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The Editor's View

MANY businesses and consumers are caught up in a 'debt storm', to use a phrase pinched from Chancellor the Exchequer George Osborne's Autumn Statement. His 45-minute speech will have done little to immediately raise any hopes that, to reuse another political slogan, 'things are going to get better'. A gloomy outlook of UK growth shrinking as much of Europe heads back into recession was painted in an analysis by the independent Office of Budget Responsibility. Unsurprisingly, the Chancellor's decision to axe January's planned 3p fuel duty rise was welcomed. But removing a price rise that was not implemented does not make businesses and consumers better off. Far better, as some have pointed out, would have been to have trimmed duty by a couple of pence. Meanwhile, congestion-busting road building projects are also welcomed, but they will take years to come to fruition. What it all means is that factor in more vehicles on the roads, inflation and predicted oil price rises and, for the foreseeable future, motoring will become more expensive and slower.

Government's Autumn Statement

Chancellor axes 3p January rise in fuel duty

THE planned 3p a litre rise in fuel duty scheduled for January 1, 2012 has been scrapped by Chancellor of the Exchequer George Osborne.

However, he plans to press ahead with a scheduled duty rise on August 1, 2012, although he pledged that the previously announced 5p a litre rise would be cut to 3p a litre.

The two increases were originally announced in the spring Budget, but amid widespread protests from a wide cross section of motoring organisations, business groups and private motorists the Chancellor promised to 'help where we can in tough times'.

Saying that motoring was 'not a luxury for most people but a necessity', he claimed that taxes on fuel would be 10p lower than they would have been without this action and the decision to cut fuel duty by 1p a litre in the spring Budget.

ACFO chairman Julie Jenner said: ‘The intensive business and consumer lobby against fuel duty increases when corporate and private budgets are under so much pressure meant the Chancellor had no choice but to cancel the January increase.

‘By cutting the proposed August 2012 duty increase to 3p a litre from 5p a litre I think he has tried to appease the protests but has also brought himself time to see how the economy is performing in eight months. We are sure he will look again at fuel duty in the spring Budget.

‘However, while we are pleased that the Chancellor will not press ahead with the 3p a litre January increase, fleets, business drivers and private motorists are no better off. Fuel prices remain extremely high so it would have been more helpful if he had relieved pressure on business and private fuel budgets by cutting duty.’

The petrol division of the Retail Motor Industry Federation said it believed that the Chancellor ‘made the right decision to cancel the fuel duty increase planned for January 1, 2012’.

Chairman Brian Madderson said: ‘The increase would have raised prices at the pump by 4p per litre within days. Based on current average UK pricing this would have pushed diesel to a new record high at over 145p per litre and this grade is steadily gaining market share at the expense of petrol.’

However, RMI Petrol said that even with no increase the UK levied the highest duty on diesel in the European Union. Duty, it said, needed to be cut by 26p per litre to achieve parity with the average diesel rates across the European Union.

Madderson continued: ‘RMI Petrol will continue to lobby Government and their officials to defer the duty increase still planned for August 1 next year. With RPI inflation indexing and 20% VAT the retail price impact could be 4p per litre at the pump, which we argue is too much and too early in the cyclical recovery of the economy.’

The Road Haulage Association said that ‘common sense had prevailed’ in respect of the axing of the planned January fuel duty rise.

‘This represents a victory for the RHA and for the FairFuelUK campaign group’, said RHA chief executive Geoff Dunning.

Theo de Pencier, chief executive of the Freight Transport Association, said the decision to axe January’s fuel duty rise would ‘help to keep the wheels of industry turning. However, he added: ‘The Chancellor has not been bold enough. He should have ruled out the planned duty rise in August 2012 as, if world oil prices remain high and above $100 per barrel into next year, it will still hit industry hard.’

IAM chief examiner Peter Rodger added: ‘Cancelling fuel duty rises next year is a welcome relief for motorists. But don’t wait for the Chancellor to reduce the cost of driving, do it yourself now.

‘The way you drive has a big impact on the amount of fuel you use. If you slow down and leave more of a gap between yourself and the vehicle in front, you won’t need to accelerate and brake so much. That’s two easy ways to reduce your fuel consumption by up to 15%.’

Government to invest billions of pounds in road development

THE Government has revealed a major road building programme to ease traffic congestion as part of a new National Infrastructure Plan.

The Plan highlights more than 500 ‘critical infrastructure projects’ to improve the UK’s transport and broadband networks as well as steps to attract major new private sector investment. The hope is that the projects will be built over the next decade and beyond.

Worth more than £250 billion, almost two thirds of the expected investment between 2011 and 2015 will be privately funded and the remainder will be either partially or fully publicly funded.

Numerous road improvements schemes to tackle traffic congestion across the country have been announced and they include:

- Two new managed motorway schemes to allow use of the hard shoulder at congested times on the M3 and M6
- Improvements to M1/M6 Junction 19
- Improvements to the vital A14 linking the Midlands to the Port of Felixstowe
- Construction of a new crossing at the lower end of the River Thames
- Acceleration of the current major projects planned on the M25 (Junctions 23-27) and the M1 (Junctions 39-42)
- Smaller projects designed to deliver significant improvements on the road network, such as removing bottlenecks and improving safety and road layout.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer George Osborne also announced the writing down of debt on the Humber Bridge to halve the tolls for cars.

The Chancellor's statement included the immediate go-ahead for 35 new road and rail schemes and he said: 'This all amounts to a huge commitment to overhauling the physical transport infrastructure of our nation.'

Simon Chapman, chief economist at the Freight Transport Association, said: 'The cost of congestion for businesses and motorists exceeds £20 billion each year. This is money thrown down the drain, and a brake on growth that the economy can ill-afford. Targeted widening of the motorway and trunk road network, and adding more capacity at bottlenecks offers a very strong rate of return, of between £3 and £13 for every £1 invested.'

ACFO chairman Julie Jenner said: 'Successive Governments have severely under invested in the nation's road network. Although the Government collects more than £40 billion a year in motoring-related taxes less than a quarter of that cash is reinvested in roads and other transport schemes.

'Congestion costs businesses money, but the promised projects will take years and years to come to fruition. While we welcome the infrastructure investment, it is long over due.

'However, while few will oppose plans to 'get Britain moving', all drivers must continue to put up with continuing congestion on roads across the country for a long time to come. As a result, congestion will cost businesses money in delayed appointments and meetings and the late delivery of goods.'

Fleet file

Fleet managers' battle to control costs

MORE than half of fleet managers (51%) are making decisions based entirely on cost grounds, according to a survey by multi-marque car leasing and fleet management company Alphabet.

The results form the first in a series of reports based on findings from the survey of 250 fleet decision-makers. The first report, *'Tackling the pressure for cost savings'*, looks at costs - a dominant issue for many fleet managers.

Surprisingly the Alphabet Fleet Management Report (AFMR) 2011 found that costs were by no means rising across the board; around half of the fleets in the sample reported that overall costs remained static over the last year (see fig 1 below).

Nevertheless, they remain a major preoccupation for fleets and come second only to driver safety in respondents' list of concerns (see fig 2 below). However, the majority of changes made by fleets over the last year have been directly connected to achieving cost savings.

Fig. 1: In the last 12 months, have the following increased, decreased or stayed the same?

Contending with dramatic increases in fuel prices is another major concern for fleet managers - 83% of respondents reported that their fuel bills had increased 'substantially' over budgeted levels - and the AFMR found that many fleets were prioritising fuel efficient technology (50%) in an attempt to redress the balance. Fleets are also evaluating business journeys (48%), changing to more fuel efficient vehicles (40%) and introducing fuel cards (35%) to reduce fuel costs.

Fig. 2: Which of the following are your biggest concerns regarding your fleet operation?

