

Minutes of the NI Freight Council
18 May 2023
Clifton House, Belfast.

Lynda Gregg as Chair opened the meeting and welcomed members and our external speaker.

Apologies received: Gary Barnes, Andrew Wilson, Paul Roberts, Amanda Wylie and Andy Spence.

Confirmation of accuracy of previous meetings' minutes – proposed by Jeff Shaw and seconded by Andrew Weir.

Nichola Mallon (NM) reminded members of the requirement to comply with competition law as set out under the meeting rules.

External Speaker: Dr Jayne Brady, Head of NI Civil Service.

Introduction: Dr Jayne Brady thanked the logistics industry for their resilience throughout the pandemic and beyond. She set out the funding shortfall within the Department for Infrastructure and the constraints of having no Minister in place and outlined how strategic planning in infrastructure and logistics is key to navigating NI through the current challenges and innovating towards Net Zero.

Q&A

Chair of the meeting, Lynda Gregg, asked about MOT HGV delays and plans to support the industry transition to Net Zero:

Response: Net Zero is a key priority to future proof industry and the economy. The challenge is to equip businesses in logistics and agri-food to innovate towards Net Zero. The NI Civil Service is exploring the prospect of ring-fenced funding for green growth as the 14% reduction in DfI's budget is limiting its ability to fund green initiatives.

Response: DVA has increased the volume of MOTs being completed compared to previous years. **Action:** DFI to provide the latest statistics following the meeting and will feedback to DVA concerns about accessing HGV test appointments and the request to allow logistics businesses to apply for a test appointment in advance of the 3-month timeframe.

A member noted the long lead in time for NIE to deliver infrastructure improvements and that while the technology is available, Net Zero legal targets and timelines are unrealistic for the logistics sector due to high costs, insufficient energy supply and poor infrastructure. It was also noted that unlike in NI, there is funding available in Ireland to bridge the gap between electric and diesel HGVs.

Response: Jayne Brady shared funding frustrations but stated that as Net Zero targets are legally binding there has to be action. **Action:** NICS will discuss with the Shared Island Fund any possible funding opportunities for the industry.

The Chair and members noted the potential of drop-in fuels options to transition to Net Zero such as Biodiesel and HVO, but the lack of subsidies to bridge the cost gap to the price of diesel makes them unviable.

Members reiterated their commitment to Net Zero and said they would transition to hydrogen or electric if the infrastructure and support was there.

Members emphasised the need for a Net Zero roadmap. The current view among the industry is that the 2030 deadline is not achievable unless government provides support. Private companies are unable to invest without greater certainty in technology and infrastructure.

Response: Jayne Brady said a priority Green Growth work stream had been set up by Permanent Secretaries in the Departments for Agriculture, Infrastructure and Economy and parties entitled to a place on the NI Executive and reassured members that the Civil Service is trying to do all it can under current constraints but without the Executive and Assembly, new policies and legislation cannot be passed.

Members urged that all preparatory work is undertaken now so that legislation is ready to be passed when a Minister is in place.

Response: Preparatory work is being carried out by all departments to ensure budgets and policies are progressed as far as possible in the absence of Ministers.

Nichola Mallon and the Chair closed this session by thanking Dr Jayne Brady and emphasising the commitment among members and the logistics industry to decarbonise but the pressing need for government to address the financial and infrastructure challenges facing the industry.

Northern Ireland agenda items:

Windsor Framework

NM gave an overview of the Agreement and set out her ongoing engagement with HMRC and government to obtain operational and technical details for members. NM has requested a webinar with HMRC and members to answer questions members have and is continuing to press for a date for this. Members will be kept updated.

NI aligns with GB on ban of tyres aged 10 years or older

NM summarised text within the agenda item and advised members of the timescales set by the Department for Infrastructure with regulations due to be introduced in the Autumn 2023.

NI Freight Forum reconvened

NM summarised text within agenda item and encouraged members to contact her with issues they want to have raised at forum meetings.

A5 Public Inquiry

NM summarised the text within agenda item, reiterated Logistics UK's long-standing support for the A5 and that she will be attending the Public Inquiry on Tuesday 30th Ma 2023 in Omagh.

