

Enterprise and Learning Committee

EL(3) 03-09 (p2) : 29 January 2009

Purpose – The Committee wish to take evidence on the draft Road Policing Manifesto from the Vehicle and Operators Services Agency (VOSA).

VOSA seek to assure the Committee that it maintains excellent levels of service from the Chief Constable of North Wales Police and his staff .

Background to VOSA

VOSA is an Executive Agency of the Department for Transport (DfT), and is part of the Safety, Service Delivery and Logistics (SSDL) Group, it was established in 2003 and is responsible for:

- the annual testing of HGVs and PSVs
- targeted and random checks of vehicle roadworthiness
- compliance with drivers hours, Working Time Directive and operator licensing conditions
- supervision of the MOT scheme including training
- offering advice and guidance to help customers comply
- collision investigations, monitoring of vehicle recalls and research.

VOSA provides administrative support to the Traffic Commissioners, who are appointed by the Secretary of State for Transport and are statutorily independent of VOSA and the Department. The Traffic Commissioners have responsibility in their region for:

- the licensing of operators of HGVs and PSVs
- the registration of local bus services
- granting vocational driver licences and taking action against drivers of HGVs and PSVs
- determining appeals against the impounding by VOSA of illegally operated HGVs.

The agency operates as a trading fund. In 2007/08 the total income for the agency was approximately £180m. The majority of this income (£145m) came from statutory fees (e.g. testing and licensing), the remainder came from central government funding (£14m) and other income, such as training and interest (£21m).

VOSA employs around 2,600 staff. They are located at its headquarters in Bristol, at offices in Swansea, Cambridge, Edinburgh, Leeds, Eastbourne and Birmingham and at 100 operational locations across Great Britain (GB).

Road Safety – Heavy Goods Vehicles and Public Service Vehicles

HGVs account for about 6% of all traffic; this represents a 6% increase over the last 10 years. PSVs make up 1% of traffic; a 10% increase. The number of foreign registered HGVs travelling to GB increased almost three times (232%) in the period 1993-2003.

Unsafe HGV and PSV vehicles and drivers present a risk on UK roads. Accident rates have been falling, but in 2007 in GB, HGVs and PSVs were involved in 2,854 fatal or serious accidents. While they are only involved in 10% of all accidents, they have a disproportionate impact, with 18% of all fatal accidents involving an HGV or PSV and can also impact on other areas, such as road reliability. VOSA's activities help to address the causes of these accidents by promoting compliance and targeting contributory factors such as vehicle defects and driver fatigue.

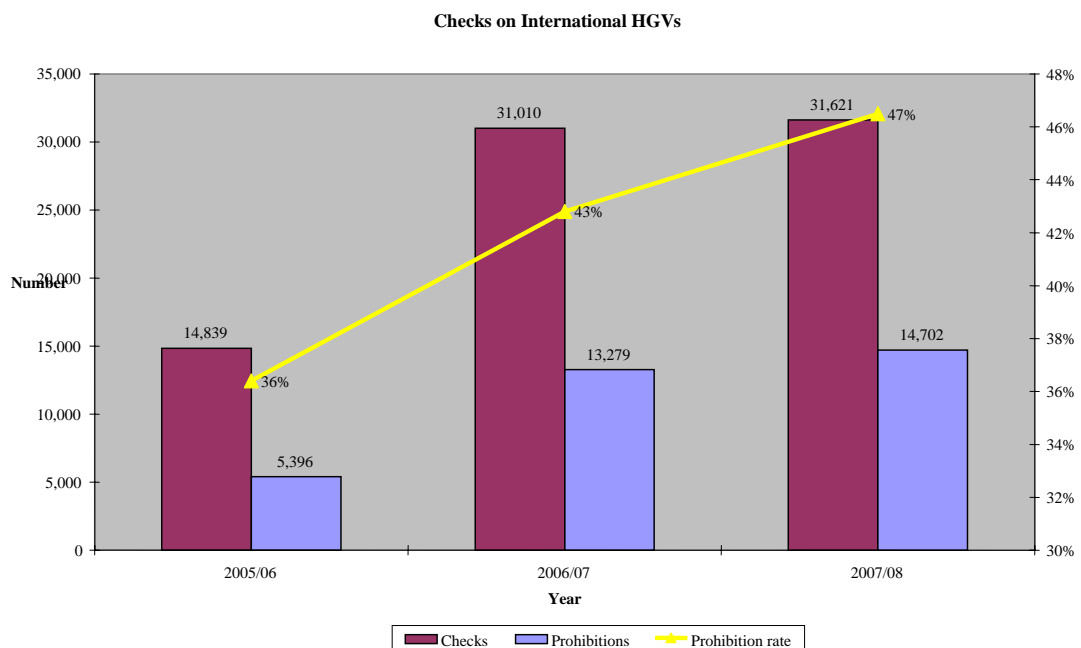
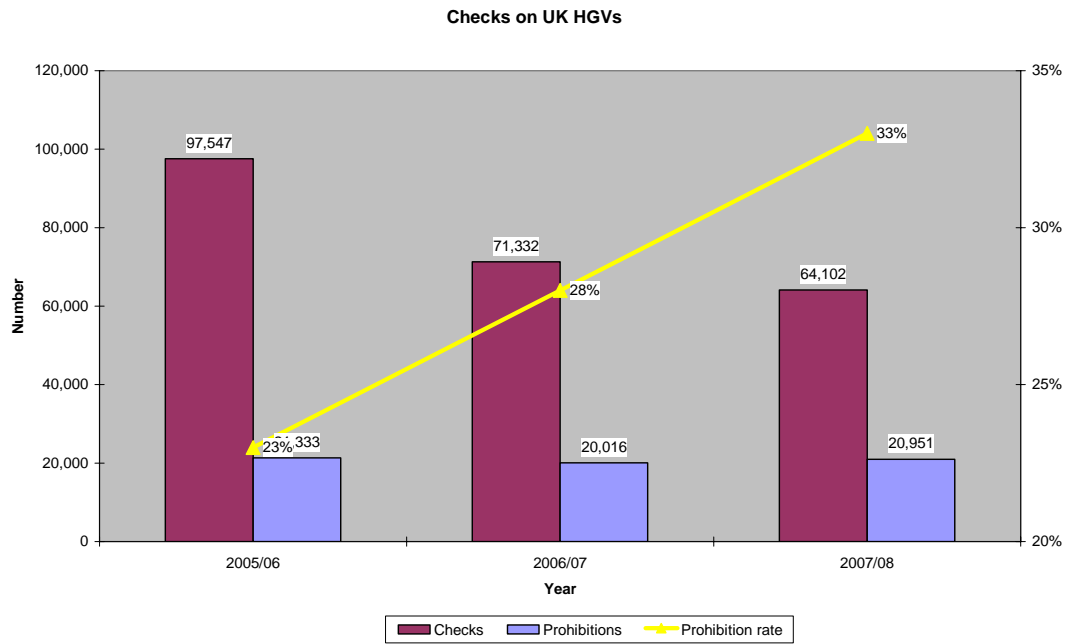
Random compliance surveys carried out by VOSA indicate deterioration in the roadworthiness of HGVs registered outside GB. The number of prohibitions in the survey for HGV motor vehicles increased from 8.6% in 2004 to 22.0% in the 2006 survey. A large number of these were for driver's hours and overloading offences. For comparison the random survey for GB HGVs shows prohibition rates at 8.8% in 2005 and 8.9% in 2006.

