

Cutting carbon

Transport's impact on air quality, particularly in city centres, has risen up the political agenda, LowCVP managing director Andy Eastlake told IRTE Conference delegates. Steve Banner reports

Vans and trucks represent a forgotten sector of transport so far as carbon reduction is concerned. So said LowCVP (Low Carbon Vehicle Partnership) managing director Andy Eastlake, delivering the keynote at this year's IRTE Conference. "They represent the biggest opportunity for us and it's one we're trying to grab," he told delegates. "So we're offering ideas to help move the carbon reduction agenda forwards."

The bus market shows just how much can be achieved, he insisted. "It has undergone a transformation over the past 10 years," said Eastlake. "This is now one of the most advanced sectors in the UK when it comes to lowering its environmental footprint." Light commercials in particular need to follow suit, given their vast potential for carbon cutting – with 4 million-plus on the highway. "The total is growing fast, which means their carbon impact is growing fast, too," he asserted.

Set up in 2002, LowCVP is a public/private membership organisation that exists to accelerate the shift towards low-carbon vehicles and fuels – something Eastlake describes as inevitable. The organisation is also there to encourage UK businesses to take advantage of the opportunities. "We're part-funded by DfT [Department for Transport] so something we're attempting to do is help British SMEs get some of their great ideas out of the shed and onto the road," said Eastlake.

LowCVP participants include government bodies, vehicle manufacturers, technology specialists, academics and fuel suppliers. "Fuel is a critical component when it comes to decarbonising transport," he said. "You can have the most fuel-efficient truck in the world, but if your fuel is made from coal then you haven't moved forward very far.

Fortunately, fuel technology is moving ahead as fast as vehicle technology."

Environmental lobbyists are also involved with LowCVP. "That includes people like Greenpeace," explained Eastlake. "You may think Greenpeace simply throws rocks at the transport industry. However, its objectives are very much aligned with ours, in terms of moving to minimise transport's impact on the environment. In fact, Greenpeace's Doug Parr is one of LowCVP's directors and a very sensible voice in all of this."

GREEN DIRECTION

That said, Eastlake believes the road transport industry is facing what he refers to as a perfect storm. "Air quality, particularly in city centres, has risen up the political agenda over the last couple of years," he observed. "In some cities, road transport is responsible for around 60% of NOx emissions and, as a consequence, is very much in the sights of DEFRA [Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs] when it comes to cleaning up.

"Remember that the Climate Change Act, which was written into UK law back in 2008, sets the country's objectives," he continued. "It means Britain has a legal commitment to reduce carbon output by 80% by 2050 compared with 2000. At present, transport is the only sector that isn't reducing. Carbon emissions from transport have in fact increased over the past year."

Van and truck manufacturers are coming to

the party, Eastlake conceded. And he cited an online newsletter from the SMMT (Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders), which highlighted zero-emission commercial vehicles in three of its lead news items. "The industry is responding to the challenges set by the regulators," he stated. However, unfortunately, many products highlighted are not yet available to operators.

So what is LowCVP doing in the meantime? And, when they come, will these new products deliver what they promise? "One of the things we're trying to build around them is proof," he stated – evidence that the technology works in the real world. "Part of our job is to come up with robust processes that deliver evidence that people can understand. So what we want to do is develop a robust, independent and government-endorsed method of evaluating technologies."

That will be particularly important for assessing vans but also trucks, and here LowCVP has been working closely with TfL (Transport for London) on its LoCity reduced urban emissions initiative. "The current test cycle does not give operators a van fuel consumption figure they can make any use of," explained Eastlake. "One key development is the introduction of clean air zones, which will be mandated in five cities. We expect those zones to be rolled out much more widely. And we have the ULEZ (ultra low emission zone) in central London.

"So something we're aiming to do is create a national framework for clean air zones. What we

FACTS

- In some cities, road transport is responsible for 60% of NOx
- LowCVP is to create a national framework for clean air zones



"The industry is not on track to meet its obligation in terms of the use of renewable energy. So we'll be listening to operators and looking at how usage can be increased"

don't want is a situation where the truck you need to go into Leeds is different to the one you need for Birmingham."

This is not a trivial undertaking. While celebrating the environmental progress made by bus manufacturers and operators, Eastlake pointed to the fact that they have benefited from some £120 million of environmental grants from government over the past 20 years. That is 10 times the grant value lavished on the commercial vehicle sector – yet the latter is 10 times the size. "As a result of all the money and effort put in, fully 40% of buses sold in the UK last year were classed as low-carbon. And pretty much all of the alternative fuel technologies – from full-electric to hydrogen – was represented."

Support is now being offered to encourage freight vehicles in a similar direction, he continued, pointing to the government's OLEV (Office for Low Emission

Vehicles), which has funds available. Additionally, LowCVP is represented on the Low Emission Freight and Logistics Trial, which has attracted £25 million worth of funding to help commercial vehicle operators test new technologies.

"There'll be a lot happening over the next few months," he insisted. "The Freight Carbon Review, which is a major analysis of the impact of carbon in the freight sector, will be coming out soon," he said. "We'll also see the report on the Low Carbon Truck Trial, which involved 300 trucks, predominantly running dual fuel, diesel and gas. And LowCVP has been evaluating the performance of gas trucks to help operators determine how best they can make use of them."

But it's not all technical, he told delegates. Consultations are underway to resolve payload penalty problems posed by some technologies

(notably battery power), because of current gross vehicle weight limits – especially where vans are concerned. And legal length retractions that certain proposed aerodynamic aids breach are also being addressed, with regulatory derogations likely in both cases.

"Another issue coming up is the renewable transport fuels obligation consultation," said Eastlake. "The industry is not on track to meet its obligation in terms of the use of renewable energy. So we'll be listening to operators and looking at how usage can be increased."

Eastlake conceded that it's not yet a perfect world for freight carriers. However, even as things stand, there is a lot that operators can do to shrink their carbon footprint, he insisted. For now, he cited measures such as cutting unladen weight wherever possible and fitting low-rolling-resistance tyres. ■