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# ESSENTIAL FLEET MANAGER *Magazine*

*For fleet professionals operating within the* ***Public Sector, Housing, Utilities*** *and* ***Infrastructure Management***

**ISSUE 1**
**2026**


***Supplier Insight:***
**Clayton Power**
working with **Openreach**
*(See pages13-16)*

CLAYTON POWER

***Special Feature:***
**Vehicle Conversions**
and **Accessories**

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The publication for fleet professionals that operate vehicle fleets that support the UK's Essential Services sector.


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## SPECIAL FEATURE VEHICLE CONVERSIONS



*Front Cover: Judy O'Keefe, Fleet Director, Openreach.*

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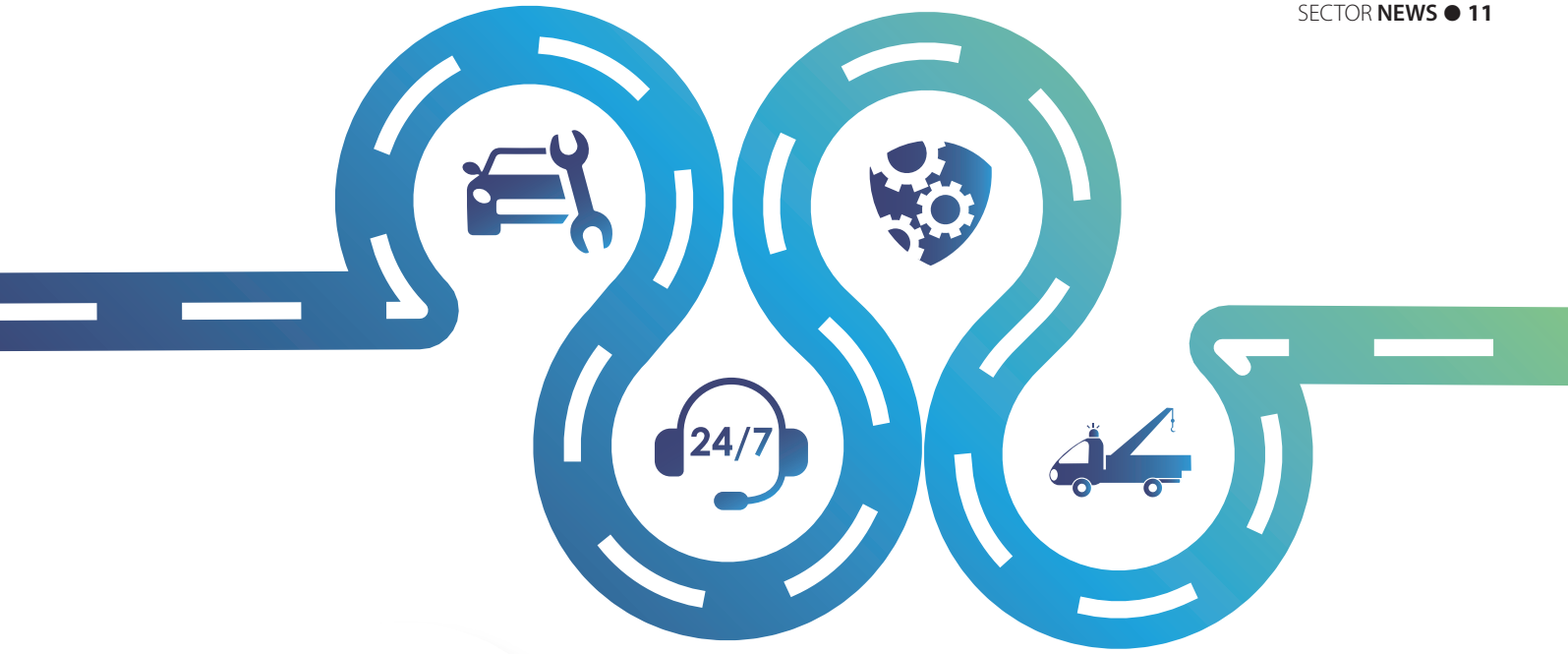


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# Bold **New Road Safety Strategy** Aims to **Save Thousands of Lives** and **Transform** Britain's **Roads**

**The UK Government has unveiled its first comprehensive Road Safety Strategy in more than a decade, marking a decisive step to reduce the number of deaths and serious injuries on Britain's roads and tackle long-standing issues that have stalled progress in recent years.**

Launched on 7 January 2026, the strategy sets an ambitious target to reduce road deaths and serious injuries by 65% by 2035, with a particularly strong goal of a 70% reduction for children under 16.

