

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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Publisher  
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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](http://www.transportengineer.org.uk)

Transport Engineer  
is distributed free of charge to SOE  
members, dependent on membership sector.  
For non-members, the annual subscription  
rate (12 issues) is £77 UK and EU, or £79  
airmail outside EU. For other SOE members,  
the discounted rate is £31.

Printed by  
Pensord Press UK

ISSN  
0020-3122

Some of the articles and guidance included in  
Transport Engineer may make a contribution  
to your personal CPD requirements.

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## Fuel duty, VED, ULEVs: time for new balls?

While Wimbledon and the Tories' first budget since 1996 are already weeks ago, some of the latter's detail should be giving us pause for thought. And not only the obvious faults.

Yes, we breathed a collective sigh of relief over the decision to continue the freeze on fuel duty - although the RHA (Road Haulage Association), FTA (Freight Transport Association) and others made clear their disappointment that an economy-boosting 3p a litre duty reduction wasn't countenanced. So, hardly an ace.

And yes, those same voices railed against George Osborne's decision to dismiss financial and structural measures to support our industry in recruiting and training truck drivers - despite his apparent recognition of the issue in the coalition's spring budget. Double fault.

But, despite initially welcoming his pronouncement that proceeds from the revised VED (vehicle exercise duty) scheme will be ring-fenced to revive the UK's crumbling road infrastructure, some now question its detail. How can it be right to lavish incentives on pure electrics at the expense of 'premium' plug-in hybrids and other ULEVs (ultra-low emission vehicles), which will be taxed similarly to high polluting vehicles? Evident anomalies like this - and that training levy on large companies - are raising eyebrows. Two double faults.

Returning to commercial vehicles, however, government measures are already in place to support R&D for lower-emission drivetrains. Indeed, Britain is very well served in this regard, with innovations accordingly impressive for everything from CV range extenders to boosters for engine downsizing and/or downspeeding, and diesel conversions (page 20). Unquestionably an ace.

The issues for most in our low-margin sector, however, remain confidence and ROI. Take heed, George. If you think you need 'new balls', next month's IRTE Conference will serve up some crackers.

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