.

On the inside, there's a digital revolution. All the switches are gone, replaced by a central touchscreen that looks after the infotainment, sat-nav, climate and other settings.

It also features an internet connection, with live traffic, internet radio and software updates available through the system

All but the base models get a digital instrument cluster too, which – like in many VW Group cars – is fully customisable and offers crisp graphics.

The engine line-up includes a 110PS three-cylinder petrol, 115PS 2.0-litre diesel and three 1.5-litre petrols that are expected to make up the bulk of sales. A plug-in hybrid will be also join the range later this year.

In fleet-friendly terms, the Leon is more fun to drive than the Golf

All the interior switches are gone, replaced by a touchscreen

	ENTRY LEVEL Seat Leon 1.0 TSI SE	DIESEL Seat Leon 2.0 TDI SE Dynamic	FLEET PICK Seat Leon 1.5 TSI 130 SE Dynamic
SPECIFICATIONS			
P11D Price	£19,625	£23,665	£22,295
CO_2 emissions (g/km)	123	114	126
Monthly BIK tax (20%)	27%/£88	29%/£114	28%/£104
Fuel efficiency (mpg)	52.3	64.2	51.4
Fuel cost (ppm)	9.4ppm	8ppm	9.6ppm
Annual VED	£175 then £150	£215 then £150	£175 then £150
Class 1A NIC	£731	£947	£861
Residual value (4yrs/80k)	£5,050/25.7%	£5,700/24%	£5,575/25%
AFR (ppm)	10ppm	12ppm	12ppm
Running cost (4yrs/80k)	30.2ppm	34.1ppm	33.5ppm

Go to www.fleetnews.co.uk for tax figures from April 2020-March 2025

RIVALS

FORD FOCUS
1.0T 125 Titanium

VAUXHALL ASTRA
1.2 Turbo 130 Business Edition

VOLKSWAGEN GOLF
1.5 TSI 130 Life

	FORD FOCUS 1.0T 125 Titanium	VAUXHALL ASTRA 1.2 Turbo 130 Business Edition	VOLKSWAGEN GOLF 1.5 TSI 130 Life
SPECIFICATIONS			
P11D Price	£22,460	£19,860	£23,670
CO_2 emissions (g/km)	125	120g/km	122
Monthly BIK tax (20%)	28%/£104	27%/£89	27%/£106
Fuel efficiency (mpg)	51.4	54.3	52.3
Fuel cost (ppm)	9.6ppm	9.1ppm	9.4ppm
Annual VED	£175 then £150	£175 then £150	£175 then £150
Class 1A NIC	£868	£740	£882
Residual value (4yrs/80k)	£6,500/28.9%	£4,175/21%	£7,550/31.9%
AFR (ppm)	10ppm	10ppm	12ppm
Running cost (4yrs/80k)	33.2ppm	31.4ppm	32.6ppm

The 1.5 petrol is available with 130PS or 150PS, both with a manual transmission. There's also a 48v mild-hybrid with 150PS that comes with a direct-shift gearbox.

While the diesel is the most efficient, emitting from 111g/km, the four-cylinder 1.5 TSI emits pretty much exactly the same as the lower powered 1.0 unit (from 123g/km) making the company car tax more favourable on petrol models.

We'd expect the TDI to achieve 60mpg easily on a long run, but the 1.5 is surprisingly efficient too, managing more than 50mpg in our tests.

Cupra versions will also follow offering better performance and handling, but also a low emission plug-in hybrid engine with 245PS that is set to attract user-choosers.

The trim walk follows Seat's Easy Move strategy, so there's SE, SE Dynamic and FR. FR Sport and Xcellence trims will follow later in the year. There are no options. Drivers can simply choose an engine, trim and colour when ordering.

SE Dynamic and FR offer the best array of kit for fleets, with a larger 10-inch touchscreen, parking sensors and sat-nav. The latter gains some sportier touches, including firmer suspension and LED headlights.

Prices start at just less than £20,000 for the 1.0 SE, we'd recommend the £22,295 1.5 TSI 130 PS SE Dynamic for core users. Benefit-in-kind tax sits at £104 per month with low running costs of 33.5ppm. Stepping up to the FR trim costs £1,000 more, but is still cheaper than a basic Golf Life with the same engine.

We were impressed by the Leon's on-road behaviour. It's relaxed and easy to drive, but has a sporty edge when required. There's very little to distinguish the Leon from a Focus when driving, which is an impressive feat.

Like the Golf and the Focus, the Leon is available with two rear axle setups. Higher powered cars (above 150PS) get independent rear suspension, while the rest of the range gets a more basic torsion beam set-up.

If we focus our comparison on the 130PS model, it is not going to be a night-and-day difference for the average driver. On rougher roads, however, the ride is less compliant.

Seat has made strides in the fleet sector with consistent growth in recent years.

The Leon is the brand's best-selling model, with around three-quarters going to fleets. With competitive running costs, impressive efficiency and a model range to suit most requirements, the new Leon should only bolster that performance.

WARDY'S WORLD

By Martin Ward

It was a bit of a surprise and disappointing to read that next year's Geneva International Motor Show (GIMS) has been cancelled.

A majority of GIMS exhibitors who took part in a survey, said they would probably not participate in a 2021 edition and they would prefer to have a motor show in 2022.

No one knows whether the health situation would've allowed the congregation of more than 600,000 visitors and 10,000 journalists next spring anyway.

It is probably the best and safest decision, but disappointing none-the-less. We can only hope it will continue in future.

However, motor shows have become very expensive and we have seen fewer exhibitors attending in recent years.

It's not the same without them. And it's not just about the missing vehicles. We miss the people we have come to know well and now regard as friends.

Could large motor shows become a thing of the past? Will they turn into virtual events, that become heartless and just something you watch on a screen? We can only hope that in a couple of years, some sense of normality will return and we can meet up with our industry friends again.

It has been strange to see how many changes at the top have happened at manufacturers, leading people going and top people arriving in new jobs. It seems the recent crisis has given companies the opportunity to review the senior management positions and make the necessary removals and appointments.

Total car registrations for March, April, May were, according to SMMT figures 279,252. Compare this with the same three months in 2018 and the number was 834,629 and last year, slightly less at 802,842. The difference between 2018 and 2020 is a massive 555,377 fewer registrations.

Things have improved substantially in June compared with the previous three months but registrations were down by a third compared with last year (145,377 versus 223,421). So, an improvement, but by no means back to normal. In June 2018 there were 234,945 cars registered compared with this June's 145,377.

A concern is that there could now be a lack of three-year-old cars in spring 2023.

What can be done? One way to get things back on an even keel is to shorten, or lengthen contracts where possible. If cars are going on the fleet in July and August, try to get 31-month contracts so they will return in March or April 2023, in time for the usual spring boost in used car demand.

Or do 43-month contracts for returns in March 2024. Doing this will even out the cars coming back into the market.

DACIA LOGAN MCV BI-FUEL

The cheapest estate car on sale in the UK. But, if your transport needs are basic, it does the job

By Matt de Prez

LPG (liquefied petroleum gas) has been somewhat forgotten as carmakers focus on electrification to bring down the emissions of their vehicles and provide fleets with lower running costs.

Dacia doesn't have electrified powertrains yet, but they are coming. The LPG engine enables it to offer a lower-emission solution in the interim while retaining the 'budget-brand' price point it is known for. LPG does bring down CO_2 emissions a little compared with conventional petrol and it's a lot cheaper than buying an electric car. Dacia's LPG range costs just £400 more than the equivalent petrol model.