Transport Secretary Heidi Alexander said that every road fatality is *"a tragedy that devastates families and communities"* and framed the strategy as a turning point in the nation's approach to road safety.

### A Decade of Stalled Progress

Despite advanced vehicle technology and decades of safety campaigns, progress in reducing casualties has plateaued. Britain has slipped relative to European peers, underscoring the need for renewed focus and decisive action.

The strategy adopts the internationally recognised Safe System approach, which recognises that while human error is inevitable, deaths and serious injuries are not. This framework emphasises the combined role of road design, vehicle technology, enforcement and behaviour change in keeping all road users safe.

### Consultations to Shape Future Law and Enforcement

Central to the strategy are a series of consultations and proposed reforms to tackle the root causes of collisions:

- **Drink and drug driving:** The Government will consult on lowering the drink-drive limit in England and Wales — unchanged since 1967 and among the highest in Europe and explore the use of preventative technology, such as alcohol interlock devices, for offenders.
- **Young and novice drivers:** With drivers aged 17–24 disproportionately involved in fatal and serious crashes, a consultation will examine introducing a minimum learning period of three to six months to ensure learners gain broader experience before testing.
- **Older drivers:** As Britain's population ages, a consultation on mandatory eyesight testing for drivers over 70 will be launched, alongside consideration of cognitive testing options — balancing safety with road independence.
- **Enforcement gaps:** New measures will target illegal number plates designed to evade cameras, crack down on uninsured drivers and tackle unroadworthy vehicles without valid MOTs.

### Modern Safety Technology and Infrastructure

The strategy also includes a package of 18 new vehicle safety technologies, such as autonomous emergency braking, lane-keeping assistance, and other systems designed to protect drivers, cyclists and pedestrians alike. Mandating these features for new vehicles aims to ensure the highest safety standards and align requirements with those across Europe.

Additionally, a new Road Safety Investigation Branch will be established to analyse collision patterns and deliver evidence-based recommendations, similar to existing bodies in aviation and rail and a Road Safety Board, chaired by the Minister for Local Transport, will oversee delivery in partnership with local authorities, emergency services and safety organisations.

### Focus on Vulnerable and Work-Related Road Users

The strategy gives particular attention to vulnerable road users. Motorcyclists, who represent a small proportion of traffic but a disproportionate share of fatalities, and children in deprived areas with higher pedestrian casualty rates will benefit from targeted reforms in training, testing and infrastructure.

Recognising the scale of work-related road risk, with an estimated one in three road fatalities involving someone driving or riding for work — a National Work-Related Road Safety Charter pilot will establish standards for employers and help businesses manage risk across modes, including HGVs, vans, motorcycles and e-cycles.

### Stakeholder Reaction and Next Steps

Safety organisations have broadly welcomed the strategy's ambition and scope. Ed King OBE, Director of The AA Charitable Trust, described it as a *"positively radical reframing of road safety"*, highlighting the importance of measures tackling drink and drug driving, seatbelt use and uninsured drivers.

However, the focus now turns to the consultation process and implementation. Industry bodies and fleets, in particular, are being urged to engage with the government consultations, open until March 31, to ensure practical, evidence-based contributions that help shape final policy and legislation.