Journeys and mileage rates are also under close scrutiny. 48% of respondents have investigated whether journeys are really necessary; 35% use video-conferencing to reduce journeys; 41% restricted the number of miles that drivers are allowed to cover, and 28% have reduced their mileage rates for grey fleet drivers.

Richard Schooling, chief executive of Alphabet (GB), said: 'Fleet managers continue to endure considerable pressure to reduce costs as organisations adapt to sluggish economic growth, and in the public sector, to spending cuts. However businesses should not allow expediency to take priority over implementing strategic changes that address the root causes of fleet operating costs.'

Indeed, although the AFMR found that over half (51%) of respondents were making fleet decisions entirely on cost grounds, 25% of the survey base expressed no interest in selecting cars on the basis of whole life costs, despite their proven advantages compared with relying on list prices of basic lease rental alone.

With fleets focussing on mileage as one of the most significant means of reducing overall operating costs, the AMFR uncovered a surprise in terms of how much respondents expect to reduce mileage over the next 12 months; the average response was only 3%.

However the survey did reveal a cautious note of optimism, amongst private fleet managers at least. Looking ahead to next year private sector fleets were more optimistic that operating budgets will increase again, although the mood was found to be considerably bleaker among public sector organisations facing up to the Government's proposed spending cuts.

27% of respondents said they expected their fleet operating budget to go up in the coming year, although a smaller number (21%), anticipated that the size of their fleet would also increase. In the public sector however a significant 56% expect to see their budgets cut, but fewer, 44%, expect that the size of their fleet will fall.

Although 30% of organisations, mainly those in the public sector, expected fleet sizes to fall, this was not matched by expectations of a fall in administration time. In fact, 75% of respondents thought that they would need to spend the same or more time on fleet affairs in the coming year.

Schooling said: 'The increasing burden of legal, financial and technical specialisation and complexity surrounding the management of vehicles will weigh heavy on in-house managers, who will have to do more for less in the coming year. The focus for fleet managers now must be on delivering significant savings in both time and costs.'

Tougher 2012 MoT means fleets face up to higher bills

FLEETS face higher MoT bills from January if drivers fail to look after vehicles as a result of revisions to the scheme.

The European Commission has changed the directive that covers the MoT for cars and light goods vehicles, which is mandatory annually when a vehicle is three years old. Tests carried out on heavy goods vehicles, buses and coaches will also be affected.

The revisions mean that more elements of vehicles will be subjected to testing and, if not in full working order, could leave fleets and private vehicle owners with significant bills and an MoT failure on their hands.

Elements being added to the MoT from January 1 next year are: Airbags, brake fluid warning light, catalytic converter, condition of all visible wiring, condition of battery, electronic seat adjustment motor, electronic parking brake, electronic stability control, high intensity discharge (HID) lamps, power steering, seat-belt pretensions, trailer/caravan electrical socket and tyre pressure monitoring system.

The new MoT rules apply retrospectively to vehicles rather than to those registered from January 1, 2012 when the tougher MoT kicks-in.

A recent survey by consumer magazine *Auto Express* suggested that the repair bill for an electronic stability control system could top £2,000, while repairing an electric seat adjustment motor could cost more than £1,500 and replacing a tyre pressure monitoring system more than £500.

Vehicle and Operator Services Agency chief executive Alastair Peoples said: ‘The MoT test is designed to make sure that a vehicle is fit to be on the road and so it needs to be updated to reflect new vehicle technology. We have worked with the industry to prepare them for these changes to make sure that the measures are introduced in the least burdensome way possible.’

HMRC updates Advisory Fuel Rates

HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) has published new Advisory Fuel Rates for the three months beginning today (Thursday, December 1).

The new rates show only one change from the previous quarter’s figures with the lowest LPG rate cut to 10p from 11p

The rates apply where employers reimburse employees for business travel in their company cars, or require employees to repay the cost of fuel used for private travel.

The new rates have been calculated using the same matrix of group average fuel consumption figures as for September, with fuel prices very little changed since then.

Advisory Fuel Rates apply to all journeys on or after December 1 until further notice. For one month from the date of change, employers may use either the previous or new current rates, as they choose, according to HMRC rules.

Applicable Advisory Fuel Rates for the next three months are:

Engine size	Petrol	LPG
1400cc or less	15p	10p
1401cc to 2000cc	18p	12p
Over 2000cc	26p	18p

Engine size	Diesel

1600cc or less 12p
1601cc to 2000cc 15p
Over 2000cc 18p

- Petrol hybrid cars are treated as petrol cars for this purpose.

Fleet operators fail to have eyesight testing policies in place

ALMOST half of fleets (42%) do not offer eyesight testing for drivers through a company scheme, according to a survey of 127 fleet operators by Brake's Fleet Safety Forum.

Additionally, 56% of respondents said they did not record when drivers last had their eyes tested, either through a company scheme or privately.

Employers have a duty to manage the risk posed by their at-work drivers, by ensuring that this most basic requirement of safe driving is being checked. Being an experienced and skilled driver who is aware of the dangers of the roads is meaningless if a person is unable to spot hazards in time due to poor eyesight, says Brake.

The Fleet Safety Forum's 'Look Sharp' campaign consists of a resource pack for managers, including a poster and electronic guidance document for managers with additional advice to circulate to drivers.

The Forum is running a one-day workshop, sponsored by Specsavers Corporate Eyecare, on January 24, 2012 in Bristol, giving fleet managers and road safety professionals an opportunity to hear from experts on what employers need to be doing and why, with practical advice and a best-practice case study. As an added incentive, Forum non-subscribers can attend the workshop and receive a year's subscription for half price.

Eyesight needs to be tested regularly throughout a driver's lifetime as its deterioration and disease won't always be noticeable to the driver, says Brake.

Experts recommend everyone has an eyesight test every two years or more frequently if required, and whenever there is a cause for concern. However, it is common for drivers not to follow this advice unless compelled, claims the organisation.

Data released by Brake reveals:

- A person can lose 40% of their vision before they realise they have a problem
- Every year in the UK an estimated 12.5 million people who are due a test do not have one
- One in six drivers cannot see well enough to pass the basic eyesight test.

Roz Cumming, development manager at Brake, said: 'We urge fleet managers to act by attending the workshop, and joining the Fleet Safety Forum giving them access to our essential resources to help them. To make our roads safer we need comprehensive eyesight tests carried out regularly throughout people's driving careers.'

Jim Lythgow, director of strategic alliances for Specsavers Corporate Eyecare, a corporate partner and supporter of Brake, said: 'Good eyesight is a prerequisite of safe driving. Research shows that employers are just not aware how good their employees' eyesight is for driving, and this is a major worry.'

Growth leads Run Your Cars to rebrand as Run Your Fleet

MAJOR growth over the last six months is being reported by Run Your Cars, which has seen its fleet size grow by nearly 1,000 vehicles since June 2011.

Originally developed for the SME market, Run Your Cars has seen demand grow from larger self-managed fleets that want to access the same benefits.

This demand, combined with feedback from current customers has resulted in Run Your Cars changing its name.

From December 2011, the company will be known as Run Your Fleet because, said managing director Steve Whitmarsh: ‘We have been listening to our customers, prospects, partners and suppliers and we believe runyourfleet.com better reflects the service we provide.

‘We cover a range of vehicles including cars, vans and minibuses in the business to business arena. Our core market is self-managed fleets that do not want to outsource their operation. However, they want to use our buying power and online tools to save costs and to better manage their vehicles and drivers.’

Run Your Fleet’s buying power means that it is able to deliver financial savings, normally only available to major businesses, to fleets of all sizes.

