

MotorTransport

Uncertainty surrounds government phase-out dates for diesel HGVs

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The phase-out dates for diesel HGVs could still change following the government's announcement that it is to postpone its ban on the sale of new diesel and petrol cars, according to freight experts.

A spokesman for Volvo Trucks said that although the government announcement did not appear to directly affect the medium and heavy truck sector "there are clearly close ties between all automotive markets, be it cars, vans, buses, coaches or trucks".

He added that the government's role was to set a long-term target and stick to it: "Together with our customers, who quite literally deliver UK GDP, the road transport industry is navigating its way through a massive transformation – the biggest we have seen since the introduction of the internal combustion engine.

"We all know that we need to find alternatives to diesel. We cannot continue as we have in the past; we must decarbonise, and to do that, we need support from government.

"Naturally some of the policies required to support such a target will take the form of sticks, but there should be carrots too. What's key is that government policies be consistent both through time and across government, to ensure that collectively we meet the target.

"As an example, we should not have subsidies delivered with one hand and import duties taken with another."

The Volvo spokesman went on: "As a country we need to be ambitious; climate change is an undeniable fact and we have to start making changes today, not tomorrow. The UK government's target of net zero by 2050 should be the minimum we aim for; the Volvo Group target is net zero by 2040.

"The UK road transport industry needs support in the short term to help this transition, but most importantly, it needs certainty. Without certainty no-one can plan, and without a plan, no-one will make the investments necessary to deliver the transformation."



The RHA said the government had failed to lay out a clear plan, which it said was detrimental for the industry. The association added that it is seeking “urgent clarity” from government on what yesterday’s announcement means for the future of HGVs. “Businesses looking to play their part on the road to net zero need certainty, not delays,” it warned.

It added the government needs to collaborate with industry to come up with a detailed plan that provides certainty for investment, drives innovation, and directs support “for those who want to do the right thing.”

David Wells, chief executive of Logistics UK, said pushing back the deadlines was unhelpful and would discourage private investment in the UK and its industries.

“There is still much to be done, from delivering a charging network to confirming plans for alternatively fuelled vehicles, but our industry remains committed to achieving net zero,” he said. “As a sector, logistics works hard to deliver on time for all sectors of the economy – if new decarbonisation deadlines are to be achieved, it is vital for the health of the UK’s supply chain, and therefore our economy, that the government does the same. At a time when industry needs detail and action, delay just creates more uncertainty.”

Carlos Rodrigues, MD of Renault Trucks & Ireland, said it believed the trajectory for diesel HGVs remained unchanged but he added: “We are concerned that more needs to be done by government to create the environment for operators to adopt electric vehicles, for example through incentives, legislation and dispensation.

“Clarity is key, and operators must be informed and supported along the way to achieve those deadlines.”

Richard Hebditch, UK director at Transport & Environment, said that the policy to support an increase in the supply of zero-emission trucks had been put on hold due to long delays in agreeing the car and van ZEV mandate. “Now the ZEV mandate is about to be published, it should create space for HGV rules to be worked up,” he said. “But the prime minister has also created great uncertainty across the board, risking investment by truck makers in the UK market as well as charging for battery electric trucks.”

Gerry Keaney, BVRLA chief executive, said: “Today’s announcement will frustrate many while offering relief to others.

“Those that have made huge financial and strategic investments in this technology and mobilised their customers and workforces for decarbonisation will be worried that government is applying the



“Others will be grateful for the extra breathing space this delay provides. We await the further details that will show the true impact of today’s announcement. It is important that progress isn’t paused and momentum can be maintained. Either way, everyone is likely to have less trust in the government’s net zero strategy and will think a lot harder before committing to any of its future strategies or roadmaps.”

Digital freight management firm Zeus said the government’s backpedalling on green policies was “very concerning” and the prime minister’s announcement cast serious doubt over the country’s ability to deliver on its promises.

“While the associated diesel HGV phase-out dates of 2035 and 2040 were not featured in the PM’s announcement, historically regulations around HGV emissions have followed in close step with passenger vehicles and so this is also likely to be at risk in the near future,” said Christopher de Saxe, head of sustainability at Zeus. “HGVs remain one of the most critical sources of emissions to address given they contribute to 19% of all road transport emissions while only contributing to 6% of vehicle miles.

“Over the last two decades, total car miles travelled has remained relatively flat, while HGV and van miles have increased steadily to cope with the growing demand for goods by a growing population.

“Furthermore, the HGV sector is one of the most difficult-to-decarbonise and so any policy which will delay progress is cause for concern.”

