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## Wise up

October marks the halfway point in Network Rail's campaign 'Wise Up, Size Up' to reduce the incidents of bridge strikes in England; there were 1,801 across its network alone last year. Also, November happens to be a full two years since the Ordnance Survey updated its OS MasterMap Highways Network to include many large vehicle hazards, such as low bridges. This data supplies satnav maps. Other specialist resources includes online services such as the Pie London Lorry Control scheme, now rolled out nationwide: Freight Journey Planner(.co.uk).

Speaking of milestones, more than 30 years has passed since trucks over 3m high have been required by law to display a maximum height notice in the cab. This is also good practice; trailer heights do vary, and their drivers are likely to be swapping trailers and vehicles all the time, so a handy reminder is no bad thing.

The trouble is, bridge strikes have not decreased, at least since 2000/1. With good data available and legal incentives in place, why not?

Maybe drivers consider manually measuring the rig as a waste of time. If so, many height measuring apps are now available for smartphones to estimate the height of nearby objects. Whether they could be relied upon in the field, however, would need to be proven. Perhaps a sensor mounted on the cab roof facing backward could do this job automatically.

Or perhaps the real issue is last-minute panic; stressed, disorientated drivers simply forget. It's true that Eddie Stobart, one of the dozen companies participating in 'Wise Up' (see p5), is reminding drivers by offering warnings on coffee cups, air fresheners, keyrings and cab stickers.

In the case of a distracted driver, a last-ditch emergency warning system might help. Trucks might already have the means to do this: for example, the new Actros (p18) can recognise traffic signs. Couldn't they be modified to read tunnel heights as well? If so, the system would need to identify the tunnel height sign, read it, compare that with the vehicle's height, and warn the driver if the gap between them is too close. (Drivers would still need to be persuaded to put in an accurate height.)

Current bridge strike countermeasures aren't working. It's time to try something new. Do it for self-interest, if for no other reason. Following some recent legal successes, Network Rail is now claiming back the cost of bridge strikes (which average £13,000 each) direct from operators.

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