The Bi-Fuel models are supplied with a gas tank mounted in place of a spare wheel. They use a new 1.0-litre three-cylinder turbocharged engine and, as the name suggests, can run on LPG or petrol.

We've tested the new powertrain in the Dacia Logan MCV, but it can also be specified on the Sandero and Duster.

	FLEET PICK LOGAN MCV COMFORT BI-FUEL
SPECIFICATIONS	
P11D price	£11,865
Monthly BIK	28%/£55
Class 1A NIC	£458
Annual VED	£175 then £150
RV (4yr/80k)	£3,200/27%
Fuel cost	8.5
AFR	6 (LPG)
Running cost (4yr/80k)	22.6
CO_2	129g/km
Fuel efficiency	39.2mpg (LPG)

The range-topping SE Twenty comes with a touchscreen sat-nav

Priced from £10,875, the Logan MCV is by far the cheapest estate car on sale in the UK. Our test model is the faux-off-roader Stepway, which is priced from £13,075.

Simplicity is the name of the game in the Dacia world, so while the Logan MCV appears to be something of a bargain – at less than half the price of a Volkswagen Golf – you have to approach it with fairly low expectations.

It's certainly spacious, with around 570 litres of boot space and up to 1,500 litres with the seats down.

We didn't get the full utilitarian experience in our range-topping SE Twenty spec test car, which comes with a touchscreen sat-nav, reversing camera and air conditioning, but, when driving, it quickly becomes apparent that it has been designed to a price.

The new engine serves up 100PS and feels strong in the mid-range. Refinement is minimal, however. The three-cylinder unit's thrum is fairly intrusive on the move although wind and road noise soon drown it out.

LPG burns less efficiently than petrol, so Dacia has tuned the engine to deliver an additional 10Nm of torque from 2,000rpm when running on gas.

Fuel consumption also dips, with the official figure suggesting 39.2mpg is achievable. However, LPG is 40% cheaper than petrol, so the fuel savings can still make financial sense with Dacia claiming a £600 saving over 12,000 miles.

That said, the official figures suggest the actual fuel cost of 8.5p per mile will not be fully reimbursed by employers – the advisory fuel rate is just 6ppm.

Dacia says the car can cover 600 miles when brimmed with petrol and gas, but we're not convinced many high-mileage drivers would be happy doing that many miles regularly in it.

The Sandero and Duster feel sweeter to drive than the lumbering Logan MCV Stepway. With its jacked-up suspension, the car feels uncertain above 60mph and doesn't give a relaxing drive.

Nonetheless, it's hard to find anything that gives more bang-per-buck if basic transport needs are all that must be met.

AUDI A5

Facelifted A5 has added appeal with inclusion of mild-hybrid diesel alongside petrol engines

By Matt de Prez

Following the launch of the facelifted A4 at the end of last year, Audi has given its sleeker cousin a similar round of updates.

The big news is the inclusion of the brand's new mild-hybrid engines, helping to reduce CO_2 emissions in the wake of WLTP.

Available in Coupe, Convertible and Sportback bodies – we test the latter here – the A5 continues to serve user-choosers who want something a bit different from the normal saloon or SUV.

Company car drivers are likely to find themselves choosing between the 163PS 35 TDI and the 190PS 40 TFSI. Both engines feature 12v mild hybrid systems, which capture energy during braking and coasting to charge a small battery which can then provide a power boost or enable extended start-stop functionality.

The diesel is the most efficient, with CO_2 emissions from 133g/km and the promise of 55mpg, while the petrol manages 150g/km and 42.8mpg. Benefit-in-kind tax is slightly cheaper for the petrol (around £6 per month for the S Line model), due to the 4% diesel surcharge, starting from £213 per month (20% taxpayer).

	FLEET PICK A5 35 TDI S
SPECIFICATIONS	
P11D price	£42,175
Monthly BIK	35%/£246
Class 1A NIC	£2,037
Annual VED	£540 then £475
RV (4yr/80k)	£11,925/28.3%
Fuel cost	9.7ppm
AFR	9ppm
Running cost (4yr/80k)	53.5ppm
CO_2	143g/km
Fuel efficiency	51.4mpg

The infotainment screen has been increased to 10.1 inches in the facelifted model

In reality, the diesel will be the better fleet choice. We've been running an A4 35 TDI on our long-term test fleet and it's been achieving more than 60mpg. In contrast, when we tested the 40 TFSI, it was struggling to achieve 35mpg.

Two other engine options are offered from launch, the 190PS 40 TDI Quattro and the 347PS S5.

Alongside the powertrain updates, Audi has re-worked the A5's suspension and steering to improve driveability.

Where the A5 once fell short against rivals in the handling department, it's now much more fun to drive. The suspension on S-Line models, while a tad firm on rougher surfaces, provides an engaging drive despite the front-wheel drive configuration. Entry-level Sport variants have a softer set-up.

Inside, the A5 still uses Audi's older interior layout with a floating infotainment screen rather than an integrated system like the A6. In the facelifted car the screen size is increased to 10.1-inches (up from the standard seven inches in the previous model) and uses the latest software.

The new system is controlled via touchscreen, marking a departure from the rotary controller found in the previous A5. We preferred the old set-up, however, which was easier to use on the move and didn't leave the screen covered in fingerprints.

Refinement levels are impressive, with the A5's sleek body providing minimal wind noise. It's easy to cover significant distances in the car without feeling fatigued.

We found the new 35 TDI to be particularly impressive. With 380Nm of torque, it rarely feels lacking and is quieter than the old TDI unit.

The 40 TFSI packs more punch, reaching 62mph from rest in 7.5 seconds versus the TDI's 8.4. For those that cover lower mileages, the tax difference makes the TFSI an appealing choice but we'd err towards the TDI as it's such a good all-rounder.

ŠKODA SUPERB FIRST TEST

1.4 TSI iV 218PS DSG SE L HATCH

By Stephen Briers

When we first drove the Škoda Superb iV plug-in hybrid at the tail end of 2019, we described it as an "attractive" proposition for company car drivers.

With benefit-in-kind taxation (BIK) from just £60 per month for a 20% taxpayer, or £721 a year, on a £36,000 car, attractive is arguably a huge undersell.

Remember, the Superb is a five-time winner at the Fleet News Awards: you simply cannot get a better upper-medium car. And the PHEV model saves a company car driver £1,300 a year in BIK compared with the 2.0-litre diesel, despite carrying a £5,500 price premium.

The good news continues for fleet operators: at 36.47ppm, running costs are 4ppm cheaper, resulting in a saving of almost £3,500 over four years/80,000 miles – although these figures are based on full-time electric running, which is a little unreasonable, despite the Superb's impressive 34-mile range.

Using fuel cost at 50% of diesel, rather than 0%, as a comparison may wipe out the overall running cost saving, but still leaves the PHEV in an advantageous total cost of ownership position when national insurance and corporation tax savings are added to the mix.

Our test car is the SE L hatch, which comes loaded with equipment. The only option is metallic paint at £595, taking the price to £36,685.

Standard fit includes adaptive cruise control, sat-nav with eight-inch touchscreen, blind spot detection, driver fatigue sensor, dynamic chassis control, electrically-operated boot, multi-collision braking, front/rear sensors, voice control and wireless Apple CarPlay amid an extensive list. We'll delve into more detail in future reviews.

