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Carrots, not just sticks, to change behaviour

Driving change is often achieved by judicious use of carrots and sticks, with 'judicious' being the operative word. Offer bags of carrots and you get there fast, but at a cost. Wield the stick too enthusiastically, and you can expect some difficulty and pain.

So it is with transport. A quick glance at LowCVP's (Low Carbon Vehicle Partnership) 'Journey of the Green Bus', launched at last month's Bus Summit in London, says it all. Government policies, it concludes, have driven near wholesale adoption of green engine technology - transforming bus operators from major polluters 20 years ago into serious contributors to improving air quality today.

How? Quite simply, public money. In 2002, LowCVP developed Low Carbon Emission Bus (LCEB) accreditation, which led to the £90 million Green Bus Fund. Hybrid engine suppliers and others flocked to the sector, driving a virtuous circle of development and investment.

Today, more than 3,500 LCEB buses are in service. And the carrots keep on coming - with, most recently, LowCVP's Low Emission Bus criteria (15% greenhouse gas reduction against Euro 5, plus Euro 6 for NOx and particulates) leading to the latest Low Emission Bus Grant.

Clearly, the model works, albeit at a (modest) cost to the public purse. So why not in freight transport? Certainly, we have seen the £23.4 million Low Carbon Truck trial - but little else. And there remain no grants to help hauliers with the high costs of green trucks.

Instead, freight operators are subject to sticks in the form of fines for non-conforming trucks in low emission zones and now the threat of peak-time HGV bans in London. Last month, DfT launched its LoCITY five-year plan (page 7). But, again, funding appears to be zero.

As ever, the vast majority must do what they have always done - help themselves. With that in mind, take advantage of the CV Show (26-28 April, NEC) and see how you can cut your own costs.

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