Run Your Fleet’s customers pay a low cost monthly membership fee which gives them access to the following:

- On-line fleet management system
- RAC breakdown cover
- Accident Management
- Tyre and glass supply
- Specially negotiated rates on hire cars
- Discounts on servicing and repairs at over 6,000 main dealer and independent outlets

Average savings are claimed to be in excess of £300 per vehicle per year for a typical fleet vehicle, and all costs are consolidated into a single monthly invoice - delivering significant administration and cash flow benefits.

Further services, including risk management, are available at a small additional cost, and a range of vehicle funding options are also available.

ICFM unveils new brand identity

THE Institute of Car Fleet Management unveiled a new brand identity at its annual national members’ conference at Peugeot UK’s headquarters in Coventry.

ICFM chairman of the ICFM, Roddy Graham declared: ‘On the eve of celebrating our 20th anniversary next year, we thought it high time to replace our traditional steering wheel logo with a new brand identity, altogether more modern in style.

‘The Council members were unanimously in favour of the new logo which has been applied across all marketing collateral and to the existing website.

‘The new logo takes into account the ICFM’s mission and vision statements, with the marque being used as an iconic translation of a fleet of cars. The use of perspective and order reflects the idea of management and development.

‘Perspective has also been used to shape a subtle directional arrow, which represents both road signage and advancing forward.

‘We believe the re-brand now brings the ICFM firmly into the 21st century in terms of image and will help attract new younger members.’

Leaders in ‘greener’ fleet management revealed

THE UK’s leaders in ‘greener’ fleet management were announced at a London ceremony attended by Transport Minister Norman Baker.

The Energy Saving Trust’s Fleet Hero Awards highlight public and private organisations that are successfully reducing their carbon footprints - and lowering their fuel bills - through fleet travel and transport policies. They also celebrate companies that supply the most innovative cost and fuel-saving products or services to car and van fleets.

Cutting fuel costs goes hand-in-hand with reducing carbon emissions. With fuel prices at their current high levels there has never been a more rewarding time to focus on good fleet management practices.

HM Revenue and Customs took the best large public sector fleet for the second year running, while West Oxfordshire District Council took the Award for smaller fleets in the same category.

The judges selected Addison Lee and Qdell & LHR Express Cars as the best private sector fleets (large and small fleet sections respectively).

Baker said: ‘If the Government is to meet its carbon reduction targets we must decarbonise road transport and making fleet operations greener is a major part of that.

‘So I am delighted to see such excellent progress in this area - big companies from both the private and public sectors have made huge strides in tackling this issue, using a range of measures such as reducing mileage, encouraging fuel efficient driving and using ultra low carbon vehicles. Not only is all this good for the environment - it makes economic sense too.’

Nigel Underdown, the EST’s head of transport, said: ‘About half of all new vehicles purchased in the UK are used in fleet operations, so the sector plays a vital part in determining the environmental performance of road transport overall.

‘There are clearly a large number of fleet operators working on a wide variety of fronts to minimise the environmental impact of their operations.’

ACFO chairman Julie Jenner, who was one of the Awards judges, said: ‘Choosing the best entries was very difficult in some categories because of the intensity of competition. Fleet operators are increasingly aware of the fact that cutting costs and reducing carbon dioxide and other harmful emissions go hand-in-hand.’

Award winners and runners-up: Best Public Sector Fleet (Large): **winner, HMRC; runner-up, Northamptonshire Police**; Best Public Sector Fleet (Small): **winner, West Oxfordshire District Council; runner-up, Hyndburn Borough Council**; Best Private Sector Fleet (Large): **winner, Addison Lee; runner-up, West One Cars**; Best Private Sector Fleet (Small): **winner, Qdell & LHR Express Cars Limited; runner-up, Hannaford**; Grey Fleet Management: **winner: Lake District National Park Authority; runner-up, Derbyshire Community Health Services NHS Trust**; Industry Supplier Award: **winner, Green Motion; runner-up: Lex Autolease**; Business Mileage Management: **winner, Lake District National Park Authority; runner-up, Hyndburn Borough Council**; Smarter Driving Award: **winner, Qdell & LHR Express Cars; runner-up, GE Capital**; Innovation in Van and Car Manufacture: **winner, Ford Motor Company Limited; runner-up, BMW**; Innovation in Fleet Services and Systems: **winner, Civica UK Ltd; runner-up, Arval**; Innovation in Fleet Management: **winner, Addison Lee; runner-up, Office Depot**; Leadership Award: **winner, Yorkshire Ambulance Service; runner-up, Greater Manchester Fire and Rescue Service**; Van Fleet Management: **winner, Commercial Group**; Motorvate Award: **winner, Northern Lincolnshire and Goole Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust; runner-up: Hyndburn Borough Council**.

Findel slashes fleet emissions as it takes on best practice

A FLEET has slashed average car and van emissions by nearly 25% after renewing almost all of its 427 vehicles this year after taking on board best practice advice from TR Fleet.

Findel plc, a group of market leading businesses in the home shopping, educational supplies and healthcare markets, has seen average carbon dioxide emissions on its 262-strong car fleet tumble from 164 g/km to 125 g/km and those on its 165-strong van fleet fall from 228 g/km to 190 g/km.

Additionally, the company is benefiting from significant financial savings - and so are drivers - and cash flow advantages after switching to vehicle leasing from outright purchase.

Almost all the vehicles have been renewed this year with vehicles selected on a whole life cost basis, whilst also ensuring they are fit-for-purpose.

The all-diesel company car fleet is now dominated by BMW 320 models equipped with the manufacturer’s Efficient Dynamics carbon-reducing package and Vauxhall Insignia EcoFLEX models. Additionally, the BMW 5 Series is prevalent among senior management.

Meanwhile, the van fleet is composed of Euro 5 emission compliant models with Mercedes-Benz Sprinters and Ford Transits to the fore.

Group fleet manager Roz Byrom said: ‘The car fleet was previously a mix of petrol and diesel models and some of our vans were up to seven years old.

‘We appointed TR Fleet as our fleet management experts and the company used its experience and marketplace knowledge to devise a new vehicle policy that would meet the company’s environmental credentials and deliver financial savings.’

The lower a vehicle’s emissions the better its fuel economy, so Findel is benefiting from improved MPG and lower fuel bills. Meanwhile, company car drivers are seeing lower benefit-in-kind tax bills, which translates into reduced National Insurance contributions for Findel which also sees savings in Vehicle Excise Duty and capital allowances.

Byrom said: ‘The company car policy that we have introduced this year has been a win-win for the company and drivers alike in terms of financial savings and carbon footprint reduction. Additionally, the company has seen a significant reduction in maintenance costs as older vehicles are defleeted, while contract hire gives the business major cash flow benefits as we don’t have significant sums of money tied up in depreciating assets.’

A part of the new policy sees the introduction of an emissions cap set at 160 g/km for senior management grades and 140 g/km for other vehicles. However, that will reduce on an annual sliding scale and next year will fall to 140 g/km and 120 g/km respectively.

Byrom said: ‘We actively encourage drivers to choose the lowest emission company cars available to them with the incentive being that the lower the CO_2 figure the lower their benefit-in-kind tax bill.’

The Findel fleet now operates on a four-year/80,000-mile replacement cycle with vehicles on non-maintenance contract hire agreements.

Hospital trust stays 'green' with Leasedrive

ONE of the biggest and busiest acute NHS Trusts in England has retained the Leasedrive Group to deliver its 'green' car salary sacrifice scheme, which only allows employees to choose vehicles emitting 140g/km or less.

Nottingham University Hospitals NHS Trust (NUH) chose Leasedrive to offer its 'mycar scheme' to its 13,000 employees in 2009 and the Trust was happy to retain the group when the three-year contract recently came to an end.

