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# A professional industry needs professional CPD

**M**ale, pale and stale. That's how senior traffic commissioner Beverley Bell described the public's perception of road transport, at last month's CV Forum, staged by the CV Show organisers in London. If she's right, it follows that it's going to be difficult, on the one hand, to attract bright young things into the industry, and, on the other, to convince a sceptical populace that developments aimed at raising efficiency might also improve safety, congestion and the environment.

As she has argued several times before, Mrs Bell suggested that the industry needs to do more, much more, both to professionalise and to improve its PR. Did she think that means moving to more legislation? As a necessarily apolitical creature, she side-stepped that question. But her answer left no doubt in the minds of delegates or panellists that, while the Coalition seems to have little appetite for increasing the burden of red tape, in her view, it may well be the only realistic starting point.

It's very hard to argue with that. Given the currently shocking state of LCV first-time pass MOT statistics (50% still fail), vans specifically may yet need regulation, probably similar to that imposed on 3.5 tonners and above. If, as is clearly the case, tens of thousands of vans are running around unroadworthy, then legislation – at least concerning frequency of inspections – and associated transparent audit trails, should be extended down to, say, 2.2 tonners.

Admittedly, heavier-duty vehicles can do a lot more damage than vans, but the latter can still be lethal, particularly given the treatment many get. So, since the industry – with some notable exceptions that don't necessarily include the big fleets – can't reliably regulate itself, there seems little alternative. Public safety and the record of the industry as a whole have got to be worth the cost and effort – and the FTA's Van Excellence scheme provides a useful benchmark. As Laura Moran, commercial vehicle director for Hertz UK, which offers some 500 vans for rental, put it: "Drivers may be entitled, but that doesn't make them qualified to [drive and operate] vans."

That said, it can't stop there. How about commercial vehicle maintenance legislation, whatever the gww? At the CV Forum, John Parry, who chairs the irtec steering group, pointed out that there are still no regulations governing technicians or workshops in the UK. Interestingly, Mrs Bell nodded vigorously, stating that the traffic commissioners and VOSA are both four-square behind the IRTE's voluntary irtec technician licensing and Workshop Accreditation schemes.

Well and good. But it is still perfectly legal for anybody, without any kind of qualification, to open a workshop and offer maintenance services, with only market forces likely to inhibit their growth. Surely, the word 'voluntary' is the sticking point? It's just too weak for functions that matter so much. And that's not only in terms of inept practices' potential to impact productivity and cost – including vehicles off-road, due to incorrect maintenance – but also to result in serious injuries or loss of life. We all know that operators' 'O' licences require that they police those whom they task with vehicle inspection and maintenance, but this is too obvious a loophole.

Regularly tested qualifications and continuous professional development (CPD), through the IRTE, should be a minimum mandatory requirement for anyone doing transport business.



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