



RHA

Driving Scotland

The Road Haulage Association's Manifesto
for the Scottish Parliament Election 2026

Contents

Driving Scotland's Future	4
A word from our Scotland Policy Director	5
Critical partners for critical industries	6
Plugging the skills gap	8
Plugging the infrastructure gap	10
Decarbonising HGVs	12
Championing Coaches	14
About the RHA	16



Driving Scotland's Future



Road freight moves 82% of all goods and 98% of agricultural and food products across the UK¹. Almost everything we depend on day-to-day spends time in the back of a truck on Scotland's roads. We move Scotland, and we drive Scotland.

That movement takes many forms. Coaches are integral to Scotland's transport network, connecting people and communities while supporting employment, tourism and local enterprise. Vans and light haulage have become increasingly important to the economy, especially with the rise of online retailing.

And HGVs are critical partners for key Scottish industries such as renewable energy, agriculture and aquaculture, forestry and housebuilding, and the whisky industry, not to mention the filling of shelves in shops all over the country, which we all take for granted.

Yet this is a challenging industry to operate in. Road haulage is highly competitive, tightly regulated and low-margin. Most of our members are small and medium-sized enterprises, typically running fewer than six vehicles and working with margins of around 2%².

As we look ahead to the next Scottish Parliament election, we want to continue working constructively with policymakers to address the key challenges facing our sector. We particularly welcome progress on revising the 40mph speed limit for HGVs on trunk roads - a change that can improve safety, reduce emissions and support economic growth³.

We now want to work with the incoming government on the other issues which are central to our industry - skills and infrastructure. If growth in the haulage sector stalls, so does growth in Scotland.

Richard Smith
Managing Director, Road Haulage Association

A word from our Scotland Policy Director



For many years RHA has forged strong relationships within the Scottish Government and we will look to do the same with the new Cabinet and MSPs in May.

Road haulage literally drives the Scottish economy supporting construction, house building, aquaculture, timber and whisky to the domestic and international markets.

Its reach and importance is vital to delivering Scotland's current major infrastructure projects and those in the pipeline. It is imperative that the incoming Government and the Cabinet select to carry out ambitions to support the road freight sector and recognise its importance to all future policies.

We remain committed to working with parties from all sides of the House and will welcome the new personnel and Cabinet at Holyrood post-election.

Martin Reid
Scotland Policy Director, Road Haulage Association

¹ Department for Transport: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/transport-statistics-great-britain-2025/transport-statistics-great-britain-2024-freight>
² RHA Cost Survey 2024: <https://www.rha.uk.net/news/news/detail/2024-rha-annual-cost-movement-survey-and-report>
³ See: Acknowledge in Transport Scotland <https://www.transport.gov.scot/media/42374/evaluation-report-june-2018-a9-perth-to-inverness-hgv-50mph-trial.pdf>

Critical partners for critical industries

Scotland's economic future is dependent on a series of growth industries, which in turn are dependent on the haulage industry.

From food and drink, to housebuilding and renewable energy infrastructure, haulage supports industry, generating tens of billions of pounds and employing hundreds of thousands of people. Nothing moves without trucks. Often in the most remote and rural areas, the haulage industry drives growth across Scotland.

Almost **117 million tonnes of goods every year**⁴ are transported to destinations across Scotland by the haulage industry. A further **200,000 tonnes**⁵, approximately, leave Scotland on trucks, adding to Scotland's exports to the Continent. As well as the direct economic and social benefits of this transportation, the haulage sector is also an economic multiplier; **for every £1 generated by the logistics industry, £3 is generated elsewhere in the UK economy**⁶.

