

Written evidence submitted by the Mineral Products Association (MPA) (RDF0009)

About MPA

The Mineral Products Association (MPA) is the trade association for the aggregates, asphalt, cement, concrete, dimension stone, lime, mortar and silica sand industries. With the affiliation of British Precast, the British Association of Reinforcement (BAR), Eurobitume, MPA Northern Ireland, MPA Scotland and the British Calcium Carbonate Federation, it has a growing membership of 530 companies and is the sectoral voice for mineral products. MPA membership is made up of the vast majority of independent SME quarrying companies throughout the UK, as well as the 9 major international and global companies. It covers 100% of UK cement and lime production, 90% of GB aggregates production, 95% of asphalt and over 70% of ready-mixed concrete and precast concrete production. In 2018, the industry supplied £16 billion worth of materials and services and was the largest supplier to the construction industry, which had annual output valued at £172 billion. Industry production represents the largest materials flow in the UK economy and is also one of the largest manufacturing sectors.

Long-term and short-term challenges to the effective functioning of the road freight supply chain

1. The effective functioning of the road freight supply chain relies on an adequate supply of drivers and vehicles, infrastructure and related services. All of these face some challenges, with driver shortages being the most pressing and high profile at present.
2. The driver shortage is not new; RHA and Logistics UK have been advising of a gap between supply and demand in the tens of thousands for some years and this has now clearly been exacerbated by the combined impacts of Brexit and the covid-19 pandemic. As well as reducing the numbers of drivers from EU member states working in the UK, the pandemic has also sharply increased demand for delivery drivers and the national fleets that support them for supermarkets, Amazon and other online retailers. Other factors raised by MPA members include IR35 changes and the poor state of roadside services for drivers, particularly

with regard to more self-employed drivers retiring early or changing careers.

3. Our members have reported some problems with securing vehicles in recent months, with suppliers stretched and increased bureaucracy to import vehicles.
4. In a varied industry with diverse products, there are different types of driving jobs. The majority of driving in our industry, delivering materials including aggregates and ready-mixed concrete, does not require overnight journeys with drivers sleeping in cabs. In fact, many members report that drivers who have been poached by other companies are coming back for the quality of life that our industry offers. Some materials, in particular cement, need overnight trips. Here, the quality of roadside services is a really big issue, with drivers often not able to use adequate wash facilities or even toilets, which is simply unacceptable.
5. A final issue raised is the treatment of drivers. While all our members go to great lengths to ensure that drivers are treated fairly and with respect on their own sites, treatment on the road and at customer sites can be very mixed. The driver shortage should alert us to the essential role drivers play in the economy and they should be afforded the respect they deserve.
6. In the long term, we expect to see a shift towards zero-emission HGVs, as discussed in detail below. This will rely on the replacement cycle of vehicles whatever technology and infrastructure comes to predominate, with companies buying new vehicles on a regular basis as older vehicles exit their fleets, often into the second hand market. Ensuring this transition works smoothly is important; it has done for Euro VI and Direct Vision Standard-compliant vehicles but that is much simpler than changing the fuel used in a fleet.

The potential effects of the Government's policies and regulations on the efficient operation of the supply chain, including cabotage rules and drivers' hours;

7. MPA warned Government that proposals to extend driver hours had safety risks and were likely to prove counter-productive rather than helpful. Members warned about a negative impact on retention by

working drivers harder, potentially leading to a negative impact on hours worked overall. In any case, the nature of the work we do, with substantial loading and tipping time, means that driving hours are not the limiting factor they may be in other industries. Cabotage does not affect our industry.

8. Safety concerns have been raised around some of the measures taken. Short-term changes to test elements such as reversing and coupling/uncoupling to speed up tests as a temporary measure to rapidly facilitate the clearing the backlog of HGV driver tests do have logic to them but should be reversed as soon as possible. Likewise, allowing drivers to take their tests for articulated lorries with rigid ones (“C+E”) is not ideal – MPA warned that there is value in the experience gained from the period of having a C (rigid only) licence only that is valuable when stepping up to a C+E (rigid or articulated). This should be returned to the status quo ante as soon as possible.
9. DVLA is clearly struggling to process the volume of paperwork in the backlog. This could be addressed by temporary additional resource. Processing applications for provisional licences should not take 12 weeks if adequately resourced. Allowing drivers to complete their theory test earlier while waiting for the provisional licence to be processed would also remove an unnecessary delay. There is also a regional imbalance to access to theory tests, with the south of the country seeing longer waits for tests to the extent that people will travel a significant distance to take the test.
10. Government should consider addressing weight limits for vehicles, which would make a difference in our industry especially for contracts serving major projects with many vehicle movements. Subject to axle weight and physical limits on the road network and a thorough safety assessment, increasing the 44 tonne weight limit to 46 and the 32 tonne limit to 34 tonnes would be worth exploring.

The effectiveness of Government policy in supporting recruitment, retention and a diverse workforce in the road haulage industry.

11. The Apprenticeship Levy has a lot of potential to help resolve the shortage in the long term, by increasing the inflow of drivers to the industry. It could also help diversify the industry, by age as well as other

characteristics. It is not perfectly suited to training drivers, however, because of the requirement to run an apprenticeship for a year which is longer than is needed to train an HGV driver.

