HOUSE OF COMMONS

Transport Committee

Oral evidence: Volumetric concrete mixers, HC 643

Wednesday 20 March 2024

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Watch the meeting

Members present: Iain Stewart (Chair); Jack Brereton; Fabian Hamilton; Paul Howell; Karl McCartney; Grahame Morris; Gavin Newlands; Greg Smith.

Questions 1–42

Witnesses

I: Chris Smith, Chair, Batched on Site Association; Matt Payne, Member of the Executive, Batched on Site Association; and Chris Leese, Chair, MPA UK Concrete.

Written evidence from witnesses:

- VCM0001 Batched on Site Association
- VCM0002 MPA UK Concrete

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Chris Smith, Matt Payne and Chris Leese.

Q1 **Chair:** Good morning and welcome to today's session of the Transport Select Committee. Today we are looking at the issue of volumetric concrete mixers, road weight limits and related matters. Before we begin, I invite each of the witnesses to give their name and organisation for the purposes of our records.

Chris Leese: I am Chris Leese. I work for the Mineral Products Association, which is the trade association that represents the mineral products industry. It does what it says on the tin—for example, cement, aggregates, asphalt and concrete. Around 80,000 people are employed in our industry. Specific to today, we represent around 70% of the UK concrete industry, including both large and small operators. Indeed, a number of our member companies also operate VCMs.

Matt Payne: I am Matthew Payne, a member of the BSA. I have a volumetric concrete company that was started in 2008. We currently have 13 volumetric vehicles. Two years ago, we invested in a plant and have five drum mixers and 23 employees.

Chris Smith: I am Chris Smith, chairman of the BSA. I own Mixamate Concrete, which is the oldest volumetric company in the country. We have 25 vehicles operating across the south and Yorkshire. I am also the owner of IHS, which is a manufacturing company in Sheffield that builds our trucks. They are exclusively UK built.

Q2 **Chair:** Thank you. We are grateful to all three of you for your time and evidence this morning. I will start off by trying to get an understanding of the scale of the sector and the number of traffic movements that flow from it, to help to put things into context. Mr Smith, how many vehicles are there, and how many movements do we have on our roads from them?

Chris Smith: We estimate that there are about 1,000 VCMs in the country. That is from top to bottom—from Cornwall up to Scotland. There are between 300 and 350 companies. The average is one or two trucks. Matt and I are quite unusual to have as many trucks as we have. They are basically "ma and pa" firms—husband and wife companies. They have one or two trucks that the husband will probably drive, and the wife takes the phone calls.

As to the share of the market, it is estimated that about 10% of the whole ready-mix market is done by volumetrics. It is never going to be much more. We are the retail end of the sector. Ready-mix has a massive place in the market for big projects, where there are lorries in all day long. That is not what we do.

The sector has been in existence for over 45 years. Mixamate started with a man and a shovel standing on the back of what looked like a little

tipper with a mixer on the back. It has just progressed and automated to where we are now.

I might have to come back on actual lorry movements. We had a report by Regeneris in 2017, looking at the environment and those sorts of things. It is quite a big report. It is not a number that gets chucked around a lot.

Q3 **Chair:** Mr Leese, from your side of the sector, how many vehicles do you have, and what is the typical number of movements?

Chris Leese: I don't know if we are from the other side of the sector. I think we are all part of the same sector. The ready-mix market in the UK is worth perhaps between 18 million and 20 million cubic metres. We measure our product in cubic metres as opposed to tonnes. I think the guys will probably agree with me that if you multiply by, say, 2.6 you would come to tonnes.

Ready-mix concrete is produced in batch plants, from around 1,000 sites in the UK. I can safely say that there will be a ready-mix concrete batching plant in every constituency. It is very much a local material. The average delivery distance is probably less than 10 miles. It is a little bit difficult to be precise about truck numbers, but the best information we have is that there are around 4,000 to 4,200 truck mixers operating in the UK. Elsewhere, you have potentially been informed that that number is much greater, but around 4,200 is the best information I have.

It is fair to say that in the past couple of decades, or indeed longer, volumetrics have established a place in certain segments of the concrete market. As we have just heard, they may comprise around 20% of the total fleet. We don't have a problem, as MPA, with volumetric trucks. As I said, some of our members actually operate volumetrics, so we are not anti-volumetrics. Both methods of delivery have their advantages and disadvantages, but we compete in the same segments. In certain segments of the concrete market both forms of delivery compete. What MPA is seeking is a level playing field.

Q4 **Chair:** Thank you. We want to explore all those issues this morning. At the outset we are, as I say, just trying to gauge the scale of the issue. I appreciate that construction projects come in all shapes and sizes. To help to inform our discussion, if you took a mid-size project, how many movements from both VCMs and truck mixers would you expect to see in a typical day on local roads leading up to that, and over what sort of duration?

Matt Payne: It is all project dependent—what they are using as their building material and whether it is forms and things that they are filling with concrete, or whether they are doing bricks and blocks. It is all dependent on what the site is. A general house would probably be 30 cubic metres of concrete. An 8-metre drum mixer is 16, so there would be four movements in and out in that day to deliver it.

Chair: For one house?

Matt Payne: For one house. The majority of the time they pump that, so there would be a fifth lorry there as well to pump it. They don't always use a pump. Some of them use a digger bucket or straight pour it. My personal point of view is that a pump is better because it makes it easier for them. A general house is probably five movements.

Q5 **Chair:** We want to explore in later questions the impact on road surfaces and strength from repeated movements at different weights. We will turn to that in a moment. The issue is obviously the weight-limit regulations. Mr Smith, you say the sector has about 1,000 VCMs. How many are above the proposed new weight limit? Are they all above, or is it a certain proportion?

Chris Smith: Since 2018, when the new rules came in saying no new vehicles could be put on the road at the higher weight, the market has virtually collapsed in new vehicles. Most of the vehicles out there now are under 12 years old. One of the things they put in the new regulation was a cut-off at 12 years, so any lorry that got to 12 years old could not be used any more at the higher weight. That is a bit of a sting because you don't do that many miles a year anyway. We have the same regulations on safety, MOTs and inspections as any HGV on the road, which we didn't prior to 2018. We welcomed them when they came in because it got rid of the cowboy element, which could run any lorry however they wanted to.

On deliveries, I have 25 trucks. They are not all on the road every day. We probably do between 20 and 40 deliveries a day. The sector where we specialise is a lot smaller. We normally do a lot of extensions and a lot of underpinning jobs, especially in the London area. We might only do two deliveries to one address. It might be the foundations for an extension, and a week or two later we will go back and do the floor. We are not personally involved in the big projects. Matt gets involved a bit more because he has ready-mix lorries. Obviously, the MPA are doing massive sites where there are sometimes hundreds of movements a day.