### A Shared Responsibility

The Government emphasises that the strategy's success hinges on shared responsibility: from individual road users to manufacturers, planners and enforcement authorities. Only by aligning these efforts, it argues, can Britain's roads become significantly safer and more equitable for all.●

# New **Local Powers** to **Keep Pavements Clear** for Those **Who Rely** on Them **Most**

**Disabled people and other vulnerable pavement users are set to benefit from new powers that will allow local leaders across England to introduce wider pavement parking restrictions, helping to keep pavements clear, safe and accessible while still allowing exemptions where appropriate.**

Vehicles parked on pavements can create serious obstacles for parents with pushchairs, wheelchair users, blind and partially sighted people, and older residents. In many cases, blocked pavements force people into the road, reducing independence and increasing the risk of accidents.

Following a public consultation, the Department for Transport has confirmed it will give councils new and strengthened legal powers to tackle pavement parking more effectively. The changes will allow restrictions to be introduced across larger areas, replacing the current system which often limits action to individual streets and involves lengthy and complex legal processes.

Under the new approach, local leaders will have the flexibility to decide where pavement parking should be restricted and where it may remain acceptable, reflecting local conditions and needs.

Local Transport Minister Lilian Greenwood said clear pavements are vital for safe and independent travel.

*"Clear pavements are essential for people to move around safely and independently, whether that's a parent with a pushchair, someone using a wheelchair, or a blind or partially sighted person,"* she said. *"That's why we're giving local authorities the power to crack down on problem pavement parking, allowing more people to travel easily and safely and get to where they need to go."*

Guide Dogs' chief executive Andrew Lennox welcomed the announcement, describing it as the result of years of campaigning.

*"Cars blocking pavements are a nuisance for everyone, but especially dangerous for people with sight loss, who can be forced into the road with traffic they can't see,"* he said. *"When pavements are blocked, people lose confidence, independence and the freedom to travel safely, limiting access to work, education and social opportunities."*

RAC senior policy officer Rod Dennis said research shows most drivers agree that pavement users should not be forced into the road due to inconsiderate parking. He added that the proposals strike a balance by allowing councils to prevent pavement parking where it causes problems, while permitting it in locations where it helps traffic flow and does not inconvenience others.

West Midlands Mayor Richard Parker said blocked pavements can prevent journeys altogether for some people and pose real safety risks.

*"Giving decisions to local leaders means solutions that reflect how our streets actually work,"* he said. *"It's a practical step that helps people move around safely, confidently and independently in their own communities."*

The Department for Transport will publish guidance later in 2026 to help councils apply the new powers in a proportionate and locally appropriate way.

Ministers say the changes support safer, more inclusive streets and form part of the government's Plan for Change, aimed at improving accessibility, inclusion, and economic growth by ensuring public spaces work for everyone.●


Model shown is 26MY Defender 90 Hard Top S with optional Tasman Blue metallic body, white contrast roof and 18" steel wheels. Official in g/km: [219-237]. The figures provided are as a result of official manufacturer's tests in accordance with EU legislation with a fully figures may vary according to factors such as driving styles, environmental conditions, load, wheel fitment, accessories fitted, actual wading. *Wet: Volume as measured by simulating the loadspace filled with liquid.

# NDER


Fuel Consumption Figures for the Defender Hard Top range in mpg (l/100km) (weighted combined): [33.7-31.5 (8.4-9.0)]. $CO_2$ Emissions
charged battery. For comparison purposes only. Real world figures may differ. $CO_2$, fuel economy, energy consumption and range
route and battery condition. Off-road sequences carried out on private land with full permissions. Always check route and exit before

# **RoSPA** on the Government's **New Road Safety Strategy**

by **Rebecca Guy**, Senior Policy Manager at the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (RoSPA)

**For the fleet sector, where driving for work remains one of the highest-risk activities employees undertake, the stakes for road safety are high. Collisions can lead to serious injury, legal and financial consequences, operational disruption and reputational harm, costs no organisation can afford to ignore. Against this backdrop, the Government's new Road Safety Strategy represents a significant and timely step, offering measures that could help fleet operators reduce risk and protect their people.**

From electric vehicles to a review of the Highway Code, many things about road travel have changed in the over a decade since the UK Government's last comprehensive Road Safety Strategy. One thing that hasn't, however, is the risk of being killed or seriously injured in a collision. The latest statistics from the Department for Transport showing just a one per cent decline in road deaths to 1,602 in 2024, are evidence that the UK has lost its position as a global leader on road safety. Deaths have decreased by just 10 per cent between 2014 and 2024, with the European Transport Safety Council ranking the UK as the 9th worst out of 32 countries in Europe for reducing road deaths between 2023 and 2024.

