

It's fair to say that most operators aren't the biggest fans of biodiesel.

While the fuel may be greener than your average barrel of bulk diesel, there are many unknowns – and stories such as this one from Halifax haven't helped matters. When the council there decided to switch its bus fleet from regular diesel to a fish-oil-based biodiesel from 2004, mechanical problems arose, and it was only after several years of refinement that conversion of the entire fleet was completed.

Evidence from fuel injection system manufacturers proves that corrosion and discoloured injectors are a common occurrence in biodiesel-fed vehicles, thanks to excess water in the fuel. So there are clearly problems, and now is the time to demand action.

Are manufacturers themselves prepared to support up to 100% biodiesel? Scania has said it is possible to run at 100%, but any benefits you get from being green are offset by an increased service schedule for fuel filters and engine oil – the latter being diluted because of that excess water. As responsible operators, we are all trying to reduce our carbon footprints, but not if that will increase our overall costs. So where is the incentive to go green?

In the absence of any clear message from governments and manufacturers alike, we should be asking people that have tried and tested 100% biodiesel, to see what the effects have been on their vehicles. Ideally, all manufacturers would come out and clarify the issues caused by using biodiesel, tell us what we have to do, should problems arise, and, most importantly, tell us how much it is going to cost us, if the vehicle is not under warranty. And if the vehicle is under warranty, what changes to the systems will be tolerated, without infringing on the guarantee?

And then there is the issue of bulk storage. Are special pumps and filters needed for the storage tanks? Is the tank's material a cause for concern? Operators usually don't have fuel in the tanks for long, but safeguards against storage problems need to be addressed.

Buses emblazoned with "runs on 100% biodiesel" or similar are becoming a more common sight. Do bus operators have the same problems as fleet managers, with their biodiesel trucks? Is there something they know that we don't, or are we having to pay in bus fares to offset the increased maintenance costs that they encounter?

Clarification on the subject of biofuels is clearly needed – and fast.



**IRTE**

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