Matt Payne: Obviously, since 2018 we have seen quite a few struggles with covid and such things. The industry was worth £55 million to the manufacturers pre-2018, but after that it has been worth about £9 million a year in new lorry sales. Lorry sales have dropped dramatically, going on the weight. There are various companies that now operate the new lorries at the lower weight. There is a company called Custom Concrete; he invested in a new lorry because he thought, with the lower weights, that he would need to put another lorry on the road to keep up with demand. That is one way it has affected it.

Q6 **Jack Brereton:** I want to ask first about waste. We have heard about situations where traditional drum mixers have gone solid because the situation was not really appropriate, and it might have been better to use a VCM in some of those circumstances. Do you think there are more

potential opportunities where VCMs would be better suited because, maybe, they have to wait for a period of time to access a site or there are specific circumstances which mean that a traditional drum mixer is not really appropriate, but they have to put more pressure on using those at the moment because of the restrictions on VCMs? Do you think there could be more opportunities to reduce waste and some of the impact? The vehicles are obviously completely destroyed if they go solid. Is there an opportunity to use VCMs more to address the issue of waste?

Chris Leese: I will answer your question, and no doubt these guys will have something to say as well, but we skipped over the question of vehicle movements with truck mixers. As I said, to go back to that, there are between around 4,000 and 4,200 trucks on the road. Perhaps the average truck mixer does five or six loads a day. It will depend on whether it is in London or in a rural area. That would give some idea of the number of movements every day associated with truck mixers.

On the point that you raise about waste, the BSA suggests that because of shelf-life issues ready-mix concrete is wasted and goes to landfill. You may have seen in my biography that before I started working for the Mineral Products Association I was managing director of one of the largest ready-mix producers in the UK for nine years. My experience with ready-mix concrete goes back a lot longer than that. I would dispute the fact that waste is an issue with truck mixers. Even if it was a significant issue, it is a fact that the huge proportion of concrete waste—if we can call it that—is recycled in the UK. The UK has been very successful indeed as a nation at recycling. Almost 100% of demolition waste is recycled back into the value stream.

Jack Brereton: You can't recycle a drum mixer that is solid.

Chris Leese: I was going to come to that. It is an incredibly rare event—incredibly rare. If I can continue, ready-mix concrete is batched according to the customer's requirements. We don't batch exactly on site like VCMs can, but if a customer says they need 2 cubic metres, we can deliver 2 cubic metres. Customers, in our experience, are generally fairly adept at ordering the amount they want.

Travel distances are, on average, less than 10 miles. It is very unusual for a delivery journey to take anything like two hours, although it can happen in London, for example, due to traffic conditions. Concrete can be retarded. You can use admixtures to retard it so that it does not necessarily go off in two hours. Even if material gets returned to the concrete batching plant, with modern batching systems it is possible to batch on top of the material remaining in the drum of the truck mixer. That waste, if you like, becomes part of the next load.

I could expand further. There are all sorts of things that the industry does to prevent the occurrence of waste concrete. Where that occasionally happens, in my experience waste concrete is allowed to cure. There is then a demand from local recyclers to take it away, crush it and turn it

into aggregate. I cannot think of an occasion when concrete waste went into landfill. It would always be either reused or recycled.

Jack Brereton: Matt, do you want to add anything?

Matt Payne: Going back to the movement thing, as Chris brought it up again, a drum mixer is loaded at the plant and has a specific amount on it of 1 to 8 metres. It drops that load and then comes back to the plant. If he is doing a 2-metre job, he would go and do the job, come back, load up and go to the next job. The beauty of the volumetric is that it can carry everything on board, and it does a milk round, so it doesn't need to keep coming back to the plant. Some days, in a 10-mile radius, a drum mixer might be doing 70 miles to a volumetric's 20 miles, because he doesn't need to keep coming back to the plant to reload. A volumetric can just do the milk round, which is what they are designed to do.

On the waste thing, volumetrics are very good for out-of-hours work and things where there are time constraints. A member of the BSA went to a prison. They had a problem and the prison was on lockdown for two hours. He was in a volumetric. He just locked himself in the cab and waited. There was no concrete to go off. If it had been a drum mixer, he would have lost the load and then he would have lost the drum, as you alluded to.

I agree with Chris: I don't think much concrete goes into landfill. It is recycled, but the recycled aggregates and crushed concrete he is talking about are normally from demolition sites, where the concrete has finished its lifespan of 10 or 20 years as a yard or as a building and then is recycled. It is not brand-new concrete that is wasted, to then be recycled. I am sure that not many of you know, but to produce a tonne of cement makes about a tonne of carbon. If you are wasting a cubic metre of concrete—if it was a footing mix—there might be 200 kilos of cement in there. That is 200 kilos of carbon that is being produced to recycle that into crushed concrete, as opposed to going into construction.

Q7 **Jack Brereton:** Chris, are there situations at the moment where basically, because of these restrictions, we are seeing over-dependence on using drum mixers as opposed to some of the alternatives?

Chris Smith: From the customers' point of view, volumetrics or mix-on-site operations have been around for about 45 years. Most customers, when they are looking at a job, will think, "Right, that's a volly job," or, "That's a ready-mix job." There is obviously a crossover in the middle where they get it wrong or they are not educated enough to know what the alternatives are.

We turn work down, sometimes daily, when people ring up saying, "Oh, we've got this job here. It's a 50 or 100-metre job." We say, "It's not for us. We're not geared up for that. That's a wholesale job. Give one of the ready-mix firms a ring." We have to be careful what we take on. Again, the ready-mix drum guys don't want to be doing 1 or 2-metre jobs. They

will do them because they don't lose money on them. They charge part-load, so every ready-mixed lorry that goes out will make the same profit as if it went out loaded, or with just 1 metre—they will charge for the fresh air in the mixer. One-metre jobs can be aggravation. It is probably going to be a DIY-er and when you get there, you are not going to be able to dump it straightaway and run. Most customers pick the right tool nowadays.

Q8 **Jack Brereton:** Matt, you mentioned some of the environmental savings, particularly the reduction in some of the carbon emissions, as a particular factor. How much environmental saving do you think can be achieved by using a volumetric mixer as opposed to using some of the more traditional methods?

Matt Payne: I would have to look it up, but one fact I have here is about the amount of water used to wash out the mixer. Traditionally, a drum mixer is washed out at the end of the day with about 1,000 litres of water. For a volumetric, it is about 150 litres. Granted, a lot of that water is recycled from both the volumetric and the drum mixer, but there is a big issue there. I don't actually know the figures on the amount of carbon that would be saved by using volumetrics.

Jack Brereton: You particularly illustrated how going back and forth to the plant with a drum mixer is obviously using a lot more fuel, with more emissions, than going from job to job.

Matt Payne: There was a thing done by Regeneris showing that it was in the millions of kilometres for the extra road movements that were needed to carry on going at the lower weight. The average load size for a volumetric is 2.9 cubic metres. That is doing the milk round. They were saying that an extra million kilometres would be needed with the lower weight, if they had to go back and reload during the day.

Jack Brereton: Chris, do you want to come in?

