



# UP AND DOWN

**R**oad tanker haulage firm Abbey Logistics has used telematics for tracking its 400 trucks, 550 bulk liquid and powder trailers and monitoring the performance of its 550 drivers, for 10 years or more. But when COVID-19 hit, it relied on that data to solve a mystery.

In the early days of lockdown, as pubs and restaurants closed, and as panic buying subsided, the company's business declined by 10%. In response, it switched off agency contracts and reduced subcontractors. All things being equal, those reductions should have increased average delivery times.

But in fact, every delivery to every customer was 100% on time. Assuming that the company still had too much resource, it furloughed 10 drivers, and parked up 10 trucks; but performance stayed the same. "We ended up furloughing 20% of the workforce," states CEO Steve Granite, but targets were still being met.

Why had it managed to be so efficient? And how could it ramp up effectively as business came back? To answer those questions, it asked telematics partner Microlise for a report about fleet average vehicle speed during lockdown, figuring that the lack of congestion on the roads might be

**Vehicle tracking data, summed up across hundreds of vehicles and thousands of trips and hundreds of thousands of miles can actually reveal quite a lot about how a transport operation works, as Abbey Transport recently discovered. By Will Dalrymple**

interfering with the numbers. Recalls Granite: "They gave us the data, and it was just so clear."

Operational speeds rose 6%, from a fleet average of 37mph to 40mph, over many thousands of miles travelled. While that's an interesting statistic on its own, Abbey has been able to apply it to inform its strategy on emerging from lockdown. "Once that average speed gets back to 37mph, which was what we were travelling at, then we know we are back to normal as a business in terms of demand. And then if we still have people on furlough, then clearly we have excess labour."

As congestion has proven to be so important to the efficiency of the

business, it has started planning a greater extent of operations at weekends and nights, when the roads are quieter.

Beyond the immediate issues posed by lockdown, the operator has been focused on productivity for some time because of coming out of a corporate transition from a family-owned to venture-capital-funded structure. Changes implemented during this time have resulted in a couple of loss-making years, so it had organised some 50 projects to turn the business around. (During lockdown in April and May, it managed to not only maintain profitability, but actually accelerate it.)

Abbey took the unusual step of releasing its data in a May report (see box, and [www.is.gd/ihumex](http://www.is.gd/ihumex)). Granite explains why: "It's a tough sector to be in, and we want to help other hauliers by saying to them, 'You may not have realised this, but there is an opportunity through COVID to protect your profitability.' I've talked to a number of operators. [Some] companies say, 'I've lost 10% of my business, but I've

## BENCHMARKING ADVICE

Suppliers CTrack, Teletrac Navman, Webfleet, Geotab and Microlise explain more about the operational benefits of benchmarking telematics data, and explain how it is done, in an online-only article. Read it via [www.is.gd/gorevu](http://www.is.gd/gorevu)



## BBEY LOGISTICS AVERAGE FLEET KPIS PRE- AND POST-COVID-19 LOCKDOWN

	February (pre-COVID-19)	April (28 March-26 April)	% change over February	May (27 April-26 May)	% change over February
Average speed (miles per hour)	37.9	38.8	2.37	40.1	5.80
MPG (miles per gallon)	8.38	8.6	2.63	8.65	3.22
CO2 emissions (g/km)	928.06	891.22	-3.97	869.79	-6.28
Instances of acceleration >95%, %	5.61	4.53	-19.25	4.8	-14.44
Engine idling, %	2.51	2.04	-18.73	2.25	-10.36
Green-band driving*, %	90.39	91.52	1.25	91.36	1.07
Cruise control, %	45.72	53.15	16.25	52.19	14.15

\*Where the vehicle is being driven within the most efficient and economical RPM range for that vehicle type

just furloughed 5% of my drivers'. They could have protected themselves more, just understanding what the impact of congestion was."

Reflects the CEO: "It's definitely opened our eyes to what telematics can actually provide." He offers the example of the sales team, who quote new work based on standard assumptions of travel times: six hours from Liverpool to London, for example. He says that Microlise is now working on providing it a report of the average time taken for the major routes over a year, which takes into account all of the incidents, all the congestion, as well as all of the good runs. Then customers such as Abbey can put it into their costings to generate more accurate quotations. "Because you could be doing it every day, and losing money, because it takes you seven hours, not six hours," remarks Granite.

Another example is tracking the time taken to load or unload a full semi-trailer at customer distribution centres. Although Abbey Logistics assumes a two-hour period to load or unload, troublesome customers can slow down progress, Granite points out. Because the telematics system tracks GPS location and time, the system already knows how long vehicles are on site, so it should be possible to produce a list of

long pick-ups or drop-offs; those delays can then be raised with the customer.

Granite concludes: "The questions that have been thrown up across the business have been huge, and Microlise have been great. They are really keen to say 'we are a data intelligence business, and we can do so much more'. But the sector just doesn't understand what it needs to know."

### COMBINED EFFORT

Microlise is not the only telematics firm that has been monitoring CV performance during the COVID-19 lockdown. Telematics firms Webfleet Services and Geotab have combined their dataset from 10,000 customers and three million connected vehicles worldwide to produce the Commercial Mobility Recovery Dashboard ([www.is.gd/yasuvi](http://www.is.gd/yasuvi)).

It has found, for example, that since 23 March, the level of commercial transport activity in the UK was among the lowest in Europe, in the range of 50-60% of the pre-COVID-19 baseline. The data has been anonymised and aggregated so it cannot be traced back to the activity of any single customer.

Neil Cawse, Geotab

CEO, said in May: "Together with Webfleet Solutions, we are uniquely positioned to leverage and analyse our data for the greater good and provide deep, data-driven insights like never before for our collective customers and communities alike. Adds Geotab VP of data and analytics Mike Branch: "In understanding the state of recovery by region and industry, fleets can use this benchmark to help them make decisions for their own recovery."

He concludes: "While the volume of trips is an excellent indicator for looking at COVID-19 recovery metrics by industry and region, fleets are using many other benchmarking metrics in their day-to-day operations to help optimise their own efficiency." **TE**

### A NEW SOURCE OF DATA

Operator, supplier and maintainer of trailers TIP Trailer Services has launched its own trailer telematics offering, TIP Insight. Not only will this offer geographical tracking, with a geofencing capability, but also it will provide information about tyre pressures (TPMS), refrigerated units and electric brake performance management systems.

The service is modular, so customers of rental trailers for example are able to switch on the services they require, without having to purchase ones they do not need. Information will be accessible in the company's corporate 'FleetConnected' cloud data platform, with customised reporting tools also available.

**"The data has been able to help us understand why we're getting an upside in productivity, and then also planning for when that upside will unwind"**

Steve Granite

