

South Central Freight Council minutes

Wednesday 26 October 2022

10:00 – 12:30

Via Teams

INTRODUCTION

- The meeting was chaired by Paul Needle from Smith & Sons Bletchington Ltd
- The minutes of the last meeting were approved
- Members were reminded by the Secretary about the competition law compliance guidance and referred members to the full details on page 5 of the Policy Report.

EXTERNAL PRESENTATION

- Phillip White from Fedcap, briefed members on the government's Restart scheme, helping people get back into work.

EXTERNAL PRESENTATION

- Rachel Gittens, Head of Future Roads Investment Strategy at National Highways briefed members on the Roads Investment Strategy 3 (RIS3) programme. Issues discussed included:
- An ask from members for improvements on the A34
- Driver facilities - DP World reported that they are creating a truck stop in the port of Southampton
- Rail – National Highways is looking to be closer to DfT on rail connectivity
- VMS signs not always up to date
- Escape routes to clear traffic when there are incidents on the highway.

Report back from modal councils

- Members received a report back from Road, Rail, Air and Water Councils

Secretary's report

- Members were updated on other issues not on the main agenda including: category B derogation consultation; revised EU roadworthiness package; guide to maintaining roadworthiness; code of practice on load security; and Generation Logistics

Future of Freight update

- Members were briefed on Government's Future of Freight Plan which was published in the summer.

AGENDA ITEMS

A1 Driver licensing call for evidence

- The Department for Transport (DfT) launched a call for evidence, which could result in a change to the legislation governing driver licensing and training provision, as part of DfT's wider response to the acute driver shortage.

The call looked at four different aspects of the licensing regime and members had the opportunity to express their views during Freight Councils.

- Members were asked if Category B licence holders should be automatically granted the C1 entitlement, and if so, whether there be any additional requirements such as age; length of time holding a Category B licence or passing an HGV medical test. Members felt that this is a watering down of road safety in order to try and solve the problem with the driver market and avoiding the real issue. Members were concerned about the high accident stats for C1 driver, especially given that this is a shrinking proportion of the driver population. Most drivers with C1 acquired rights only drive at 7.5 tonnes when they are moving home and often these vehicles are overloaded and not operated in a safe manner. However, members welcomed the scrapping of the test to tow a trailer on a category B licence. It may be better to explore further the potential to add HGV drivers to the Shortage Occupation List.
- Members did not believe that any purposes or groups of drivers of C1 vehicles should be exempt from Driver CPC requirements.
- Members were asked for their views on the proposal for DVSA to manage a mandatory register of HGV instructors and publish their pass rates. In the Oxfordshire area, there is very little choice for HGV driving instruction, so this would be of limited benefit. But in other areas this would be useful. Members were supportive of the proposal as they believe it will raise standards and pass rates, particularly as HGV driving tests are in short supply and drivers are often having to travel well out of their area to obtain a test.
- On the small-scale changes offered, some concerns were raised about the size of some agricultural vehicles and what level of licence their drivers have. Welcome the move to require a category C licence.
- Members agreed that the Government should look to fundamentally change driving licence entitlements to align with future alternatively fuelled vehicle weight derogations i.e. Category B up to 4.25 tonnes, and other possible amendments. The route to drive these vehicles should be made more straightforward. The issue is not always down to weight of the vehicle, the size of some 3.5 tonnes vans can be as great as 7.5 tonnes for certain applications. One member reported that they are struggling to get the uplift training for 4.25 tonnes across the country due to lack of trainers. Does Logistics UK offer this course? Also, is the training required to drive up to 4.25 tonnes for non-commercial use?

A2 Decarbonisation – skills & maintenance

- As the second topic for the net zero standing agenda item at Freight Councils, Logistics UK sought feedback on the changing skill set needed to maintain new vehicles, vessels and aircraft due to developments in technology.
- Members discussed the barriers to develop skills to support the transition to net zero. These included the availability and cost of appropriate courses along with a shortage of technical colleges offering suitable courses.
- Concerns were also raised about the quality of skills being developed and said that this is manifesting itself through the main dealers where there are receiving MOT failures on vehicles for basic issues that should have been picked up. It was reported that Traffic Commissioners are relatively sympathetic to operators who are relying on reputable external maintenance providers, particularly in rural areas where there is less choice of alternative providers. Where the Traffic Commissioners are less sympathetic is when paperwork is not completely in a timely manner and poor record keeping. It is important for Transport Managers to ensure that they have a clear paper trail.
- To address these skills gaps, members said that they are investing in upskilling of their own workshop staff on EV technology in advance of introducing EVs into their fleets.
- Members would like the government to better understand the challenge with the shortage of skilled mechanics.

A3 FORS Standard version 7 modifications

- Logistics UK, as a member of the Governance and Standards Advisory Group (GSAG), sought members' views on the inclusion, or not, of a requirement to undertake an Operator Licence compliance audit as part of the specifications for Version 7 of the Fleet Operator Recognition Scheme (FORS) Standard, which is currently under discussion.
- Members did not support the inclusion of an Operator Licence compliance audit into the FORS Standard. They would rather have the support of Logistics UK to approach specifiers and advise them about other available accreditation schemes. Often, they don't understand the full complexity of the FORS standard.

- Members felt that If O'licence compliance was to be included, much of the FORS standard would need to be thinned out. There were mixed views about how rigorous bronze audits are. Members felt that there should be greater focus on improving the standard of the auditing.

ANY OTHER BUSINESS

- Attendance was confirmed for UK Road Council on 3 November
- Specifying vehicles on Operator Licence – the issue was flagged following the Upper Tribunal ruling on Connor Construction regarding the specifying of vehicles on the Operators License. This could create some operational concerns. One example given was vehicles being kept for spare parts. Logistics UK has taken up this issue with the Senior Traffic Commissioner who will be required to clarify the requirements around the specifying of vehicles on VOL.

DATE OF NEXT MEETINGS

- Thursday 2 February 2023 09:30 – 13:00 (finishing with lunch) at the Hilton Newbury North
- May 2023 at the ITT Hub, Farnborough TBC
- October 2023 (date TBC) at the Hilton Newbury North

ATTENDEES

Chairman

Paul Needle Smith & Sons Bletchington Ltd

Members

Alan Asbury	CLS Energy (Consultancy) Ltd
Andrew Banks	Stone King LLP
Marie Bowler	Howard Tenens Logistics Ltd
Lee Curds	Agrii
Mark Hooper	DP World Southampton
Gary Locock	Pilkington UK Ltd
Rob Malone	E P Barrus Ltd
Mark Sayers	Churchill Freight Services Ltd
Jerry Ward	John Lewis Partnership
Paul Watkins	DX Network Services Limited
Karl Wintle	Geotechnical Engineering Ltd

Guests

Rachel Gittens	National Highways
David Lakin	National Highways
Phillip White	Fedcap

Staff

Natalie Chapman	Head of Public Affairs
Caroline Brodersen	Graduate Policy Analyst