

Minute of the NI Freight Council
2nd February 2023
09:30 – 12:30
Clifton House, 2 Clifton Street, Belfast.

List of attendees:

Gary Barnes (Briggs Equipment) - Chair	Martin McGoldrick (Surefreight)
Maire-Claire Reid (TST Group) - VC	Janette Rockett (Briggs Equipment)
Lynda Gregg (Antrim & N/Abbey Borough Council) - VC	David McDowell (Savage & Whitten Wholesale)
Glenn Alderdice (Woodside Group)	Paul Roberts (McQuillin Companies)
Dan Carey (Dale Farm)	George Monaghan (Kier)
Sarah Hards (AM Logistics)	Martin Connolly (Dale Farm)
David Hurley (Sysco Foods Ltd)	
John Jenkins (Dennison Commercial	David Wells - Logistics UK
Mark Lorimer (The McAvoy Group)	Kate Jennings - Logistics UK
Fergal McGorman (Bryson Recycling)	Jayne Currie - Logistics UK
John Purdy (TBF Thompson)	Freya Penny - Logistics UK
Jeff Shaw (Ards & North Down Council)	Eric Higham - Logistics UK
Andrew Wilson (Transllink)	Ian Wright - Logistics UK
Paul Burrow (Translink)	Nichola Mallon - Logistics UK

Apologies: Gary Hanna (Flo Gas), Darragh Kelly (Amazon), John Lawell (BOC).

1. Introduction

The Chairman, Gary Barnes, opened the meeting, welcomed everyone, and invited Logistics UK CEO David Wells to make opening remarks.

- The Minutes of the last meeting were proposed by the Chair and seconded by Jeff Shaw.
- N. Mallon reminded all in attendance of the Guidance for Conduct of Logistics UK meetings and ensuring competition law compliance.

2. NI Agenda Items: N. Mallon gave an overview and update on the following issues:

G18 - Consultation on the proposed ban of tyres aged 10 years or older on heavy goods vehicles, buses, coaches, and minibuses.

G19 - Free rolling tyres: change to the annual vehicle test.

G20 - Draft Road Safety Strategy for NI to 2030.

G21 - Meeting with European Economic and Social Committee & recent high level political meetings at UK, RoI and EU level.

G22 - A5 Consultations.

Additional items:

N. Mallon's introductory meeting with the new Head of Transport Regulation Unit, Caroline Hobson, and lobbying of DfI for re-establishment of the NI Freight Forum.

3. Modal Councils update & secretary's report:

- N. Mallon gave a report from the meeting of Road Council on 3 November and recent meetings of the Air, Rail, Water, Customs & Trade and Shippers Councils. A further update was provided on the Warehouse, Van Policy, and Environment working groups.
- K. Jennings presented the policy team organogram and gave an overview of Logistics UK's Budget Submission and key asks ahead of the Spring Budget, which was submitted to the Treasury on 1st February.
- N. Mallon outlined progress on other issues including the Senior Traffic Commissioner's Statutory Documents consultation; Clandestine Entrant Civil Penalty Scheme; Guide to Maintaining Roadworthiness; Direct Vision Standard update; the UK Chief Medical Officer's report on air pollution; Earned Recognition (ER) vehicle testing; and Discover Logistics Careers weekend.

4. Agenda items

A1 - Road Transport (Working Time) Regulations

K. Jennings gave an overview of the Retained EU Law Bill and the possibility of changes to the Road Transport (Working Time) Regulations 2005, which implement European Directive 2002/15/EC, and limit the total amount of work (driving and other work) that can be carried out by drivers in-scope of the retained EU drivers' hours rules. In anticipation, and to be prepared to respond to any proposed changes, members were asked for their views and expressed the following.

One member said there was currently too much ambiguity, especially on rest. Most mistakes are not made maliciously, but because drivers do not understand the rules. Drivers are being asked to be almost mathematicians, which works to put older drivers off. If genuine simplification is going to be offered, the industry would take it but it is not clear what 'simplification' means. One improvement would be if 'rest' was better defined. Another simplification suggested by a member would be two half hour breaks to allow compliance with both regimes.

Some expressed a preference to align with the EU, but the point was made that EU rules are getting tighter and more complicated.

A number of members emphasised the need to avoid different regulations in GB and NI, like tachographs at present, which adds complexity.

One aspect of the Regulations members thought should be retained is at least one break before 6 hours are up but to reduce it to 15 minutes.