Alison Needham, pay services manager for NUH, said: 'We originally implemented the car salary sacrifice scheme to deliver cost savings to the Trust, as well as offering an attractive benefit to employees. The people who have received their vehicles think the scheme is great and we find the helpdesk particularly good and responsive. We've worked hard with Leasedrive to get the right scheme for our drivers and saw no need to move to another supplier.

'We operate a 'green' car scheme where, as well as encouraging employees to choose cars that have a lower impact on the environment, we also operate a medilink bus service which allows employees to park offsite and travel to both Nottingham City Hospital and Queen's Medical Centre by bus.'

Roddy Graham, commercial director, Leasedrive, added: 'The salary sacrifice scheme already incentivises people to choose more environmentally-friendly vehicles because drivers have to pay benefit-in-kind tax, so the lower the emissions, the less they pay.

'Nottingham University Hospitals NHS Trust has chosen to take this further and is using 'mycar' to help meet its own environmental targets by putting a maximum cap on emissions of 140 g/km. This demonstrates the flexibility of the' mycar scheme' and how it can be tailored to meet the specific needs of different organisations.'

Employees save tax and National Insurance on the money sacrificed. The Trust can save as much as £800 per vehicle per annum through reductions in National Insurance and pension contributions.

Deadline looms for fleets to register for RoSPA Awards

FIRMS with employees who drive for work have until today (Thursday, December 1) to register for entry into RoSPA's Management of Occupational Road Risk (MORR) Awards 2012.

Registration is taking place at www.rospa.com/awards/. All firms registering their intention to participate in the scheme will then have until February 1 to submit their full entries.

Among the issues considered by the scheme are: the leadership of MORR from senior decision-makers to line managers at all levels; the communication of occupational road safety information inside and outside organisations and the involvement of the workforce; planning for MORR based on risk assessments that identify control measures and set priorities, standards and targets; arrangements for active monitoring; and, the investigation of accidents and problems and the implementation of the lessons learned.

The RoSPA MORR Awards form part of the annual RoSPA Occupational Health and Safety Awards.

In addition to receiving an achievement award (at bronze, silver or gold level), all successful MORR entries will be considered for the RoSPA/Allianz MORR Trophy. In 2011, more than 30 organisations won MORR achievement awards and the RoSPA/Allianz MORR Trophy was won by Tesco Dotcom.

Awards ceremonies will take place alongside Safety and Health Expo in Birmingham from May 15-17, 2012, and also in Glasgow on September 20, 2012. For more information, visit www.rospa.com/awards/, call 0121 248 2090 or email awards@rospa.com.

Model update

Ford adds sportiest model yet to all-new Focus line-up

FORD is adding what it calls the 'sportiest' model yet to its all-new Focus line-up with the introduction of the Zetec S.

Developed specifically for UK customers, the Zetec S combines sporty styling with the debut of the 1.6 litre 180 PS EcoBoost petrol engine.

Based on the existing Zetec model, it adds a full sports styling kit including unique front and rear spoilers with lower sill extensions and 17-inch alloy wheels together with sports suspension featuring stiffened springs and dampers, aluminium-style sports pedals, rear LED tail lamps and Ford Power starter button.

The Ford Focus Zetec S is available now in five-door bodystyle with estate to follow in February 2012, and is offered with a choice of four engines including the new EcoBoost turbo-charged petrol engine, which has a top speed of 138 mph, reaches 0-62 mph in 7.9sec and has emissions of 139 g/km.

Any Focus Zetec S chosen with that engine or the 1.6 litre 115 PS TDCi will carry the ECOnetic Technology badge, as they benefit from auto start-stop, Ford ECO mode, gear shift indicator, active grille shutter and smart regenerative charging.

The 1.6 litre 125 PS Ti-VCT petrol and the 2.0 litre 163 PS TDCi are also available and can be specified with either manual or PowerShift automatic transmission.

At £18,745 on the road the Focus Zetec S is priced at £1,250 above the equivalent Zetec derivative. If purchased separately, the additional features would add over £1,700. The Zetec S and Titanium are identically priced so customers can choose either sport or luxury at the same price point.

Manufacturer news

Saab GB goes into administration as survival fight continues

SAAB GB, a 100% subsidiary of Swedish Automobile N.V. (SWAN), has gone into administration – although business continues as usual.

The decision, which was taken voluntarily, follows months of intensive negotiations and a long period of suspended production and tight liquidity situation at Saab Automobile AB.

With immediate effect, David Dunckley and Daniel Taylor of Grant Thornton UK LLP have been appointed joint administrators of Saab GB.

Saab GB has exclusive rights to distribute Saab cars and parts in the UK. It employs 55 people in Milton Keynes and distributes the cars and parts to a 58-strong dealer network across the UK of which 20 are 'Saab only' sites.

Saab City, a wholly owned subsidiary of Saab GB employing 65 people, operates two Saab motor dealerships, one in Wapping and a smaller site in Fulham.

A statement from Saab GB said: 'The board is of the opinion that administration gives the company and creditors the necessary legal protection until it has secured the required funding for the company. The appointment of the administrator is effected by the directors of Saab GB. The administrator will take on the management powers of the directors.'

Meanwhile, SWAN is continuing discussions with potential investors regarding the sale of Saab Automobile AB and Saab GB.

Taylor said: 'The administration is a consequence of the problems of the holding company in securing finance as well as stoppages in production.

'It is clear that the key to ensuring a future for Saab is the financial restructuring of the wider Saab Group, whose directors we understand are currently in negotiation with potential Chinese automotive concerns. Further announcements will follow as soon as possible.'

Saab GB and its dealer network has been trading in the UK for more than 50 years, and is Saab Automobile's largest sales market in Europe outside Sweden.

A Saab GB customer hotline has been set up on 0845 300 9593 or visit www.saab.co.uk for more details.

Prime Minister welcomes new jobs and cars at Toyota plant

TOYOTA'S Burnaston factory in Derbyshire is to be the sole European manufacturing centre for new generation C-segment hatchbacks - including hybrid, petrol, and diesel models

The introduction of new generation hatchback models - which will replace the Auris hatchback - will increase Burnaston production volumes creating up to 1,500 additional jobs in the next two years, with the first phase of 500 members to be recruited in the middle of 2012

Toyota will also invest more than £100 million in tooling and equipment at Toyota Manufacturing UK (TMUK) as a consequence of the decision, taking its total investment in the country to more than £2.1 billion since 1989. In addition, a further £85 million will be invested in the UK supply chain.

Prime Minister David Cameron welcomed the news of Toyota's further investment in British manufacturing and jobs on a visit to the factory.

He said: 'This major announcement from Toyota is fantastic news and a massive vote of confidence for UK manufacturing.

'This investment and the jobs it will create provide a terrific boost not just to the local economy but to the whole country, and is a tribute to the great skill, hard work and sheer professionalism shown by the Toyota workforce.

'Toyota's commitment to the UK shows the growing strength of the UK car industry - it is our great British success story.

'It is vital that we build a more balanced economy, one with manufacturing, innovation and exports at its heart. The automotive sector is leading the way in helping us achieve this – it is an extraordinary success story and one that we are very proud of.'

Didier Leroy, Toyota Motor Europe president and CEO, said: 'The investment we are making will secure a dynamic future for TMUK as a leading manufacturing centre for our core models in Europe. It also supports our commitment to delivering superior quality vehicles and contributes to Toyota's sustainable growth in Europe.'

In addition to announcing consolidation of C-segment hatchback production at TMUK, Toyota has also announced Toyota Motor Manufacturing Turkey, which currently builds the Verso compact MPV and shares production of the Auris hatchback, will become its European centre for C-segment saloon production.

