

News story: Vans to go greener and cleaner under new plans

Changes to driver licensing rules will make it easier for van drivers to switch to electric vehicles, the government has announced today (28 July 2017).

Van drivers will be able to operate heavier electric or gas-powered vehicles without having to apply for a new licence, as part of moves to improve air quality in towns and cities across the country.

The reforms are a step towards the government's aim for nearly all cars and vans on our roads to be zero emission by 2050.

Currently, a motorist with an ordinary category B licence for a car can drive a van weighing up to 3,500kg. Cleaner vans, especially those powered by electricity from batteries, are generally heavier than conventional diesel vans because of the battery they carry. This reduces the amount of goods they can carry or means van drivers have to apply for a category C licence with the associated costs and medical report requirements.

Now the Department for Transport has published [plans to allow motorists to drive vans weighing up to 4,250kg](#) if they are powered by electricity, natural gas, LPG or hydrogen.

Transport Minister Jesse Norman said:

Vans have become essential to our economy and are vital for our builders, small businesses and delivery drivers. We have more of them on our roads than ever before. That's a good sign for the economy, but our challenge is to try to tackle their impact on air quality.

We want to make it easier for businesses to opt for cleaner vehicles, and these proposals are designed to do just that.

Road traffic estimates show there has been a rapid rise in light goods vehicle traffic over the last 20 years, in part powered by the growth in internet shopping.

In 2016 vans clocked up 49.1 billion vehicle miles – an increase of 23% when compared with 2006. Vans spend much of their time driving around our towns and cities and over 96% of them are diesel powered so making them greener is essential for people's health and the environment.

Head of Fleet at Ocado Stuart Skingsley said:

At Ocado, we are very keen to incorporate the latest low-emission technologies in our vehicle fleet, but we have been unable to do so, due to the extra weight of the technology and category B licence restrictions.

This vital derogation would allow us to field the latest alternatively fuelled vans, reducing harmful emissions and improving the UK's air quality.

A [public consultation](#) is now open on the proposed new measures and will last 12 weeks. They will help level the playing field by addressing the payload penalty which currently puts operators of cleaner vans at a commercial disadvantage compared to operators of equivalent conventionally-fuelled vehicles.