Members also highlighted the importance of taking into consideration the north/south dimension. There was concern about the impact of any changes to drivers' hours rules on drivers who cross the border daily and the following questions were raised - Will the tachograph software revert to GB rules when drivers are in another jurisdiction? Will we see the correct infringements from tachograph analysis? Will the RSA pull drivers on infringements which occurred in NI operating under different rules?

A2 - Trailer Registration

N. Mallon set out that while there is no mandatory requirement for trailers used solely within the UK to be registered, the subject of trailer registration has been raised a number of times recently by DfT, Traffic Commissioners and DVSA and asked members for their views. Members raised the following points:

This information is already available within the MOT system.

If it has to be introduced, it should be UK wide.

Using the chassis number will not work due to lack of visibility. Would the fleet number be acceptable? However, that can be easily changed/removed. If a new requirement is introduced, that will burden business.

Currently operators do not have to register trailers in NI because they are operating across the south so any system would need to align with the EU.

The consensus however among members was – what problem is this trying to fix? Is there really a problem – where is the evidence? And is trailer registration the solution to this problem? Without more information from DfT this seems to be adding to the bureaucracy facing the industry rather than improving things. This appears to be more about a future revenue raising stream for government than addressing a problem in the industry.

A3 Decarbonisation – Transitional Technologies

N. Mallon gave an overview of the ambitious net zero targets set in legislation by the UK government and NI Assembly, the UK government's delay in publishing a Low Carbon Fuels Strategy, and calls within Logistics UK's Budget Submission calling for incentivisation through the tax system for alternative fuels. Members were asked for their feedback on transitional fuels and technologies that can support the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions (GHG) on the journey to net zero by 2050.

Members said they were committed to decarbonising but there are too many barriers: cost of vehicles, fuel & depot charging infrastructure (especially when the depot is leased not owned by the business) and grid connection, impact on payload, the lack of general charging infrastructure and power supply, electric, hydrogen and HVO, the lack of government grants and incentives through the tax system to move to greener fuels, and the need for the right legislative and regulatory environment that works for manufacturers, operators and energy suppliers.

The right technology depends on the operation. Batteries into HGVs is an option but that requires having specifically skilled technicians for a low number of vehicles and at a time when there is a shortage.

The benefits of moving to HVO as a transitional step were highlighted, but with a current cost difference V diesel of approximately 50ppl, it is not commercially viable.

There was general frustration that government produces targets and leaves the private sector to figure everything out and pay for it. It was noted that there is less government support provided compared with RoI and countries like Germany. The issue of mixed messages was also raised, for example manufacturers being pushed to Euro VII at the same time as businesses are being pushed to zero emissions.

Given the level of members' concern, it was agreed that Logistics UK would request a meeting with NIE and the Hydrogen Team in the Department for Economy to discuss their modelling of future demand and plans to ensure sufficient supply.

A4 Transport Committee Inquiry into Strategic Road Investment in England

This item was not discussed in any detail given its specific relevance to England as opposed to NI.

External Speaker – Minister for State for Northern Ireland, Steve Baker MP.

At 11.30am the Minister for State, Steve Baker, joined the meeting and was introduced by David Wells. He spoke briefly before taking questions from members.

Issues raised by members included the NI Protocol and signs of a deal being reached, the importance of learning from past mistakes and ensuring any agreement is tested with businesses to make sure it can work, the need for mutual recognition of qualifications under the TCA, the need for greater education and awareness raising among GB based businesses to better facilitate GB – NI trade, the need for impact assessments on NI businesses and cross border trade of any changes from the Retained EU Law Bill and the importance of ensuring frictionless borders for international hauliers.

Other topics raised by members included the prospect of direct rule if an Executive is not formed before June 2023, the need for delivery of key infrastructure projects in NI including the A5, A1 upgrade, York Street Interchange and improvements to the A75 in Scotland, an update on the UK Connectivity Review, reform of the Apprenticeship Levy, the need for government grants/rebates/incentives for logistics companies to decarbonise and government plans to secure revenue replacement streams as taxation from diesel falls.

The Minister agreed to ongoing engagement with Logistics UK on these issues and other challenges and opportunities facing the industry and to meeting members again.

5. Any Other Business

No item was raised.

The Chair Gary Barnes and Vice Chair Marie-Claire Reid expressed an interest in attending Road Council on 9 February at the London Marriott County Hall. N Mallon to provide them with details in the event they can attend.

