

ON THE RIGHT TACH

Transport managers and drivers need to know their responsibilities regarding tachograph use, as the industry embraces new legislation and next-generation systems. John Challen reports

Euro 6 isn't the only technology-forcing legislation to have made waves in the HGV world. Tachograph legislation – including the introduction of the 'one-minute rule' – has had its impacts and is still driving manufacturers to refine their offerings, with so-called smart tachographs due out by 2017.

Some operators feel like they need all the help they can get – leading many to Road Tech, which

offers an unlimited (in terms of the number of vehicles) 28-day trial of its Tachomaster product. This unit offers instant analysis of driver and vehicle data, while also allowing investigation of driving styles so that fleet managers can see where improvements are possible.

In fact, Road Tech claims to handle 63% of the UK's transport fleet – including the likes of Tesco, DHL and Sainsbury's – so is in the thick of smart tacho development. Managing director Derek Beavor points to its most recent addition, a DCRS (driver compliance reporting system), which, he says, virtually runs itself. "If you've got drivers making infringements, you can allocate your own points system to manage them. But you've got an accurate record of who has done what, and when," he says.

Beavor asserts that operators themselves are also often responsible for driving system improvements in the knowledge that the technology is there. He gives the example of many demanding automatic downloads along the lines of current telematics systems. Many also want to link their

VDO's DTCO 2.1 active digital tachometer already has a GPS module



tachograph systems to their telematics, as well as to their fleet management software.

Why? “The telematics system tells you where the vehicle has been and how long it drove for. The tachograph details when the driver drove. And the fleet management system tells you who you work for and what you charge,” explains Beevor. “With all those elements, you have costings for a job in moments – something that used to take hours when it had to be done manually.”

Going live

One company that has integrated system functions is Masternaut, predominantly through its Masternaut Live technology. “We can extract data on a minute-by-minute basis, or whenever the driving status changes,” comments Walther Bernard, managing director at Masternaut E.Novation. While previously, only archived data was visible to fleet managers, now all information can be accessed in real time, allowing better management of daily and weekly driving for both vehicles and drivers.

“Going even further, with Live data we can simulate the one-minute rule in Masternaut,” says Bernard. “Fleet managers can see the benefits of the additional driving time on their screens or smartphones wherever they are.” They may be in the back office, but they can see the drivers’ messages in their vehicles. “If a driver is exceeding or close to exceeding his or her driving time, and they get a message on the tachograph and confirm they’ve seen it, the despatcher also sees the message,” confirms Bernard.

When harvesting information from digital tachographs, the biggest danger, according to Foster Tachographs’ managing director Gordon Humphreys, is operators relying on drivers’ cards. Unfortunately, this doesn’t provide the full picture. “Operators need to make sure they dedicate sufficient time to identify unauthorised vehicle movements, as well as those recorded by the driver,” he comments. “Every time a vehicle is driven without the card in a position to record, it still records onto the vehicle unit.”

That insight matters: vehicle movements might be entirely above board, with, for example, technicians in company yards moving vehicles. But how do you distinguish between these events and drivers pulling away from loading bays when they are outside hours? Humphreys makes the point that telematics and geofences help, but they don’t prove the identity of the driver when no driver card is inserted.

Humphreys cites the Alison Jones Transport tribunal case, which set a broad precedent for traffic commissioners’ expectations of operators and their transport managers. Essentially, that case underlined the importance of operators running supervision systems and audits to prove that their

driver monitoring systems work, specifically in terms of identifying drivers’ hours and tachograph offences.


“In other words, whatever systems are in place, they need to be robust enough to identify breaches. If they aren’t, the system fails. So using driver card information alone is not enough. They need data from vehicle units, time sheets and other documentation. A comparison is needed between them and the tachograph record produced by the driver.”

What about the future of tachographs? Proposals lodged by the European Commission back in 2011 give clues to the next generation. Humphreys reckons ‘smart’ tachographs are likely to be in development during 2015–16 and ready for installation in vehicles by 2017.

“These systems will help identify start and finish locations through GPS technology, but at the moment, I don’t know where they sit when it comes to an individual’s privacy. There is also talk of providing further information from the tachograph to the driver, in terms of compliance. But the danger is that even though it is EC legislation, different member states will interpret the law differently.”

One manufacturer already offering a GPS module to its tachographs is VDO, which launched its DTCO 2.1 active digital tachograph at April’s CV Show, in Birmingham. Its new unit is said to be the easiest to use, and the developer says it can help operators and fleet managers to improve efficiency.

“There is so much technology in our newest unit that the fleet manager is potentially unaware of,” states product manager Peter Needham.

“We now have the option to download ‘S’ file data from the unit when the vehicle has been in a collision. That is vital for accident analysis and helps us discover what happened in the lead up to the accident.” 

Left: Masternaut presents fleet managers with a range of data, including vehicle location, speed and driver activities

Power to the people

Stoneridge says its latest tachograph – the SE5000 Exact Duo2 – has been developed with feedback from users. “Whether a driver, fleet manager or workshop engineer, our customers had a say in what went into the new tachograph,” insists Victoria Tramma, the company’s marketing and sales manager. “All features have been tailored to our customers’ needs and will help them plan their week more effectively,” she adds.

One requirement was the inclusion of Working Time Directive calculations, which provide drivers with warnings if they are approaching their daily or weekly limits. This feature alone should reduce infringements and fines, reckons Tramma.

In addition, the new model has been equipped with an advanced Period of Availability (POA) mode, which allows drivers to configure how the POA is counted – giving them and their employers more flexibility and control over breaks and rest times.