The haulage sector is a critical partner for Scotland's critical industries:

- Whisky
- Aquaculture
- Renewables
- Forestry
- Agriculture
- Retail



4 Transport Scotland <https://www.transport.gov.scot/publication/scottish-transport-statistics-2024/chapter-3-road-freight/>
5 Transport Scotland <https://www.transport.gov.scot/publication/scottish-transport-statistics-2024/chapter-3-road-freight/>
6 Logistics UK & Oxford Economics <https://logistics.org.uk/CMSPages/GetFile.aspx?quid=43278074-995a-42c6-8209-237f9911a1f4&lang=en-GB>



Plugging the skills gap

Scotland is experiencing significant skills shortages within the road transport sector. This has been true for many years, but it is undoubtedly becoming more acute, at a time when Scotland's growth industries such as agriculture, aquaculture, whisky, renewables and forestry need road transport to continue to expand.

The road transport sector suffers from poor public perception and a lack of understanding of the careers available. Although our members work hard to promote the sector, this ultimately needs to be mandated by the government to ensure that quality careers advice, based on the skills shortages within Scotland, is provided within all schools and colleges.

Due to higher-than-expected numbers of drivers leaving the profession, our revised forecast shows a need for **60,000 new HGV drivers** across the UK each year for the next five years⁷. With our coach members experiencing similar issues in recruiting coach drivers.

However, skills shortages are not just being felt within driving roles. There is a growing issue with recruiting, training and retaining heavy vehicle technicians. This is a more difficult issue to resolve, as it takes three years for a technician to be fully qualified.

Additionally, with decarbonisation targets, there is a need to upskill the current workforce on zero-emission vehicles. The cost for colleges to invest in up-to-date technology for learners is considerable, and help will be needed to keep up with industry requirements.

Given that **96% of road transport operators are SMEs (less than 50 employees) in Scotland**⁸, access to funding to ensure the smooth transition to zero emission vehicles and maintain driver numbers will be crucial to keep the Scottish economy moving.

With RHA members being drawn into paying the Apprenticeship Levy in greater numbers as payrolls increase, there is a need for greater transparency in how levy funds are spent.

Recommendations:

- Schools, colleges and Skills Development Scotland/Scottish Funding Council should provide clear logistics careers guidance and promote the opportunities available.
- Provide transparency of apprenticeship levy funds and utilise the levy for investment in road transport-specific apprenticeships and short courses to fund vital training such as driver and technician courses.
- In readiness for decarbonisation, invest in green skills, ensuring that colleges have access to up-to-date technology.
- Work with employers to ensure that course content is relevant and, as technology develops, new courses are available. For example, investment in digital skills for AI.

⁷ FOI Request to DVLA on license and DQC data October 2025

⁸ Office of National Statistics 2025, Business Population by activity, size and location: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/businessindustryandtrade/business/activitysizeandlocation/datasets/ukbusinessactivitysizeandlocation>

HGV driver prevalence by region

Assessments	Relative prevalence of people working as large goods vehicle drivers = number per 1000 working population		2023-24 as % of 2016
	Apr 2023-Mar 2024	Jan 2016-Dec 2016	
Yorkshire and The Humber	11.8	11.7	101
East Midlands	16.3	16.6	98
Wales	10.9	11.2	98
South East	6.9	7.2	96
Northern Ireland	10.9	12.3	89
West Midlands	10.3	11.8	87
East	9.7	12.5	78
North East	7.7	10.2	76
North West	8.0	12.0	67
Scotland	6.3	10.1	63
South West	5.8	10.1	58
London	2.1	4.6	45

Apr 23-Mar 24 6.3 drivers per 1000 people;

Jan 16-Dec 16 10.1 drivers per 1000 people;

63% reduction 9

Plugging the infrastructure gap

Safe and secure parking – a problem with a short-term solution

Freight crime is largely unseen and misunderstood – except by those who suffer from it.

Freight crime costs the UK economy around **£250 million annually**⁹. The National Vehicle Crime Intelligence Service (NaVCIS) reports that in 2024, **there were 4879 reports of HGV and cargo crime in the UK**, resulting in an estimated cost of the **loss in value from thefts alone of £111,547,106**¹⁰. The retail value will of course be much higher, not to mention the cost of damage to vehicles and higher insurance premiums.

