RHA vision for
Decarbonising Road Freight

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Promoting safety, efficiency and compliance in the freight sector
The RHA is calling for a new national decarbonisation of freight “Road Map” to be developed by the UK Government. We believe such a road map is essential to support the decisions of businesses, authorities and people to get the best decarbonisation outcomes, while ensuring the economy and jobs are supported.

The road map needs to create a level of certainty for freight sectors to make the required investments in low carbon/no carbon solutions. This is vital for a sector where decarbonisation, especially for large road vehicles, is particularly difficult.

We believe that market-driven solutions are best-placed to achieve freight decarbonisation and to stimulate the innovation needed in a sustainable way. This can only be done if vehicle life cycles are respected and businesses investment is supported by clear rules.

The RHA’s approach is guided by a hierarchy against which actions can be considered as we move to a net zero road freight sector.

We describe this hierarchy as **Eliminate – Minimise – Offset**.

In simple terms, this means that where we can, we should eliminate carbon emissions from freight movements. But, where this is not practicable, we should minimise carbon emissions, and finally we should offset any remaining emissions that have not been eliminated.

Offsetting needs to be both a priority and viable solution for road freight while more permanent low carbon/no carbon solutions are developed. It is vital that an agreed understanding is developed on how offsetting should work, what counts as an offset and what does not. The current reputation of initiatives in this area is poor and needs to be improved.
This paper sets out the approach the RHA will adopt for the road freight industry when engaging in the debate on achieving a net zero carbon future.

Decarbonising the economy will substantially impact every sector of the economy, including road freight, and will lead to behavioural changes by consumers and business. How the change to low carbon transport is managed is one of the most important tasks politically and economically facing the UK over the next 25 years.

Background

Nationally, politicians are committing to ensure that the UK moves to producing net zero carbon emissions. Though a target date of 2050 has been enshrined in legislation, policy rhetoric at national and local government level is to be net-zero before then.

The Challenge

Freight transportation will be one of the most difficult sectors to decarbonise while maintaining the customer-focussed, efficient and cost-effective movement of goods.

The technical challenges involved are considerable as there are no clear technological solutions in place that achieves a net zero future for the movement of goods in large vehicles by 2050.

In 2018, the RHA committed to working to reduce freight carbon emissions by 15% by 2025 from 2015 levels; however, we know there is far more that needs to be done.
Proper planning, good quality information, and clear ways forward that support secure investment in lower carbon solutions are needed. Short-term knee-jerk reactions must be avoided if we wish to see a sustainable shift to a net zero carbon future.

To achieve net zero carbon road freight, we need an evidence-based national approach based on sustainable development principals against which all can act, including national, regional and local governments. By putting net zero carbon for road freight into the mainstream of policy making in this way, we will achieve the environmental objective while maintaining economic performance and social cohesion.

The need to move goods by road is permanent and so is the need to invest in a road network that facilitates the movement of goods (and people) efficiently in a net zero carbon way.

The national road map

Hauliers and the businesses they supply are willing to invest in a net zero carbon future, but they must have confidence that the regulatory framework will not retrospectively undermine that investment.

This requires policies and plans against which vehicle makers, vehicle purchasers, supply chains, people and policy makers can make decisions. Fundamental to this is the need to ensure that investment in vehicles and infrastructure is supported – with national and international standards to drive change being introduced in line with vehicle and infrastructure life cycles.

Local initiatives must align with the central “road map”. Failure to work within cohesive national and international standards will undermine investment, add cost, and will result in poorer outcomes.

The principals of sustainability - Economic Development, Social Development and Environmental Protection - need to be embedded in developing the roadmap.
A number of areas need to be addressed as the move towards net zero is developed. This includes:

- vehicle technologies and standards
- alternative fuels
- operational measures within the supply chain
- infrastructure standards and management
- driver behaviour

In dealing with these areas, government and industry will need to consider what is technically possible, economically viable and environmentally sustainable, and promote it within the framework of eliminate, minimise and offset.

There needs to be an acceptance that the time frames for interventions against each of the area will vary. Some things can be done now, others require technological solutions that are for now, unclear and unknown.

Solutions and measures deemed to be acceptable must be recognised for enough time to allow investment in those solutions to achieve a reasonable payback. This approach will support investment and provide us with the stepping stones to a net zero carbon road freight sector. We have seen the damaging impact that premature outlawing of certain vehicle types well short of their commercial life span can have.

End-users and service providers must be at the heart of the solutions as they are developed, not just infrastructure and equipment providers.

Next Steps

The RHA would like to see the Government, working with industry, commit as soon as possible to creating a freight transport decarbonisation road map. This should be aligned with the hierarchy advocated by the RHA to eliminate, minimise and offset.