

Empty freight runs waste millions of pounds and cost the earth

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Road freight operators could save millions of pounds and significantly reduce carbon emissions by improving their operations, according to recent research involving Heriot-Watt University.

The study by the Centre into road freight movements confirms that the UK freight market and transport industry is on the road to recovery following the economic downturn. In 2013 an estimated 1.6 million people worked in logistic related jobs, accounting for over five per of

the UK workforce.

Despite freight movements being up, loads are still down, with the proportion of empty kilometres run increasing by around three per cent over the last 13 years. Recent figures show almost a third of HGV kilometres driven were without a load, when they could have been carrying on average 10.4 tonnes of goods, or approximately 26,000 cans of standard baked beans, per truck.

The study also shows that most freight operators, 87 per cent, employs fewer than 10 people and owns an average of four vehicles. Only 55 road haulage companies employ more than 250 workers.

The Centre warns that if the industry is to contribute to meeting ambitious Government targets to significantly reduce all [carbon emissions](#) by 80 per cent by 2050, operators need to join forces to find efficient and innovative solutions to transporting the UK's consumer goods.

Maja Piecyk, Principal Investigator at Heriot-Watt and co-author of the study, explains, "While our findings show the industry is recovering, they also reveal it is highly fragmented and is dominated by small companies and sole operators, who may not have the means or the money to become more efficient or environmentally friendly.

"If the industry is going to change practice significantly, and meet Government regulations, it's important to not only invest in new technology and systems but to encourage new thinking. Reducing empty running will require new levels of operation and collaboration, which is one of the critical success factors the Centre aims to address."

Industry Consortium

Already 13 companies have signed up to help tackle road freight issues by joining an industry consortium set up by the Centre. Combining logistics expertise from Heriot-Watt University's Logistics Research Centre and engineering expertise from the Department of Engineering at the University of Cambridge, it will explore ways to make road freight economically, socially and environmentally sustainable.

Operators of all sizes are now being invited to join the consortium, where they can help define and participate in leading-edge research and be among the very first to trial new technology or ways of working that could make dramatic environmental and financial savings.

Members are already testing a new decarbonisation software tool which allows them to calculate the most carbon friendly and economical way to transport goods around the UK.

Provided by Heriot-Watt University

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