The value of goods stolen alone cannot calculate the true cost of freight crime; it affects a company's viability, with a particularly severe impact on small to medium sized enterprises that make up the majority of the logistics industry, many of whom are already struggling with cost-of-living and business pressures.

Freight crime impacts drivers, too. In what other industry would we tolerate a situation where the workforce is at risk of psychological and physical harm every single time they go to work?

Fixing this problem is relatively straightforward in Scotland, because there are simple freight routes. Broadly speaking, freight in Scotland comes from the M74 or A1 and travels up the east coast on the A90; it then moves west on the A96, and returns south on either the A9 or the A82.

Recommendation:

- Build three new large-scale, secure, protected sites which would
 - Reduce freight crime
 - Improve driver safety
 - Reduce park-ups on public roads and car parks, which can be understandably unpopular with local residents
- Position the sites in line with freight movements:
- South of Edinburgh
- South of Aberdeen
- around Inverness

⁹ Research by Snap, reported in Fleetnews, October 2024 <https://www.fleetnews.co.uk/news/freight-crimes-could-cost-the-industry-61bn-by-2049>

¹⁰ Nacvis, September 2025 <https://navcis.police.uk/tt-club-calls-for-urgent-overhaul-of-lorry-parking-security-across-the-uk-to-combat-rising-cargo-theft/>

Trunk road deficiencies – a problem with a longer term solution

Investment in roads has a greater positive impact on regional economies and society.

First and foremost, people and families going about their day need to feel safe on the roads they use. All too often in Scotland, they do not.

They would also like to feel that their journey does not contribute significantly to climate change. Again, all too often in Scotland, they cannot, because of stop-start journeys.

For the Road Haulage Association's members, Scotland's trunk road network is a lifeline which their customer businesses depend on to move goods within Scotland, west to Ireland by ferry, and south to England and Wales, and to ports destined for Europe. Industries such as whisky and salmon, the UK's largest drink and food exports respectively, take their produce from the most remote parts of Scotland to the world, and quality trunk roads are essential, not merely desirable.

Recommendation:

Create a strategy and routemap, with key milestones and dates, for the full upgrading of the following roads:

- A1 – patchy dual carriageway coverage in Scotland – needs fully dualled
- A9 – needs dualling to be completed
- A75 – needs bypassing and dualling works
- A77 – needs bypassing and other continual investment
- A82 – needs widening and other upgrades
- A90 – continued maintenance required
- A96 – needs fully dualled



Decarbonising commercial vehicles

The haulage industry has been decarbonising continuously for some time. Over the last 11 years, **NOx tailpipe emissions have decreased by around 80%**¹¹ as a result of the industry investment in new vehicles. The process is clear and established: manufacturers innovate and supply HGVs with cleaner and more efficient combustion engines, and hauliers understand the value and the life cycle of their investment, investing as much as they sustainably can.

This is not happening yet with the transition from combustion HGVs to those powered by battery or hydrogen. There are just over **1000 electric HGVs on UK roads out of a total fleet of 535,000 – or 0.2%**¹². And we are only now seeing the first hydrogen-powered trucks being registered in the UK.

Why?

There are five conditions which make a rapid transition to battery or hydrogen HGVs challenging:

- 1. Cost.** Broadly speaking, a diesel HGV costs in the region of £140,000-150,000; a battery electric costs around £350,000, and a hydrogen from £500,000. 85% of hauliers are small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs)¹³, and this is an investment they simply cannot afford.
- 2. Payload.** Hauliers deal with a maximum weight limit of 44 tonnes. This includes the weight of the truck as well as the goods inside it. A battery truck is around two tonnes heavier than a diesel truck, which is two tonnes off the payload hauliers can carry for customers.
- 3. Range.** Battery technology remains at a relatively early stage with advertised ranges of around 300 miles compared to 500 miles for a diesel equivalent. Compounding this, there are only three HGV electric charging stations in the UK, and none in Scotland – a situation that is highly likely to change throughout 2026 as ZEHID-funded public charging points come online.
- 4. Downtime.** Many HGVs operate 24 hours a day. One driver gets out at the end of a shift, and another gets in and drives away. Battery charging time would significantly increase the cost base and decrease the efficiency of each truck.
- 5. Uncertainty.** Hauliers invest based on a minimum 12 year buying cycle. Today, a haulier cannot predict the residual value of a diesel, or battery, or hydrogen HGV.