The Superb is powered by a 1.4-litre TSI 156PS petrol with an 85kW/115PS electric motor for total power of 218PS. Combined fuel efficiency is 148.7 to 217.3mpg, while CO_2 emissions are just 30g/km.

The battery does eat into the boot space, reducing capacity from 625 litres to 485. Nevertheless, that's still competitive.

MAZDA CX-30 FIRST TEST

2.0 180PS 2WD SPORT LUX

By Sarah Tooze

We've gone from testing the Mazda3 saloon to its compact SUV cousin, the CX-30, which shares the same platform.

The CX-30 is a new addition to the brand's line-up, sitting between the CX-3 and CX-5, and competes with the likes of the Nissan Qashqai and Škoda Karoq.

While the latter offers a far more generous boot (91 litres more at 521l versus 430l), the CX-30's boot is on a par with the Qashqai's and gives drivers 72l more than in the 3.

It will appeal to company car drivers looking for something a bit different in the crossover market and those making the move from a diesel to a petrol engine.

Like the 3, the CX-30 features the new Skyactiv-X petrol engine, which is designed to give the fuel economy of a diesel and the performance and refinement of a petrol. It incorporates Mazda's M Hybrid technology – a 24v mild-hybrid system that recycles recovered kinetic energy.

CO_2 emissions start at 105g/km while our Sport Lux model is 133g/km with a combined fuel economy of 47.9mpg.

Jeremy Thomson, Mazda Motors UK managing director, told us at last year's Geneva Motor Show that "Skyactiv-X will be a substantial opportunity in the fleet sector".

With only short urban journeys to date, I've not yet been able to verify the fuel economy claim but we did achieve the claimed 52.3mpg in the 3.

Thomson also promised that the CX-30 would take the brand in a "premium direction" and the interior does live up to that.

There's also a good level of standard technology, including colour head-up display, radar cruise control, LED headlights, blind spot monitoring, driver attention alert, lane departure warning, rear cross traffic alert and traffic sign recognition.

Our model comes with reversing camera, power tailgate and keyless entry (SEL-Lux and above), plus larger alloy wheels and privacy glass.

VOLKSWAGEN PASSAT FIRST TEST

1.4 TSI 156PS GTE ADVANCE PHEV

By Gareth Roberts

One-in-four Volkswagen Passats sold in the UK are predicted to be GTE variants and, after just a few weeks of driving the GTE Advance estate, I'm beginning to understand why.

There are eight variants of the new Passat available in the UK: SE, SE Nav, SEL, R-Line and limited-run, Estate-only R-Line Edition, alongside the Alltrack, GTE and GTE Advance.

Our 1.4 TSI plug-in hybrid electric vehicle (PHEV) GTE Advance Passat has emissions of 33g/km (GTE is 31g/km), an electric-only range of 33 miles (WLTP) and a P11D price of £41,395.

Attracting a 10% benefit-in-kind (BIK) tax rate this financial year, it means a 20% taxpayer would pay £69 per month in company car tax.

The first thing to note, which helps it into that 10% company car tax bracket, is the electric-only range on the new GTE is an almost 40% improvement on the outgoing model. It would certainly be enough for most commutes – whenever they might return.

The electric motor is paired with a 156PS 1.4 TSI petrol engine to deliver a combined output of 218PS, 0-62mph in 7.6 seconds in the estate, and fuel economy of 201.8mpg (WLTP).

The GTE will start up in pure electric mode and run this way unless you change the settings or accelerate quickly. The transition from electric to petrol power is almost seamless and the petrol engine is also one of the quietest around.

Unsurprisingly, the secret for getting the best fuel economy out of the GTE is ensuring it is regularly charged. With no home charge point available, I used a household socket and it took approximately five hours to fully charge the 13kWh battery – an upgrade on the 9.9kWh battery featured on the old model. Use a wallbox and the charge time should reduce to around three-and-a-half hours.

Over the next few weeks, I intend to compare both the fuel economy of a regularly charged car, run in electric mode where possible, and a more irregular charging pattern to see how it varies. Power costs from home charging will also be monitored.

CITROËN C5 AIRCROSS FINAL TEST

130 BLUEHDI FLAIR PLUS

By Luke Neal

The time has come to bid a fond farewell to our Volcano Red Citroën C5 Aircross. Over the past six months, I've enjoyed the car's Advanced Comfort programme, the high level of equipment that comes with the Flair Plus trim level, the build quality and the fuel economy. And all with only a couple of minor gripes along the way over the infotainment system and the wiper jets.

The C5 Aircross marries unique design features to sensible underpinnings to create a well rounded SUV experience.

The C5 Aircross offers numerous personalisation options. These include 30 exterior combinations, with seven body colours (Polar White, Perla Nera Black, Platinum Grey, Steel Grey, Volcano Red, Tijuca Blue and Pearl White) and three anodised colour packs (Silver, White and Red). Exterior colours can also be combined with a Perla Nera Black roof.

The personalisation extends to the interior too, with three trim colours. In addition to the standard grey Silica cloth interior there's also Metropolitan Grey leather and cloth and the oddly named Hype Brown leather interiors.

It's hard to see that any drivers choosing a C5 Aircross would have much to complain about, but the C5's design may not appeal to all.

A quick look on the *Fleet News* car running costs calculator (click here) to compare the C5 against some of its closest rivals, the Renault Kadjar, Nissan Qashqai and Peugeot 3008 (which shares its underpinnings with the C5), sees all these models close on price. They are also all very similar on CO_2 and fuel efficiency while the C5 is slightly ahead on its residual value (RV). At four years/80,000 miles the Citroën C5 Aircross 130 Blue HDi Flair Plus has a cost per mile of 38.59p with an RV of £8,725.

While there plenty of similarly priced mid-sized SUVs on the market the C5 Aircross is a strong contender based on its overall user-friendliness and design appeal.

VOLVO XC60 FINAL TEST

D4 MOMENTUM

By Matt de Prez

A Google notification recently alerted me to the fact that it's been three years since I first drove the Volvo XC60 at its UK launch event in the Yorkshire Dales.

Since then, many new cars have come to market and, having jumped back into our XC60 long-termer for its final stint before it goes back to Volvo, I think that it's aged rather well.

Okay, so three years isn't exactly a long time but, to me, the XC60 still looks and feels as if it was released yesterday.

Minor updates and changes throughout the car's life have seen the infotainment system improved along with the introduction of new mild-hybrid engines. Our front-wheel drive model was one of additions last year, introduced to offer fleets a lower CO_2-emitting choice with a lower P11D (£39,250).

It's the cheapest XC60, but it feels great.

Ditching four-wheel drive has improved drivability; the XC60 feels more nimble and lighter, and the engine more eager. We're easily getting more than 40mpg too, which isn't bad for a big luxury SUV.

My dad, a long-time Volvo fan, is also impressed by our Onyx Black model – complete with its striking Amber leather interior. He thought the D4 felt just as quick as his first-generation XC60 D5 and felt that Volvo had done a thoroughly good job of modernising the XC60 without losing any of its appeal.

AUDI A4

35 TDI TECHNIK

By Andrew Ryan

Many years ago, it was common for motoring magazines to demonstrate the size of car boots by putting a golf bag in them.

While this practice been phased out in recent years in favour of suitcases and other items which relate to more people, it's still a consideration for me: as the saying almost goes, I enjoy spoiling a good walk (with golf).

