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Cooking on gas or driving on technology?

With a report from the cross-party Energy and Climate Change Committee concluding that the UK will miss its renewable energy targets “unless there is a step change in transport”, something looks likely to give – and soon.

Add the fact that its report ‘2020 renewable heat and transport targets’ also discounts electrification of long-haul HGVs as a realistic prospect (in contrast to light- and mid-duty delivery and utility fleets, which are seeing development), and that something should surely be government support for gas, and in particular biomethane?

Of course, there are other alternative fuels – including LPG (liquefied petroleum gas) for which there is arguably already a workable refuelling infrastructure. But government and industry both know that, if it’s renewables that matter, biomethane ticks all the boxes. And it simultaneously deals with the equally vexing issue of exhaust missions – particulates, NOx and CO₂.

So we may be forgiven for expecting financial incentives – not only for building more methane plants and stations, but encouraging uptake of dual-fuel and the latest generation of higher-torque gas trucks. Each is, after all, vital to attract operators away from diesel.

Well, maybe. But support is one thing: incentives are another. Government’s latest is £24 million of OLEV and Innovate funding for further trials – this time covering trucks and vans – in the wake of the Low Carbon Truck Trial. Meanwhile, DfT is consulting on extending its longer semi-trailer trial, following good green successes to-date.

As ever, it seems industry itself must step up to the plate – which puts enabling technology and market forces in the driving seat. However, the action here is less about gas and more about IT and ‘Logistics 4.0’. So, while integrated supply chains will doubtless deliver environmental savings, they won’t be on the scale required.

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