12. Some MPA members have put together courses that build other elements of their business in to top up the driver training, while others have decided that despite paying the levy and having the funds in their account it is better value to just pay directly for the training. Allowing a shorter Driver Apprenticeship would release a lot of funding to address a very clear shortage in the labour market.
13. Alternatively, tax incentives for companies to pay for driver training outside the Apprenticeship Levy scheme would be a strong incentive and overcome the cost barriers faced by individuals seeking to become HGV drivers.
14. The short-term measures the Government has taken on allowing more visas for drivers are helpful but likely to be insufficient. This is in large part due to the rest of Europe experiencing the same economic shifts that have increased demand, leading to reported shortages in most countries. Post-Brexit, the extra bureaucracy for drivers from Central European countries such as Poland or Lithuania to come to the UK over Germany or Belgium is probably a deterrent at the margin.

The potential effects of the Government's policies and regulations on road safety;

15. MPA did not support the extension of driver hours, as described above. This was due to a combination of safety concerns for over-worked drivers in addition to the potential impact on retention that the measure could have, exacerbating the overall shortage of drivers. As a sector with heavy, specialist vehicles it is imperative that drivers are adequately rested to do a difficult, skilful job properly.

Workforce skills, training and development;

16. The nature of the work and the demographic of the workforce makes routine training and competency assessment a challenge. Large companies in the sector require drivers to be able to demonstrate a minimum level of training to allow entry to site. Over 40,000 drivers

have attended the Site Safety Awareness Training at the Mineral Products Qualification Centre (MPQC) over the last 5 years, part of the Government's CPC Driver Training program.

17. Currently the use of online training and eLearning for the Government CPC Driver Training scheme is limited, an expansion of these delivery methods would allow access to approved training in the remote areas of the UK.

18. A major initiative is currently underway to rollout 'MP Connect,' an integrated platform operated by MPQC. The driver swipes a smartcard on entry to site which gives access to appropriate information about the driver which is compared to a list of requirements for the site which is being entered, enabling more active management and enforcement of training requirements. The platform currently has 200 sites with 10,000 drivers holding cards. The platform will be expanded to over 1500 sites and 40,000 drivers during 2022/23. The MP Connect platform strongly encouraged by MPA and many members are supporting the initiative.

Decarbonising road freight

19. Our members use some of the heaviest vehicles on the road, with aggregate tipper trucks, concrete mixers and asphalt trucks among some of the specialist, heavy vehicles that will need to be decarbonised to reach net zero. This is on top of the challenge of decarbonising non-road mobile machinery in quarries such as loading shovels, excavators and dump trucks.

20. In our response to the government's recent consultation on the end date for sale of non-zero emission HGVs, we supported the ambition to phase out the sale of HGVs over 26 tonnes by 2040, subject to two caveats: vehicle availability and infrastructure deployment. Assuming our members can buy and use zero emission HGVs they will, using the normal fleet renewal cycle to switch the industry over. We have a good track record as shown by the transition to Euro VI and Direct Vision Standard vehicles in London. 2040 is a long way away and given the progress on cars and vans, it feels achievable.

21. Our main concern is on the infrastructure. If vehicles are electric-powered, there will be significant costs to upgrade electricity

connections to sites, if we assume on-site, overnight charging. If not, a substantial network of HGV-only charging stations will be needed. Connections may be more feasible or affordable in some locations than others – city centre terminals may be less expensive than remote quarries, for instance. But even the most convenient sites will face a cost for upgrading grid connections to cope with charging what will need to be very large batteries for a day's work for a vehicle in our industry. Distribution Network Operators must be challenged on the costs of connections, which can be extremely high and may be a major barrier to deployment of electric vehicles in some cases.

22.If zero-emission HGVs are to be hydrogen-powered, fuelling infrastructure equivalent to today's for diesel will be necessary. Ideally this would be in improved roadside facilities for drivers. It will also require sufficient supplies of hydrogen to be available. We are concerned that hydrogen is being proposed as the solution to many problems that can be electrified such as home heating or public transport, potentially raising costs, or even risking supply, for industry or heavy transport that cannot be electrified.

23.Our industry has a lot of remote sites, based on the geology and where a quarry can reasonably operate. The sites of fuelling stations are therefore really important, and the roll out of hydrogen charging in particular will need to be sufficient to enable the vehicles to be used. There is no point having hydrogen stations only in cities when the essential materials needed to build and sustain those cities are sourced in rural areas with no access to hydrogen. This will be particularly acute in the early rollout, and a focus on strategic locations for hydrogen HGV fuelling will be important to enable companies to invest with confidence.

The extent to which the Transport Select Committee's previous recommendations on haulage, including those set out in Skills and Planning in the Road Haulage Sector, July 2016, HC68, were (a) pertinent and (b) unheeded.

24.The conclusions from the 2016 report are familiar and have not been successfully addressed, even before considering the impacts of Covid and Brexit. All the issues covered remain pertinent, with the treatment of drivers and the poor quality of roadside facilities particularly

important. The focus on retention is even more relevant today than in 2016.

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