Together with the Avensis saloon and tourer, hatchback production at Burnaston will consolidate TMUK's position as a leading manufacturing centre for Toyota's core models for Europe and will further strengthen Britain's status as an exporter - about 85% of TMUK engine and vehicle production is shipped to Europe and other world markets.

Mazda regenerative braking system improves fuel economy by 10%

MAZDA has developed a regenerative braking system for cars capable of improving fuel economy by approximately 10%.

The new i-ELOOP system, the first of its kind in the world to use a capacitor, will begin to appear in Mazda vehicles from 2012 and will debut on the all-new CX-5 compact SUV, which is set for launch in the spring.

The technology converts the vehicle's kinetic energy into electricity as it decelerates, using the electricity to power the climate control, audio system and numerous other electrical components.

The capacitor technology in i-ELOOP can store large volumes of electricity and, unlike batteries, can be charged and discharged rapidly and is resistant to deterioration through prolonged use.

The name i-ELOOP is an adaptation of 'Intelligent Energy Loop' and represents Mazda's intention to efficiently recycle energy in an intelligent way.

Regenerative braking systems are growing in popularity as a means of saving fuel. They use an electric motor or alternator to generate electricity as the vehicle decelerates, thereby recovering a portion of the vehicle's kinetic energy. Unlike the regenerative braking systems found in hybrid vehicles, Mazda's solution avoids the need for a dedicated electric motor and battery.

In stop-start driving conditions, the use of i-ELOOP fuel economy improves by approximately 10%. Working in conjunction with Mazda's 'i-stop' idling stop technology, i-ELOOP can extend the period that the engine can be shut off.

Mitsubishi boss opens personal customer hotline

MITSUBISHI UK boss Lance Bradley has launched a hotline that allows customers to contact him directly.

He is also publishing the star rating of his 110-strong dealer network on Mitsubishi's consumer website so that buyers know which is the best dealer near them.

With 80% of dealers getting four stars and above it's not quite the gamble it might seem, although most dealers thought he was joking when he proposed publishing the table, according to *Headlineauto*. The ratings come from independent consumer satisfaction surveys.

'We're a small, independent company so we can afford to do things differently', he said.

Bradley's recently-launched hotline is a link on the website. He said: 'I get about one inquiry a day and they are entirely reasonable and mostly simple to sort out. I respond within a day and it sets an example to the dealers and to everyone who works at Mitsubishi that if I can do it, so can they.'

Mitsubishi UK says it will break even this year and next because the company 'is putting dealer profitability above our own', a decision backed by shareholders who, Bradley says, take a long-term view of the business.

The saviour this year has been a 33.7% growth in pick-up sales which account for 40% of Mitsubishi's business. He expects total sales this year and next to stay fairly flat at around 15,000 units.

Honda keeps drivers on the move this winter

HONDA drivers can be ready when the cold weather comes thanks to a new winter care programme, which includes a seasonal health check, a full winter service and the opportunity to purchase a pair of tyre snow socks.

Honda’s snow socks are tyre covers which are designed to be easy to use and provide a solution to help get drivers moving on snowy side roads. They can be kept in the boot and slipped on to the front set of tyres when needed. From £70 per pair, snow socks are claimed to provide extra traction to increase grip on snow without causing noise or vibration while driving.

Once the car is back on a clear road, they can be removed and stored in the boot of the car ready for when they need to be used again.

Dave Hodgetts, managing director of Honda (UK), said: ‘Snow socks offer the perfect combination of affordability and ease of use without the worry of where to store them.’

Honda is also offering customers who purchase a set of winter tyres a storage solution. For £35+VAT, customers buying a winter set can place their spare ‘summer’ ones in secure storage. The cost covers a 12-month period and includes two tyre transfers to/from the Honda dealership for winter and summer changeovers.

The winter health check, which includes battery, windscreen, tyres, brakes, lights, engine coolant and screenwash costs £40 and customers will receive a complimentary winter safety kit worth £24.99. The pack includes a foldable snow shovel, foil blanket, high-visibility vest and LED torch.

Daimler to axe Maybach subsidiary

DAIMLER is preparing to disband its ultra-luxurious Maybach car marque due to poor sales.

The decision follows almost a decade of trying to make Maybach a profitable rival to Rolls Royce and Bentley.

Maybach will be replaced by new and more luxurious models from the Daimler-owned Mercedes brand.

‘It would not be sensible to develop a successor model for the current Maybach,’ chief executive Dieter Zetsche in an interview with German daily newspaper *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*.

The firm had resurrected the historic brand in response to the decision by German rivals BMW to take control of the Rolls Royce marque, and Volkswagen’s acquisition of Bentley.

Daimler had intended to sell 1,000 Maybachs a year at more than €300,000 each, but fell well short of that at around 200 a year, the BBC reported.

The firm is expected to target a lower-priced section of the luxury market with its new Mercedes luxury line, and develop cars for sale at a price in the €100,000-€300,000 range.

Zetsche suggested sales of the Maybach would end in 2013 when the S-Class range will be widened from three to six models.

Suzuki starts arbitration procedures against Volkswagen

SUZUKI has filed for international arbitration in its bitter dispute with Volkswagen after the German manufacturer refused to sell back its 20% stake in the Japanese company.

The stake was bought in 2009, but relations between the two have since deteriorated.
Suzuki ended its partnership with Volkswagen in September, after the latter accused it of breaking terms of their agreement. The German firm has said Suzuki has 'no legal foundation' to force it to sell its shares.

However, Suzuki said in a statement that it had commenced arbitration proceedings in London with the International Chamber of Commerce International Court of Arbitration, in order to compel Volkswagen to dispose of its shares to Suzuki or Suzuki's designated third party.

Volkswagen had hoped that its stake in Suzuki would provide a way for it to gain access to the fast-growing Indian car market, through the Japanese manufacturer's prominent position in the country.

The companies had also planned to co-operate on developing technology. However, despite all the plans no projects were launched even after two years of the deal being signed.

The breaking point came after Suzuki decided to buy diesel engines from Fiat for its cars built in Hungary, a move that Volkswagen said was a breach of contract.

Light commercial vehicles

Deadline looms for London Low Emission Zone compliance

DEADLINE day is approaching for larger vans, minibuses and other specialist diesel vehicles to meet Euro 3 emission standards in order to be driven within London's Low Emission Zone without paying a daily charge.

With little more than a month left until new Low Emission Zone is introduced, new research by the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders (SMMT) has shown that of the 3.57 million vans on UK roads at the end of 2010, 31.1% were not eligible for the new Low Emission Zone (LEZ) that comes into effect on January 3, 2012.

More surprising is the fact that London exceeded the national average with 37% of vans (almost 85,000) not meeting the emission standards.

Typically, Euro 3 vehicles are those registered after January 1, 2002, affecting those that will be 10 years old from January next year.

'It's not only emissions that improve when owners and operators upgrade, fuel efficiency also gets better, returning real-world benefits on top of the Low Emission Zone savings,' said Paul Everitt, SMMT chief executive.

'SMMT anticipates a slight rise in commercial vehicle registrations in this last quarter of 2011 as owners and operators buy-into more efficient, compliant vehicles. The commercial vehicle market has been strong all year and is up 20% for the year-to-date.

'It's clear that those businesses and individuals running vans and trucks in the capital have already begun to renew their vehicles and we'll be watching with interest how the market performs over the next few months.'

The Low Emission Zone will continue to apply to heavy commercial vehicles but from January 3, 2012, the regulations will demand an increase from Euro 3 to Euro 4 standards. Vehicles first registered as new on or after October 1, 2006 will meet the Euro 4 standard, but the 2010 Motorparc shows that 32% nationally, and 29% in Greater London, do not meet the Low Emission Zone threshold, said the SMMT.