Recommendations:

Whilst the technical challenges to introduce zero emission commercial vehicles into fleets are overcome, the short-term focus should be on low-carbon fuels. Low carbon fuels are a category of fuels that include hydrotreated vegetable oil (HVO), compressed natural gas (CNG) and liquid natural gas (LNG). CNG and LNG require retrofitting, but HVO can be used in existing diesel vehicles, and could reduce emissions by up to 90% during the transition.

The UK government should create an emissions-linked rebate on fuel duty to encourage hauliers and coach operators to use HVO to cut carbon emissions now.

The Scottish Government should place itself at the forefront of HVO production, promoting economic growth as well as substantially reducing tailpipe emissions from the haulage industry.

11 RHA internal forecasting https://www.rha.uk.net/Portals/0/PolicyCampaigning/RHA_NoXPaper_231217_FINAL.pdf?ver=77ps9CooC7FisP3NijBAWA%3D%3D

12 Charge UK 2025, Electrifying Freight Roadmap 2025: <https://www.chargeuk.org/post/government-must-unlock-hgv-electrification-to-meet-2040-diesel-ban>

13 RHA Spending Review 2025 Submission: <https://www.rha.uk.net/Portals/0/PolicyCampaigning/spendingreviewfinalversiondoc.pdf?ver=v5tmabj1fRnOpTclng0Fnw==> Or RHA briefing: <https://www.rha.uk.net/Portals/0/News/Guidance/RHA-Introduction-to-Road-Haulage.pdf?ver=2023-05-17-145106-820>