Chris Leese: Yes. There are quite a lot of things. On the waste point, I don't think there is any point in getting into tit for tat, and I'm sure you would not thank us for that, but I just cannot agree with the points that have been made about waste in ready-mix. It just is not the case. I think we are playing to exceptions—the one time when a truck mixer was in a prison and the prison went into lockdown. As a general rule, on the general deliveries that either type of vehicle would make, a ready-mix truck will not incur waste. Obviously, waste is wasted cost. It is lost profit, so it is something that the industry fights very hard against.

On the point about water, again in my direct experience—having been responsible right at the beginning of my career for 400 or 500 ready-mix plants; I honestly can't remember, but it was a lot of concrete plants—the drum mixer has to be washed out at the end of the day. The industry avoids using mains water wherever it can, first, because it recognises its environmental responsibilities, so it seeks to reduce the use of mains water, and—

Q9 **Jack Brereton:** What further steps is the sector taking to improve the environmental effects?

Chris Leese: Secondly, relating to costs, you would find, if you went to many ready-mix plants, that water is recycled. I think you mentioned that, Matt, in fairness. A lot of water is recycled within the plant. Indeed, a lot of plants also harvest rainwater to avoid the use of mains water. The industry has taken steps to reduce the use of mains water. Certainly, when I was in my previous employ, one of the KPIs that we had in the business was the number of litres of water used per cubic metre of concrete that was produced. We were successful in driving it down.

Q10 **Jack Brereton:** What sort of steps have been taken to reduce carbon emissions?

Chris Leese: In terms of carbon emissions, on the one hand sometimes a volumetric solution will involve less journeys. Sometimes that is true; I agree. Sometimes, it won't and that is where we come into direct competition.

Transport emissions are, of course, important. They are recognised by the Mineral Products Association in the road map to beyond net zero that we have produced. Transport emissions are around 7% of the total emissions from the concrete and cement industry, but that is all transport: it includes deliveries to plants, and the cement and aggregates deliveries to these guys' depots. Transport emissions are important. Our industry is beginning to explore alternative lower-carbon solutions such as electric truck mixers, although the deployment of those is probably still a little distance away.

It is important to recognise that if you increase the weight—the payload—for a vehicle, of course it is going to be more efficient. It will need to do fewer journeys. A 38-tonne on a four-axle volumetric truck will have to do fewer journeys to a given job site than one running at 32. The same applies to truck mixers, which brings us back to MPA's key point. I know you asked about carbon, but that then leads to, "If it's okay to increase to 38 tonnes on four axles for volumetrics, why not increase to 38 tonnes on truck mixers?"

I know there are other considerations like road wear, which you said you wanted to come to, and safety. It comes to the nub of our point, which is that we are seeking a level playing field. If we can do 38 on VCMs, and we compete directly with one another in certain market segments, let's do 38 on truck mixers.

Jack Brereton: Is there anything you want to add, Chris?

Chris Smith: A level playing field is not about weight. A drum mixer at 32 tonnes can carry 8 cubic metres of any grade of concrete. Because the volumetric is carrying all the machinery and is bringing the batching plant with it, it has a disadvantage of at least 6 tonnes before it even gets on the road. That is the difference. At 38 tonnes, a volumetric can carry 8

metres of any mix because we have the disadvantage at the beginning of carrying the plant and machinery with us. A ready-mix drum mixer has got, sitting in his yard, a big piece of plant to make that concrete. We are not asking for any more metreage advantage. We are just asking for a level playing field on 8 cubic metres of any strength of concrete or load. I think it gets lost as to whose playing field we are on. We would rather be on the one where it is 8 metres for both.

Chris Leese: May I come in, Chair?

Chair: Yes, of course.

Chris Leese: There is another point on that. The BSA makes a point about the fact that volumetric trucks often carry a pump. That, of course, amounts to extra weight on that vehicle. I agree with the point that has been made. Pumps are not, by any manner of means, always required.

Carrying pumps on trucks is not exclusive to VCMs. Back in the day—before my day in ready-mix—some truck mixers carried pumps. The traditional ready-mix industry, if we can put it that way, shunned the installation of pumps on the back of truck mixer-type vehicles simply because it represented lost payload.

Chair: Thank you. Karl and then Fabian want to ask a couple of quick supplementary questions.

Q11 **Karl McCartney:** Thank you, Chair. I declare that I have met Matt and Chris Smith previously. I have not had the pleasure of meeting Chris Leese before today.

Chris, I am going to come straight to you. Could you give quick answers, if that's okay? What is the cost of a volumetric cement mixer vehicle compared to a normal drum one, if I were to buy one today?

Chris Leese: I can tell you how much it will cost to buy a truck mixer; these guys can tell you very easily how much it will cost to buy a volumetric. To buy a truck mixer it is about £150,000 or £160,000.

Chris Smith: For a standard volumetric, about £250,000.

Matt Payne: Yes, £250,000.

Chris Smith: If they have a pump on the back, £300,000.

Q12 **Karl McCartney:** If we are looking at a level playing field, there is a difference in cost there in vehicles to operate—just yes or no.

Chris Leese: Yes.

Q13 **Karl McCartney:** In the organisation that you represent, you have some that run both types of vehicles, but I guess that the vast majority of businesses you represent run normal drum mixers, as you would call them.

Chris Leese: That is correct.

Q14 **Karl McCartney:** Can we come to the cost of the environmentally friendly policies that you run? I think you have already admitted that whether you wash it during the day or not, at the end of the day you will use around about 1,000 litres of water, wherever it comes from—virtue signalling—whether it is rainwater or from the mains. For each of those vehicles you will use around 1,000 litres, compared to 150 litres for a volumetric.

Chris Leese: I don't know if 1,000 litres is correct. I would have to check that, but I would agree that yes, at the end of the day any vehicle that has delivered concrete has to be washed down. That consumes water.

Q15 **Karl McCartney:** Moving to a hypothetical—prisons have been mentioned—should a drum mixer turn up at a site, potentially a prison, for how long, even with additives, will concrete remain liquid and able to be poured before it becomes solid?

Chris Leese: That is like asking, "How long is a piece of string?", because it depends—

Karl McCartney: Would it be three hours, five hours or longer?

Chair: Let the witness answer, please.

Karl McCartney: I would like a quick answer, Chair.

Chris Leese: It depends on the additives that are used. Typically, two to three hours.

Q16 **Karl McCartney:** If there was a lockdown in the prison of five hours and it became solid, what would be the cost then of replacing a drum—

Chris Leese: You would not end up in those circumstances with a dead load because truck-mixer drivers carry additives in their cabs that they can put into the drum to prevent the material from going solid. It is a disaster in the ready-mix industry, as these guys know, if you have a load go off in the drum of a truck mixer. It is an incredibly rare occurrence.

Karl McCartney: But if it happens—I am talking hypothetically—what would be the cost? Would you need to replace the whole vehicle or just the drum?