Renault Kangoo electric wins international Van of the Year title

THE Kangoo Van Z.E., Renault's 100%-electric van, has been voted International Van of the Year 2012 by a jury of 22 European journalists specialising in light commercial vehicles

It is the first time that an electric vehicle has won the prize, competing against numerous internal combustion engined vans.

The jury chose Kangoo Van Z.E. for its zero-emission virtues, as well as for its practical and economical qualities. Kangoo Van Z.E., launches in the UK today (December 1).

The vehicle won the award with 104 points out of a possible 168, beating the Iveco Daily, Fiat Ducato and Volkswagen Caddy.

Jury chairman Pieter Wieman said: 'With the Kangoo Van Z.E. Renault brings the electric van within the reach of the normal European van user. Thereby delivering a major contribution to environmental sustainability, one of the most important issues of the transport of goods by road nowadays.'

In the UK, the van costs from £16,990 excluding VAT. The battery is hired for a monthly fee with a variety of mileage and duration permutations. For example, a three-year/12,000 miles per annum contract is £74 per month excluding VAT.

Fleets told to 'use better vans' to cut costs

VAN fleet operators can do more to control and cut costs to ensure survival in the increasingly competitive economic climate, according to a white paper commissioned by Volkswagen Commercial Vehicles UK.

With more than three million vans on UK roads, representing nearly 10% of all vehicles registered, they play a vital role in the economy, but the report highlights plenty of room for improved efficiency.

'Our white paper *'Evolution of Van: Efficiency and Fleet Operation'* was commissioned to look in detail at the current pressures on van fleet operators and help understand more about improving efficiency, such as how to utilise fleets more effectively, and how to implement simple measures to cut operating and whole life costs,' said Alastair Hemmings, national fleet manager, Volkswagen Commercial Vehicles UK.

'This means better fuel use, better maintenance, better van choice and better utilisation, while a good, franchised van dealer is increasingly important,' he continued.

For many van fleets, fuel is the biggest single cost. The report notes that a more effective use of telematics is one way to help well-run companies gain a lead over their less efficient competitors thanks to better data on fuel use and driver behaviour, plus the more obvious data on route planning, vehicle use, performance and maintenance.

The white paper, written by commercial vehicle consultant Robin Dickeson, is available to read at http://www.volkswagen-vans.co.uk/fleet/white-paper.

Nissan answers 'fleet business' request from franchise organisation

NISSAN has secured a unique fleet supply contract for a national renewable energy franchise company - a deal it claims that other motor manufacturers rejected as not being 'fleet business'.

The not-for-profit organisation, Puragen, has selected the newly-launched Nissan NV400, the NV200 and the Primastar for its 72 UK-wide franchise owners.

Jeremy Malindine, head of Puragen, says that despite its well-established corporate backing, the newly-launched organisation faced the seemingly impossible task in getting any motor manufacturers it approached to provide fleet terms.

He said: ‘What we needed was recognition that, although our franchise owners were new-start businesses, they would benefit from the strength of the group from day one.

‘But we soon discovered the problem that faces every new, national franchise operation made up of privately-owned franchises with no trading history; motor manufacturers tend to see each franchise owner as a single entity, rather than recognising the aggregate value of the entire franchise network.

‘This, typically, results in franchisees having to buy a single van as an individual, without fleet support and the protection that a fleet contract hire agreement provides. This is problematic for businesses that need to maintain vehicle uptime and have access to a replacement in case of maintenance.

‘It was a hard journey finding a vehicle buying arrangement for our franchisees and Nissan appeared to be the only manufacturer with the innovation and imagination to recognise the unique demands of franchised fleet supply.’

Nissan and the UK’s largest Nissan dealer group, West Way Nissan, was central in organising a range of contract hire agreements from a pool of suppliers, offering three-year, fully-maintained deals for Puragen franchise owners.

Malindine said: ‘We selected Nissan’s light commercial vehicles as they are more economical than most of the other vans we considered and also have better emission levels; an important factor to align with our credentials as an eco-business.

‘Load space in the vans is also critical as the systems we are carrying, including solar panels and hot water cylinders, can be large and bulky. That’s also why every vehicle is being supplied fully ply-lined.

‘Other standard specifications we have requested include a roof rack with ladder systems and pipe carriers, though individual franchisees can add other features, such as racking or false floors, if needed. The silver vans are all liveried by the West Way Nissan dealerships, helping to support the brand image we want our representatives to portray.’

Puragen expects its franchisees to acquire at least 100 vehicles within the next 12 months. It is the sister company to electrical contracting industry body, NICEIC, and is owned by the Ascertiva Group and the Electrical Safety Council.

Co-op leads the way with zero-emission Mercedes van

THE Midcounties Co-operative’s funeral service has become the first UK customer for a new breed of all-electric Mercedes-Benz van that produces no pollutant emissions whatsoever.

Its investment in the ground-breaking Vito E-CELL underlines Midcounties Co-operative’s commitment to environmental responsibility across all of its operations.

The Vito E-CELL is claimed to be the world’s first battery-powered van to be built on line at a mainstream production facility.

An 82 bhp electric motor drives the front wheels, which means that the space beneath the load floor can be used to store the lithium-ion batteries without impinging on the cargo area.

The Vito E-CELL also employs a regenerative system which captures the energy that would otherwise be lost in braking. This is used to power the heating and ventilation system and heated seats (available as standard.

The Vito E-CELL offers an average range between recharges of 80 miles, while its volume and 775kg payload capacities are claimed to be in line with those of standard models. The van will accelerate from 0-31 mph in 6.5 seconds while, to maximise operating range, it has an electronically limited top speed of 56 mph.

Warwick-based Midcounties Co-operative Funeral Group has more than 75 local funeral 'homes' throughout the West Midlands, Oxfordshire, Gloucestershire and Wiltshire areas, which offer a full range of services.

The long-bodied Vito E-CELL was supplied by Blackburn dealer Ciceley Commercials, having undergone conversion to private ambulance specification by Wilcox Limousines, of Chalfont St Peter. It is being used to take people from the place at which they passed away, to the funeral home.

Ciceley Commercials is additionally processing orders from Midcounties Co-operative Funeral for eight eco-friendly Vito 113CDI BlueEFFICIENCY models. These vehicles will also by converted by Wilcox Limousines for operation as private ambulances.

Simon Fisher, funeral group general manager for Midcounties Co-operative, said: 'We are very conscious of our responsibilities towards the wider community and determined, therefore, to do all we can to reduce our emissions.

'I have been searching for a suitable vehicle for a number of years and am delighted, therefore, to have found the E-CELL. It is a very exciting addition to our funeral fleet and one that can play a big part in helping us to achieve our environmental goals.'

Midcounties Co-operative Funeral has installed a recharging facility at its Walsall funeral home - it takes a maximum of six hours to charge a completely empty battery from a 380/400 volt input.

The Vito E-CELL is available direct from Mercedes-Benz UK on a contract hire basis and will be maintained within the manufacturer's existing dealer network by staff using established Star Diagnosis and other servicing systems.

Residual value update

Remarketing Association announces conference date

THE Vehicle Remarketing Association (VRA) will hold its 2012 conference on February 9 at the new Silverstone Wing, a state of the art conference facility within the Silverstone motor racing circuit.

The theme - Shaping the Future of Remarketing - is predicted to attract a great deal of interest at a time when market trading conditions continue to be very uncertain.

As with the inaugural VRA conference in January this year, the topics cover wide-ranging vehicle remarketing influences and activity, with audience engagement and instant feedback through the use of electronic voting handsets.

Television presenter and automotive broadcaster Ginny Buckley will again host the event, which features a line-up of key figures from the remarketing sector and broader motor industry.

