



DOWNLOAD

Services to download drivers' hours data from tachograph cards are becoming increasingly standard, finds Steve Banner. But that doesn't mean that they are all made the same

Downloading tachograph data remotely from onboard units and drivers' cards - rather than employing somebody to go out and do it manually whenever vehicles come back to base - makes sound economic sense. Nor is there anything new about it, says Chris Cuffe, marketing director at supplier Tachosys, whose range encompasses the near-ubiquitous digiDL remote download tool.

"Remote downloading has been available for the past eight years and it looks as though most haulage companies are now opting for it," he observes. "It's coming of age."

What may be new, however, is the idea that such downloads can be used as a management tool, as well as to ensure compliance with the drivers' hours rules. Download in real time in conjunction with a drivers' hours analysis package, the argument goes, and you can see how many more hours your drivers have available to them before they have to take a statutory break or

their daily or weekly rest. The end result is better productivity.

Well-known tachograph analysis specialist Road Tech has recently been promoting its new DOT - Download Optimisation Technology - real-time downloading package for £14.95 per truck per month, with no charge made for the necessary onboard unit. Bolting on the company's Falcon tracking system will cost another £5/truck/month.

Continental has for sometime been offering TIS-Web and TIS-Web Motion, which can be used in conjunction with one another. The former allows tachograph data to be analysed and archived; the latter allows hauliers to see where all their trucks are and where they are heading. TIS-Web Motion also transmits each driver's remaining driving time and required rests in real time. If trucks are fitted with Continental's onboard pressure monitoring system (see pp20-21), then the haulier can see if there is a problem with any of the tyres, and contact the driver if necessary. "We can download your data remotely, and if you combine that with our tracking

solution then it will cost you £20 per truck per month," says Kevin Green, Continental UK head of sales and marketing, tachograph, telematics and services.

THE TELEMATICS ANGLE

In the same way that analysis specialists are offering tracking solutions, telematics companies are marketing tachograph download packages that can be integrated with their mainstream products. Geotab, for example, is offering GeoTach, which has been developed by Spanish technology house Evestel. Another provider is Teletrac Navman. Its UK vice president of sales, Scott Hutchins, says: "We've got a piece of hardware that we can connect to an onboard unit that will send hours data via a SIM card to any of the tachograph analysis companies."

Combine hours information with data from an onboard tracker giving the truck's whereabouts, and an operator can allocate jobs to drivers accordingly. "It is an approach that can bring huge benefits, without a shadow of a doubt,"

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Mark Lewin



observes Jemma James, director of commercial operations and marketing at tachograph analysis supplier TruTac. "Not only can you see how many hours a driver has got left, you can also see that he is not stuck in a traffic jam on the M25, as he claims to be," she comments, when he is in reality parked up somewhere reading a newspaper. Covering some 500 fleets, TruTac works with around 40 different providers of telematics services, including well-known names such as Isotrak and Microlise, says James.

Only being able to obtain drivers' hours data in line with a set downloading schedule - once every seven days, for example - is no longer good enough, she says. Operators have become used to instant telematics data, and they want instant drivers' hours data, too, so that decisions can be made quickly.

While remote downloading can help transport managers to run their fleets more efficiently, the benefits it can bring in terms of compliance should not be ignored, says James - especially if an operator has embraced Earned Recognition, or is seeking to do so.

Download manually and there is always the risk that a truck will be missed, points out Mark Lewin, training development manager at tachograph analysis and transport training house Novadata. By contrast, remote

downloading makes it more likely that no vehicle or card will be omitted. If it is done in real time, then hours infringements can be picked up more quickly, and appropriate action taken.

"If you download tachograph information more regularly, then that will impress the traffic commissioner," says Lewin. That presupposes, of course, that any breaches are raised with the driver concerned as quickly as possible, ideally no later than the day after the incident occurred. "Do so, and you won't end up spending an hour with a driver dealing with a month's worth of infringements," he remarks.

IN THE LOOP

Bringing drivers into the loop in a positive way is vitally important, says James. "We offer an app called TruDriver which provides them with a variety of information, including how many hours they have available, when they need to take their breaks, and when their next shift starts," she says.

Standalone telematics data can of course be used to determine where drivers departed from, when and where they stopped, and how far they have travelled. It is not as precise as tachograph information authenticated by the company card that must be present however, and should not

be relied upon by managers if, by doing so, they risk causing a driver to commit an infringement.

"The card creates the necessary data handshake and we host the company

card in the majority of cases," James says. Its charges for remote download are taken annually, she explains: "The downloading tool required costs £300, plus the cost of having it fitted, and the necessary SIM card costs £60 a year. We make no extra charges."

While downloading according to a fixed schedule may no longer meet the needs of many operators, as James says, some systems do not offer higher frequencies, warns Cuffe. "Worse still, the most rudimentary of them do not distinguish between a driver card and a vehicle unit," he contends. "Let's take an example: John works on a Thursday and a Friday but the remote download for the fleet is performed every Monday," he continues. "Unfortunately, with some systems, John's card will not be downloaded, as there is no separate schedule for drivers."

He also advises operators to consider the situation with double-manning where the first driver's card is picked up, but the second driver's card is missed when the drivers change over. Cuffe adds: "You should avoid such oversights in design, as they may mean you still have to collect card data manually. Remember, too, that the company card can only be accessed by one truck at a time, so it is essential that it is locked for as short a time as possible, or other vehicles will not be able to access it." However, he points out that many systems lock the card for long periods, necessitating the use of multiple cards.

"Given that they may in effect impose a limit of one company card to one PC, it is easy to see that this could become an IT nightmare. The best systems allow you to host the card anywhere on the

internet, and will support thousands of vehicles with one card," he concludes. That has to be the most efficient solution, and the one fleets will increasingly wish to adopt. **TE**