The introduction of a new Road Safety Strategy was a key recommendation in RoSPA's National Accident Prevention Strategy, which outlines the scale of the UK's accident crisis and the solutions needed to reverse rising accident figures. Having helped the Scottish and Welsh governments deliver their respective devolved road safety strategies, RoSPA recognises that a clear, evidence-based approach is essential to preventing road traffic collisions and saving lives.

The introduction of ambitious, clearly defined road safety targets is a particularly significant development. If backed by robust data, regular reporting and meaningful enforcement, these targets provide a vital framework for accountability and focus. This ensures that progress can be properly measured and that policies can be adjusted where they are not delivering results.

A commitment to consult on mandating the fitting of new safety technologies is an overdue step to protect pedestrians and all road users. These technologies will ensure that new vehicles meet the highest modern safety requirements, delivering life-saving benefits. If proposals go ahead, this change is estimated to prevent more than 14,000 people from being killed or seriously injured on Great Britain's roads over 15 years.

The decision to consult on lowering the legal drink-driving limit is an important step towards strengthening road safety. This reflects the clear scientific consensus that even low levels of alcohol significantly impair driving ability, sending a strong message about the dangers of drink-driving.

Proposals to consult on mandatory eyesight tests for drivers at age 70 represent another constructive step towards improving road safety. Drivers must be able to see clearly and respond safely on the road, and regular vision checks are a sensible way to reduce risk as we age. Any system should support people in driving safely for as long as possible, while taking timely action when health or eyesight could put them or others in danger. It is equally important to strengthen protections for young and newly qualified drivers, who are significantly more likely to be killed or seriously injured. The Government's commitment to consult on a minimum learning period for new drivers is a positive step, though there remains a strong case for introducing post-test measures to better protect young drivers.

The Government's commitment to establishing a dedicated Road Safety Investigation Branch marks another significant step forward. Unlike aviation and rail, road deaths have previously occurred without a consistent national system for learning lessons and making formal safety recommendations. With a dedicated investigative branch, opportunities to prevent future tragedies could be realised.

For fleet operators, this Strategy signals a renewed determination to tackle preventable road harm in ways that support safer work-related driving. However, its success will depend on effective delivery, the right investment, and clear guidance, so that its measures lead to improvements on the road. As organisations look to strengthen their driving cultures and manage risk more effectively, insights from RoSPA's fleet safety expertise can help ensure the Strategy's ambitions translate into meaningful, day-to-day safety outcomes for drivers and the wider public.●

Contact **RoSPA** today to see how they can support your fleet, visit: **www.rospa.com/driver-training**


# **Millbrook Healthcare** Expands Fleet with **136 Specialist Mercedes-Benz Vans**

**Millbrook Healthcare has expanded its fleet with 136 specialist vans from Mercedes-Benz Vans Dealer Marshall Motor Group Ltd, supporting vital community equipment services for the NHS and local authorities.**

The teams deliver, install, and maintain mobility equipment, enabling people to live safely and independently at home, and supporting urgent hospital discharges and emergency repairs.

The new fleet includes 102 Sprinter L3H2 PRO vans, 22 Sprinter L2H2 PRO vans, and 12 Citan L1 vans, all purpose-built for safe handling of specialist equipment. Integrated dash cameras and in-cab technology enhance safety, compliance, and route planning across Millbrook's nationwide operations.

