

Is your satnav fit for purpose?

News story

The number of bridge strike incidents in the UK remains alarmingly high. Some advice for drivers and operators to help lower this number.



The number of bridge strike incidents in the UK remains alarmingly high. In 2020/21 there were 1624 incidences on the Network Rail infrastructure alone. There are many more incidences of commercial vehicles using inappropriate routes, including not complying with weight limits, which results in damage to roads, congestion and risks the safety of other road users.

In addition to the potentially catastrophic road safety issues, there are serious financial implications to these incidences. The impact on drivers and operators can also be significant. Following a bridge strike in St. Helens, the traffic commissioner held a public inquiry and concluded that the primary cause of the incident was the driver's failure to carry out his responsibilities in a professional manner. His HGV driver's licence was revoked, and he was disqualified from holding an HGV licence for six months.

However, the traffic commissioner also found that the operator could have done more to prevent the incident and the operator found their licence permanently curtailed.

One of the reasons for these incidences occurring is poor route planning and the reliance on inappropriate satnav systems, which lack commercial functionality to warn the driver of all the critical points on routes. Whilst satnav technology can be employed effectively and efficiently, the devices used must be fit for a commercial role. Good satnav devices will regularly be updated with up-to-date information on the road network, including height restrictions.

Having suitable satnav equipment is not a substitute for effective route planning, but it may assist the driver to avoid some of these incidences, especially when routes change during a journey.

The traffic commissioners expect operators and drivers to treat this issue

seriously and take responsibility. Any failure to do so could lead to an operator or driver having to appear before a traffic commissioner. To minimise the risk of poor road choices always:

- Make sure your satnav is a commercial vehicle satnav, not one designed for a car! Planning a route on a device that thinks you are driving a car has too many risks. Make sure your device is up to date. Roads and maps are constantly changing. It is your responsibility to plan correctly.
- Make sure that if satnavs are provided to drivers, they are trained to use them and, importantly, the correct checks and procedures are in place to ensure they do! They must know how to set the alarm if they run close to an obstacle.
- Have a satnav policy within your operation. Set rules for use of personal satnavs and ensure they are fit for purpose.
- Don't assume you know the restrictions on a road, check first!
- Double check on an up-to-date map. You could use Google Street Views to get a sight of an unfamiliar route or junction, including delivery or pick up points. Operators should establish whether there are any localised issues that impact on routes and include this in customer information notes for drivers.
- Know your vehicle height, width and weight, and ensure your drivers do – provide height conversion charts.
- Even when your vehicle is 'not in service' your route must still be planned. Taking unsuitable shortcuts back to the depot or when going for maintenance is a risk.

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