

With 2011 just around the corner, John Challen asks SOE president Chris Grime, and CEO of the Freight Transport Association Theo de Pencier, to predict the next 12 months for fleet managers

Theo de Pencier (TdP)
is CEO of the Freight
Transport Association

The year following the global economic downturn has proved eventful for the UK's transport industry. Greater emphasis on reducing fleet carbon emissions; more focus on training (including a fresh approach and structure for irtec); a new-look show for commercial vehicles; and a blueprint for new testing facilities unveiled by VOSA.



Talking

There will much to look forward to in 2011, as operators adapt to their leaner businesses and continue to strive for greater efficiencies. Plenty for Chris Grime, SOE president, and Theo de Pencier, the FTA's CEO, to mull over, as they forecast the challenges for next year.

JC What positives can be taken from 2010 for the transport industry?

CG "From the IRTE's point of view, the CV Operator Show was a great success. It demonstrated to us that people were willing to look at developments in the transport industry and to embrace them. I was impressed, for example, by the range of diagnostic equipment on offer; it really gave operators the chance to try before they buy. As a result of the show, I have introduced diagnostic equipment from three different suppliers into the six Lancashire County Council workshops."

TdP "I've been impressed with how the industry has coped with year two of the recession. I still call it a recession, as our members certainly don't think they are out of the woods yet. Membership has remained strong and, to us, that indicates compliance, while running fleets properly remains the number one priority. We have a pretty good gauge of overall service levels and quality throughout the industry, and we've found a reduction in non-compliance; indeed, in some areas, some service levels are at an all-time high."

JC There is an ever-increasing need for operators to adopt green solutions – be they aerodynamic aids, biofuels, low rolling resistance tyres or driver training and management. How can your organisations, and the industry, help over the next 12 months?

CG "There are two major things that operators can do now. One is training and ensuring that drivers are driving efficiently. The best way to do this is to use one of the many telematics systems that can provide information to a fleet manager's headquarters instantly.

"Companies should also ensure that their fuel stock management systems work properly. It's great if you get drivers operating at optimum efficiency, but

heads

if you are losing 100–200 litres of diesel a day through theft, the benefits of improved fuel consumption are lost.

“The IRTE has done its bit, with, for example, our guide to improving fuel efficiency. We heard from many operators that had been taken in by unscrupulous fuel system interventions that simply didn’t work – and the guide aims to stop that.”

TdP “I’ve been impressed with how people have got their heads around low carbon – and the message that going green means greater efficiency, which, in turn, equals money saved. The creation of our Low Carbon Reduction Scheme, with a little help from the DfT, has seen fuel savings of up to 10% among the 42 participating companies. Bearing in mind that these companies account for 50–60,000 HGVs, or 15% of the UK’s total truck fleet, some lessons could be learned from them.

“We need to get a large enough quantity of data under our belts to make it relevant, but first results should be emerging in early spring. The targets have already been specified and we think, on average, the group can save a further 10–15% over and above what has already been achieved.”

JC **ATFs (Authorised Testing Facilities) eventually arrived in 2010. What is your opinion of them and do you believe they are the best way forward for operators to undertake their vehicle testing in 2011?**

TdP “At the FTA, the impression we get, following chats with VOSA and the new ministerial team at the DfT, is that the principle of moving testing closer to the operator will be pursued with renewed vigour. While I think most of us were fairly sceptical about the test station model VOSA finally decided to go with, it does appear to be working.

“It is also very pleasing that Philip Hammond [Secretary of State for Transport] has a long-term ambition that testing done at ATFs will be less costly than at VOSA’s own premises. That, I’m sure, will remove a concern of many operators.”

CG “I’m of exactly the same mindset as Theo, and I’ll be very interested to see how they develop in 2011. In fact, I am looking at whether it would be beneficial for Lancashire County Council to

have an ATF on our own site. But I need to be fully aware of the financial impact on the organisation. However, if operators can get their tests done closer to their premises, it has got to be a benefit.”

JC **How important will training be to operators throughout 2011 and what impact will it have on the wider transport industry?**

CG “We’ve seen continued recruitment of apprentices through 2010 and I see them as key to the future of vehicle engineering. I think the level of training that engineers get in the industry is excellent – a fact that can only be helped by the revised irtec scheme to be launched in 2011. It is a great refresher and clearly demonstrates that all engineers, not just those that have recently gained

Chris Grime (CG) is president of the SOE, and principal fleet engineer, Lancashire County Council



Transport Engineer editor John Challen (JC) quizzed Grime and de Pencier on greener fleets, ATFs and training



their qualification, still need to meet a particular standard.

“Also, with our maintenance supplier assessment guide in place, which is aimed squarely at those who contract out fleet maintenance, we believe it is only a matter of time before IRTE is approving or

accrediting maintenance facilities.”

Theo de Pencier: “I agree with Chris that apprentices are critical and represent one of the very few aspects of the whole training spectrum that government really values. We are also very supportive of irtec, as well as ongoing training. There have been comments about the slow uptake of Driver CPC in some parts of the industry, but most of our members from larger operators have planned for it, as part of their continuous learning.”

JC What are the reasons for being positive as we move into 2011?

TdP “We made infrastructure investment our main mantra during the build-up to the government’s Comprehensive Spending Review and we were really pleased with the resulting decision, which was to stick to much of the planned road improvements to major routes around the country.

We worked closely with the CBI, whose transport policy mirrored our own, and the message seems to have got through to both the DfT and, more importantly, the Treasury.”

CG “I am really looking forward to the CV Show 2011, including the return of the vehicle manufacturers. It reveals progress in the industry, which, in turn, shows signs of confidence returning to the industry.” **TE**

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