Chris Leese: No. You would replace the drum. In some circumstances you might be able to break it out. In other circumstances you would have to replace the drum. It is incredibly rare.

Q17 **Karl McCartney:** If you go down the EV route—we can talk about the extra weight you would have for an EV drum concrete vehicle—should that run out of electricity and stop being able to turn its drum, would that be the same thing? You might be able to break it out or you might have to renew the drum on the same type of vehicle.

Chris Leese: Again, you would kill the load. You would use additives to kill the load before you got to the point—

Karl McCartney: You would pour it out.

Chris Leese: Yes, or seek somewhere you could discharge it. Again, I have to say that it is incredibly rare.

Q18 **Fabian Hamilton:** Briefly, Mr Leese, last year I visited one of the plants you used to work for, CEMEX in Leeds, on the edge of my constituency. It is a big employer and in a very important position there. One of the points they raised was exactly that—traffic issues threatening their load. Like you, they said it was quite rare that this happened. They tried to recall the vehicle to the plant so that they could discharge the load before it went off, but the very fact that they mentioned that as one of the issues was quite significant.

I will move on from that and get to my point. I recently had 2 cubic metres of concrete delivered to line the basement floor of my home in Leeds. Because the mixer lorry did not have a pump, we had to have another lorry pumping. Surely, the fact that the volumetric concrete mixer lorries have the pump already installed not only saves on extra journeys but saves on extra vehicles.

Chris Leese: To the latter point, yes, there are occasions when it is absolutely right to use a volumetric truck. There is no dispute about that whatsoever. Maybe your basement was one such case. Pumps are not always needed. It is possible that you may have been led to believe that a pump has to follow a truck mixer around; that is not true. On a lot of occasions, a truck mixer can get to exactly the same place that a volumetric truck can get to and pour the material directly into the footings. Sometimes a pump is required. Sometimes we use a digger bucket. Sometimes it might be a skip.

Going back to the issue of material going off in drums, we deliver something like 16 million to 18 million cubic metres a year, as I have already told you. I bet, within that volume, that there would be less than a handful of occasions, if any, when material has gone off in a drum and a drum has been lost as a result.

The whole sense of urgency that you find when you work in the ready-mix concrete industry comes from the fact that you are working with a product which is live and potentially can go off. We put all sorts of measures in place to avoid that happening. There are admixtures and the ability to kill a load if there is a problem with the truck or the site. It is always in the back of the mind of the drivers that they have a live product that can go off. Of course it is. It is a good thing that it is because, in the unlikely event that there is a problem, it drives them to make the right decisions before things go terminally wrong.

Fabian Hamilton: I have to say that CEMEX were very impressive. I just want to put that on the record.

Q19 **Greg Smith:** Good morning, gentlemen. It was referenced in some of your opening answers that the 2018 regulations were introduced. So that

the Committee is very clear, can you each give your view on how the changes in the new regulations affected the whole sector, and the practical implications that came about because of them? Were there any benefits to them, or were they all disbenefits?

Chris Smith: Prior to 2018, we were classed as mobile engineering plant because the whole reason for the lorry being there was the machinery in the back, and it was not delivering goods. You would go to a site, and you could not even sell sand to the guys on the site. Everything had to go through the mixer. That was upheld in court up and down the country every time the DVSA tried to prosecute. The judges said, "No, these guys are in this sector."

Europe had the same problem with loads of lorries. They started a review, and it came out of that that we would have to be put into the box of HGVs. There was kicking and screaming, maybe, but there was an element of rogues and cowboys before. You could buy a lorry and get on the road without an operator's licence. The BSA was formed in 2007 to try to bring some regulation. In the early days, from 2007 to 2010, we had direct talks with the Government. In the end the Government guys from the Ministry said, "No, we've been told to stop talking and we'll settle this in court." In the early days we tried to bring in some regulations with them.

In 2018, it was a bit scary for the guys in the industry at the time because we were unregulated, but we have taken them all on board and there is no problem with operators' licences and tachographs. There are six-weekly walk-around checks. Everything that an HGV has to do, we have to do. The only thing that was recognised was the equipment we carried. I've got just a normal volumetric with 6 tonnes. My trucks that carry the pump have a tail weight of 21 tonnes. It is a lot of weight for a ready-mix lorry, which probably weighs 12 tonnes. It is just an empty vessel to deliver a product.

That was the thing that scared us with the 10-year rule. We had tried prior to 2018 to bring the weight of the trucks down, but they have to be sturdy. They carry a lot of material, so you can't start cutting down on the safety side of it. Since 2018 or 2017, about a tonne has been taken out of the vehicles by using lighter materials. They have tried using fibreglass for the cement hoppers and things, but that was not very successful.

Moving forward, we are where we are. The 12-year rule was a bit of a surprise. After 12 years you have to scrap the lorries, although we go through all the same safety checks as everyone else. A tipper or a ready-mix lorry can go on for 20 years. Most of the 32-tonne lorries that are on the road now are because operators of the VCMs have got to their 12-year rule with their lorries and they cannot use them any more. You can use them down to 32 tonnes, but because the older ones were heavier, they get penalised twice. On the 32-tonne lorries you cannot get 8 metres. You will be lucky to get 7 metres. Matt runs 13 VCMs, and two of

them are the lightweight ones. I will let him explain the disadvantages of running them.

Matt Payne: Going to the question, I don't think any volumetric producer had an issue with the laws that were brought in in 2019, because they were safety bound. As Chris said, I think the first volumetric was 1975. They were classed as engineering plant because, at the time, it was drive to the job, spend five hours mixing the concrete and then drive back to the yard. Now, things have come on a lot more and the mixing of the concrete is probably two minutes a cubic metre. They are a lot quicker. It was right that they came into line with HGVs, which I don't think anyone had a problem with. As Chris said, there were MOTs, six-weekly inspections, O licences, driver hours and all the rest of it.

The one issue is that the lorries are heavier than a drum mixer. That is the biggest issue we have. That is why the Department for Transport gave us the extra weight. There was a report that showed that with the extra 20% weight we have been given, there was no extra damage to the road. With things that are safety related, there are no issues whatsoever. Like Chris said, they have done a lot in the industry to try to make the lorries as light as possible. With everything they have done, they have managed to save about a tonne. Manufacturers have said they could get them lighter, but there would be safety concerns. They have done all they can do.

Chris Leese: We can all agree that the additional regulation around driving licences and all the other things was a good thing. The point at issue is the weight limit. I can't say that I am aware of any particular changes that we noticed in the marketplace following the 2018 decision, other than perhaps that vehicles became much better regulated.

There is one thing I would like to say. We are almost talking as if the 8-metre truck mixer has got it all. Actually, it is a fight with an 8-metre truck mixer, which is becoming the industry standard, to be able to carry 8 metres on a four-axle truck mixer, because of the additional weight of the various equipment that is put on there. Our industry has had to do things with truck mixers like alloy wheels, for example, which sounds very cool on a truck mixer but they are actually there for weight saving. Composite drums are something else that has been looked at. Again, it is all about trying to save weight in order to be able to maximise payload. I am aware that there are 8-wheel, four-axle truck mixers on the road today that struggle to carry a maximum payload. Truck mixers don't have it all their own way.