**Kevin Downham, Fleet Sales Manager at Marshall Motor Group, said**: *"Fulfilling Millbrook's largest order yet has been a real pleasure. Knowing these vehicles support the NHS in creating safe homes for those in need makes it all the more rewarding."*

The vans are covered by Mercedes-Benz Vans ServiceCare Complete Plan for three years, including repairs, maintenance, MOT testing, and 24/7 roadside support through the MobiloVan programme, minimising downtime.

Now operating across nine UK locations, the fleet ensures teams reach service users quickly and reliably. Sarah Palfreyman, Sales Director at Mercedes-Benz Vans UK, said: *"We're proud to supply dependable, purpose-built vans that help organisations like Millbrook support communities across the UK."*

**Millbrook's Service Centre Manager, Gary Burnham, added**: *"These vans are already supporting our operations, helping us deliver high-quality equipment so service users can live safely and independently."* ●


*Pictured (L–R): Andrew Rogan (HDC), Jamie Williams (Cambridgeshire Constabulary), Cllr Julie Kerr, Sarah Conboy (Council Leader), Vicky Best (Cambridgeshire Fire and Rescue Service), Cllr Lara Davenport-Ray, Richard Hamilton (Huntingdon Red Watch) and Colin Moss (HDC)*

# From **Bin Lorries** to **Blue Lights**: How a **Landmark Partnership** Cut **Fleet Carbon Emissions** by **Over 80%**

**Huntingdonshire District Council (HDC), working alongside Cambridgeshire Constabulary and Cambridgeshire Fire and Rescue Service, has delivered a landmark fleet decarbonisation initiative, achieving an 80% reduction in carbon emissions from participating vehicles.**

The results follow an eight-month pilot in which HDC trialled hydrotreated vegetable oil (HVO) across a selection of its own plant, machinery and fleet vehicles. Following the success of the trial, a unanimous vote by the HDC Cabinet in September 25, approved the roll-out of HVO across the council's entire operational and pool fleet of 95 vehicles.

With fleet vehicles accounting for more than a third of the council's overall carbon footprint, the switch from fossil diesel to HVO has already reduced emissions by around 1,100 tonnes of $CO_2$ per year – equivalent to a 30% reduction in total council emissions.

**Leadership and Collaboration**

Cllr Sarah Conboy, Executive Leader of Huntingdonshire District Council, said:

*"We have taken our responsibility to reduce carbon emissions seriously, and this trial shows that practical, innovative solutions can deliver real change without disrupting essential services."*

She added:

*"What makes this achievement even more significant is the spirit of collaboration behind it. We weren't required to work with the emergency services, but we chose to, because shared ambition accelerates progress. By opening up our infrastructure and testing new technologies together, we've created a model that others can adopt.*

*"As more councils and public bodies explore alternatives to fossil fuels, we hope our experience demonstrates that bold action is possible now. Climate change demands urgency, and this project shows how local authorities can take decisive steps while continuing to deliver for residents."*

**Why HVO Works**

HVO is a renewable alternative to fossil diesel, produced from waste vegetable oils. As a drop-in fuel, it can be used on its own or blended with diesel, allowing vehicles to refuel normally without downtime, service disruption or performance impact.

As part of the pilot, HDC invited the emergency services to participate. Both Cambridgeshire Fire and Rescue Service and Cambridgeshire Constabulary, located within three miles of HDC's HVO tank at Eastfield House, opted to join the trial.

***Andrew Rogan**, Head of Operational Services at HDC*

Andrew Rogan, Head of Operational Services at Huntingdonshire District Council, said:

*"This is a brilliant example of public sector partnership driving innovation, and we believe it's the first initiative where a council has partnered with the blue-light services for an HVO trial."*

*Superintendent **Robin Sissons**, Cambridgeshire Constabulary*

### Emergency Services See Operational Benefits

Seven police vehicles – both marked and unmarked, across a range of makes and models, ran on HVO during the trial. Officers highlighted the benefits of HVO as a drop-in fuel, allowing seamless switching between diesel and HVO during long rural shifts. Easy 24/7 access to fuel close to headquarters further simplified adoption.