The easing of the coronavirus lockdown has seen me return to the links and the A4 saloon has been ideal transport for this.

Saloons always suffer in terms of practicality compared with hatchbacks or estates – and an Avant version of the A4 is available to those wanting more versatility – but that hasn't been an issue for me.

At 480 litres, the A4's boot is identical in size to that of the BMW 3 Series and 45 litres bigger than the Mercedes-Benz C-Class.

My bulky golf trolley, when folded, slides nicely under the rear windscreen and into the furthest recesses of the boot, while – with the longest clubs taken out – the bag fits sideways across the front. The remaining clubs sit diagonally across the top of the load, and the boot can close with room to spare.

This practicality only enhances the overall appeal of the A4 and, for me, you would have to go a fair way to top it in the premium sector.

VOLKSWAGEN CADDY

2.0TDI STARTLINE DSG

By Trevor Gehlcken

I have eulogised about our long-term Caddy's reliability, its wonderful build quality and its admirable driving manners – but I have yet to talk about the business end, which is why most fleet managers will choose a van.

So let's take a peek into the back…

The Caddy has asymmetric loads, which means one is wider than the other. It doesn't signify much if the rear doors are unglazed but, for those with windows, it means the driver's rear view mirror isn't obscured by a big metal post. There's also a side sliding door as is common on vans of this size.

Load volume at 3.2 cu m and payload at 647kg are about par for the course in a small van, but the Caddy also has half-height side panels which should stop any loose cargo damaging the van from the inside out and causing those dreaded reverse dings which are almost impossible to mend cost-effectively.

Also of note is the plastic non-slip floor which stops small items from whizzing about in the back when they aren't lashed down. It's also useful for any company that carries loads which are likely to scratch the rear end. At selling time the plastic can be removed to reveal a pristine metal floor, which will add hundreds of pounds to the resale value.

Six load-lashing eyes are provided to keep things in place, although they are all in the floor. I could have done with a couple halfway up the load area on a few occasions.

But the icing on the cake is the dazzlingly bright lighting system in the roof. Most vans have a single pathetic little light that is next to useless when loading up in the dark and it's just one more example of how Volkswagen has carefully considered exactly what a busy van driver needs when speccing the Caddy.

Shortly, our Caddy will be swapped for the bigger Crafter, which we will be keeping for three months, so it will be interesting to see how the bigger van shapes up against its smaller brother.

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Iveco lines up major launches in Q4

New S-Way, X-Way and T-Way all planned

PLUS: DECARBONISATION MASTERPLAN SOUGHT • ARE HVO FUELS THE ANSWER FOR HGVs? • RENAULT D210 12 TONNE

Clear direction sought for a decarbonisation masterplan

Commercial fleets are facing a 'which is the best choice' alternative fuel dilemma

By Gareth Roberts

The Government is being urged to develop a 'masterplan' that will enable the decarbonisation of transport, including vans and trucks.

The sale of new internal combustion engine (ICE) vans is due to be banned from 2040 alongside cars. But that could change, with the Department for Transport (DfT) currently consulting on bringing forward the ban from 2040 to 2035, or earlier, and including hybrid vehicles for the first time.

Government policy has focused on the electrification of car and van fleets, while the pathway for the decarbonisation of heavier vans and trucks remains unclear.

Graham Hoare, executive director of business transformation at Ford, said there will not be a "single solution" or a "silver bullet" to decarbonising commercial fleets, but the next 15 years would be "unparalleled" in the transformation of the industry.

"We're very excited about the electrification pathway, but that will come in many different shapes and sizes; a range of solutions will be appropriate for our customers."

A range of alternative fuel vehicles (AFVs) is being developed and beginning to be adopted by fleets, with electric, hydrogen, biomethane and hydrogenated vegetable oil (see page 66) among those being employed or considered by operators.

Hoare explained: "There isn't one size that will fit all (applications); different classes of vehicle will move at different rates and a different application of electrification technology will be necessary as we move to that zero emissions objective.

"For heavier vehicles in the commercial vehicle world, we will see the implementation of hydrogen, where appropriate. But all of these need to be brought together and we need to define a masterplan."

> "THERE ISN'T ONE SIZE THAT WILL FIT ALL; DIFFERENT CLASSES OF VEHICLE WILL MOVE AT DIFFERENT RATES"
>
> **GRAHAM HOARE, FORD**

GOVERNMENT STRATEGY

The Road to Zero strategy published in July 2018 stated that the Government's long-term goal was the development and deployment of zero-emission HGVs.

However, it acknowledged that the pathway to achieving this was not as clear as for cars and vans, which are subject to the current consultation.

The strategy also included a new industry-wide voluntary target for reducing HGV greenhouse gas emissions by 15% by 2025, from 2015 levels.

It was bolstered by a new EU Heavy Duty Vehicle (HDV) CO_2 emission standards regulation, which came into effect in July 2019.

This established, for the first time, CO_2 reduction targets for HDVs. The new regulation set binding CO_2 emission reduction targets for HDV manufacturers of 15% by 2025 and 30% by 2030 (based on 2019 emission levels).

Manufacturers face fines for non-compliance.

In the Government's *Decarbonising Transport: Setting the Challenge* report, published in March, HGV greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions are projected to fall by 26% from 2018 to 2050, despite a projected increase in HGV mileage of 7% over the same period.

Emission savings are driven by the new 2030 HDV CO_2 regulations, it says, alongside baseline efficiency improvements driven by the market.

New van CO_2 emission reductions regulations came into effect on January 1, 2020, setting targets out to 2030 which apply in the UK.

The regulation sets binding CO_2 emission reduction targets for new vans of 15% by 2025 and 31% by 2030 (viewed against a 2021 baseline).

DIFFERENT CHALLENGES

Carlo Rodrigues, managing director of Renault Trucks UK and Ireland, said: "Some manufacturers are developing pure electric battery trucks, but others are focusing on hydrogen or other fuel sources. We do trucks to transport load, not to transport batteries."

He explained: "On urban, last-mile deliveries, the weight of the batteries still allows us to provide good payload today and at a really competitive price. But, if you want to do a large truck, a semi-truck, then the battery technology is a challenge because it's very heavy. Hydrogen is a possible solution."

Renault's pure battery electric truck, the Range D Wide ZE 26 tonne 6x2 rigid, arrived in the UK earlier this month. Its 93-mile range makes it most suitable for last-mile deliveries.

In its annual report to Parliament, the Committee on Climate Change recommends that the DfT organises trials of zero-emission HGVs within the next year, to establish which is the most suitable and cost-effective technology for the UK.

The report also calls for the Government to strengthen incentives for commercial fleets to buy more efficient and zero-carbon HGVs and include HGV recharging in Project Rapid plans.

Toby Poston, director of corporate affairs at the British Vehicle Rental and Leasing Association (BVRLA) says the zero-emission vehicle outlook varies considerably in the fleet sector dependent on the type of vehicle used and the business operating model.

"There needs to be a more segmented approach that considers what is realistic for all vehicle types," Poston said. Suitable vehicle supply, infrastructure, range and cost of ownership is not there yet for all fleet users.

"The challenges faced by LCV and HGV operators are very different to those faced by car fleet operators, who are further along on the road to zero."

FUEL CHOICES

Ford is employing a range of technologies in its vans, with plug-in hybrid and mild hybrid systems available and a fully electric Transit to be launched in 2021.

