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# Welcome to a new era of transport understanding

As the UK transport industry reflects on last month's supremely successful Commercial Vehicle Operator Show at the NEC, Birmingham (page 36), it's becoming apparent that the new-look event provided a timely and much needed forum. After a two-year wait, here was a show by fleet engineers for fleet engineers – a CV for the CV sector – and visitors and exhibitors alike were clearly pleased with what they saw.

It didn't just feel right. The proof was everywhere. And not only in the sales of workshop, van and truck tools, equipment, software and services right off the show stands (something that most industry-focused exhibition organisers can only dream of these days). Engineers and technicians were clearly also taking the opportunities all around them to learn about: modern vehicle diagnostics; telematics; fuel facts and some of the alternatives; what can be done with electric vehicles of all kinds; emerging low-cost specialist vehicle bodybuilders and manufacturers; and garage equipment and systems capable of significantly improving quality and performance.

But life moves on and, as we go to press, attention has temporarily turned to today's headlines: volcanic ash, the election and that word 'change'. In the case of the Icelandic volcano, serious change has already been inflicted – with stranded passengers and threatened businesses watching an integral part of our infrastructure being challenged as never before. As for the election, change is less a promise and more just potential, as is the way with politics.

However, both are bringing an intriguing new focus on transport and logistics. With the air space over the UK and much of northern Europe locked down, the world was witnessing what happens when an essential, but hitherto practically invisible, aspect of our economy fails. On the one hand, there was the expensive human misery of people and planes trapped in the wrong places; but, on the other, goods and materials were not moving, too. And although air freight is responsible for moving less than 1% of goods in and out of the UK, the FTA (Freight Transport Association) estimates that those account for around a quarter by value. What's more, many are key components without which manufacturing grinds to a halt, while others are perishable goods, both food and pharmaceuticals, with limited shelf lives.

Then there's the election. It's just possible that, this time around, the electorate may notice the glaring lack of a commitment, from any of the main parties, to an investment in our infrastructure capable of serving the dual masters of our economy and the environment. By the time you read this, the die will already have been cast, but it's to be hoped that, whichever party strides into 10 Downing Street, transport is right up there on the agenda.

It might just happen. The FTA chose the CV Operator Show to launch its Love Logistics campaign, designed to raise the profile of transport, at just the right time. Its Logistics Report 2010 not only demonstrates the importance of our sector, but shines a powerful light on what makes it tick at all levels. Everything from the issues of compliance to the specification of vehicles, the smooth functioning of operators, their dependence on competent maintenance services and the engineering achievements of our industry is laid bare.

Could we really be on the verge of a new beginning?

**Brian Tingham BSc CEng MInstMC FSOE**

