FREIGHT &LOGISTICS

60-second interview

ANDY EASTLAKE
Managing Director, Low Carbon Vehicle Partnership

■ What does your current role entail?
I'm responsible for the whole strategic leadership of the Low Carbon Vehicle Partnership, but as a small secretariat team this can mean that I get involved in a very wide range of activities, from designing the latest accreditation schemes for buses and HGVs to supporting the uptake of low carbon technologies.

■ How important are HGVs as part of the drive towards low carbon vehicles?
Up to now, the policy has mainly focused on cars, buses and – to some extent – vans, but we're now turning more of our attention to the harder-to-tackle freight sector. One of the problems is the huge range of vehicle types which makes it harder to introduce simple policy mechanisms that are effective across the board. Much of our work so far has been focused on comparative validation and accreditation of vehicle types and technologies for HGVs. We've also been working on a retrofit accreditation scheme which can cut polluting emissions from trucks in the short term.

■ What are the specific challenges for freight when it comes to moving to low carbon vehicles?
Air quality impacts are, arguably, the most immediate concern, particularly where operations are in sensitive (mainly urban) areas. Thankfully, Euro VI is delivering what was intended here. Perhaps one of the biggest challenges now is that many of the 'easy wins' have already been taken, since fuel is such a significant cost for operators. While the potential benefits from new fuels and technology are great, it is now more difficult to identify the best pathway for each specific operation. Add to this the challenge of getting all our information into the hands of the smaller operators who can really benefit from quality data to inform their choices.

■ Many manufacturers are now investing heavily in electric vehicles – are they backing the right horse?
There are certainly some big names investing in truck electrification, but there are also new gas engines and diesel products coming to market. It will be very interesting to see if a disruptor (think Tesla in cars) will emerge in the heavy sector. It will be a long time before we have fleets of electric long-haul trucks plying our motorways but that is the end-game certainly. It will be an interesting journey getting there and will include continued development of diesel technology in the near term.

■ What do you predict will be the fuel of the future for HGVs?
It is probably easier to answer what won't be the fuel of the future, and that is fossil diesel! We already have gas, renewable diesel and electricity and I do think hydrogen has a role for HGVs. Our challenge is trying to make sense of this variety to help steer the market and make the strategic investments in the infrastructure required – and all within a highly competitive and low margin commercial environment.

■ How will Clean Air Zones drive the market for low-emission trucks?
Air quality has already played a significant role in determining the current truck market but, fortunately, today's vehicles are meeting the air quality challenge head on. Replacing or retrofitting the pre-Euro VI fleet as quickly as practical (and affordable) will help meet immediate concerns. Perhaps more impact will be seen with the introduction of Zero Emission Zones which, in my view, are inevitable in the long term, and already proposed in Oxford and London.

■ What role do you think autonomous vehicles will have to play?
Autonomy has the potential to contribute to cutting carbon and emissions but it won't necessarily be delivered without careful planning. We published a report last year – *Automated Vehicles – Automatically Low Carbon?* – which showed that we need sensible policy interventions to ensure that enhancements in connectivity and autonomy do deliver emissions reductions and not, as might be the case, drive further increases in the demand for travel and mobility.

■ What do you see as the biggest challenges for the logistics industry in the next 10 years?
In 10 years I think vehicles, operations, data and expectations will be radically different. Picking the winner now is very difficult, so identifying the next logical strategic step is an area where Government – and the LowCVP – can hopefully help.