However, Hoare says the diesel engine will be here for the next decade. "It's very practical, it's got this duality, it's got this breadth of capability. We're searching for new capability in this space to make the commercial vehicle solution work."

He thinks hydrogen will have a role to play, particularly in the heavier end of the market, which is where the manufacturer will focus its R&D efforts.

But he acknowledged that the pathway is not so clear for heavy commercial vehicles (CVs), with real change not coming until the end of the decade.

For many applications, battery electric vehicles (BEVs) are clearly the best fit, but the relatively higher mass and lower power density of current battery technology means that for vehicles which operate with the heaviest weights and longest ranges, storing the necessary power is not good news for vehicle capacity.

Amy Adams, vice president of fuel cell and hydrogen technologies at Cummins, said: "When we think about trains, heavy goods vehicles, and drayage trucks – vehicles with extreme power requirements and centralised operations hubs – FCEV (fuel cell electric vehicle) solutions are the most viable option."

Adams explained: "We see the electrification of CVs as being reliant on technological maturity, economic reality, regulatory surety, and infrastructural capacity.

"Only by developing the technology to the point where it's ready to use, making it affordable enough to be economically viable, creating a policy environment where companies are confident in which solutions they should choose to roll out, and ensuring the built environment is ready to support the vehicles, will EVs move into the mainstream."

The John Lewis Partnership has chosen biomethane as a low-carbon alternative to diesel as it gears-up to stop using fossil fuels across its entire 4,800-strong fleet by 2030.

The organisation is building a dedicated biomethane gas filling station at its head office in Bracknell, Berkshire, and expects it to be up and running by December (commercialfleet.org, June 18).

Initially serving approximately 120 Waitrose trucks, John Lewis wants its fleet of 600 HGVs to be switched to biomethane by 2028.

Since 2015, 85 of the Partnership's heavy diesel vehicles have been replaced with biomethane trucks, and a further 143 will be bought and in operation by the end of 2020, making this the largest order of biomethane trucks in the UK.

General manager of central transport, Justin Laney, said: "It's important we act now using available technology rather than wait for unproven solutions to appear."

ISTOCK.COM/PETMAL

Iveco global brand president Thomas Hilse says it will be two years before truck sales return to pre-Covid levels

Iveco lines up major launches for the final quarter of 2020

New S-Way, X-Way and T-Way all planned while an electric version of the Daily comes in 2022. *John Lewis* reports

Iveco will embark on a programme of UK truck launches in the last quarter as the coronavirus pandemic slackens its grip on the economy, says global brand president Thomas Hilse.

Leading the charge will be the new S-Way tractor unit, which was due to get its send-off at the Commercial Vehicle Show back in April before Covid-19 brought about the event's cancellation.

The company will also launch the new X-Way. Targeted at tipper fleets and other businesses involved in construction, the current X-Way offers a competitive payload. Its successor, which will share S-Way's cab, will deliver the same advantage.

Both the S-Way and the X-Way will be right-hand-drive versions.

Iveco will also be rolling out a left-hand-drive version of the heavy-duty T-Way for construction applications. It will not arrive here in right-hand-drive until next year. Succeeding the equally-robust Trakker, it should be just as unbreakable.

Like Trakker, however, it will not offer X-Way's payload benefits which means the T-Way may only sell in small numbers in the UK.

An all-new Eurocargo is some distance away. The current model will receive an upgrade, says Hilse. We asked when, but he was unable to comment.

The latest Daily is already here, but not yet in battery-electric guise.

"We should have an electric version of the new Daily available in the UK in two years' time," says Hilse. "It will have a longer range than the previous model and the price will be lower because the price of batteries is falling."

Daily is increasingly being specified with the impressive eight-speed H-Matic automatic gearbox, he reports.

"Up to 50% of customers are taking it, and that could increase to 75% over the next five years," he predicts. "They like it because it offers reduced fuel usage, longer clutch life and increased driver comfort, and should increase the residual value."

Iveco's European assembly plants are in production again as countries emerge from the Covid-19 lockdown. The majority were closed from late March to early May.

"Line speed is getting back to normal and we're suffering no problems with component supplies," Hilse says. "The factories are working on single shifts at the moment, but they should soon be able to move up to the next level as the order intake picks up."

It will take up to two years before markets return to pre-Covid-19 levels, he predicts. "I think we'll see a total 30% to 35% decline in registrations of trucks this year," he says.

A scrappage programme leading to the withdrawal of older, less environmentally-friendly trucks would give sales a fillip and is being contemplated by several governments. But Hilse believes it needs a Europe-wide solution.

Older diesel vehicles could end up being replaced by trucks powered by compressed natural gas (CNG) or liquefied natural gas (LNG). As well as being environmentally-friendly, both fuels are proving to be increasingly practical bets and have been enthusiastically embraced by Iveco.

"We've already shown that an LNG truck can travel up to 1,600kms (almost 1,000 miles) before its tanks need refilling," Hilse says.

He stresses the emission benefits of bio-LNG made from renewable biomass. It can cut CO_2 emissions by approximately 80% compared with diesel and produces low levels of NOx and particulates.

"It's available now, and production is increasing," he says.

Hydrogen is another route Iveco is pursuing in conjunction with US manufacturer Nikola in a project that was announced late last year.

A 400PS tractor unit based on Iveco's new S-Way using Nikola's zero-emission fuel cell technology is set to go on sale in 2023. "We'll be building it in our Ulm factory in Germany," Hilse says.

Using the platform of a conventionally-engineered truck as the launch-pad for fuel cell technology and taking advantage of Iveco's ability to build commercial vehicles in quantity, makes sense for both parties. "I'm sure our competitors would like to be in our position," he says.

Hilse is thinking of Volvo Group and Daimler Truck's plan announced earlier this year to form a joint venture with the aim of developing and producing fuel cell systems for trucks in large volumes. The agreement with Nikola has put Iveco ahead of its rivals, he contends.

It will be some time before fuel cells displace other environmentally-friendly forms of propulsion, however. Hilse predicts that by 2030 several technologies will have emerged as mainstream choices for truck fleets, including fuel cells, bio-LNG and battery electric.

> "LINE SPEED IS GETTING BACK TO NORMAL AND WE'RE SUFFERING NO PROBLEMS WITH COMPONENT SUPPLIES"
>
> **THOMAS HILSE, IVECO**

"Remember that, by 2050, trucks will have to be completely emission-free as a result of the Green Deal," he says. "That is likely to mean 2040 for our industry given how long trucks last."

Again based on S-Way, a battery-electric tractor unit developed jointly with Nikola with an expected range of 400km (250 miles) should be on the road with fleets in 2021. So-called glider Eurocargo chassis – chassis with their engines and gearboxes removed – are being delivered to Electra Commercial Vehicles in Lancashire for conversion to battery electric power.

While connectivity is becoming increasingly important – it is a key feature of S-Way's design – Hilse does not believe it will lead to a widespread adoption of platooning. The technology works, but the fuel savings promised are simply are not there given European driving conditions, he says.

Attempt to employ it on a congested motorway and you will find that a car tries to get between the platooning trucks every two or three kilometres, says Hilse. If they are obliged to draw apart from one another again and again, then any advantages are lost.

It might work on long-distance runs in the USA, on highways that are not peppered with junctions constantly used by vehicles entering and leaving the traffic stream, he suggests. Autonomous trucks might work under the same conditions, but he does not envisage their widespread European adoption anytime soon, either.