Free rolling tyres: updated change to the annual vehicle test

NM summarised text within agenda item and drew members attention to the 3rd of July 2023 as the date that DVA will also fail HGVs and buses fitted with a FRT on the front steering axle.

Modal Councils & Secretary's report

NM drew members attention to the list of councils and working groups in the report and encouraged members to get involved so the NI voice and perspective is taken into consideration as Logistics UK forms policy positions.

Longer semi-trailers

NM updated members on the announcement by DFT. **Action:** NM to follow up on a query from a member on the current requirements re longer semi-trailers in RoI.

DCPC review

The consensus among members was:

- In its current format DCPC does not achieve what it is set out to do. Trainee's do not engage with CPC. Practical training is more effective.
- Adds costs because practical informal training does not count towards CPC.
- O-licencing and Tachograph training has value. 2 training sessions for each within a 5-year period would be reasonable.
- Clarification needed on which courses can be done annually. One issue of concern is DVA may not accept repeat training as a valid DCPC training. **Action:** request from Chair to the MAC for clarification on which courses can be repeated.
- A member noted that they have tailored the CPC to their business.
- The proposed DCPC one off test defeats the purpose of safety training as drivers will be focused on passing the test rather than learning.

Guide to Maintaining Roadworthiness

NM has engaged with DVA on when it will be updating the NI guide. DVA have said they are monitoring the updated GB guidance and plan to update theirs “in due course”. Members highlighted the need for lead-in time for consultation/feedback and preparation before DVA introduces any changes

Members set out the challenges for operators if they have to do laden brake testing and made the point that ‘Desires’ outlined in the Guide are not practical to implement in reality. NM encouraged members to engage if there are further concerns regarding any of the other update items in this section of the policy report.

Agenda items:

MOT testing for earned recognition operators

NM summarised the text within this agenda item.

- Members noted that there has not been a large uptake of ER in GB, so it cannot be that beneficial to operators.
- DVA/DVSA stop the worst operators, so the benefits of Earned Recognition to good operators are minimal.

Compliance standards for lighter trailers

NM summarised the text within this agenda item. Members’ consensus view was that:

- MOT testing for lighter trailers adds to admin costs.
- Question of who would enforce it.
- Concerns about how the MOT system and centres would cope with additional service when there are delays in carrying out currently required tests.
- Unsure if introduction of new standards would make any improvement. Tyres/lamps have to be roadworthy anyway.
- Overall view was that this is more of a problem for privately owned trailers/caravans and MOT testing is a hammer to crack a nut which won’t happen as introducing this additional burden on citizens would lose politicians votes.

Smart motorways

NM summarised text within agenda item.

- Members agreed on the need for greater education and public awareness but what is really needed for logistics, is increased capacity on the road network.

Retained EU Law (revocation and reform) bill

NM summarised text within agenda item and asked members to share any feedback at any time.

‘Last mile’ urban logistics

NM summarised text within agenda item.

- A member expressed the view that potential local distribution hubs for Belfast have been spoken about for a long time but nothing ever happens.

AOB

Chair and NM thanked members for attending the NI Decarbonisation Information Event and asked them for ideas on future events and suggested sessions of interest and value for Transport Manager Conference. Members suggested:

- Workshop on hydrogen with Hydrogen NI on what support is available from government and with practical insights shared by a logistics company on the journey.
- Event/session on options for alternative fuels – what is currently available and what is realistically coming online and when?
- Webinar/meeting with NIE Networks about capacity and investment plans
- Session with the PSNI on up-and-coming campaigns
- Transport Manager Conference – focus on what is ahead rather than what is gone.

Action: Members were encouraged to contact Jayne Currie or NM with any further suggestions on content for Transport Manager Conference.

Several members raised the need for an easier online facility for operators to check driver licence validity through DVA, what action is being taken to tackle delays where medical examinations are required and inconsistencies in letters from DVA to drivers waiting on their medical appointment. **Action:** NM will request an update from DVA on licensing delays and inconsistency in letters.

Jayne Currie reminded members of the dates for the NI annual dinner/awards.

Chair thanked members for attending and notified them of the next meeting on 19th October 2023.

Meeting ended.