Robin Sissons, Superintendent at Cambridgeshire Constabulary, said:

*"We saw no issues with performance at any point. We purposely switched vehicles back and forth between diesel and HVO, and that blendability de-risked our operations.*

*"While HVO is slightly more expensive, it helps reduce our carbon footprint without any detriment to operational policing."*

For Cambridgeshire Fire and Rescue Service, the trial complemented its wider sustainability programme, with no change in vehicle performance – even during emergency response.

***Vicky Best,** Assistant Director at Cambridgeshire Fire and Rescue Service*

Vicky Best, Assistant Director at Cambridgeshire Fire and Rescue Service, said:

*"We have an ambitious target to be as carbon neutral as possible by 2030. Switching to HVO helps us work towards that goal and provides a practical stepping stone while the cost of fully electric vehicles remains a challenge."*

### A Practical Alternative to Full Electrification

With the government's target for all new cars and vans to be zero-emission by 2035, both public and private sector fleets face challenges around cost, range and charging infrastructure. For emergency services and rural fleets in particular, HVO offers an immediate solution using existing vehicles.

Vicky Best added:

*"All-electric fire engines are still very costly. We recently purchased three new fire engines for the cost of one electric equivalent. By running a fire engine on HVO, we're reducing carbon emissions by more than 80% right now."*

Robin Sissons continued:

*"Our vehicles need to be extremely versatile – covering long distances, responding at speed, carrying equipment or remaining stationary at incidents. EVs can't yet meet all those demands."*

### Infrastructure Enables Success

During the trial, HDC managed all logistics, including fuel purchase, storage and access. Emergency service partners were able to refuel 24/7 using secure fuel-key access at Eastfield House.

Robin Sissons said:

*"It's been easy because the council already had the infrastructure in place. The fuel's available around the clock from a secure site, and we saw no loss of performance.*

*"We couldn't have trialled HVO on our own, but HDC made it simple. If more councils offered HVO, it would strengthen resilience across the county."*

### A Model for Wider Adoption

With no operational impact and significant carbon savings, both emergency services have continued using HVO beyond the pilot. HDC believes the partnership provides a model that could be replicated by councils nationwide and extended to include shared services such as fleet maintenance and staff training.

Vicky Best concluded:

*"From an emissions perspective, HDC offered a fantastic opportunity. Shared goals made this partnership work – we may be different organisations, but we're heading in the same direction."*●

# Special Feature

# Vehicle Conversions and Accessories

## SUPPLIER INSIGHT

# Quiet, Clean, Efficient: How **Openreach Transformed** the **Engineer Experience** with **Lithium Onboard Power**

ONBOARD POWER SOLUTION

### INTRODUCTION

Essential service fleets in the public sector, utilities, and infrastructure management face significant operational challenges. Vehicles must operate efficiently and safely while handling complex tasks, often in dense urban areas or remote locations; at the same time, there is increasing pressure to reduce environmental impact and improve sustainability.

Traditionally, fleets have relied on idling vehicle engines or petrol and diesel generators to power onboard tools, equipment, and welfare facilities. While effective, these methods produce noise, exhaust fumes, and increased wear on vehicles, which can negatively affect both workers and the communities they serve. Even with cleaner engines and fully electric Light Commercial Vehicles (e-LCVs), fleets still face challenges powering ancillary equipment without compromising battery range or relying on fossil fuel generators.

This is where Clayton Power comes in. Working closely with fleet operators across the country, Clayton Power operates with an established UK team delivering local sales, technical support, and aftersales service. Founded in Odense, Denmark, in 2000, Clayton Power designs, develops, and manufactures mobile power systems for fleet vehicles in Europe.

Its Lithium Power Supply (LPS) technology, available in the UK for over a decade, provides reliable, emission-free power for tools, equipment, and onboard facilities without engine idling or generators.

The current LPS II platform is a fully integrated battery and inverter system, available in four power options, from LPS II 1500 to LPS II 3000, with the ability to scale capacity using additional G4 batteries.

