

Published by
The Society of Operations Engineers

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Registered in England
Company No 3667147

Registered Charity
No 1081753
A Company Limited by Guarantee

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Transport Engineer
is the official journal of IRTE.
Produced on behalf of IRTE by
MA Business
Hawley Mill, Hawley Road,
Dartford, Kent DA2 7TJ
Tel: 01322 221144
www.transportengineer.org.uk

Transport Engineer
is distributed free of charge to SOE
members, dependent on membership sector.
For non-members, the annual subscription
rate (12 issues) is £79.50 UK and EU, or
£81.50 airmail outside EU. For other SOE
members, the discounted rate is £32.

Printed by
Pensord Press UK

ISSN
0020-3122

Some of the articles and guidance included in
Transport Engineer may make a contribution
to your personal CPD requirements.

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Hot air and cool heads: industry needs action

Barely had new London mayor Sadiq Khan sipped his first coffee than he was announcing his intention to bring forward plans for the ULEZ (ultra low emission zone). It didn't go down well. Indeed, the industry is reeling at the prospect of unbudgeted and frankly unrealistic costs to accelerate Euro 6 fleet upgrades.

It's easy to see both sides. Khan is responding to the capital's and the judiciary's calls for cleaner air with what he sees as a quick fix. That despite last month's report for DEFRA, which slates clean air zones as too inflexible. Meanwhile, transport operators, already struggling with low margins and growing calls for CLOCS-compliant urban trucks, see themselves as the unfairly treated fall guys (page 8).

What a difference a day makes. Just 24 hours earlier, the FTA for one had been congratulating the new mayor and calling on him to help London by going for three "quick wins". A review of rulings that restrict night-time deliveries; a congestion charge discount for clean CVs ahead of the ULEZ; and stronger action against rogue operators.

We shouldn't abandon hope yet. However, early indications are that Mr Khan is more interested in sticks than carrots - and overtly populist measures than constructive dialogue. Which is a huge shame and bound to backfire. Certainly when it comes to transporting the materials needed to meet his 80,000-a-year home-building aspiration.

The fact is there is only so much hard-pressed operators can do to transform air quality. Worthwhile change won't happen without open minds and partnerships involving DfT, City of London and others. We need initiatives as per the Low Carbon Truck trial, but also financial incentives. And these should not just be targeted at Euro 6 diesels and cleaner fuels, but also low-emission chilled transport (page 7).

Without transport on side, the government and the mayor will struggle to meet their commitments to the electorate and Europe.

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