Enforcement of GB and International Vehicles

VOSA focuses on the mechanical condition of vehicles, overloading and the removal of tired drivers from the road. Most of this enforcement is done at roadside check sites, some also takes place at operator premises.

To reduce the burden on law abiding operators, and to make the best use of staff resources, VOSA is investing in technology to target the non-compliant. This includes the development of a rating system for GB operators based on the risk of their being non-compliant (the Operator Compliance Risk Score/OCRS), greater use of intelligence, and the use of weigh in motion sensors (WIMS) and automatic number plate recognition equipment (ANPR).

Current evidence shows that HGVs on international journeys are at a high risk of being non-compliant and so VOSA is specifically targeting these vehicles in enforcement checks. In 2007/08 38% of roadworthiness spot checks were targeted at HGVs on international journeys, compared to 16% in 2005/06, resulting in 14,702 prohibitions in 2007/08 compared to 5,396 in 2005/06.



Investing in enforcement

On 8 April 2008 the Government announced an increase in funding of £24 million to support VOSAs High Risk Traffic Initiative (HRTI); targeting vehicles with a high risk of non-compliance, including international traffic.

For HRTI VOSA has recruited 148 staff to create 24/7 shift working teams that will increase its presence at ports and on the road network. This will be supported by additional ANPR and WIMS sites. VOSA is working with the Highways Agency (HA) and the devolved administrations to identify and develop new strategic sites. VOSA is looking to obtain dedicated facilities at both Dover and Coquelles (Euro Tunnel) to target high-risk traffic. This would provide a significant opportunity to target high risk traffic from Dover and the tunnel where approximately 65% of all HGV traffic enters the UK.

The HRTI teams should be fully effective by July 2009 at 15 sites across the motorway network. It is anticipated this will lead to least a 50% increase in the number of checks conducted compared to 2007/08.

Enhancements to enforcement powers

In 2009 DfT will introduce new measures authorising VOSA examiners and Police Officers to issue fixed penalty notices and collect on-the-spot penalties from drivers suspected of an offence without a satisfactory UK address. This will support UK businesses and improve road safety by making it easier to penalise drivers who commit an offence, regardless of whether the driver resides in the UK or elsewhere. In addition, the new measures enable the Police and VOSA examiners to immobilise vehicles that have been prohibited from continuing a journey as a result of a driver contravening drivers' hours rules or driving a vehicle with defects.

VOSA's powers to stop vehicles were introduced in England and Wales under the Police Reform Act 2002. This has provided VOSA with greater flexibility in planning roadside operations in terms of times, location and duration of check.

An example of a joint enforcement operation with the Police at Hollyhead on Sunday 12 June 2008 between the hours of 14:00 – 03:00.

- From a small team consisting of one stopper 3 TE's and 2VE's they issued the following number of prohibition notices preventing further travel
- 38 drivers tachograph hours offences
- 40 mechanical defects
- 20 overloads including an overloaded PSV
- 1 dangerous goods offence
- 5 other offence prohibition notices
- 1 driver was arrested for dangerous vehicle condition
- 5 UK drivers were reported for prosecution
- We had to stop checking vehicles at 02:30 hours as we simply run out of parking space for defective and prohibited vehicles

Attachment – demonstration slides

Summary / Recommendations

In summary, VOSA and the Police force work very well together. They share joint aims of reducing the killed and seriously injured incidents on the network and the associated vehicle delay they cause. Any initiative aimed at increasing or improving capacity and/or resource is welcomed and supported by VOSA.