**Benefits of LPS II:**

- Power tools, lighting, pumps, laptops, and welfare equipment while the vehicle's engine is off
- Quieter, safe, and healthier working conditions
- Reduced emissions and environmental impact
- Supplies auxiliary power without drawing on the traction battery in EVs
- Lightweight – from 22.5 kg. Save up to 100 kg vs. traditional setup

*"Our solution was born from a very practical challenge, reducing roadside noise caused by engine idling and generator use. These interruptions frequently caused work stoppages for our customers working in residential areas, and we knew there had to be a better way. The LPS II is an all-in-one power solution that eliminates these issues while improving operational efficiency and reducing environmental impact. Fleets can now work quietly, safely, and independently of traditional fuel sources,"* says Karl Jones, Head of Sales at Clayton Power.

By combining real-world engineering insight with innovative lithium technology, Clayton Power has become a trusted partner for high-profile fleet operators, including Openreach. One of the earliest adopters of the technology, Openreach recognised the operational and community benefits of reducing noise, emissions, and engine idling.

*"Our solutions are not just about providing power, they are about improving the daily working experience for engineers, enhancing public perception, and supporting the transition to a more sustainable fleet future. The following case study highlights Openreach's operational challenges, the outcomes delivered, and how, from the initial trial to today, Openreach has helped shape the development of onboard lithium power in real-world operational activity,"* Karl added.

# CASE STUDY

# **Lessons** from the **Frontline: Openreach** on **Adopting Lithium Power** Across a **Nationwide Fleet**

## BACKGROUND

**When it comes to frontline operations, innovation isn't always about speed or headline-grabbing technology. Sometimes it's about the small, everyday moments that shape a working day.**

For Openreach, the shift to onboard lithium power in service vehicles has transformed the way engineers work, quietly, safely, and more efficiently, while setting the standard for fleet operations across the UK.

This is not a story about sales figures or $CO_2$ reductions; it is about a market leader acting early, learning from real-world experience, and helping shape a technology now deployed across thousands of vehicles.

## A NEW WAY OF WORKING

For engineers, the biggest difference wasn't technical; it was how the working day felt:

- **No engine** running in the background
- **No noisy** generator beside the van
- **No fumes** drifting across the job site

Instead, there was quiet, and the ability to focus purely on the work in front of them. Tools, pumps, lighting, laptops, and welfare equipment could operate without engine idling. Breaks were calmer, night work less intrusive, and conversations with residents easier.

Small moments that matter:

- **Tea breaks** and lunchtimes without engine noise
- **Tools ready** and charged when needed
- **More space** inside vehicles, with no generator or fuel to carry
- **No reliance** on petrol generators for everyday tasks
- **A calmer** presence on the street

The work itself did not change, but the experience of doing it did.


## THE CHALLENGE

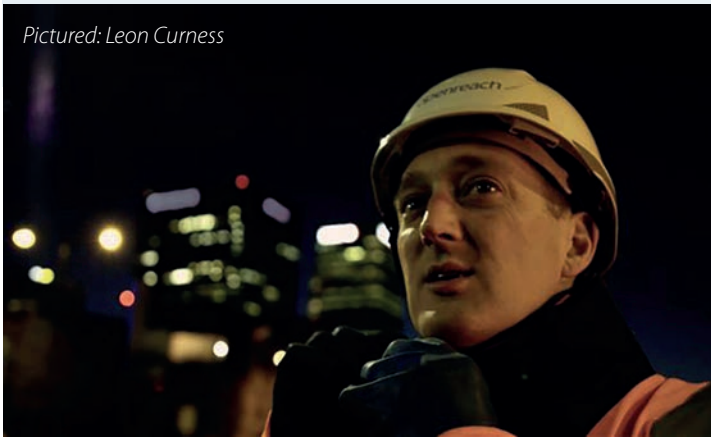
The issue first came to a head in central London, 2016, where night-shift fibre repair teams were working through the small hours. Engines and petrol generators were too loud for built-up areas, and local councils' noise abatement officers often halted work, resulting in fines and lost productivity.