Q20 **Greg Smith:** That is really helpful. I want to get into the point about how light you can make a truck before it simply can't carry its payload. Getting a tonne out of the vehicle sounds pretty impressive on one level, but there are always innovators and there is always more science. You see it across all modes of transport, vehicles and plant. There is always

another way. How much further do you think the industry could push it to get the vehicles as light as possible to comply in some way with a lower weight limit, were the temporary uplift to be taken away? Or does that uplift need to be made permanent?

Matt Payne: I am not an engineer, but I would say that they have done everything they can. They have started using Hardox steel in the bodies. Some manufacturers are using aluminium. As Chris said earlier, I don't think the aluminium lorries will last 15 years, as an old steel lorry would. You are probably going to get six years out of an aluminium body. Apart from things like that, I don't think there is too much more you can do. The chassis manufacturers have stronger chassis. They used to be able to run at a design rate of 44 tonnes. If they are running at a lower weight, they produce a lighter chassis so that there is more flex in the body. Unless technology moves on, I don't think there is much more they can do.

The drum mixers have been trying to make a lighter drum for years. As Chris said, they have tried fibreglass drums, which did not last very long. They have tried different plastic water tanks. It always seems to come back to trying to reinvent the wheel. They stick with what they are at. It is the same with volumetrics. The manufacturers have tried their hardest, but I don't think there is too much more they can legitimately do without compromising on safety.

Greg Smith: That is clear. Chris?

Chris Smith: Prior to 2018 it wasn't carte blanche—"Oh, we don't care what it weighs anyway." When they were building them, they were conscious of the weight. When they were told to go back and try again, that is when they squeezed the extra tonne out. They were as light as they thought they could be beforehand, although it was not the most important thing. Design weights were heavier, but they went back and redesigned it. A tare weight of a volumetric now is 17, 18 or maybe 16?

Matt Payne: Empty, they are about 15.

Chris Smith: That is a tare weight against 12, so they are down on load capacity for carrying. As I said earlier, mine run at 44 tonnes. A Highways England investigation in 2017 said that five axles at 44 was perfectly fine. They are not a white elephant. There are loads of lorries out there at that weight. There are hundreds of thousands of artics at 44 tonnes. Big cranes and big pumps all run at those sorts of weights. It is not as if it is the only thing in the country at that weight. Again, it has the pump on board.

Going sideways slightly, we do about 40 jobs a day. The average is about three jobs per lorry because we are carrying the pump, and we have to get there and run the lines out. We do a little milk round with the load. We probably reload on average once a day. That is across London and the south-east.

Q21 **Greg Smith:** This is slightly off topic, but it is on the weight issue. Presumably, as we approach 2050, diesel will not be permitted any more. I presume you are all on diesel. That sort of weight is never going to run on a battery. Presumably, going forward, hydrogen is the preferred option. That might help on weight.

Chris Smith: It is like the weight thing. We are waiting for the next big thing to come along. Like the drum mixers, we could probably end up running the truck itself on batteries. All the machinery runs on the PTO from the main engine. Yes, it is a bit of a Catch-22. You might end up putting a donkey engine on the back of the truck just to run the machinery, and that is extra weight. There is another tonne and a half or 2 tonnes of donkey engine.

Greg Smith: I understand that.

Matt Payne: Like you said, they have moved things forward. I agree with you that hydrogen is probably the way forward for construction vehicles in general, and heavy industry. The Government have just allowed higher weight for battery-operated trucks as the truck is heavier because of the battery. It is the same as our volumetric; it is heavier because it is taking the plant with it, so it is the same as the battery truck. What we are asking for is to make the weight permanent instead of finishing.

Greg Smith: Chris?

Chris Leese: We have talked a lot about the weight issue. On electric trucks, that is an issue that is coming down the line. The industry is testing electric truck mixers. I would not claim to be an expert on them. They have arrived since I left direct operational management. The weight of the batteries inevitably reduces payload.

If I can bring it back to fair competition, there is something we will probably not agree on at this end of the table, but our industry would be quite happy if we standardised at 38 tonnes on four axles because that would assist in bringing in electric truck mixers. At the moment, the weight of the batteries is eating into payload and that is an issue. It means more journeys for the same volume of concrete delivered, for example. That is an issue that needs to be considered. It just brings us back to the level playing field issue that I mentioned at the beginning.

Q22 **Greg Smith:** I understand that. Can I come back to the point about road safety and wear and tear on the roads from heavier vehicles? Anyone who drives right now knows that there are multiple factors as to the state of Britain's roads at the moment. With a few winters of very bad weather, Britain's roads are not in a particularly great place at the moment for a lot of reasons. I know, from my own constituency, which suffers from more HGV movements than virtually any other, with the construction of a particularly unpopular railway, that those movements have a material effect on the state of the roads. In and out of compounds and so on, there are roads that look like the surface of the moon.

Matt, you raised the point that there has been no evidence of VCMs impacting the roads. What was the study that proved that? What was the evidence base for that? Heavy vehicles have a bigger impact, unless they are running very low tyre pressures, which are not very good for those vehicles on the roads.

Matt Payne: Yes, I agree with that. Highways England specifically looked in 2017 at the operating weight of four-axle volumetrics above 41 tonnes. They concluded that VCMs on five axles, operating within both the UK and EU limits, had no adverse effect on the roads. They recommended a reduction of weight to 38.4 for a four-axle volumetric truck because they thought that at a higher weight there was an issue. But at 38.4, there were no extra issues or problems caused.

Greg Smith: When was that done?

Matt Payne: In 2017, by Highways England.

Chris Leese: May I come in?

Greg Smith: Please do.

Chris Leese: I am briefed that recently the Roads Minister declined to extend a derogation for two and three-axle electric HGVs, which had been brought in, to four and six-axle electric HGVs, on the grounds of road wear and tear. It would seem to us that it would be deeply inconsistent to allow, we would argue, a much weaker claim for carbon savings and efficiencies from VCMs but not to allow such a derogation for electric vehicles, which will make a huge difference to the carbon output from transport.

Chris Smith: Chris talks about lifting up the weights of the drum mixers to 38 to create a level playing field. They can carry 8 metres, although he says they struggle sometimes at 32 tonnes. We can carry 8 metres at 38 tonnes. By giving them the 38 tonnes as an operating, they would be at 10 and 11 cubic metres. The level playing field has just gone out of the window on load.

Greg Smith: It has become a hill.

Matt Payne: Going back to your basement, Mr Hamilton, it sounds like you had a very good experience with your concrete. Chris talks about us being in competition. We are not in competition with MPA members. They are the ones who supply us our cement and our aggregates.

