

Published by: The Society of Operations Engineers

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The Society of Operations Engineers is a licensed member of the Engineering Council

Registered in England:

Company No. 3667147

Registered Charity: No.1081753

A Company Limited by Guarantee

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Publisher: Peter Knutton

Transport Engineer is the official journal of IRTE.  
Produced on behalf of IRTE and The Society of Operations Engineers by Findlay Media Ltd, Hawley Mill, Hawley Road, Dartford, Kent DA2 7JT  
Tel: 01322 221144  
Fax: 01322 221188  
www.transportengineer.org.uk

Transport Engineer is distributed free of charge to SOE members, dependent on membership sector. For non-members, the annual subscription rate (12 issues) is £71 UK and EU, or £73 airmail outside EU. For other SOE members, the discounted rate is £28.



Printed by: Holbrooks Printers Ltd, Portsmouth ISSN: 0020-3122

Views expressed in Transport Engineer are those of the writers and do not necessarily reflect the views of The Society of Operations Engineers or of Findlay Media Ltd.

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**IRTE**  
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# Will the new man at the helm steer the rudder?

So it's all change again at the DfT, with Patrick McLoughlin the new Transport Secretary, replacing Justine Greening, who leaves after just 10 months. Word is that her intransigence over Heathrow was too much for business-friendly George Osborne.

McLoughlin will be seen as more even handed – at least inasmuch as he was silent on transport matters at his former post, as Chief Whip and Parliamentary Secretary to the Treasury.

As for his knowledge of transport, it may be better than many realise, given his stint as Parliamentary Under Secretary of State to the DfT from 1989 to 1992.

Certainly, McLoughlin hasn't been slow to make his mark since taking office. Recent comments about motorway speeding spell the end of the road for that mooted 80mph limit, for example. More importantly for the haulage industry, his announcement of legislation last month aimed at charging foreign trucks £1,000 to drive on our roads will be widely welcomed. We'll have to wait until 2015, but it will finally mean a more level playing field for the UK transport industry. As McLoughlin put it: "It is simply not right that foreign lorries do not pay to use our roads, when our trucks invariably have to fork out when travelling to the continent."

So far, so good. But both of these ventures were always going to be easy wins. When it comes to other, more systemic issues facing fleet managers and transport engineers – such as the relentless pressure on margins, constantly rising costs (particularly fuel) and ever hardening compliance requirements – making a worthwhile difference becomes much tougher.

Yes, the DfT had already pitched in with the Technology Strategy Board to provide £11m of funding for the low carbon commercial vehicles programme that will see Tesco, John Lewis and others running demonstrator vehicles, mostly on multi-fuel engines (Transport Engineer, September 2012, page 3). And, yes, there are the longer semi-trailer trials, aimed at improving fuel efficiency and competitiveness – although we're talking about 10 years before that comes to fruition and all the risk on the shoulders of the operators brave enough to put their hands up.

But what about funding to support the impending requirement for Euro 6-engined trucks, with all that means, in terms of increased capital, if not operational, costs? How about reviewing fuel duty downwards, in light of the widely held belief that cutting operators' biggest opex would significantly boost the economy and be more than self-funding for the Exchequer?

Delegates attending last month's packed IRTE conference at the Heritage Motor Centre, in Gaydon (page 5), heard speaker after speaker give glowing testimonials to a wide range of technologies that are now benefiting their operations. But they all cost capital to get started and, in these straitened times, money is hard to come by. Unless Vince Cable's proposed Business Bank becomes a reality, good, proven ideas that could make a big difference to transport are going to remain for the small minority with deep pockets and overriding green agendas.

Likewise, although no one could disagree with the exhortations of senior traffic commissioner Beverley Bell and VOSA chief exec Alastair Peoples to get on top of Driver CPC and vehicle maintenance standards, these, too, don't come cheap. Let's hope Patrick is listening.



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