

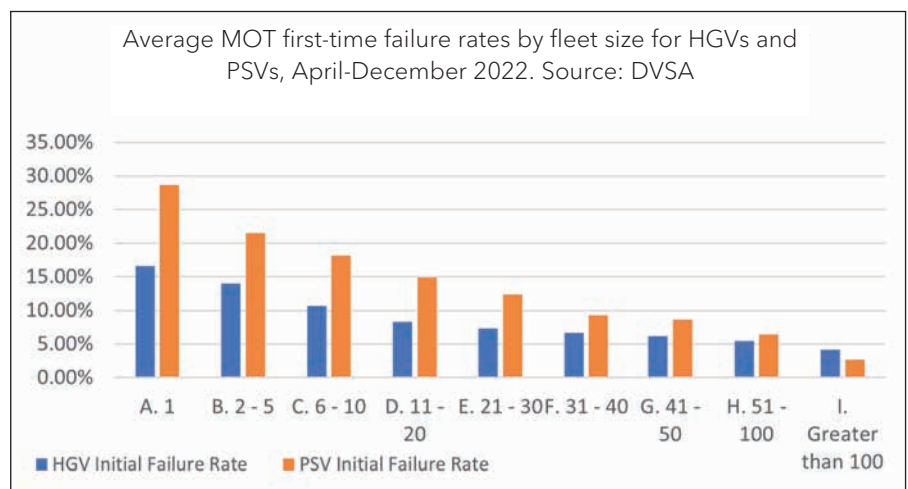
PREPARE TO PASS

Analysing the DVSA data relating to annual test results for small and large HGV and PSV fleets makes for interesting reading, reports John Challen

Improving the first-time pass rates for commercial vehicle fleets is often viewed as the holy grail for any operator, but the latest information from DVSA might challenge how much progress is really being made. While pass rates are going up, the initial failure rates across the board of both HGVs and PSVs remain pretty high, especially among smaller fleets.

In both HGVs and PSVs, the larger the fleet, the lower the rate of failure. Across almost all sizes of fleets, the failure rates are higher for PSVs than HGVs, until the fleet size reaches above 101 vehicles. Then, while the HGV failure rate was 4.14% (70,343 tests in total) for the latest reporting period available, April-December 2022, PSVs in larger fleets of 101 or more are only failing 2.65% of the time (across 23,264 tests).

John Taylor, operational technical executive at the Confederation of Passenger Transport, says that over the past few years, there has been a gradual improvement in pass rates. "I get to see the DVSA figures on a daily basis and the overall rate is currently around 93%," he confirms. "To us, that's an excellent pass rate, especially when you consider that you're always going to get problems with items such as bulbs that are out or headlamp aim fails that are affected by suspension and chassis issues. That's a positive angle in an industry that has constantly been moving forward to try and improve performance levels."



However, when it comes to those April to December 2022 figures, Taylor recognises that there is still work to be done, even if such issues can't easily be fixed overnight. "Larger fleets obviously have a greater ability to achieve a first-time pass rate, thanks to more training and better facilities; they are effectively carrying out an MOT with every inspection," he reasons. "They will put the vehicle on a roller brake tester, run headlamp aim checks, emissions testing - and all the staff will be trained to the standards that the DVSA would expect."

Taylor also argues that larger fleets in both the HGV and PSV world would have access to inspection-accredited testers, as well as engineers that are solely employed to carry out repairs. "A smaller fleet of up to five vehicles is less likely to employ their own engineer," he says. "They tend to use another means of inspection such as a garage, and will have less input into the repair and maintenance of their vehicle. That's probably the case of fleets up to 50 vehicles. At that point, people will start to think about employing a mechanic, so

they are more reliant on what is available in the marketplace. That's why the larger groups are so much better, because they can control their staff - plus they are set targets for pass rates and work on KPIs, which other smaller companies might not."