Individual speakers already confirmed include: Trevor Finn, chief executive, Pendragon plc; Paul Everitt, chief executive, SMMT; John Lewis, chief executive, BVRLA; Helena Fearon, director risk and compliance, Trader Media Group; and David Raistrick, automotive partner, Deloitte UK

Additionally, the event will present a group forum, hosted by Ginny Buckley, comprising well known remarketing figures discussing the prevailing market conditions and general outlook.

Tickets can be booked online at www.vehicle-remarketing.co.uk and are priced at £149 for VRA members and £199 for non-members.

Manheim Remarketing launches new Coventry auction centre

MANHEIM Remarketing is expanding its operations in response to growing demand from vendors for an additional, dedicated centre for manufacturer closed auctions.

The new operation will be located in Coventry and will complement the sales programmes at Manheim Remarketing's super-centre at Bruntingthorpe.

The centre will open in March 2012 with Skoda UK confirmed as the first manufacturer to take residency following its commitment to a new 2012 programme of monthly auctions.

Mike Pilkington, managing director, Manheim Remarketing said: 'Despite the challenging times we are committed to investing in our infrastructure in order to meet changing customer requirements for flexible physical auction as well as online sales channels.

'Our investment in Coventry is part of our long term strategy and the new auction centre will support customers seeking an experience tailored to their requirements from a convenient, central location. Manheim Remarketing's presence at Bruntingthorpe and in Birmingham, complemented by this new operation at Coventry, will provide an unrivalled network of auction centres in the Midlands.'

Politics and regulation

Government scraps proposed Dartford Crossing toll rise

THE Government's decision not to increase Dartford Crossing toll charges has been welcomed by the Freight Transport Association (FTA).

A Department for Transport consultation on proposals to increase the charging regime at the Crossing during November and again in April 2012 was revealed in a consultation document issued in June.

This week Transport Minister Mike Penning said: 'I am pleased with the number of responses received and the level of engagement from local communities. In recognition of the number of representations made and to allow the Department time to carefully consider the responses further, I can advise that there will be no increase in either November 2011 or April 2012. A final decision on the timing of future rises and a full response to the consultation will, subject to Cabinet Committee clearance, be announced early next year.'

However, the FTA said that the Government's final decision on the timing and scale of future rises must be proportionate and a serious commitment given to invest in reducing congestion for this key piece of infrastructure.

Malcolm Bingham, the FTA's head of road network management, said: 'The news will alleviate some pressure for those thousands of hard-pressed commercial vehicle operators that use this key piece of infrastructure every day.

'The proposed 60% hike is astronomical and comes at a time of massive fuel price pressure too. Such a hike is an especially bitter pill to swallow given that the bridge was paid off in 2003. It was after this point that the toll, which was needed to pay off the bridge's construction, should have been abandoned. Instead it was reinvented as a 'road charge' aimed at controlling congestion; although, clearly this hasn't worked.

In a recent survey, 87% of FTA members named the Dartford Crossing as Kent's most costly congestion pinch point.

Bingham concluded: 'The average cost of an HGV stuck in traffic for an hour is around £50, so it is little wonder that our members see congestion as a massive burden. We would like to see the money taken from road users invested in free flow technology and ideally the construction of another crossing. This would be the fairest way of alleviating congestion on this critical road link and securing a long-term solution to the problem.'

IAM calls for drink-driving warnings on alcohol labels

THE Institute of Advanced Motorists (IAM) is calling for drink-driving warnings on labels for alcoholic drinks, at the start of its Christmas drink-drive campaign.

In 2009, one in five motorists killed in crashes were over the legal limit. Drink-driving killed 380 people in 2009, and seriously injured 1,490 others. There were more than 10,000 incidents involving drink-drivers and over 1,000 of those happened the morning after, between 7am and noon.

The alcohol industry has agreed to provide health information on 80% of alcohol labels on UK shelves by 2013 and the IAM believes that drink-driving warnings should be included.

IAM chief executive Simon Best said: 'Drink-driving is an epidemic on our roads. Every one of 2009's drink-driving incidents was preventable. That 380 people died in crashes that year, simply because they didn't heed the warnings and the law, is tragic.

'We want to see clear drink-driving warnings that are just as hard-hitting as health warnings on cigarette labels. If the drinks industry softens the road safety and health messages on its labels then the case for a compulsory system of labelling would be compelling. The message to everyone is don't drink and drive.'

Severn Bridge tolls to rise in 2012

INCREASED toll prices for vehicles crossing the Severn Bridge and Second Severn Crossing will be introduced on January 1, 2012.

Severn River Crossing Plc says that tolls for cars and motor caravans will increase to £6 from £5.70; tolls for small goods vehicles and small buses will increase to £12.10 from £11.50 and those for HGVs and buses will increase to £18.10 from £17.20.

The increases have been condemned by the Freight Transport Association, which says that lorry operators using the Severn Crossing already face the most expensive tolls in the UK

Ian Gallagher, the FTA's policy manager for Wales, said: 'It would seem that under the current contract the users of the Severn crossings are at the mercy of cynical charges to use, what is for the haulage industry, an essential piece of infrastructure.

'This nightmare of successive, above-inflation annual price hikes will end in 2017 when the bridge is back in public hands. But what this situation highlights is the need for private sector infrastructure projects in the future to more carefully consider the contractual terms so that those affected are not held to ransom with unreasonable demands.'

The FTA has suggested amending the current contract with Severn River Crossing Plc to reduce the level of tolls but to levy them over a longer period of time. This would still accrue the same level of income but would place less of a burden on businesses. FTA is also advocating a lower tariff for night-time crossings for commercial vehicles.

Remote islands to get cheaper fuel

REMOTE island communities will benefit from a 5p a litre fuel discount from March 2012, Chief Secretary to the Treasury Danny Alexander has announced.

The announcement came after the Government received final European Union clearance to operate its rural fuel rebate pilot scheme in the Inner and Outer Hebrides, Northern Isles, islands in the Clyde and the Isles of Scilly.

The scheme will bring much needed relief to remote islands, where pump prices are particularly high due to transportation costs, says the Treasury.

Fuel retailers on the islands will receive a 5p a litre rebate on the petrol and diesel they purchase and will be required to pass on the full saving to the customer. To ensure that retailers suffer no cashflow problems in passing on the discount from March 1, they will be able to claim the 5p rebate from HM Revenue & Customs on fuel purchased from January 1 next year.

Dealer news

Caffyns goes through transformation as it seeks opportunities

DEALER group Caffyns has reported pre-tax profits of £241,000 for the six-months to September 30 on turnover down to £86.7m compared with £103.79m for the same period last year when pre-tax profits were £917,000.

The company said that it continued to trade profitably in a weak market as it goes through a transformation period.

Chief executive Simon Caffyn said the company continued its drive to represent more resilient premium and premium-volume franchises and added: ‘As such, we are making necessary changes to our business which, underpinned by a strong balance sheet, means we are well placed to take advantage of improvements in market conditions in the longer term and deliver value to all shareholders.’

The company said it had sold or closed seven non-core operations during the period under review which accounted for £12.3m of the revenue reduction.

Describing the outlook for the rest of the trading year as ‘both challenging and uncertain’, Caffyn said: ‘The emphasis remains on careful stock management and the retention of aftersales customers. Costs have been cut further and we continue to review all areas of the business to identify any inefficiencies.

‘The sourcing of good used car stock is being improved to maintain enquiry levels and to return gross profit margins to higher levels. Our aftersales systems have been enhanced to aid retention of our customers and to help them to manage their service and repair costs through the use of service plans.

‘Despite today’s difficult trading environment, as a result of our substantial restructuring together with our strong balance sheet, we are well placed in the longer term to take advantage of any available opportunities.’