Mr Hamilton, with your basement, I don't know whether you had any concrete left over that they had to discard. A lot of the time, the volumetrics are doing the smaller jobs that the big guys don't want to do. It is things like that, where your builder does not know whether it is 1.7 metres or 2.2 metres. They are the jobs we primarily do. We are not looking to do the big jobs. Drum mixers are superb at what they do, which is doing a big job and getting the concrete there as quickly as you can. But the smaller jobs, where you are unsure about the size, are the

ones where the volumetrics come into their own. That is where we are. A lot of the time, admittedly, the drum mixers might not bring back any waste, but there might be a quarter of a cube left on site or half a cube left on site. That is where the volumetrics come into their own.

Chris Leese: I would not disagree. There are jobs that are ideally placed for volumetrics—for truck mixers of all sizes. We have talked a lot about 8-metre truck mixers. In fact, there are an awful lot of 6-metre truck mixers on the road. Indeed, there are some smaller mini mixers on the road. The realm of the small customer is not only that of volumetric trucks. Again, we should just come back to a level playing field and let the operators of the various vehicles fight it out with fair competition, which we have been doing for a long time. It is not correct to say that ready-mix producers, large or small, are not interested in small jobs. Of course, they are. They deliver very successfully to an awful lot of small jobs. Volumetric operators deliver very successfully to a lot of small jobs, too.

Chair: Karl and Fabian want to ask some supplementaries.

Q23 **Karl McCartney:** Chris Leese, I am going to come back to you because you keep banging on about level playing fields. I get that you are representing the people who employ you, but it is a bit of smoke and mirrors as far as I am concerned. You have already pointed out the change in cost in the two different types of vehicles. As Chris Smith said—and you have just countered some of what you said—if everybody can carry 8 cubic metres-worth, that is a level playing field. Those who have volumetric cement mixers obviously have the added costs of buying those vehicles. Your members, with their drum mixers, are buying a cheaper vehicle. If it is a level playing field, surely it is the amount of product that is being carried. What is the breakdown in the percentage of the business? In the 100% business of cement provision, how much is provided by drum mixers and how much is provided by volumetric cement?

Chris Leese: How much is provided by—

Karl McCartney: Percentage-wise, what is the breakdown in the sector, roughly?

Chris Leese: I do not know that number. I think you said you do, Matt.

Matt Payne: I think just about 10% of the concrete industry is now volumetrics.

Q24 **Karl McCartney:** Has that been since what—1975? Obviously you have built up from when there was only one vehicle. Has it been roughly about that over the past whatever years?

Matt Payne: The last 10 to 15 years, I think.

Chris Leese: To come back on your point about a level playing field, if I may, it is not just about the cost of the truck. If you want to start

building a ready-mix concrete plant in order to feed that truck, you are looking at the best part of £1.6 million to £2 million.

Karl McCartney: I understand that there are economic impacts all the way through the sector, and what decisions are made and regulations are put in place.

Chris Leese: Yes, exactly.

Q25 **Karl McCartney:** We as regulators, or the Department for Transport, need to look at it. We can talk about environmental impacts and we can talk about electric-powered vehicles being much heavier permanently, whereas at least all of your trucks, when they have delivered their cement, are going to be lighter, with less wear on the roads. That is the point I would make. Ultimately, it is about how in future we can move forward with everybody being able to continue operating as they have done in the past, but on a level playing field where everybody can carry, surely, the same amount of product.

Chris Leese: I would say that the right decision was made previously. I appreciate that these guys will not agree, but I would say the right decision was made previously and, taking into account safety, wear and tear and level playing field, the playing field is pretty level—32 tonnes on four axles.

Q26 **Karl McCartney:** Would you like to see volumetric provision completely removed from the market?

Chris Leese: No.

Karl McCartney: That is what you and your members would like to see.

Chris Leese: Not at all, no. As I just said to you, some of our members operate—

Q27 **Karl McCartney:** Do you think it would be economically unviable though?

Chris Leese: No, I don't believe it would be unviable. When I was responsible for running volumetric trucks and introduced them into the company that I previously worked for, in fact, we made the active decision to run them at 32 tonnes. In those days it was before the decision had been made about O licences and all the other things, but we ran them as HGVs.

Karl McCartney: Thank you.

Q28 **Fabian Hamilton:** Mr Payne mentioned my basement, and I do not want to make it about that, but he made an important point. I, as an ignorant member of the public, had no idea about volumetric mixers versus the other type. We did not use 2 cubic metres in the end. I thought we would need it but, of course, what do I know? I organised it myself; it was not a builder who did it. In the end, it was 1.7, I think. The point is that we had two vehicles outside. I didn't know we had to have two vehicles because I

just did not know how it worked. That greatly increased the cost to me but also the number of vehicles on the road; it was quite shocking. Had I known about volumetric, it would have been far, far easier and better.

Matt Payne: On that 0.3 of a cubic metre, if you look at the average load size of a volumetric as 3 metres, if he goes out in the morning loaded with 9 metres, and he does three jobs, that is 0.9 of a cubic metre. He is saving almost a cubic metre a day by people not knowing exactly what they need. That is the nature of the business. On the big jobs, where they have 100 metres or 200 metres of concrete, they can wait and call in the last load and say, "We need 3 metres for the last load instead of eight." The smaller jobs, as yours was, are the ones where the volumetrics come into their own. There are other jobs where they might be a little bit out of their depth and they need another 0.3, instead of having 0.3 left over. The beauty of the volumetric is that they can stop at that point.

Q29 **Fabian Hamilton:** What is the proportion? We have already done this. It is about 10% of all concrete, is it?

Matt Payne: Yes.

Fabian Hamilton: Does that equate to the number of vehicles? Is it 90% conventional mixers and 10% volumetric?

Chris Leese: Matt says 1,000 vehicles on the road; we say 4,200 or thereabouts truck mixers on the road. So it is 20%.

Chair: Do you want to move on to the questions about the consultation?

Q30 **Fabian Hamilton:** Yes, of course. I want to move on to the way the Transport Department has run the consultation. Why do you think the Department is holding this consultation instead of just letting the framework that was adopted in 2018 play out? Is there any particular reason why we are having another consultation?

Chris Smith: Basically, we have gone back and said that the 10-year rule is not going to work. We have tried all the lighter lorries. We have tried to run at 32 tonnes. A 32-tonne lorry gets less than 7 metres, which is not a level playing field. My lorries, even at 44 tonnes, get no payload advantage. We are still only carrying between 8 and 9 metres because of the extra equipment.

We have flexibility with the pump—flexibility is a word that has not been used much here. Volumetrics bring total flexibility to the sector. Ready-mix are great at what they do—big jobs in and out all day long. Volumetrics can sit there and wait. For example, last Christmas we did the Kentish Town railway bridge for BAM Nuttall. All over the Christmas period, we had lorries just sitting there for hours on end until they said, "Right, can we concrete quickly?", when they had pulled an old bridge off and there was a danger. That flexibility can only be done with a volumetric. Luckily, we used our pump as well because we were pumping

down to the line. It is the flexibility in this end of the sector that is crucial.

