



Targeted roadside inspections have led to a general improvement of the roadworthiness of the UK's truck fleet, but more work is required, reports John Challen

# Enforce the issue

Undetected or ignored, mechanical or operational problems on a truck or bus are a big problem. Not only to the driver and operator, but also to other road users. DVSA has made a concerted effort over recent years to spot and deal with defective vehicles at the earliest opportunity through more careful identification and roadside inspection of those that are potentially problematic.

"We know that a minority of operators don't manage maintenance properly, and annual test data shows vehicles can - and do - have defects, even when the operator knows they're going to be inspected," says Marian Kitson, director of enforcement at DVSA.

The inspection process is quite involved. Firstly, DVSA traffic examiners will look at drivers' hours via downloads of tachograph activity and also check whether the driver has a CPC. They also weigh vehicles to ensure they are compliant, given how much an overloaded truck can affect braking performance.

The checks are carried out either at the roadside or at dedicated testing

sites. When a defective vehicle is identified near official check sites, the enforcement stopping officer will pull a truck or bus over by lighting up their 'Follow me' sign, and expect the vehicle to follow the car to the stop site. The checks are used to keep unsafe vehicles off the road.

To assist the enforcement offensive, DVSA also has accredited 'static' stopping officers who stand at the roadside - in suitable locations - and direct a vehicle into the check site. This approach is usually used on lower-speed roads where DVSA uses layby facilities to conduct the check. The agency also has the benefit of help from elsewhere within the emergency services. "Sometimes we'll carry out joint operations with the police, and they'll undertake the vehicle stop and our people will check the vehicle and driver," explains Kitson.

## ON THE RIGHT SIDE OF THE LAW

There are plenty of common-sense measures that drivers and operators can take to ensure that vehicles don't get stopped by the enforcement team. "DVSA uses intelligence from operator risk scores (OCRS) and traffic

activities (such as whether there are any tachograph or drivers' hours offences) and intelligence markers, where we have known high-risk vehicles, drivers and/or operators," explains Kitson, who adds that some vehicles are stopped as part of planned operations, targeting particular types of vehicles. "We will also stop vehicles where there is a visible road safety risk identified, such as an insecure load," says Kitson. "The police will also stop vehicles on this basis."

Examiners are tasked with dealing with numerous drivers' hours infringements on pulled vehicles as well a variety of mechanical defects, which - if ignored - could have serious consequences. The issues range from the condition of tyres, brake systems and components to loose wheel nuts and excess weight. The most recent data from DVSA shows the three most 'popular' defects were condition of tyres, indicator and hazard warning lights, and brake systems. In a bid to increase roadworthiness rates, DVSA often shares the most extreme examples of poor maintenance on social media.

Kitson says that since starting to take an intelligence-led approach to

***“The vehicles we stop are targeted using intelligence marking, data from ANPR and visual identification of any dangerous faults”***

Marian Kitson

enforcement, fewer vehicles have been stopped. “DVSA has identified similar numbers of defects and infringements as previous years, which is what we would expect from taking a more targeted approach.”

In the ideal world, the number of defects spotted/recorded would be zero, but Kitson reveals that the official (and more realistic) target is 28,000 defects/traffic offences a year.

“The vehicles we stop are targeted using intelligence marking, data from ANPR and visual identification of any dangerous faults. This can be at the roadside, during joint operations with other agencies, or at an operating centre (from where the company operates the vehicles) or where a vehicle is making deliveries to,” she says. “This is to reduce the burden on compliant operators and drivers.”

Operators/drivers who have Earned Recognition status are not routinely stopped, says Kitson – for good reason. “DVSA Earned Recognition is a way to prove a business meets driver and vehicle standards. Operators regularly share performance information with DVSA. In return, their vehicles are less likely to be stopped for inspections.

“It’s a voluntary scheme that’s designed to work for operators of all sizes and allows DVSA to target the serially and seriously non-compliant.”

Getting pulled over by the enforcement team isn’t something to be taken lightly. Kitson says that in the most serious cases, there will be follow-up investigations with the operator. “These investigations can result in prosecution and/or a public inquiry,” she advises. In addition, drivers can be called to a conduct hearing by a traffic commissioner, where their competence to hold a truck licence will be analysed.



### MOBILE CONNECTION

One of the latest tools at the disposal of the roadside enforcement teams is DVSA’s mobile inspection unit (MIU – pictured above), which is being trialled at fixed check sites across the country. Introduced after considerable research, Kitson says that while it is too early to tell what impact the MIU has had on enforcement, she is hopeful it will make a big difference. “It is a new, bespoke portable vehicle check site, which can be deployed on any accessible flat piece of land of appropriate size,” she explains. “The facilities enable vehicles of most sizes and types to be inspected and make sure they meet appropriate safety standards.” The facilities of the MIU rival DVSA’s most capable of enforcement sites; there’s a roller brake tester on board, as well as an under vehicle inspection scanner, shaker plates and the potential to check tachograph calibration.

Transported using a standard container trailer, the MIU is seen as complementary to the current enforcement teams, as opposed to a replacement. “The vehicle gives DVSA the extra capability to carry out enforcement activity more widely to keep roads, vehicles and drivers safe,”

she explains. “This reduces our reliance on fixed check sites and ensures that the most serious and serially non-compliant cannot avoid our checks by navigating around those fixed sites – we can take our check site to where we find them.”

A vehicle examiner who has used the MIU commented: “A lot of tech is packed into one mobile unit. It takes us around 15 minutes to fully extend the ramps and the roof and a little more time to get everything else set up.

“We inspect the vehicle in the normal way but with the added advantage of being able to use the roller brake tester and other equipment on the unit to enhance the overall effectiveness of the inspection itself,” explains the examiner. “This set-up is a major step forward as far as roadside inspections are concerned and it proved to those present that the MIU had potential. It also gave a certain amount of professionalism to the vehicle examiner when checking vehicle brakes.”

The examiner concludes: “The drivers were very impressed with what we are now able to achieve at the roadside and I’m sure most of them thought the experience and knowledge that their brakes are working correctly was beneficial. This is a positive outcome.” 