

Sustainability at the heart of vehicle fleets

The two-pronged approach to green business

Fleet managers face many pressures and 'green' issues will not always be top of their agenda. However, it is becoming increasingly important for companies to take measures to responsibly reduce their carbon footprint, not only from a CSR perspective but also to achieve significant cost reductions.

Environmental legislation is becoming increasingly stringent and tax liabilities increasingly demanding. Company boards also recognise the customer and shareholder appeal of corporate social responsibility policies that have an environmental focus.

Vehicle fleets inevitably contribute to companies' carbon emissions and are therefore a key area of focus when looking for ways to improve environmental performance. Making this happen requires good planning, but it is achievable – and in ways that will help businesses realise considerable tax and fuel cost savings.

Tackling the issue requires consideration of the fixed and variable overheads of a fleet and its operation. The vehicle fleet is the fixed element and upgrading it by purchasing or leasing more fuel-efficient vehicles can have a considerable impact. The cost of doing, however, may frequently prove financially prohibitive and cannot easily be done overnight.

How the fleet operates is the flexible element, which through careful management can result in immediate environmental gains, as well as cost savings. As with all effective business improvements, good operational and performance measurements, based on sound data is key.

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Purchasing or leasing an eco-friendly fleet: a fixed asset investment

A business's fleet replacement policy should have a green criterion and be flexible enough to take advantage of constantly evolving technologies. The automotive industry around the world is competing to produce cleaner and greener vehicles. With solutions ranging from development of conventional engine technology through hybrid options to zero emission electric vehicles, there's a growing array to choose from.

Making the right choice, however, requires all salient facts at a company's fingertips. They need to know precisely what distances their vehicles cover each day, how they travel between site locations, and what they do on arrival. This information can now be generated through a fleet management technology system and processed into the essential data needed to make informed decisions and to make the business case for change. In addition to enhancing business repute and delivering operational cost savings, companies should also consider the benefits offered by government's green fiscal incentives. These do not start and end with lower tax liabilities. Investing in an eco-fleet can mean benefits ranging from Congestion Charge discounts to significant capital contributions towards the cost of new vehicles.

Eco-friendly fleet operations: the flexible choice

Slashing CO₂ emissions needn't be dependent upon upgrading to fleet vehicles with superior mpg efficiency; a move that can involve considerable investment.

Companies have an alternative option – a quick and effective solution for delivering immediate green results. This requires a focus on how vehicles are used, above all:

- Smart job allocation and scheduling to reduce total mileage and footprint;
- Eco-friendly driving style to save fuel and reduce CO₂ emissions.

Smart scheduling

Dispatching the most appropriate mobile workers to jobs requires accurate management information. This will range from assessing the urgency and priority of jobs to the location of employees and traffic flow en route.

All these factors play a role in managers' decisions, which should be focused on reducing mileage and idle time and ultimately determining the total mileage and carbon footprint of their vehicles.

Advanced fleet management systems, which combine tracking, messaging, navigation and real time traffic information technologies, enable office-based managers to make the most appropriate business decisions by monitor fleet activity, vehicle locations, movements and driver performance. Managers are able to allocate jobs to the nearest, or most appropriate, workers in the field. The optimal route may not be the shortest, but decisions can be taken based upon vehicles' quickest arrival times – not simply to those who are closest to customers.

Fleet management technology also significantly improves vehicle routing. Historical trip data can be analysed to avoid wasted mileage with drivers able to avoid congestion by live traffic information being relayed automatically to their navigation devices en-route. Coupled with smart routing, factoring in not only traffic flows, but also traffic lights, roundabouts and other obstacles, this can mean journey time savings of up to 15 per cent – and a marked reduction in CO₂ emissions.



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Green efficiencies through improved driving performance

Positively influencing driving behaviour, promoting a more eco-friendly, fuel-efficient, performance behind the wheel, can lead to swift and effective results. Harsh acceleration or braking and excessive speeding are driving characteristics that have the biggest negative impact on fuel consumption, not to mention driver safety and vehicle maintenance costs. But to effect change, a company requires insights into the driving performance and fuel efficiency of every vehicle and driver in their fleet.

Fleet management technology can provide this, relaying driver behaviour data to managers who, by setting benchmarks on fuel efficiency, can identify sub-standard driving performance for individual employees.

Such standards should sit at the heart of a company-wide and stringent green driving policy. Once this is in place it is about meeting the objectives of this policy and monitoring progress and performance.

Incidence of idling, where engines are left running while a vehicle is stationary, offers a good example of a frequently repeated transgression, particularly amongst hauliers. There could be reasons for idling, but more often than not it can be avoided and if drivers are aware of a company's policy towards such incidents, adherence to it can be monitored.

A fleet management system also allows operators to monitor driver speeds by generating detailed speed analysis reports and even offering on-board diagnostics, enabling managers to measure and reduce fuel costs by taking live data direct from vehicles. Moreover, all of this information can be reviewed retrospectively or in real time, both for individual employees or entire fleets, enabling companies to target fuel-efficient driver training where it is most needed.

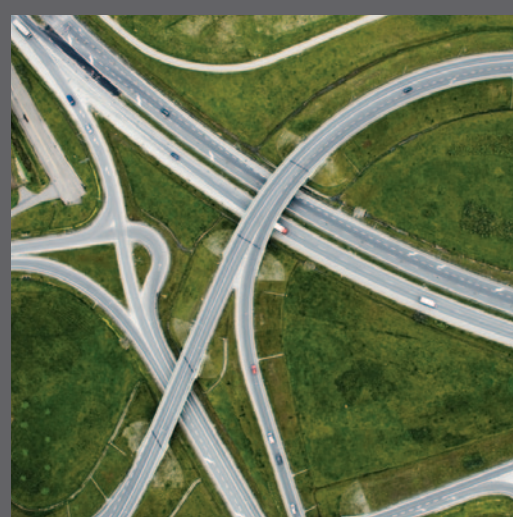
Empowering drivers to effect change can go a long way to successfully achieving green targets and technological advancements mean drivers themselves can now see their fuel efficiency, or be warned of speeding or excessive steering and braking, by a simple alert on their sat nav.

Protecting the environment, your drivers and your bottom line

Technological advancements are bringing many benefits that contribute to reducing the environmental impact of business and helping organisations conduct themselves responsibly - from technology within vehicles to technology used to manage them.

Companies should establish clear fuel consumption and carbon-reduction objectives and a strategic policy, with clear KPIs, to gauge performance and success. Having these KPIs at their fingertips will help companies achieve the goals they have set.

Managing mileage and driving behaviour will not only protect the environment, it will also protect drivers and business's bottom line.



Fleet management technology can help manage mileage and driving behaviour. This will not only protect the environment, it will also protect drivers and business's bottom line.

