

LINKED LANES

Maintaining roadworthiness through the MOT has proven problematic for the DVSA. It is now turning to technology to improve standards and compliance, finds Peter Shakespeare

While the MOT for HGVs and PSVs is carried out by testers employed by the Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency (DVSA), in Authorised Testing Facilities, the rest of the UK's in-scope vehicles are tested by 'civilian' authorised testers employed by the wide range of businesses that own MOT stations.

While most MOT stations are law abiding, MOT fraud remains an important issue. In 2017, DVSA investigated 511 garages and 483 authorised MOT testers. As a result of this, it stopped 45 garages and 111 testers from testing. The most severe cases were prosecuted. In one case, two men pleaded guilty in court. The garage owner was given an eight-month suspended sentence, ordered to carry out 200 hours of unpaid work, as well as pay costs of £2,500 and an £80 victim surcharge. A tester was given a four-month suspended sentence, ordered to carry out 200 hours of unpaid work and pay costs of £500 and an £80 victim surcharge. Both were banned from testing for five years.

Class 7 vehicles (vans 3,000kg to 3,500kg gvw) are also a thorn in the side of DVSA's efforts to ensure



roadworthiness. The latest statistics published show that in the first half of 2019, 40.5% failed their MOT on initial presentation, with nearly 13% of these failing with at least one dangerous item. Most vans in this class are privately-owned mobile toolboxes, or jobbing builders' vehicles. The high cost of ensuring they are properly roadworthy could tempt their owners to acquire MOTs without the vehicle actually being tested.

While preventing MOT fraud and improving van pass rates are not its sole aims, DVSA has issued a new requirement which begins to shut the door on dodgy MOTs. From 1 October 2019, DVSA introduced a requirement for new roller brake testers (RBT) to be 'connected'. This was the start of a rollout of connected MOT equipment for non-HGV/PSV testing centres. The new regulations apply to new or re-opening MOT testing sites, new test lanes and garages replacing their existing RBT models. Emissions testing equipment, headlamp testers and decelerometers will come in scope of the new regulations between 1 February and mid-summer 2020.

REQUIREMENTS

Connected MOT test equipment needs to be able to communicate with DVSA's MOT Testing System (MTS). This means it must be capable of receiving test and vehicle information from the MTS and transmitting test results to the system. Automatically transferring results to MTS removes the requirement for manual data entry, which significantly reduces the opportunity for fraud. Test equipment manufacturers have developed software solutions that enable test data to be transferred from the equipment in the form of a JSON file via a secure application programming interface (API), as required by DVSA. To connect the equipment to the MTS, the test centre must register its equipment with DVSA and obtain a software connection 'key'.

DVSA head of MOT policy Chris Price states: "Connected equipment



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negative risk rating) and help the DVSA to combat MOT fraud, which is beneficial to the industry as a whole. Once equipment is connected to the DVSA’s system, there would be no requirement for MOT stations to keep the results printouts from each test. Instead, all results could be stored online,” he adds.

“With linked MOT equipment, the DVSA could be able to update testing criteria automatically, meaning garages could no longer need to pay for updates to this equipment. And crucially, connected equipment will make it harder for dishonest testers and MOT stations to cheat the system.”

Calcott also highlighted that DVSA is bringing into scope fitment of the new connected equipment for MOT stations that change ownership. He says his company has seen a significant increase in orders for RBTs as a result, as change of ownership happens frequently in the sector.

John Hix, director of the Fleet Operator Recognition Scheme, contends that too many van users pay scant regard to roadworthiness. He says: “MOT testing must be accurate, consistent and fair. Digitisation of elements of the MOT test should help. However, the fact that nearly half of vans fail their first MOT shows that too many van users treat the test as a means to find out whether their vehicle is roadworthy, rather than through regular maintenance and inspections.”

ENFORCEMENT CHANGES?

In terms of how connected equipment might impact enforcement in the future, DVSA would not comment. It says that it will continue to target vans and other light commercial vehicles for roadworthiness offences at the roadside. Vehicle owners and operators should ensure the vehicle is safe to drive throughout the year. It adds that the increase in light goods vehicles [vans] on the road means it is more important than ever that the MOT plays its key role in ensuring the vehicles are safe and, if they found to be defective, are fixed or scrapped. The data collected by connected equipment is used in the same way as any other data collected by the MOT.

Kwik Fit, the UK’s largest MOT tester, does not yet have any connected equipment installed at its sites. But Eric Smith, MOT scheme manager at Kwik Fit, remains positive, calling the scheme “hugely beneficial” to both drivers and garage owners. He adds: “Any additional costs to centres are relatively low per individual site and can be factored into ongoing upgrades of equipment. In the longer term, we hope that those costs will be recouped in making the testing process more streamlined.” **TE**

will help DVSA and the motor trade to improve the MOT test for the future. It will improve consistency in the test by helping the tester make better informed judgements on defects, it will speed the test up, meaning the test stations can be more efficient, and it will drive down fraud in the industry.”

According to manufacturer Boston Garage Equipment, connected MOT equipment offers multiple benefits to vehicle testing stations. Director Bradley Calcott explains: “Currently, inaccurate manual data entry is a big issue for DVSA. The cost of fixing errors is considerable, and this is one of the main drivers behind connected equipment. Current systems require MOT testers to record brake test, emissions, and headlamp aim results, and then enter them manually into the MOT system, often on a separate computer. This is both time consuming and a potential source of errors. With connected equipment, the results will be transferred automatically, with no need for any action from the tester.

“With linked MOT test equipment, the DVSA’s system will be able to make the pass/fail decision based on the data that has been received. This will remove any ambiguity the tester may face, reduce the chance of errors (and potentially a