"I don't see driverless trucks being used in Europe to any great degree during the next 10 years," he says. "The technology is in place, but there are legal and ethical questions that still have to be addressed."

He worries all the talk about autonomous trucks may turn out to be counterproductive because it could deter youngsters from becoming drivers at a time of acute shortage. Why join an industry that might be on the verge of eliminating your job?

"I think it might scare them away," he says. "That can't be a welcome development given we need to incentivise young people to take up the profession."

ALTERNATIVE FUELS WITH FEW DRAWBACKS

Paraffinic diesels require little in the way of additional infrastructure, but they do cost more, reports *John Lewis*

Most alternative fuels come with baggage; everything from charging points and specialised dispensers to extra pipework and unique storage facilities. All this infrastructure costs money, takes up space and requires extra staff training.

The beauty of running on 100% hydrotreated vegetable oil (HVO) is that none of this is required. An aromatic-free paraffinic diesel that can be used as a drop-in substitute for mineral diesel, it can be stored in the same bulk tank and used in exactly the same way, say its proponents.

A second-generation biofuel made from renewables such as used cooking oil and animal fat from food industry waste, its big advantage is its low CO_2 figure.

"It can help users reduce greenhouse gas emissions by up to 90% compared with fossil diesel," says Peter Zonneveld, vice president sales, renewables, Europe and Asia Pacific at leading producer Neste. The Finnish company markets the fuel under the Neste MY Renewable Diesel banner.

"Scientific studies and field trials have shown that it produces 33% fewer particulates than fossil diesel," he continues. Hydrocarbon emissions are down by 30%, carbon monoxide output is reduced by 24%, and NOx (nitrogen oxide) emissions by 9%, he adds.

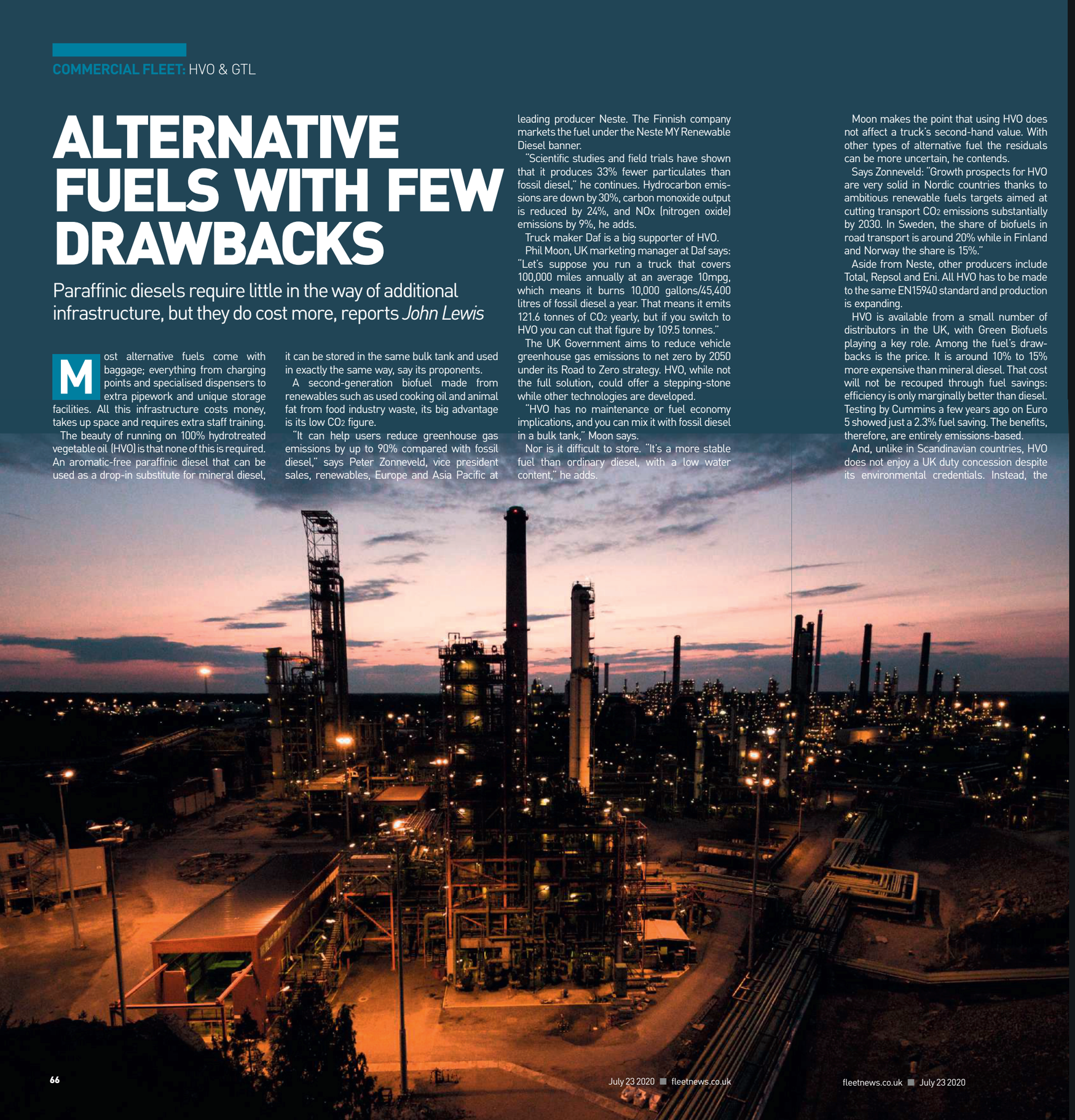
Truck maker Daf is a big supporter of HVO.

Phil Moon, UK marketing manager at Daf says: "Let's suppose you run a truck that covers 100,000 miles annually at an average 10mpg, which means it burns 10,000 gallons/45,400 litres of fossil diesel a year. That means it emits 121.6 tonnes of CO_2 yearly, but if you switch to HVO you can cut that figure by 109.5 tonnes."

The UK Government aims to reduce vehicle greenhouse gas emissions to net zero by 2050 under its Road to Zero strategy. HVO, while not the full solution, could offer a stepping-stone while other technologies are developed.

"HVO has no maintenance or fuel economy implications, and you can mix it with fossil diesel in a bulk tank," Moon says.

Nor is it difficult to store. "It's a more stable fuel than ordinary diesel, with a low water content," he adds.



Moon makes the point that using HVO does not affect a truck's second-hand value. With other types of alternative fuel the residuals can be more uncertain, he contends.

Says Zonneveld: "Growth prospects for HVO are very solid in Nordic countries thanks to ambitious renewable fuels targets aimed at cutting transport CO_2 emissions substantially by 2030. In Sweden, the share of biofuels in road transport is around 20% while in Finland and Norway the share is 15%."

Aside from Neste, other producers include Total, Repsol and Eni. All HVO has to be made to the same EN15940 standard and production is expanding.

HVO is available from a small number of distributors in the UK, with Green Biofuels playing a key role. Among the fuel's drawbacks is the price. It is around 10% to 15% more expensive than mineral diesel. That cost will not be recouped through fuel savings: efficiency is only marginally better than diesel. Testing by Cummins a few years ago on Euro 5 showed just a 2.3% fuel saving. The benefits, therefore, are entirely emissions-based.

