

Sharing the space

How have FORS and CLOCS affected UK truck operators - and not just those in London and the South East?
Brian Weatherley hears it from the IRTE Conference expert panel

Jacqueline O'Donovan, managing director of North London-based O'Donovan Waste Disposal, reminded delegates that construction vehicles are often in the press for the wrong reasons, especially in London. "But with the industry expected to deliver good examples of best practice," she said, "FORS [Fleet Operator Recognition Scheme] and CLOCS [Construction Logistics and Cyclist Safety] have underpinned efforts to raise standards."

Though a strong advocate of both schemes - the company is a FORS Gold operator, a member of the FORS Governance and Standards Advisory Group and a CLOCS Champion - O'Donovan reported they'd had little impact on her company. "We were already meeting the requirements through staff training, best-in-class fleet safety, monitoring our operations and doing above and beyond what's required."

And for Donovan, technology isn't the answer to avoiding collisions. "The amount of technology needed in the cab is so vast it's reached its limit and acts as an overload for drivers." Far better, she insisted, to improve direct vision - challenging truck manufacturers to tackle this issue without delay.

O'Donovan Waste Disposal recently took delivery of the UK's first Mercedes Econic skiploader and driver feedback has been fantastic, she said. "The view from the driving seat has been improved immensely and they can gain eye contact. Drivers want to carry out their work with peace of mind. They want [more] direct vision and the quicker we can get to that the better."

Confirming an on-cost for complying with FORS and CLOCS, O'Donovan nevertheless maintained: "Since becoming FORS-accredited our insurance cost has reduced by over £2,000 per vehicle per year." The firm has also seen a 33% reduction in incidents while average claims costs have dropped by 66%. "It's

undeniable. These savings far outweigh the initial outlay. And if we can help reduce the number of vulnerable road users who are injured or killed, we can't question the cost."

Moving on, Travis Perkins (another FORS Gold member) group fleet director Graham Bellman reckoned CLOCS has done wonders for construction logistics. "It mirrors a lot of what FORS is about - education and safety systems. It also empowers our customers to take some part of the responsibility in getting vehicles safely on to sites."

FACTORY-FIT SAFETY

But, with increasingly busy streets and more cyclists, he asked: "Would you want to be a driver today?" Operators, regulators and truck makers, he said, have to make their jobs easier. Along with trialling low-entry cab designs, Bellman wants more safety kit available as factory fitments. He asked: "Why have I still got to buy a reversing camera and bolt a screen on to the truck dashboard?"

Just as the construction industry provided the spur for CLOCS, Bellman asked delegates: "What about every other sector? You're all champions. You need to pick the ball up and run with it. FORS is a great network to move on." The road safety aspects of both schemes should also be shared with customers, he added. "We've got a great framework in FORS and CLOCS. When you're dealing with your customers, you must emphasise it." And Bellman's parting

message: "Invest in safety where you can, with what you can. Embrace safe urban driving, embrace all of the warning systems you can put on vehicles. Many of them are very cost effective."

Having been involved in developing accident prevention measures since 2003, Cemex's national fleet engineer Paul Clarke confirmed the company has always strived to be at the forefront. Prior to FORS and CLOCS, the firm had already developed its own additional safety items to help drivers avoid collisions with vulnerable road users.

"We don't just buy items off the shelf," he explained. "We trial them with the drivers, get feedback and then [if suitable] we'll fit them across the board." In addition to being a FORS Gold member, Cemex vehicles either meet or exceed CLOCS requirements. "CLOCS has enabled rapid unification," Clarke told delegates. "It was disjointed before, but now we can all work to the same standard." Sharing best practice among CLOCS members has ensured success, he said. However, like his fellow panellists, Clarke declared: "I don't like bolting bits on after I've paid for my truck that could then fail and nobody wants to pick them up under R&M. We need a lot more safety kit fitted at source."

Meanwhile, two years ago Clarke asked Mercedes-Benz if it could build a tipper based on a low-entry Econic. The result has been successfully running with Cemex in London. "We're getting more because that's the way the industry has to go." Cemex's current

FACT

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fleet policy is to specify either low-height/high-vision chassis, or standard models and enhance driver vision with, for example, extra windows in nearside doors.

What of FORS itself? FORS director John Hix said that when the scheme went national and commercial in 2015, some doomsayers thought it would take a nosedive. However, he told delegates, it continues to thrive beyond London and recently celebrated its 4,000th accredited operator. “That’s a great achievement for FORS and the industry,” he insisted. And he added that 70% of FORS-accredited firms now operate outside the M25, while transport buyers are increasingly demanding FORS accreditation throughout supply chains.

To date some 30,000 drivers have gone through FORS courses like safe urban driving. And an updated FORS standard has now been published (www.fors-online.org.uk) with strengthened environmental credentials. There are also further best practice developments, including the introduction of risk-based driver licence checking and new Gold-level requirements on noise assessment.

Hix confirmed the new standard is clearer and more user-friendly. Responding to operator calls for a single national approach, he declared: “We’ve worked hard to provide that and we’re happy to work with anybody with the same vision as us.”

As demand grows for direct driver vision on urban vehicles, what are manufacturers doing? Dennis Eagle’s chief engineer Jon Sayers reported that its trademark low-entry cab (branded Urban Safety Vehicle) has always been focused around operator and driver safety. Hence the direct vision and ease of access and egress to and from the cab.

And on greater integration of safety equipment, Sayers promised: “On next year’s model, we’ll be integrating the majority of these [safety systems] as factory-fit options... We’re acutely aware of driver overload, so we’re trying to minimise requirements on the driver to observe different warnings and integrate everything into a simple warning system.”

What about urban policy? Glen Davies, who works with CILT on city logistics, environment and safety (and previously played a major role in developing

TfL’s FORS and CLOCS) predicted that London will continue to set the agenda. Referring to this year’s mayoral elections, he said: “For the first time, we saw a powerful mayoral manifesto aiming to promote safer, cleaner lorries, and reduce their numbers in peak periods. Over the next four years those who manufacture and operate HGVs will experience significant changes.”

Those will reach well beyond London, he warned. “Whatever happens in London will have a knock-on effect throughout the country. Why? Because across the UK, HGVs are over-represented in collisions involving cyclists and pedestrian fatalities.”

With a ULEZ (ultra low emission zone) expected in London by 2020 and London mayor Sadiq Khan accelerating its arrival, he observed: “We’re seeing clean air zones across the rest of the UK, too.” But for those schemes to be successful, there must be clearly defined and legally-defensible standards. “Politicians and clients may be dealing the cards, but manufacturers and operators need to play their best hand – by making a contribution to the debate.” ■