Ford urges vehicle drivers to 'warm up for winter' safely

FORD has launched a 'warm up for winter' campaign urging motorists to properly manage all aspects of car maintenance and preparation for driving in cold and icy conditions as the weather forecast predicts chillier days ahead.

The manufacturer is particularly concerned at the number of drivers taking to the roads without properly clearing snow and ice from their vehicles - and specifically windscreens.

Ford says motorists face stiff penalties and risk causing accidents by 'portholing' their car windscreen. Car drivers also risk a police fine and invalidating their insurance in the event of their vehicle being stolen if leaving it unattended with the engine running to defrost.

Stuart Southgate, Ford's automotive safety office director, said: 'Being able to clearly see where you are driving is perhaps the most obvious and basic safety requirement for motorists. Failing to take proper care to clear windscreens can have serious consequences not just for drivers, but for pedestrians and other road users too.'

If motorists do not wait for the whole windscreen to clear and instead drive with just a small 'porthole' of visibility ahead they can face a driving ban.

An Essex police spokesperson said: 'Failing to clear your windscreen of ice or frost constitutes careless driving, and would be punishable with points on your licence and a fine. The exact penalty is dependent on the circumstances and severity of the offence committed, and would be decided in a criminal court.'

Leaving a vehicle unattended while the engine is running on a public road is the offence of quitting. It attracts a £30 non-endorsable fixed penalty notice.

According to insurance company estimates, around 2,000 cars are stolen each year when 'frosting'.

While frustrated motorists often resort to using tools such as stiletto heels, CD cases, credit cards and finger nails to scrape at stubborn ice, one in 10 confesses to pouring a kettle of boiling water onto the windscreen.

Dave Gidden, product support manager at Autoglass, said: 'We don't advise using hot water. There is a huge difference in the temperature of the hot water people use and the windscreen itself in freezing conditions. This thermal shock may cause severe damage to the windscreen. Glass is very hard but it is not malleable so it doesn't permit rapid uneven expansion.'

Britain in pothole trouble before winter sets in

ROADS in many parts of the UK are already plagued with potholes before any winter freeze gets to work on them, the AA's army of Streetwatchers has revealed.

For councils trying to get on top of the plague, only the South West has on average more repaired potholes than new ones.

The survey involved around 1,000 AA Streetwatchers walking around their UK neighbourhoods for an hour noting nine road and path-related issues. Overall, they found that the average pothole count per AA Streetwatcher was 14.9 potholes compared to 12.5 a year ago. The survey defined a pothole as being at least six inches in diameter and at least two inches deep.

The survey results leave a strong sense of councils struggling courageously to tackle the pothole problem, says the motoring organisation. However, they seem to have been overwhelmed trying to patch up roads that are crumbling through years of inadequate funding of structural repairs.

AA president Edmund King said: ‘Drivers don’t want to spend the winter trying to zig-zag round even more potholes and paying out when their cars are damaged by repairable road defects. The poor condition of the roads is of particular concern to those on two wheels when the consequences of hitting a pothole can be fatal.

‘The AA Streetwatch volunteers have once again shown that the UK has a pothole plague which has not gone away despite extra repairs this year. Highways authorities need to get to grips with the pothole problem, as compensation claims will soar when cold weather strikes and roads start breaking up again placing greater burdens on already strained budgets.’

Brit award for National Windscreens

NATIONAL Windscreens has secured a three-year contract with Brit Insurance as its vehicle glass replacement and repair supplier.

The solus contract includes the use of National Windscreens supplier management facility ‘Quik Quote’ which is being used to effectively manage and reduce the invoicing and costs related to non-approved windscreen suppliers

Winning the contract supports National Windscreens’ growth plan, which has included the relocation to a larger head office, the addition of further branches and the employment of over 200 new staff in 2011.

National Windscreens insurance sales director Rob Stevens said: ‘The award of this contract is a testament to the continued investment we are making to ensure our delivery of a truly first class service to all of our customers, be they insurance or fleet-based, is maintained.’

People on the move

Whitehorn takes on president’s role at Hyundai Motor UK

TONY Whitehorn, Hyundai Motor UK’s (HMUK) managing director has been promoted to the role of president and CEO.

It is the first time in the history of Hyundai Motor Europe that a managing director has been promoted to president and CEO level.

Whitehorn said: ‘I am delighted to be asked to become the new president and CEO of Hyundai here in the UK. Not just because it’s a real honour, but mainly because it underlines the fact that the company is maturing in its development as a global player and localising.

‘Hyundai is becoming stronger across the globe because it recognises the regional variations. That’s why we have seen the introduction of cars being specifically designed and produced for the European market. The benefits of this bespoke approach have been obvious to all and this new role for me is another significant step in the localisation of Hyundai in the market place.’

Hyundai UK’s current president, Ike Oh, will remain at HMUK and work alongside Whitehorn as Chief Executive Co-ordinator.

Chater appointed to ICFM Council

THE Institute of Car Fleet Management (ICFM) has appointed Stephen Chater, corporate operations manager at BMW Group UK, to its Council.

ICFM chairman Roddy Graham said: ‘I know Steve is extremely passionate about the importance of training in personal career development and enhancing job roles by delivering added value benefits. I am sure that his contribution while serving on our Council will be immense.’

Chater, a member (MICFM) of the ICFM, has been working in the automotive industry for BMW for over 25 years. In this time he has held numerous roles within the BMW organisation and played an active role in improving education within the sector. He spent six years at BMW in various training roles, latterly as head of the BMW Group Academy, responsible for all training and development.

Taylor takes on marketing role at Volkswagen Fleet

ROB Taylor is to join the Volkswagen Fleet Services team as marketing manager from December 16, replacing Cheryle Kateley who is leaving the business temporarily after 15 years to take a sabbatical.

Taylor is no stranger to the Volkswagen Group, having held the position of national communications manager within the SEAT brand since 2006. He previously worked in Audi for nine years covering a variety of roles.

In his new role, Taylor will be responsible for overseeing Volkswagen Fleet Services’ marketing activities, including advertising, events and the fleet website.

Potter takes to the driving seat at Aston Barclay Chelmsford

EXPERIENCED vehicle remarketeer Martin Potter has taken over the helm at Aston Barclay’s Chelmsford auction house.

Over the past 20 years Potter has had a number of senior operational and sales roles, most recently with Manheim as corporate sales director.

Tim Hudson, Aston Barclay’s managing director, said: ‘You simply can’t understate the value of Martin’s appointment to the company, he brings with him a vast wealth of experience and arguably one of the finest reputations in the industry. I know his immediate input will again take our Chelmsford operation to another level and I am delighted to welcome him on board.’
Photo caption: Aston Barclay managing director Tim Hudson (right) welcomes Martin Potter, the company’s newly appointed general manager for Chelmsford.

Manheim Remarketing appoints new transport and logistics boss

MANHEIM Remarketing has appointed Darren Simpson to the new position of general manager, transport and logistics.

He will be responsible for the overall business logistics strategy, with a focus on best practice, customer service, and cost control.

Simpson joins Manheim Remarketing with over 15 years experience in the logistics industry, having previously held senior management positions at Allied Bakeries and Norbert Dentressangle.

Nearly 500,000 vehicles are handled by Manheim Remarketing each year through its dedicated sales channels and 18 remarketing centres throughout the UK. The number of vehicle movements has grown steadily over the past three years by 5% and the number of miles travelled over the same period has increased from 18 million to nearly 20 million miles, an increase of just over 10%.

The appointment follows the recent decision by Manheim Remarketing to strengthen its logistics capability by investing in nine new DAF FAS CF 75.310 eight car transporters. That increased the overall size of its owned car transporter fleet by 25%, from 28 to 35 vehicles.

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