And, unlike in Scandinavian countries, HVO does not enjoy a UK duty concession despite its environmental credentials. Instead, the Department for Transport (DfT)is using the Renewable Transport Fuel Obligation to promote its adoption. It means fuel producers have to ensure a percentage of the product they supply is made from renewables.

Neat HVO is not available from public forecourts in the UK – if you want to use it you will have to store it in your own bulk tanks – and not all manufacturers are willing to allow it to go into their vehicles.

VAN MAKERS DIVIDED

While truck makers are happy to endorse its use, van makers are more equivocal. Some approve it for their entire range, others approve it for some models but not others, and yet others do not approve it at all.

"The reality is that it should work perfectly well in any modern diesel engine," says independent transport industry consultant, Martin Flach, formerly alternative fuels director at Iveco. "Where it has not been approved then it is probably because the manufacturer concerned has been so busy working on battery-electrical vehicles that it has not got round to testing it."

Fleets should therefore get written confirmation that HVO is approved for use in a vehicle before they fill up the tank. Failure to do so could invalidate the warranty.

Some operators may be worried about palm oil being used as an HVO feedstock given the links between its production and deforestation. Suppliers are aware of this concern and are addressing it, conscious that it will have to be phased out in mainland Europe by 2030 in line with the European Union's sustainability standards, says FuelsEurope.

Palm oil mill effluent is on the list of wastes used to produce the HVO that Green Biofuels sources from Neste.

ICSS APPROVAL

"Under our ICSS (International Sustainability and Carbon Certification) approval, however, it has to be generated from plantations planted before 2007," says Green Biofuels chief operating officer, Magnus Hammick.

"It is hazardous, has no other use, and making it into a fuel avoids it going into a landfill."

A growing number of UK operators are trialling HVO and are adopting it for at least some of their vehicles.

"We supplied 10 million litres in 2019, we should reach 50 million litres this year and our target for 2021 is 350 million," Hammick says. "We should achieve a billion litres in 2022."

Among those fleets leading the charge is the London Borough of Hackney.

It operates 90 trucks, including skip wagons and hook loaders as well as RCVs, and plans to run them all on HVO, says corporate fleet manager Norman Harding. "We're going battery-electric for our LCVs and cars," he adds.

His recommendation that the council switches to HVO is in partly based on evidence from independent trials conducted at the Millbrook Proving Ground in Bedfordshire.

They confirmed that the fuel's CO_2 benefits are even better than those claimed by Neste, with a saving of up to 94% on a stop-start test designed to simulate a Euro VI RCV's urban duty cycle.

> "GROWTH PROSPECTS FOR HVO ARE VERY SOLID IN NORDIC COUNTRIES THANKS TO AMBITIOUS RENEWABLE FUELS TARGETS AIMED AT CUTTING CO_2 EMISSIONS"
>
> **PETER ZONNEVELD, NESTE**

A subsequent trial of an RCV on a mixture of urban and rural routes involving operators such as Veolia and Biffa saw a similar level of CO_2 saving. Substantial cuts in NOx emissions were achieved in both cases.

"We've trialled the fuel ourselves and we haven't had a problem with it," Harding says. "Cold starting, for example, has been fine."

Hammick says the Green D+ HVO Green Biofuels can offer features such as an additive which, among other things, chemically reduces the amount of NOx in the exhaust gases.

"CO_2 is down by 96% compared with fossil diesel, particulates by more than 85% and NOx by 30%," he states.

A number of other fleets have used HVO with some success, including Power Electrics, which supplies mobile generators. Price remains an issue for some operators, however, in the light of pinched profit margins; not to mention the need to preserve cash as the UK emerges from the Covid-19 crisis.

GTL

HVO is not the only drop-in paraffinic diesel being produced. GTL – the initials stand for gas-to-liquid – can cut NOx by up to 37% and particulates by a hefty 90% compared with mineral diesel, says Certas Energy, which markets Shell GTL in the UK.

Like HVO, GTL costs several pence a litre more than standard diesel – expect just 5% over conventional diesel. However, because it is made from a fossil fuel, its CO_2 reduction is a tiny fraction of that of its rival. Its *raison d'etre*, therefore, is for air quality improvement rather than tackling climate issues.

FTA ADVICE

By Ray Marshall, senior transport advisor, FTA

Q Is there any way of monitoring compliance regarding MOT pass rates, enforcement encounters, etc. for operators based and registered in Northern Ireland who do not come under OCRS (Operator Compliance Risk Score) but carry out haulage operations in England?

A There is no equivalent OCRS for operators with a Northern Ireland O-licence – only if they have an operating centre and an O-licence in Great Britain will they have an OCRS score. The Northern Ireland Driver & Vehicle Agency (DVA) is in the final stages of developing a bespoke Northern Ireland OCRS system that will communicate with similar Great Britain & Republic of Ireland systems, but the Covid-19 pandemic will likely delay the delivery date of this; DVA had hoped originally the system would be ready to launch sometime this year.

Q If a driver has forgotten his paperwork for a pre-start vehicle check and has no evidence that he has carried out this duty, is he still okay to drive?

A A daily walk around sheet should be completed before the driver operates the vehicle to ensure that no defects are found; the document must then be signed to confirm the vehicle is in a roadworthy state. If the vehicle is stopped on route and a defect is found, the Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency (DVSA) officer would normally ask for this sheet.

While not having this form would not stop the vehicle from being driven, it would be down to company policy if the vehicle can be driven with no pre-use checks being carried out.

Q If a vehicle's height is above the markings on a bridge, I have always deemed this to mean do not travel underneath. Can you confirm the legal stance on the height indicators on bridges?

A There are hundreds of different road signs, each with their own meaning. However, most fall into one of three categories based on their shape.

The general rule is:

- **Circular road signs:** Circular signs *give orders*; they must be followed to stay within the law. Circles with a red border tell you what you must not do (i.e. make a U-turn). Blue circles usually give a positive instruction, such as 'turn left ahead'.
- **Triangular road signs:** Triangular signs *warn road users*. Road signs in the shape of an equilateral triangle are designed to warn you about the road layout or any hazards that lie ahead, such as sharp bends. They almost always have a red border.
- **Rectangular road signs:** Rectangular signs *inform road users*. Blue rectangular signs give motorway information, green signs on primary roads, while white signs give directions on minor roads. Rectangular signs can also indicate bus lanes and congestion charge zones.

So, in summary, the height indicators on bridges are there for your information, and if your vehicle is higher than the dimensions shown, you must stop and must not pass the sign. If you pass the sign you are likely to collide with the bridge and risk being prosecuted.

HGV levy suspension arrangements

The Government announced recently that the HGV Road User Levy will be suspended for 12 months from August 1, 2020. The move is intended to provide some relief to UK and foreign hauliers, given the difficulties faced during the Covid-19 pandemic.

A zero-levy rate will apply to the tax and levy renewals of HGVs from this date. This means all vehicles will benefit from the zero levy.

The Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA) systems will not be updated to show this information until late evening on July 31 to early morning on August 1.

DVLA recommends operators do not tax any vehicle due to be registered on August 1, 2020 in advance.

If these vehicles are registered and taxed on August 1, operators will not pay the levy.

DVLA also recommends that if operators have vehicles with vehicle tax due on August 1, 2020, they wait until then to tax them.

If operators buy vehicle tax in advance (in July) with an August start date, they will still be charged the levy.

