

EYES IN THE SKY

Operators using telematics systems report that, used wisely, they can generate significant savings around fuel consumption, maintenance, insurance and more. John Challen looks at latest systems and what they have to offer

Steep growth in the uptake of telematics systems among commercial transport fleets – one recent report suggests that the number in Europe will have grown from 1.5m in 2009 to 4m by 2014 – is probably proof enough that they work. Certainly, operators that have taken the plunge talk of significant improvements, in terms of both operational costs and profitability. Zenith Hygiene, for example, says its TomTom telematics and fleet management systems have helped shave £222,660 from its annual fuel bill alone.

In fact, the firm reports that average vehicle mpg soared from 26 to 43 in just three months across its fleet of 119 vans. Admittedly, that was not just the result of installing TomTom's navigation system and ecoPlus fuel monitoring devices. Zenith says that a key part of its success was a comprehensive programme of training, using TomTom's Optidrive to monitor driving style and help drivers meet achievable performance benchmarks – with incentives and extra training where necessary.

That said, its achievements didn't stop there. The scheme, implemented with the cooperation of drivers themselves, also dramatically reduced instances of speeding, idling and harsh braking,

with the usual additional benefits. What's more, it led to more efficient job despatch processes, which, in turn, enabled the company to improve response rates and ultimately also customer service.

Monitoring behaviour

But there are plenty of other examples that ought to encourage fleet managers contemplating investing in telematics and tracking technologies. Balfour Beatty Fleet Services (BBFS) – which runs the ninth largest fleet in the UK – chose Masternaut

telematics. This project was, in part, driven by Balfour Beatty's strong safety culture, as per its 'Zero Harm' campaign, which demands zero fatalities or permanently disabling injuries, along with an aspiration for zero accidents and injuries. Hence its work with Masternaut, using the company's Driver

Behaviour products, which include duty of care and fuel management functionality.

"We wanted to find a single source for our Telematics," explains BBFS' head of driver risk management Robert Lindsay. "There were a lot of smaller contracts throughout different parts of the business. So the plan was to get all of our commercial vehicles fitted with the [same] system,

**£222,660
saved in annual
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so we could get a much better handle on schedules, record accurate mileage data and be able to call vehicles back in ourselves [for maintenance], rather than relying on individuals to do that for us.”

Lindsay believes that, as a result, R&M costs and residual values should improve, with better driving standards, encouraged by the telematics system, also playing a part. He concedes that it's early days, with just 600 Balfour Beatty vehicles so far using the new Masternaut telematics system, but states that they are revealing good results.

“We've run a few trials in our fleet and seen good driving improvements as well as fuel savings of around 8%. Going forward, we're keen to improve driver behaviour further, through the in-cab feedback, and to manage our information

more effectively.” The system is now being rolled out, with “a large chunk” of the group's 5,000 commercial vehicles expected to be on the technology by the end of this year.

That should happen despite Masternaut's internal restructuring, which, Lindsay says, has caused a bit of a holdup. “Masternaut's merger with Cybit slowed down the process to some extent, because a lot of the technology we saw within Cybit was what we were interested in,” he explains. “But the system seems to be coming together well now.”

The world of telematics and vehicle tracking continues to evolve. With operators reaping the benefits of time and cost savings when using the systems correctly, fleets that have so far opted out may find themselves being left behind. 

Telematics and tracking systems update

Convinced that telematics, tracking and fleet management systems have something to offer you? Confused by the sheer number on the market? Here is a round-up of some of the latest, demonstrating the scope and variety of functionality out there.

Delphi Product & Service Solutions' new Telematics-connected vehicle technology – set for availability to UK fleets in the near future – is described as a wireless communication tool, allowing independent workshops and dealerships to ‘talk’ with fleet operators and their drivers through a device installed on the vehicle itself.

Delphi's ‘plug-and play’ device is self-installed into the diagnostic connector under the vehicle dash. Two-way communication, plus vehicle data delivered via the device, then allows garages to offer a variety of services, such as remote vehicle diagnostics, roadside assistance, service maintenance reminders, vehicle health monitoring and incident management.

CMS SupaTrak offers a wide range of telematics systems to suit different requirements, including vehicle tracking (SupaTrak), mobile working (JobTrak) and driver behaviour management – the latter through its award-winning EcoTrak. One of the company's latest developments is its second-generation Safer Driving Assistant (SDA II). This is an in-cab communications device that provides job allocation, but also helps manage driver behaviour, and enables two-way messaging between transport office operators and drivers – the objective being to improve fleet utilisation and efficiency.

Ctrack's Driver Behaviour Indicator (DBI) – an in-vehicle device that alerts drivers to infringements on the road by displaying traffic-light coloured warning lights – is proving popular. This telematics systems supplier's range includes: Ctrack mobi2, which provides real-time access to the vehicle tracking system via a smartphone or tablet; and Ctrack Driver ID, which claims to offer operators “a means of enhancing fleet

performance and reducing operational overheads by gaining greater insight into the status, whereabouts and behaviour of drivers”.

Traker has recently upgraded its Tracker Fleet range. Its latest units, explains managing director Stephen Doran, provide additional capabilities, including transient voltage detection. “This detects electrical noise to more accurately determine when an engine is running and eliminating problems such as ‘false idling’ readings,” he explains. “It also examines driver performance and has a flexible reporting suite that can be customised to meet specific needs.”

Cobra last year won its first pan-European tracking deal for commercial vehicles, with Mercedes-Benz trucks. The contract, which covers the OEM's complete range of vans and trucks, offers many benefits for operators, says Cobra managing director Andrew Smith. “Fleets have peace of mind that this system runs under Mercedes-Benz warranty, that it isn't going to cause problems with the rest of the trucks electronics equipment and it is covered throughout Europe.”

The world's first 4G telematics solution for transport, fleet and field service operators has been launched by BigChange. Connecting drivers and fleets to the office via the mobile internet, the company's JobWatch Office app links to the JobWatch multi-functional mobile app, which, in turn, runs on a rugged touchscreen mobile computer that can be used as a fixed or portable device.

JobWatch is an ‘out of the box’ system that's claimed to cover all aspects of live vehicle and logistics reporting, with GPS vehicle tracking, Sat-Nav and mobile communications. It also looks after timesheets, driver debrief and feedback, expenses, delivery management and stock management, as well as reporting for vehicle defects. BigChange says its 4G development helps operators to improve customer service, increase billable time and eliminate paperwork.