

'Greening' your fleet

Two-pronged approach

Fleet managers face many pressures and 'green' issues are perhaps not always top of their agenda. But for all businesses it's becoming increasingly important to know what their carbon footprint is and how they can manage and reduce it. The cost of fuel is a burden for any business with vehicles, particularly when prices escalate and environmental legislation continues to be more stringent, focusing on reducing the impact on the environment. Company boards also recognise the customer and shareholder appeal of corporate social responsibility policies in which the environment is a focal point. For them it's just plain good business sense.

Operating a vehicle fleet inevitably contributes to a company's carbon footprint and is therefore a key area of focus when seeking ways to reduce it. Making it happen, however, requires good planning, but it can be done and in ways that will, in the longer run, save you money. One way to tackle the issue is to consider your fleet and its operation in two parts: there's a 'fixed' element and a 'flexible' element, just as there are fixed and variable costs in any business. The fleet is the fixed element, as it is something that cannot be changed easily overnight, but which needs approaching in a longer-term strategic way. The way the fleet operates is the flexible element, which through careful management can result in immediate environmental gains as well as cost savings. As with all business improvements, good measurement based on sound data is the key. Where are you today, where do you want to be tomorrow, and what progress are you making along the way?

The purchase/lease of an eco-friendly fleet – the fixed element

First you need to consider your fleet replacement policy. Does it have 'eco friendliness' as a core theme? Is it flexible enough to take advantage of the constantly evolving technologies? The automotive industry around the world is competing to produce cleaner and greener vehicles. With solutions ranging from further development of conventional internal combustion engine technology through hybrid solutions to zero emission electric vehicles, there's a growing array to choose from. Amongst all of these there may be a solution – or a mix of solutions – that meets your needs and which could bring the environmental benefits you seek. However, making the choice requires that you have the facts at your fingertips. You need to know precisely what distances your vehicles cover each day, how they get between places, and what they do on arrival. Much of that information can now be obtained through a vehicle tracking system and processed into the essential data that is essential if you are to make informed decisions and to argue your business case for change. Consider too the numerous fiscal incentives now being made available by most governments to encourage greener fleets. These can range from significant capital contributions to the cost of new vehicles to lower taxation levels on the type of fuel used or reduced levels of annual vehicle taxation, even free parking in city centres!

Eco-friendly operation of the fleet – the flexible element

Making the choice isn't always easy and 'greening' the fleet will take time as it involves huge investments and long term contracts regarding vehicle purchase.

However there is another to reduce your company's footprint, which is pretty immediate and could start tomorrow.

This requires a focus on the utilisation of your vehicles:

- Smart job allocation and scheduling to reduce total mileage and footprint.
- Eco-friendly driving style to save fuel and reduce CO₂ emissions.

Smart scheduling

To make smart decisions you need information. This will enable you to send the right person to the right job and to assess the urgency or priority over other jobs. You then need further information, such as current location and traffic en route. All these factors play a role in your decisions, which should be focused on reducing mileage and idle time and ultimately determine the total mileage and carbon footprint of your vehicles.

That's where technology can help. Connected Navigation solutions from TomTom WORK enable you to make the best business decision. Nearest available vehicles can be selected for a new job and communications sent straight to the staff in the field. Historical trip data can be analysed to avoid wasted mileage. And whilst satellite navigation will get your drivers between places by the shortest route, they can now make intelligent use of live information such as HD Traffic™ so traffic hold-ups can be avoided and delays minimised by choosing alternative routes.

It is also worth noting that research suggests that the shortest route may not always be best, because in general a more constant and fluid driving style is more eco-friendly compared to driving in heavy traffic. A connected Navigation system will achieve this for you, to ensure you are on the optimal route, not just the shortest. It means that you use less fuel and emit less CO₂ and it makes journey times more predictable, enabling accurate ETA's for your customers.

Driving behaviour plays a large part

The manner in which your vehicles are driven plays a large part in how much fuel is used and therefore the amount of CO₂ emitted. Heavy acceleration or braking and excessive speeding are driving characteristics that have the biggest negative impact on fuel consumption, not to mention the driver safety and cost aspect. This should be viewed on a company level. It is about setting a company standard by which your staff can be benchmarked - a company-wide, fully-supported and stringent green driving policy. Once this is in place it is about meeting the objectives of this policy and having effective tools to monitor progress and performance.

A quick example of a repeat offender is idling time and the costs associated with having an engine running for over five minutes while standing still. There could be reasons for this, but more often than not it can be avoided and if drivers are aware of the policy you can monitor their adherence to it. Speeding, harsh steering and braking do not have a positive effect on fuel economy. Having a tracking device in the vehicle with a built-in accelerometer will measure the g-forces of the vehicle. This gives a continuous measurement over time of all of your vehicles and helps you set a standard. Driving events can then be monitored and exceptions can be investigated and dealt with appropriately.

Protecting the environment, your drivers and your bottom line

New technology is bringing many benefits that contribute to reducing the environmental impact of business and help organisations conduct themselves responsibly. This covers technology within the vehicles themselves and also the technology used to manage these vehicles, which work together to reduce the carbon footprint.

The key to unlocking the potential of this is detailed information delivered in an easy-to-manage way that will tell you the size of your current carbon footprint and allows you to monitor the success of your policy and watch this reduce over time.

You need to establish objectives and a strategy to meet them in the form of a policy with clear KPI's to gauge performance and success. Having these daily KPI's at your fingertips will help you to achieve the goals you have set.

Managing mileage and driving behaviour protects the environment, protects your drivers and protects your bottom line.

Connected Navigation from TomTom WORK offers smart fleet and workforce management solutions to improve business performance, in a responsible and green way:

The Dashboard reporting gives management an immediate overview of performance indicators against the goals set for:

- o Driving behavior
- o Carbon footprint
- o Idle time

TomTom HD Traffic keeps your fleet moving and out of traffic where possible.

Real-time information (on job status, position of workforce) helps you reduce mileage by scheduling smartly.