Operators will be entitled to a refund but, as the DVLA has a reduced number of staff working on site (to meet social distancing requirements), it will take longer to process the refund.

You can tax your vehicle either online, by telephone, or at a post office that deals with vehicle tax.

Please note, DVLA will not be refunding levy money on existing licences.

- **For more information visit: https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/hgv-road-user-levy**

How to tackle work-related stress

Employers have a legal duty to protect their employees from stress at work by undertaking a risk assessment and creating an action plan to promote positive wellbeing. This is particularly pertinent now, with the additional pressures created by the coronavirus pandemic.

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) defines stress as 'the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressures or other types of demand placed on them'.

Employees often feel stressed when they cannot cope with the pressure they are under, along with a host of other issues. For example, employees can feel stressed if they do not have the required skills or time to meet tight deadlines; appropriate planning, training and support can reduce pressure and bring stress levels down.

Stress affects people differently; factors like skills, experience, age or disability may all impact how an employee copes with pressure.

There are six main elements in the workplace that can affect stress levels where employers should assess the risks:

- demands
- control
- support
- relationships
- role
- change

While stress is not an illness, as such, it can make you feel ill. Recognising the signs of stress in employees will help employers to take steps to stop, lower and manage stress in their workplace.

The earlier a problem is tackled the less impact it will have. If you think that an employee is having problems, encourage them to talk to someone, whether it is their line manager, trade union representative, GP or their occupational health team.

The HSE has produced a host of documents, advice and case studies that can assist an employer. if they think that an employee is suffering from stress. Visit https://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/

RENAULT D210 12 TONNE

Renault D Range shows transport efficiency at 12-tonne operating weight

By Tim Campbell

Transport efficiency is a key requirement when operating a commercial vehicle and, at the lower end of the weight range, operators have traditionally gravitated towards the 7.5-tonne gross vehicle weight (gvw) sector.

But, with the inevitable reduction in the pool of truck drivers using their grandfather rights at 7.5 tonnes, the ability for new drivers passing their rigid truck licences allows operators to give consideration to moving further up the gvw scale.

In many cases, manufacturers share the same chassis and cab design up to and including around the 12-tonne weight. Above this the vehicle resembles more of the heavier weight rigids mainly based around 18 tonnes.

So a move towards a 12-tonne truck has many benefits as a similar chassis weight, but increased gvw means an almost doubling of payload potential without an increase in footprint and current driver licencing requirements.

Power for the Renault D210 is provided by the in-house DTI5 engine rated at 210PS (154kW) developed at 2,200rpm and a torque of 800Nm provided along a rev range between 1,050rpm to 1,700rpm.

This common rail 5.1-litre engine has a working fuel injection pressure of 2,000 bar and uses variable geometry turbocharging along with SCR and a DPF to meet the stringent Euro VI levels with a reduction in engine torque of 25% when vehicle emissions are above the 'D' level requirements.

The lightweight aluminium cased automated six-speed Optitronic gearbox features a 0.78 overdrive on sixth gear. There is also the option of an Allison automatic with torque converter as well as a manual ZF 6S 800 six-speed.

An exhaust-mounted 80kW retarder is standard, delivering maximum braking at 2,800rpm, with an electronic Telma retarder option.

The D range at 12 tonnes has 12 chassis lengths ranging from the tipper-based 3,250mm right through to the distribution-friendly 6,500mm. These allow body lengths ranging from 4,216mm to 9,486mm, with the 4.4m wheelbase one of the most popular, allowing for a six-metre (20ft) body.

The front axle features parabolic leaf springs with stabiliser bars and is rated 4,480kgs. The rear suspension features parabolic springs and stabiliser bars, air suspension available as an option. The P08120 single reduction rear axle has a drive axle ratio of 3.31 and differential lock is an option.

Looking at the 4.4m wheelbase, the kerb weight is 4,261kgs, offering a payload of 7,739kgs which in many cases is almost twice the payload of a 7.5-tonner with, basically, the same chassis.

Discs all round are standard and the D range features the usual array of electronic braking systems such as electronic brake assist (EBA), emergency brake light (EBL) and anti-wheel lock braking system (ABS).

The 2.3m all-steel day cab features rubber pads on the front with springs at the rear and the mirrors are not only electrically controlled but also heated. Inside, the driver's seat is air suspended and has an armrest complete with integral seat belt. The dashboard is split into three: the instrument panel, centre console and passenger area. The instrument panel is a mixture of analogue and digital with a prominent rev counter featuring a colour coded green zone.

The Renault D120 is an efficient carrying machine balanced with the low cost of ownership associated with a 7.5-tonner.

	MODEL TESTED
SPECIFICATIONS	
Model	D12 4x2 210
Cab	Day
Engine	Renault DTI 5
Power	210PS (154kW) @2,200rpm
Torque	800Nm @ 1050-1700rpm
Gearbox	6-speed Optitronic Automated
Front axle	4,500kgs
Rear axles	8480kgs
GVW	12,000kgs
Chassis Weight	4,261kgs
Wheelbase	4.4m
Brakes	Discs all round
Tank	130 litres / 32 litres AdBlue

THE LAST WORD

RONALD CLANCY

UK COUNTRY MANAGER AT VIMCAR

Clancy doesn't much care for anything with the word 'diet' in its name, but he is a big fan of playing golf and attending live music events. And as for Oasis songs? They're a definite, not a maybe

The advice I would give to my 18-year-old self is be present, enjoy the journey and don't worry too much about the destination.

The song I would have on my driving playlist is Oasis – *I Hope, I Think, I Know.*

If money was no object I would retire and drive across the world to a five-star hotel in a 1963 Ferrari 250 GT California Spyder.

My hobbies and interests are golf, travel, rugby, football and live music.

My first memory associated with a car is driving along the Fife Coast on holiday with my family listening to *Definitely Maybe* by Oasis.

My favourite movie quote is "I drink your milkshake" from *There Will Be Blood.*

A book that I would recommend others read is F. Scott Fitzgerald *Tender Is the Night.*

If I were made transport minister for the day, I would resign.

My pet hate is diet anything.

Why fleet?
The opportunity arose to be part of a journey with a fantastic company – Vimcar – which has had significant success and growth in Europe and, rightly, felt it was ready to launch and expand into the UK. Being asked to take a leading role in that was impossible to turn down.

How I got here
I started my career looking after fleet and logistics at a steel company in Scotland before moving to London and into business intelligence. Most recently, I worked in software solutions for a large employee experience company.

Latest products, developments and achievements
Our Fleet Geo vehicle tracking service was launched in the UK in the middle of April, which, obviously, with Covid-19 and the UK lockdown was not the dream situation. But, despite this, Vimcar has achieved double the number of clients we had anticipated to have before the coronavirus outbreak and we expect to achieve treble our targeted number by the end of next month. The second half of the year will also see the release of our Fleet Admin service which helps small fleet owners to manage the administrative requirements of their vehicles.

My company in three words
Cost. Optimisation. Must.

Career influence
I've always been attracted to companies that have clear value proposition with tangible results for clients. It gives you a strong sense of purpose, knowing what you do supports small- to medium-sized businesses to reduce costs and improve productivity, especially at a challenging time like now.

Advice to fleet newcomers
Take pride, what you do offers immense value to all parts of the economy and society.

If I wasn't in fleet
I would be playing golf.

Next issue: Russell Thoms, managing director at DriveSmart