Championing Coaches

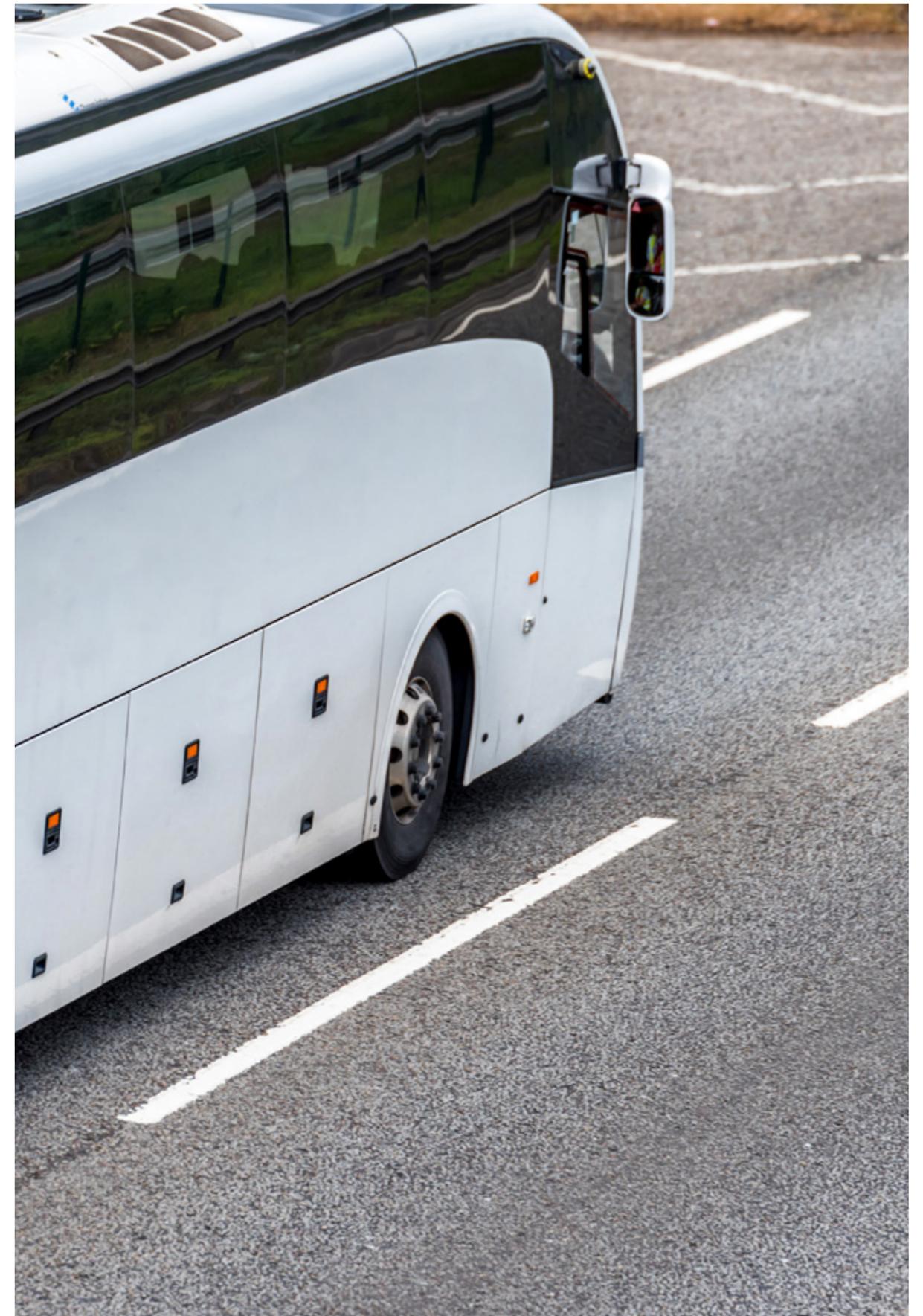
A huge range of activities, industries and economic sectors depend on coach travel – sports, domestic tourism, school transport, cultural events such as gigs and festivals, and rail replacement.

There is also a strong and expanding appetite for domestic tourism. Coach travel has compelling advantages, with a growing recognition of its reliability and value-for-money, allied with a high consumer demand for ecologically sustainable transport.

The coach sector, therefore, is playing an increasingly important role in growing the economy, encouraging investment and providing good jobs, with the overall economic contribution of the coach sector being **calculated by KPMG at £7.2bn¹⁴**.

Recommendations:

- Adopt an approach to regulation that maintains the unrivalled safety record of coaches, but removes unnecessary regulation and allows the market to develop.
- Adopt an approach to skills that allows a new generation of drivers to enter the industry direct from education, and reduces the barriers to access for those seeking a new career.
- Adopt an approach to decarbonising, developing skills, vehicles and infrastructure that makes zero emissions a more attractive option for operators.
- Adopt an approach to planning and infrastructure investment that includes the needs of the sector when both local and national projects are being considered.



About the RHA

- The RHA is the largest dedicated trade association representing over 8,500 HGV, coach, and van operators across the UK.

Our members are operators of vehicles who, between them, operate around 250,000 HGVs (half of the UK fleet) out of 10,000 operating centres and range from a single-truck company to those with thousands of vehicles.

The UK road haulage sector is responsible for 81% of all freight movements and is directly involved in the transportation of 98% of all agricultural products.

To find out more, please click here: www.rha.uk.net

- To find out more, please contact:
Policy@RHA.uk.net

- For more information, please connect with us:



@RHANews



/RoadHaulageAssociation



/road-haulage-association



TheRoadHaulageAssociation



@roadhaulageassoc