

## **Written submission from Unite the Union (RDF0023)**

Unite thanks the Committee for the opportunity to give evidence in person and is pleased that the Committee is looking at specific practical steps that need to be taken to make a real difference to the road freight supply chain. Of course Unite's priority is the working conditions of existing drivers across the country and as such our members have developed a number of specific demands that we believe will bring real positive change to the sector.

We welcome the chance to review the DCPC and hope that, in collaboration with other stakeholders, we can create a vocational training structure that adds real value to drivers and the industry.

However, the review of the DCPC is only one very small part of the solution that are required. We have attempted to provide below clear and practical steps that the government can take, or support and encourage the industry to take, to bring real change.

You will find attached a report commissioned by Unite on the current issues and proposed solutions through the establishment of minimum standards.

Also attached is the Unite Driver Manifesto published earlier this year that lists 7 clear demands.

Whilst the challenges in the sector are very varied they all contribute to the industry being unattractive to new and existing drivers. Each of the points below will go some way to improving the industry.

- Driver Facilities - minimum standards for facilities for professional drivers should be developed jointly with drivers, employers and providers. We would draw the Committee's attention to previous work done as part of a project way back in 2006, document attached. Unite believes that a review of these standards and the development of an inspectorate that includes facilities provided by private providers and those provided by operators/employers will improve standards across the country. Unite does not believe that public funds should simply be given to existing private companies to improve their facilities. If these private companies, many of whom have made significant profits, do not provide appropriate facilities, in line with agreed standards, then they should not receive public subsidy. We further believe that much stronger sanctions must be applied to companies that refuse drivers access to on site facilities.
- The government should commission a detailed study to look at the reasons why drivers are leaving the industry and why under represented communities are not attracted to the industry. There is significant anecdotal evidence but very little qualitative evidence that will focus the industry on what actually needs to be done.

- Unite has welcomed the changes to IR35 that has gone a long way to eradicating bogus self-employment from the industry. However, we are receiving reports of companies that are still using limited company drivers who are, in our opinion, illegitimate. We want the government to encourage HMRC to make much greater strides in enforcing the IR35 regulations which will then allow the Traffic Commissioners to consider the issue of repute of operators who look to undermine the sustainability of the industry.
- The role of economic employers has been key to the current fragility of the road freight supply chain. Retailers and manufacturers have driven down standards by high use of temporary/agency labour and outsourcing. We do not dispute that generally road transport businesses are low margin. However, the economic employers are very profitable. This imbalance must change by establishing safe rates for road transport.
- These safe rates can only be achieved through a form of sectoral bargaining. The Committee will be well aware of the fragmented nature of the industry with small and medium enterprises making up the vast majority of road haulage enterprises. Even though the industry is diverse there are examples already of specific sub sectorial standards. The Down Stream Oil Distribution forum meets as a cross sector group to establish minimum standards. With a similar approach we believe that we can collaboratively improve standards across the industry.
- The current steps the government have taken in regards to improving the process for entering the industry post pandemic will have an effect. However, if the historical industry issues are not addressed the overall attrition will continue. The ongoing relaxation of drivers' hours is now irrelevant and must be over turned. Drivers can already work very flexibly and for very long hours, these relaxations put all road users at risk. In 'Why We Sleep' by Matthew Walker Professor of Neuroscience and Psychology at the University of California, he states "Tragically, one person dies in a traffic accident every hour in the United States due to fatigue – related error. It is disquieting to learn that vehicular accidents caused by drowsy driving exceed those caused by alcohol and drugs combined." It is already well known that overweight and obese truck drivers are more likely to suffer micro sleeps and drowsy driving due to sleep apnoea and weight issues.
- Drowsy driving is more dangerous than drunk or drug driving as if you are drunk or on drugs your reactions are delayed. If you have a microsleep (5-10 seconds) you have no control.
- The relaxation of cabotage rules has been seen as an insult by our membership. Allowing non UK haulage companies to carry out unrestricted operations whilst not dealing with the underlying, long term industry issues has further demonstrated the lack of understanding or concern of existing UK drivers.

In conclusion, when the entire industry; employers, drivers and regulators agree that major change needs to happen then we must prosecute every opportunity to make those required changes. The road haulage supply chain holds the economy together, without it the country stops.

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