**Minute of the Northern Ireland Freight Council**

**01 February 2024**

**Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service Learning and Development Centre.**

* **Introduction**

1. The Chair welcomed members, noted apologies, and thanked NIFRS for hosting the council meeting and facilitating a tour for members afterwards. The Chair reminded members of the need for competition law compliance.
2. The Chair proposed, and J. Shaw seconded, the minutes of the previous council meeting. With members permission, the meeting was recorded from this point following a request from a member who was unable to attend.

* **External Presentation and Q&A Session**

Martin Doherty, Centre Director, CASE (Centre for Advanced Sustainable Energy) & Dr Nathan Skillen, Lecturer & Programme Director, MSc Net Zero Engineering at QUB) gave a presentation on Biomethane & its potential for the logistics industry.

*Key points:*

* Net zero requires a fundamental transformation in terms of policy context, behaviours and public understanding.
* NI has huge biogenic resource (i.e. slurry and grass) potential and in solving problems in agriculture, can provide a fuel source for logistics. As well as generating a local, secure fuel source and delivering carbon savings, it will also save money that is currently spent on importing oil to NI.
* Biomethane can be used as a dual fuel. Conversion costs estimated to be £15,000 - £18,000.
* Price – diesel £1.06 per litre compared with £0.63 for CNG. *NB: Please note these are 2016 figures.*
* First injection of biomethane into the grid took place in December 2023.
* A number of logistics companies are running biomethane trials.

*Members discussion/Q&A:*

* Government has set a 2035 target as the end date for purchasing a new combustible engine. Gas uses a combustible engine so is this not an expensive short-term fix? A) Yes, it is combustible, but government is likely to push targets out and biomethane allows you to go greener now via existing fleet to meet customer demands.
* Unlike in GB, in NI you have to pay to upgrade your grid connection. This is an additional cost barrier. A) This pricing policy is changing.
* Re: vehicles like bin lorries, to use CNG you need to put in a much larger gas tank which affects payload capacity and can result in having to do two runs for the same load.
* Are the gas companies on board with this? What is the timeline for infrastructure delivery? Is connection easy? A) Yes, the gas companies are involved. Firmus want to come to speak to members. There is also the option of hybrid vehicles while refuelling infrastructure is progressed.
* Is RoI linking up so there is an all-island approach? And GB, NI and RoI so there is harmony across these islands and key logistics routes? A) CASE was in the Dail recently presenting to TDs on biomethane. The EU has introduced a requirement of access to the gas network every 150km.
* Emergency vehicles, including fire engines, present particular challenges when it comes to biomethane and hydrogen and other alternative fuels. More work is needed on viable options for these vehicles.
* Whether biomethane, hydrogen or other fuels, this will require upskilling and training by logistics businesses. There are training courses in QUB which are currently free as they are funded by the Department for Economy. Contact Dr Nathan Skillen for more details.

**Action: Members interested in learning more about biomethane should contact Martin Doherty (**[**Martin.Doherty@qub.ac.uk**](mailto:Martin.Doherty@qub.ac.uk)**). To learn more about skills and training courses available, contact Nathan Skillen (**[**N.Skillen@qub.ac.uk**](mailto:N.Skillen@qub.ac.uk)**).**

**Action: Slides to be circulated to Council members.**

* **Northern Ireland Items**

NM gave an update on each item – pages 28 & 29 of Policy Report.

DFI to change Driver CPC process for UK only drivers.

Members raised the following queries:

* JAUPT are providing 35 hours of e-learning in NI. Is this allowed?
* To maintain a dual licence (both C&E and D Cat’s) in NI a driver must currently sit 5 DCPC courses. To hold both in RoI, drivers must sit an additional 6th DCPC. Are there any plans to change the current NI approach, or align with RoI, as part of these UK DCPC changes?
* Will different CPC cards issue - one for UK only drivers and one for international?
* Will course content be completely different for UK and International cards?
* Is Logistics UK aware of/ concerned about inaccurate content being taught by other external training providers?

Some members commented that without assessment, Driver CPC can be of limited value as drivers do not always take everything in. Members feel in person training is much more beneficial as it better ensures the driver is alert throughout.

A member commented on the high cost of Logistics UK's training fees.

**Action: NM to raise queries with DCPC policy lead in Logistics UK and the Department for Infrastructure and circulate responses.**

**Action: NM to feedback comments on DCPC assessment and Logistics UK’s training fees.**

£254 charge per trivial variation to fleets.

Update on efforts to resolve Driver CPC card errors.

DFI 2023/24 Road Safety Action Plan published.

Logistics UK’s consultation response on the Newry Southern Relief Road.

Department for Finance Revenue Raising Consultation.

NM gave an overview of this consultation which closes on 13 February 2024 and asked for members feedback on consultation questions.

Q1 Should Industrial Derating be removed? A) Full consensus - No

Q2 What, in your view, would be the impact of removing this support? A) It will impact businesses via additional costs. NI businesses have additional transport costs compared with GB. For example, one member builds and ships modular buildings (for schools) and another ships concrete. Neither option would be competitive with GB prices without rates relief. Removal of rates relief will put NI businesses at a further competitive disadvantage after building up this expertise.

Q3 Should Non-Domestic Vacant Rating relief be removed? A) Full consensus - No

Q4 What, in your view, would be the impact of removing this support? A) As above

Q5 Should Freight Transport Relief be removed?

Q6 What, in your view, would be the impact of removing this support? A) No member present was aware of/in receipt of this relief.

**Action: NM to prepare and submit consultation response.**

* **UK Modal Councils & Secretary report**

NM gave an overview of the report including the meeting of Road Council on 9 November 2023, recent meetings of modal councils and working groups and an update on other issues including Logistics UK’s Spring Budget submission and Direct Vision Standard.