What about the discrepancy between the HGV rates and PSVs in the same vehicle bands? Taylor makes a solid defence of his industry: "In the HGV world, it's different, because a lot more of the vehicles are bought on lease with a contract maintenance agreement. Also, because operators tend to have the vehicles for a shorter length of time - seven years, instead of our 15, for example - they tend to use dealerships more for doing their inspection and repair work and MOT preparation and presentation. For the bus and coach world, much more of that is done in-house."

Inspection times also come into play when trying to justify the difference in pass rates, believes Taylor. "The inspection cycles might be shorter on a PSV-type operation. You tend to

ANALYSIS

There is no doubt that the concept of removing the hard shoulder as a place of refuge on motorways is counter-intuitive in the eyes of most drivers. But the accident statistics – despite their relative infancy and skewing by the COVID-19 pandemic – do paint an optimistic picture; and if the action plans to address safety concerns can be proved to be effective, it is hard to make a case to scrap these sections of the road network or ban further development, despite the underlying political pressures.

Ultimately drivers cause accidents, not roads, and Thames Valley Police's recent statement that over 3,000 offences (ignoring lane and speed restrictions) have been committed on the M4 section of smart motorway since its completion speaks volumes. Driver education and enforcement will have the biggest effect on smart motorway safety, so only time will tell if the messages get through.

-Peter Shakespeare



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per HMVM of 0.12, 0.09 and 0.07 respectively. All of the above motorways performed better than A-roads, which had a five-year average fatal casualty rate of 0.41 for the same period.

DIFFERENT RISKS

RoSPA concludes that while smart motorways had a lower fatality rate than conventional motorways, for the five-year period, government data suggests that on smart motorways, some risks are reduced, while others increase. It says: "On ALR there is an expected reduction in the risk of drivers speeding or tailgating, but an increased expected risk of collisions involving vehicles stopped in a live lane. Most collisions occur between moving vehicles, while stopped vehicle collision rates range from 2.36% for controlled motorways, 2.99% for conventional motorways, to 5.26% for ALR motorways."

It continues: "While the risk of a live lane collision between a stopped and moving vehicle is greater on ALR and DHS motorways, the risk of collision involving only moving vehicles is lower. Before and after data on DHS schemes suggest that personal injury collisions are reduced. Overall, the evidence has demonstrated that while the nature of the risks varied between the motorway

types, ALR was expected to reduce the overall level of risk by 20% and be as safe as, or safer than, conventional motorways. Even though fatal casualty rates on the ALR network are lower, injury rates are higher. DHS motorways have a lower fatal casualty rate and a slightly higher rate of slight and serious casualties."

One particular area that concerns the smart motorway safety lobby are collisions involving vehicles stopped in a live lane. On this point, RoSPA reports: "Collisions tend to be infrequent, with an average of 19 collisions per year across nine of the 12 ALR schemes, being far lower than the 9,206 live lane breakdowns per year across all ALR schemes."

In its 2021 report, the TSC required retrofitting additional emergency refuge areas to existing all-lane running motorways to make them a maximum of 1.5km apart (2.5km as built), decreasing to every 1km where physically possible. It also commissioned the Office of Rail and Road (ORR) to conduct an independent evaluation of the effectiveness and operation of stopped vehicle detection (SVD) technology (including maintenance and monitoring). It also inserted the emergency corridor manoeuvre into the Highway Code to

help emergency services and traffic patrol officers to access incidents when traffic is congested. Following the TSC's recommendations, DfT's action plan also included an action for National Highways to retrofit radar-based SVD technology across all ALR motorways.

In December 2022, ORR published its first annual assessment of safety performance on the strategic road network and progress update on TSC's smart motorways recommendations. It reported that National Highways met its action to have this technology in place on every existing ALR motorway, but the technology's performance is not expected to be on par until July.

Although the ORR report said that good progress had been made on updates, it is too early to make an overall assessment whether the frequency and duration of live lane stops have reduced and whether drivers' perception of safety has improved.

In its 2022 second year progress report, National Highways said that not until late 2023 will data be available on recently implemented technologies.

DfT said that during the smart motorway implementation pause, it had committed £900 million for safety improvements across the network, including more emergency areas. [TE](#)