Matt Payne: At the period of consultation you refer to, it was expected that, with technology, we would be able to reduce the weight of the lorries in that time. It is not feasible, which is why we are revisiting it. We have tried everything we can and we cannot get down to the weight that they expect us to get to.

Q31 **Fabian Hamilton:** How effectively do you feel the Department and the DVSA collaborate with your sector on regulatory issues, Mr Leese?

Chris Leese: We think it is fine on policy issues. It is an area that I am briefed on rather than engaged with every day. We are approached for relevant things, I am told, such as the road investment strategy and supply chain workshops. We met the Rail Minister and the Roads Minister recently. We get approached when relevant. We have, as a trade body, less contact with the DVSA. Our members probably engage more with the DVSA.

As the MPA and as an industry—I hope this is not expanding the question too far—we also engage on various road safety initiatives. CycleSafe, for example, has been a big part of what the MPA has been involved with. Recently, we formed a collaboration with Driving for Better Business. As I say, I am briefed that the contact is fine. It works.

Fabian Hamilton: Do the other witnesses agree with that?

Chris Smith: No. We have no contact at all. Apart from the process of reviewing the 2018 stuff, there is no contact.

Matt Payne: I agree with Chris. Maybe they consult the MPA more than they do us, because its members are multinational companies and maybe hold a bit more clout than we do.

Chris Leese: I am not going to disagree with too much of that, other than to say, "Please can we get away from the notion that the MPA just represents multinational businesses?" We represent businesses of all sizes. It happens that the larger producers in the UK are members of the MPA, but there are many small and medium-sized enterprises that are also members of the MPA.

Q32 **Fabian Hamilton:** What have the Government told you about the likely next steps and timescales for any decisions?

Chris Smith: On their review?

Fabian Hamilton: Yes.

Chris Smith: None at the moment. We have actually asked our MP to go and ask when we are likely to hear some sort of response.

Fabian Hamilton: Mr Payne, have they told you anything?

Matt Payne: No.

Fabian Hamilton: Mr Leese?

Chris Leese: I am not aware that we have been told anything.

Fabian Hamilton: That is very helpful. Thank you.

Chair: Government timelines for responding to consultations are flexible, to use the word of the morning. Gavin, I turn to you now.

Q33 **Gavin Newlands:** I am not sure that "flexible" is the word I would use, Chair.

Thank you all very much and good morning. We have touched on this already this morning, but just to set it in concrete, if you will, of the three options that are in the consultation, can you each tell us your preferred option or, indeed, another option that you prefer that is not on the list? We have: maintaining the current exceptional temporary arrangement; allowing the VCMs to operate at the weights of the temporary VSOs, if there are the advance notifications; and allowing further VSOs, until further notice, subject to various things including vehicle age and so forth. Mr Leese, what would your preferred option be out of the three?

Chris Leese: You won't be surprised to hear—

Gavin Newlands: I don't think I will be.

Chris Leese: We think the right decision was made, so we would go for the status quo. On the prior notice, I am sure that is not going to work for these guys nor, indeed, for our members who operate VCMs. On earned recognition, we already work with earned recognition and, of course, the principle of earned recognition is, putting it very simplistically, that for doing the right things you get to be inspected and regulated less—inspected less, as it were. If the decision was to go for 38 tonnes on four axles, just to keep it simple, with earned recognition, you would find the MPA lobbying for the same for truck mixers.

Gavin Newlands: Which, obviously, we have covered already. Matt?

Matt Payne: My thing would be for the VSO to be continued indefinitely. The earned recognition, I think, would be very difficult. A lot of volumetric companies are small businesses, as Chris said, with two trucks or less.

Q34 **Gavin Newlands:** Maybe you could go into a bit of detail on that. What would that entail for a small business? You said it would be quite difficult because of the size of some of the businesses.

Matt Payne: Just the cost of it. Chris will know more than me about earned recognition schemes. They are normally for bigger companies that can have someone looking at these bits for them full time. Chris may know about that.

Chris Smith: Yes. Tesco's, Sainsbury's—those sort of guys— make up the bulk of the earned recognition members. They have branded lorries, huge departments to look after and they all go back to the main dealer for everything. There is a lot of extra paperwork. When this was floated a couple of months ago, we got a consultant in who would get you through to earned recognition. He said, "Okay, yes, your paperwork is fine. Your reports are fine. But there's a lot more work that has to be done." No one I know has been forced into this. We had a Zoom with the head of earned recognition. There is a lot more pressure and a lot more bookwork for small businesses. There are a few advantages—you might not get pulled as much if they see you coming down the road. They put your number plate into the system and they go, "Oh, he is on earned," and they let you go by unless they can see something obvious.

I don't know why they have even floated the advance notices again. Prior to 2018, that was one of their suggestions going forward and we explained then that we cannot do two days' notice. If you are moving a wind turbine, you have months to plan. In our industry, people ring up the morning of the job and say, "Oh, our inspector has just come. Can I have some concrete this afternoon, please?" It is totally—I do not know why they even suggested it.

Q35 **Grahame Morris:** Forgive me, but I can understand why they put that in if one of the concerns is 38 tonnes and the impact on particular roads and, particularly, bridges—if there is a practical reason.

Chris Smith: In 2017, they said we were okay on bridges. It goes around in circles a little bit, that one.

Matt Payne: It is more for practical reasons than anything else. It is generally 48 hours before when people are ordering concrete, or the same day. It would not work, having to give that notice.

Chris Smith: Or somebody orders it in the expectation that the inspectors are coming in the morning to pass the haul. A lot of times they ring up and say, "Oh, sod it. They didn't pass my haul. I don't want it today." You wouldn't be able to send that lorry anywhere else.

As to the status quo, there have been no big problems since 2018, that we are aware of, where they would say, "All right, you've got it. We can't take it off you because of the weight differences and keeping the 8-metre thing, but we want some more regulation to keep it." That has not happened, so I don't know why they want to force us down that road either.

Q36 **Gavin Newlands:** I was looking at the various options. Chris Smith, in terms of the three options, what proportion of the current VCM fleet would be able to keep operating under each of the three potential options?

Chris Smith: Nobody would be able to advance. If it was leaving the status quo for 2028, personally we would be out of business—Mixamate

would be out of business. All our 25 trucks have pumps on board running at 44 tonnes; we just could not do it. If we went down to a four-axle 32, we would be carrying 5 cubic metres, which is totally uneconomical; you could not make any money with that. Most people want to stay with what we have now. We went back with a fourth option and the fourth option was to leave it as it is, as permanent, with the caveat that if things went really wrong, you could revisit it.

Gavin Newlands: Matt?