* **NI Election Priorities**

Members identified net zero, skills and infrastructure as their top three priorities*:*

Fair transition to a green economy

* Who is paying for the green economy? The NI government already has severe budgetary shortfalls.
* There is no infrastructure for green technology/logistics.
* There is an absence of practical leadership. Government sets targets then leaves it to businesses to ‘figure it out’. ‘Government doesn’t provide solutions. It sets targets’.
* ‘Government doesn’t listen to industry’s advice’.
* There is no recognition among government of the extra costs to go green. Goods and services will become more expensive.
* There is a willingness in the industry to change but it is not viable at the minute.
* One member said they have a Sustainability Champions Group in the business to monitor CO2 emissions for each and all projects.
* Need conformity and direction from government on alternative fuels, as well as grants, so businesses have greater certainty and can have the confidence to invest.
* What happens to a vehicle bought as an interim solution which is then sold 10 years later? What is the market resaleable value and how does that compare with the original price paid for it? These are the investment decisions businesses are grappling with.
* An operational understanding of ‘going green’ is needed in the boardroom of companies.
* We need a clear pathway from government. A roadmap with dates which includes when fuels and infrastructure will be available.
* Diesel will continue to be the fuel source for many businesses.
* There is an expectation in the industry that there will be exceptions and derogations for some sectors when it comes to low and zero emission vehicles.

Skills partnership to support a thriving sector.

* In school there is too much of an emphasis on academia and not enough focus on vocational training and skills. The curriculum needs reformed to meet the current and future needs of industry. E.G how many schools offer motor mechanics GCSE?
* Reform of the Apprenticeship Levy.
* Need better apprenticeship pathways into the industry. Careers advisors do not suggest logistics. The apprenticeship hourly pay is too low which acts as a disincentive. Not many jobs are available for apprentices when they finish their training. Many insurance companies will not over apprenticeships which is a disincentive for employers.
* A greater focus is needed on school leavers (aged 14 – 16) who enjoy ‘out of classroom learning’ to encourage a new generation into the industry.
* Need to upskill/train technicians to work on alternatively fuelled vehicles.

Innovative and integrated infrastructure

* Members highlighted York Street Interchange and the A5 as top priorities.

* **Guide to Maintaining Road Worthiness Refresh**
* Suggestion for change - there used to be a safety check graph/timeline that was very helpful, but it has been removed. Putting it back in would be helpful.
* The NI version must be proofread to ensure it is 100% accurate for NI.
* **Road safety priorities/safety and compliance**

*Member discussion:*

* Members expressed concern that as fatalities on the roads have reached an eight year high, the PSNI’s traffic branch is losing staff.
* Due to DFI budget pressures there have been no new road safety campaigns.
* The driving test in NI is not fit for purpose. Young drivers are being taught to pass a test, not how to drive.
* Boy and girl racers are a significant risk to road safety.
* R plates and the 45mph restricted speed limit on motorways is creating problems and increasing risk on the roads. It can cause accidents from overtaking by other frustrated drivers. These new drivers are increasing the risk to themselves and other road users by following the law. It needs to change. New drivers should be allowed to travel at 55 mph on motorways and other drivers should have more patience.
* Escalating insurance costs is a barrier to many young people wanting to learn to drive/pursue a driving career.
* Some members are using telematics to monitor and improve driver behaviour (i.e. speeding boxes, measuring of accelerators at lights to monitor fuel consumption). But there is a need to be careful in respect of an over reliance on technology to the detriment of driver awareness.
* Some members use financial incentives to improve driver behaviour (i.e. including driver bonuses for using less fuel).
* Members expressed frustration that in GB if a driver goes before the TM for using a mobile phone while driving for example, he/she can lose their license. In NI, the liability and responsibility falls to the haulage operator to report the driver to TRU which can contribute to driver carelessness.
* **ZEV Refuelling and Recharging**

Members covered these points in earlier discussions on related agenda items.

* **AOB**

No issues were raised.

* **Dates for diaries.**
* Freight Council meetings in 2024 - Thursday 16th May and Thursday 17th October 2024 in Clifton House, Belfast.
* Logistics UK Decarbonisation & HGV Conference – Tuesday 16th April 2024, 9am-12.30pm in Corrs Corner Hotel.

**The Chair thanked everyone for attending, reiterated our appreciation to NIFRS and closed the meeting.**

**Attendance**

Gary Barnes, Briggs Equipment

Ronnie Millar, Almac Pharma

Jeff Shaw, Ards and North Down BC

Chris Arthur, Dennisons.

David Fitzpatrick, Jenkins Shipping.

Sarah Hards, AM Logistics

Maire-Claire Reid, TST Group

George Monaghan, Kier

Colin Beck, NIFRS

Ian Grimes, NIFRS

Paul Roberts, McQuillan Quarries (online)

Damien McKenna, Mannok Build (online)

Sarah O’Neill, Moy Park (online)

Martin Little, Moy Park (online)

Alex Herdman, Logistics UK

Nichola Mallon, Logistics UK

Mark Lorimer, McAvoy Group.

**Apologies**

John Purdy,TBF Thompson

John Jenkins, Dennisons

Adrian Currie, Dale Farm

Fergal McGorman, Bryson Recycling

Aileen Monaghan, Brsyon Recycling.

Andrew Wilson, TransLink

David Hurley, Sysco

Andrew Weir, Sysco

Victor Carson, Almac Pharma

Lynda Gregg, Antrim and Newtownabbey BC  
Andrew Sheilds, Libraries NI

Jayne Currie, Logistics UK