

Published by: The Society of Operations Engineers

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Registered in England:  
Company No 3667147  
Registered Charity: No 1081753  
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Transport Engineer is the official journal of IRTE.  
Produced on behalf of IRTE by Findlay Media Ltd, Hawley Mill, Hawley Road, Dartford, Kent DA2 7TJ  
Tel: 01322 221144  
www.transportengineer.org.uk

**abc** Transport Engineer is distributed free of charge to SOE members, dependent on membership sector. For non-members, the annual subscription rate (12 issues) is £75 UK and EU, or £77 airmail outside EU. For other SOE members, the discounted rate is £30.

Printed by: Pensord Press UK  
ISSN: 0020-3122

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# Will 2014 be the year of dual-fuel and gas trucks?

**H**appy New Year to all our readers. And while it is now 2014, as we go to press 2013 remains the big issue. On the one hand, operators are still digesting the Autumn Statement. On the other, OEMs are worrying about the truck market, now that Euro 6 is upon us and even derogated Euro 5 vehicles aren't moving fast.

What's the thinking? Well, for operators, the chancellor's widely-anticipated cancellation of the 1.61 pence per litre fuel duty hike was good news, saving the industry an estimated £186 million, according to the Freight Transport Association.

Granted, it might have been better: FTA chief exec Theo de Pencier has been outspoken in his criticism, pointing out that what his members need is a fuel duty reduction and some guarantee of stability to encourage any realistic investment. But even he was enthusiastic about George Osborne's decision to maintain the differential in duty between diesel and road fuel gases, such as LNG (liquefied natural gas) and CNG (compressed natural gas) – as used in dual-fuel commercial vehicles – for the next decade.

Understandably, that also went down well with LowCVP (the Low Carbon Vehicle Partnership), which has been campaigning for longer-term certainty in duty rates for cleaner fuels to encourage their wider adoption. LowCVP managing director Andy Eastlake also drew attention to the chancellor's indication that the coalition will review the incentive's impact on cleaner vehicle uptake and public finances at Budget 2018, if elected – and that it will seek EU approval to apply a reduced rate to methanol, too. He also approved of the new National Infrastructure Plan and the government's intention to invest £5 million during 2014–15 in an electric vehicle readiness programme for public sector fleets.

For some, all this is about as green a light as you're likely to get to invest in more environmentally-friendly engines. The RHA (Road Haulage Association), which held a post-Statement briefing – supported by major industry players, including DAF, Mercedes-Benz, Volvo Trucks and dual-fuel technology supplier Hardstaff Group – certainly thinks so. It is one among many now stating openly that operators need to take gas and dual-fuel trucks more seriously. "We know, from member surveys, that [the initiative] will create new interest in the gas option... It is important that members are aware of the funding, technical, commercial and political issues surrounding gas that affect their businesses," commented RHA director of policy Jack Semple.

Yes indeed. And operators can also now get advice from big names such as Asda, Brit European, DHL, Eddie Stobart, Howard Tenens and Sainsbury's – all of which have taken the plunge with significant dual-fuel diesel-and-methane haulage fleets, plus their own refuelling stations. The only remaining stumbling blocks are the up-front cost (still around £20,000), the relatively few OEMs offering dual-fuel trucks and the still 'patchy' gas infrastructure.

All these will be resolved, however, as demand grows and the economies of scale kick in. And, as they do, so the cost-benefits around running and financing dual-fuel will also become more attractive. Look forward to a virtuous circle of environmentally-friendly, cost-cutting technology in 2014 and beyond. And when that happens, manufacturers, too, may see their fortunes improve.



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