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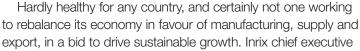


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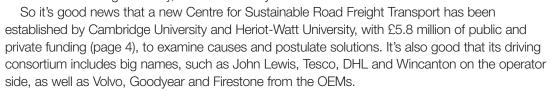
RTE engineering success

Dreaming of lower costs brings New Year cheer

s 2012 drew to a close, the Centre for Economics and Business Research, along with traffic information firm Inrix, published a survey that put shocking scale on the cost of congestion to the UK. It revealed that the economy suffers to the tune of more than £4.3 billion per year, in terms of wasted time and fuel. Delays specifically to business and freight vehicles cost some £1.1 billion every year, at today's prices, with over £426 million wasted on fuel, because of traffic, it suggested.







Prof David Cebon, director of the acclaimed Cambridge Vehicle Dynamics Consortium (CVDC) and the first director of the new centre, makes it clear that this is not just about technology. "When a vehicle delivers its freight and returns to base empty," he explains, "the fuel used on the return trip serves no useful purpose... So consumption per freight task is increased by 70%." And he continues: "When freight is taken off a large articulated truck and put onto two smaller trucks, 40% more fuel is used to deliver that same freight." Yet we still do it.

Hence the new centre's focus on marrying engineering and logistics. Beyond working on processes and technology to slash empty running, Cebon talks, for example, of minimising congestion by re-routing haulage vehicles, with the help of telematics and tracking, and rethinking freight distribution, focusing on fewer, larger, more efficient and more manoeuvrable vehicles.

It's a subtle, but nevertheless welcome, departure from the solely technical focus of most transport R&D. Equally, it provides useful additional context for reports such as Ricardo AEA's – commissioned by TKTN (Transport Knowledge Transfer Network) and LowCVP (Low Carbon Vehicle Partnership) – which recommends switching from diesel to gas, reducing rolling resistance and aerodynamic drag, and increasing hybrid and electric vehicle uptake (page 5).

Yes, of course those remain important, if we want to cut carbon emissions and hence fuel costs. They could also be instrumental in building up the UK's expertise to drive export growth. However, we do need a holistic approach – one that will be noticed by government and the DfT. As LowCVP managing director Andy Eastlake himself states: "The Low Carbon Truck Trials are a good start, but we need a long-term road transport gas strategy to build on the progress."

We wish you a happy, healthy, prosperous and productive New Year.

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