

## The decision to relax EU drivers' hours at the beginning of last month, due to the adverse weather, was helpful. But will it have wider implications for fleet managers and technicians?

Under the terms of the agreement, DfT (the Department for Transport) allowed more flexibility on drivers' hours rules for haulage firms transporting liquid natural gas, petroleum products and fuel oil to premises throughout the UK.

The decision was welcomed with open arms, during a period of some of the worst snow the country has seen for a generation. But one look at the changes shows that, albeit for a limited period, workshops suffered more strain, while planned servicing schedules for trucks, as well as driver monitoring data, were also impacted.

DfT allowed the daily driving limit to be raised from nine to 10 hours; daily rest requirements were squeezed from 11 to nine hours; and the weekly (56 hours) and fortnightly (90 hours) limits for drivers were lifted. The only rule to remain unchanged was the directive that requires a 45-minute break after driving for 4.5 hours.

Drivers were working longer hours, which, in turn, meant the vehicles covered more miles at a faster rate than normal. So wear and tear increased, and visits to workshops became more frequent.

It is currently too soon to get figures on how the changes affected operators. However, given that much of the road network – in Scotland especially – was gridlocked, there must be a serious question mark over any perceived improvement in efficiency.

There is also the argument that, despite it being an apparently helpful measure to UK plc, the decision to relax drivers' rules sets a precedent. What about other 'extreme' circumstances?

For example, given the deep recession from which many are still recovering, should allowances be made to let drivers work longer hours to meet delivery deadlines? Such a decision could make the difference between an operator seeing revenue or the receiver.

Maybe the EU needs to look more closely at the subject. If a temporary increase in drivers' hours is acceptable, why not make it permanent?

Transport Engineer's regular 'IRTE to IRTE' members' column: focusing on the issues, challenges and concerns that matter to transport engineers and fleet managers

