



In her keynote to the IRTE Conference 2012, senior traffic commissioner Beverley Bell challenged the transport industry to sort out its standards and shake off its image

Challenge for change

“We need to raise standards right across the transport industry – all the way from technicians to drivers and operators’ transport managers. It is way past time to clean up this industry’s image.”

So said Beverley Bell, senior traffic commissioner, in her keynote address at the IRTE Conference 2012. Her view matters. If there are aspects of transport that concern traffic commissioners, then every operator, transport manager, fleet engineer and driver ought to be worrying about them, too.

Starting with the men and women behind commercial vehicle wheels, she made the point that Driver CPC (Certificate of Professional Competence) is mandatory and that time is running out. It’s important, she said, not only in terms of raising driving standards, but also ensuring that drivers understand their responsibilities when it comes to their daily walk-around checks and defect reporting.

“Make sure your drivers are up to date on their Driver CPC training,” she urged. “The breadth of ignorance is breathtaking: they are a really important part of your maintenance systems.”

Moving on to workshops, she railed against the situation that allows individuals without relevant qualifications to start businesses and sign off commercial vehicles as fit for purpose. “Anyone can set up their own maintenance operation, and this is not what we, as an industry, want,” she asserted.

But, equally, even some main agents’ standards of vehicle preparation are not as high as they should

be, she added. “That’s because maintenance contractors cannot be called to account by regulators... It’s their customers, the operators, who find themselves called into public inquiries.”

For Mrs Bell, this should not be about government imposing legislation – traffic commissioners want to regulate with a light touch, she insisted. What she wants is independent verification of the industry, by the industry. “The IRTE’s workshop accreditation scheme is a very good starting point,” she said. “But other organisations – such as SMMT [Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders], FTA [Freight Transport

Association], RHA [Road Haulage Association] and CILT [Chartered Institute of Logistics and Transport] – should also have a part to play.”

That said, she urged the industry to work towards a unified standard, not the current mix of approaches found, for example, in the dealership networks. “Volvo, Mercedes-Benz, Scania and the others all have their own maintenance standards, but my challenge to you all is to find one single, industry standard. The IRTE has been very vocal in this area and we need a ‘one size fits all’ accreditation. I am sure that VOSA and the traffic commissioners will support you in this endeavour. If it became operational, VOSA could target those operators that fall below the standard ... and we will see the wrongdoers at public inquiries.”

Turning her attention finally to transport managers, Mrs Bell condemned the “shocking” pay and deference often afforded to these professionals. “To my colleagues and I, the transport manager’s role is key. They are responsible for operators staying within the terms of their ‘O’ licences,” she reminded delegates. “So these are important people and they are not getting enough prominence.”

Her advice: operators should examine the senior traffic commissioner’s statutory guidance, available online. Similarly, transport managers must check that they have the requisite authority and are able to discharge their responsibilities fully.

“Do it now,” she requested. “We will work with you, but we expect you to help yourselves.”