Matt Payne: If the VSO was continued indefinitely, there would be no issue; everyone would carry on. The prior notice, as we have explained, would be unusable. You would see 95% of the volumetric producers leaving the industry. With earned recognition, there would be a handful of people who would be big enough to do it. I am sure that Chris—whether he has the numbers or not, I don't know—would be able to tell you that not all of the MPA members would be using earned recognition. Some of their smaller members, I am sure, are not. Again, I would say 90% of volumetric producers would stop doing it if they had to go under that scheme.

Q37 **Grahame Morris:** I am sorry to be a bit dim about this. Can you explain a little bit more about what is involved with earned recognition? What does the DVSA say? I know you said paperwork, but precisely what?

Chris Smith: Every piece of paperwork and every inspection you do, you have to send off to the Ministry as well.

Grahame Morris: Volumes, weights, times?

Chris Smith: More inspections and walk-arounds. Every morning, every driver of any HGV has to do a walk-around nowadays. It is normally on an app. All those records have to be made available to the Department. All your records from your six-weeklies have to be sent there. Chris is nodding. Obviously, MOT results, everything you do on paper has to be sent in to the Ministry.

Matt Payne: A lot of companies use a consultant to come in and do that for them. Obviously there is a cost to that for our members. I think it is a cost they would not be able to stomach.

Q38 **Gavin Newlands:** Last question from me, Chair. If you were allowed to continue operating at the upper level, but with this scheme—I fully accept the costs and the implications—might not that be the least-worst option for the sector, rather than the current arrangement?

Matt Payne: No, obviously the best option would be—

Gavin Newlands: That is why I used the term "least-worst."

Matt Payne: I think it would be about whether we could do an earned recognition system within the Batched on Site Association, where every volumetric has to be a member of the Batched on Site Association and

abide by certain rules and things like that. Like I said, I am quite lucky and Chris is quite lucky, because we are quite big producers, and there are a few of them out there, with mixed fleets. People with mixed fleets who have drum mixers as well as volumetrics will have the capacity to do the earned recognition. I think the small family business, with two or three trucks, would struggle and say, as we alluded to earlier, "I've got £1 million-worth of kit here. Why don't I sell it and reinvest it somewhere else that will be a bit easier on me?"

Q39 **Gavin Newlands:** I lied, Chair, sorry—I have a quick last question for Mr Leese. And I call myself a politician. If these guys at the BSA were to get their way and the DFT and the DVSA were to change their current approach, obviously you guys would lobby hard against it. Would you guys be thinking of potential legal action?

Chris Leese: I can't—

Gavin Newlands: I wasn't expecting that you would tell me yes or no.

Chris Leese: I can't comment on that. I do not know the answer. But there are a couple of points I would like to make in relation to what you said a moment ago.

Gavin Newlands: On you go.

Chris Leese: The first thing is that we heard a moment ago that at 38.4 tonnes on four axles, the payload would be reduced to 5 cubic metres. Somewhere in your own evidence, Matt, it says 6.5 metres to 7 metres, so some clarification is potentially—

Matt Payne: On Chris's lorries with the pumps.

Chris Leese: Right. If you are carrying a pump. If a truck mixer was carrying a pump, it would probably be able to carry 5 to 6 metres, so it is broadly similar.

To go back to the point, road wear and tear is an issue. DFT themselves say that 38 tonnes on four axles is a huge magnitude of proportion of greater wear and tear on the road than 32 tonnes on four axles. We could come back to you with some more on that and where our evidence comes from, if that helps. If you were minded to say to these guys, "Yes, 38.4 tonnes on four axles is fine," then let's do that for truck mixers. Let's do it for tippers. Let's have less vehicles on the road, less vehicle movements and less carbon—all the things that we have talked about from vehicle movements.

Q40 **Gavin Newlands:** In terms of that evidence, Highways England looked at it again. In 2017 it was fine, but thereafter it was not, apparently. Apart from that investigation report by National Highways—or Highways England; I can't remember what it was called at that particular time—is there any other evidence internationally about this? I know that in Europe higher weights are allowed. Is there evidence from elsewhere that would,

perhaps, rebut some of the National Highways report?

Matt Payne: Chris can tell you, because he sells trucks to Europe—Italy and places. I don't know whether we are aligned with Europe or not at the moment.

Gavin Newlands: Sadly not too much.

Matt Payne: As for—

Gavin Newlands: I don't know if you missed it but we're out.

Matt Payne: I don't know whether we are out or not. As for weights, in France, for an eight-wheeler, four-axle truck it is 38 tonnes. Down in Italy, they are near 40 tonnes. The Netherlands are more.

Chris Smith: Fifty, for five-axle.

Matt Payne: Fifty tonnes in the Netherlands.

Q41 **Gavin Newlands:** In terms of any evidence of wear and tear on the roads, is there anything else to point to other than what DFT are working on?

Matt Payne: I'm assuming that they presume there is no extra wear and tear, otherwise they would reduce the weights on their lorries.

Gavin Newlands: Thank you very much.

Q42 **Chair:** Thank you. Unless any other colleague wants to catch my eye, we have concluded our questions. I would like to give each of you the opportunity to put on the record any points that we have not covered. I will go down the line. Mr Leese, I turn to you first.

Chris Leese: Yes, there are a number of issues—criticisms—that have been raised by BSA about truck mixers, everything from operating in rural areas to the shelf life of ready-mix concrete, to waste, pumps and waste water. I won't take up your time now going through rebutting each of those; what we will do is take the opportunity, perhaps, to write in with further evidence if that is okay.

Chair: Yes. It is an open invitation: if any of you wants to supplement the points you have made this morning with further evidence, that is perfectly acceptable. Thank you.

Matt Payne: I bought my first truck in 2008 and it has taken us this long to grow. The fact that we have grown so big and that volumetrics have become an issue for the MPA shows that there is a market out there; this was something that was needed and customers were calling for it. Customers are what make the company grow and if the companies were not growing—like I said, there was £55 million-worth of new trucks sold before the 2008 regulation change, when it went down to £9 million-worth of trucks, and that shows me that there is a huge demand out there.

Chris Smith: There is one quick point about what Chris just put up. If it was down to 32 tonnes, a ready-mix lorry could carry a pump and they would only do 5 metres. Earlier on, he said that is why they stopped doing it; it was not economical. That is why there are no ready-mix trucks in this country with pumps on, because you cannot make money.

Chris Leese: Because we have focused on payload.

Chris Smith: Yes, payload—where payload is the level playing field. From the questions today, nearly every Member here has got that argument. I really appreciate your homework, fellas. Going forward, it is the payload and the extra tail weight that we carry that is the crucial matter.

Matt Payne: They have obviously tried a drum mixer with a pump on it, as Chris said, and it didn't work. The way to cut the weight for them was to get rid of the pump. That is them saving weight. The way to save weight on a volumetric has been tried and we have saved a tonne. We cannot take off 3 tonnes of pump overnight at a click of our fingers. They have done everything they can to reduce the weights of these lorries and it is not feasible. Safety-wise, it is not going to be possible.

Chair: Thank you all very much indeed for your time and evidence this morning. We are very grateful. Thank you.