Using lithium power inside service vehicles was new, unfamiliar, and misunderstood. Openreach recognised that if engineers could power tools and welfare equipment without engine idling, and carry out roadside operations without petrol generators, they could keep essential work moving quietly, safely, and efficiently.

## PRACTICAL CHALLENGES IDENTIFIED

- **Noise and fumes** in residential and built-up areas
- **Engines** left running simply to recharge tools and laptops
- **Petrol generators** that were unreliable or difficult to manage
- **Vehicles** carrying fuel and additional equipment, adding risk and complexity
- **Ongoing** vehicle maintenance issues caused by excessive engine idling
- **Jobs** paused or disrupted due to noise complaints
- **Poor** public perception around idling, emissions, and noise

The goal was straightforward: reduce noise, cut engine idling, remove reliance on petrol generators, and create a calmer, more efficient working environment for engineers and the communities they serve.



*Pictured: Leon Curness*

## THE EARLY TRIAL (2016)

In 2016, Openreach began a pilot trial in London with a night-shift fibre repair team led by Noel Fallon, Leon Curness, and Russ Baker, with support from Alex McArthur (then within BT Fleet) .

The trial proved that the lithium system could reliably power tools, pumps, lighting, laptops, and welfare equipment even when the vehicle was off; it addressed operational frustrations while improving engineer experience and public perception.

## TECHNOLOGY SHAPED BY REALITY

Openreach didn't just adopt lithium power; they helped shape its evolution. Working closely with Clayton Power, engineers, fleet teams, and operational staff provided continuous real-world feedback, ensuring the system met the harsh conditions of daily fieldwork.

This collaboration ensured the lithium power systems were robust, reliable, and genuinely fit for purpose, addressing:

- **Everyday** tool and device charging needs
- **Reliability** across long shifts and multiple stops
- **Seamless** integration with existing vehicle infrastructure
- **Minimal** disruption to engineers' workflow

## A DECADE OF IMPACT

Today, more than 3,000 Openreach vehicles are equipped with Clayton Power LPS systems, deployed across urban and rural locations. What began as a cautious trial has matured into one of the most established collaborations of its kind in the fleet sector.

As fibre deployment accelerated and operational practices evolved, the partnership expanded across depots and regions, supporting engineers nationwide; the system is now embedded in day-to-day operations, helping Openreach maintain efficiency, engineer wellbeing, and community trust.

# CUSTOMER Q&A


## INTRODUCTION

**The story of Openreach's adoption of Clayton Power's onboard power systems illustrates how innovation in fleet operations can transform the day-to-day experience of engineers, improve operational efficiency, and reduce environmental impact. But the real lessons go beyond technology — they are about the challenges faced in implementing new systems and how to overcome them, from selecting the right partners and solutions to integrating them across a complex, nationwide fleet.**

To bring real-world experiences and outcomes from the case study to life, Essential Fleet Manager Magazine spoke with Openreach's fleet and operational teams. In the following Q&A, Chris Mullings, Senior Manager Fleet Operations, and Judy O'Keefe, Fleet Director, share their insights, experiences, and advice for other fleet operators considering Clayton Power's lithium power solutions.

## INTERVIEW

**Judy O'Keefe,** Fleet Director

**Q: Firstly, Chris and Judy, thank you for taking the time to be involved with this case study, could you give us a short background about your roles at Openreach and how you were involved in the trial or rollout.**

**Judy**: I am the Fleet Director for Openreach and have been in the role since summer 2024. Prior to this, I was the Operational Director for the Openreach Complex Engineering team and Openreach Innovation, bringing my operational field, commercial, and contractual knowledge into Fleet alongside extensive technology and innovation experience.

Clayton Power is leading the way, and our collaboration is of clear value to both businesses. I want to continue exploring opportunities within Fleet, while also investigating future options across the wider organisation. There are further opportunities to improve safety and sustainability, remove cost, and reduce complexity. We are already exploring how vehicles fitted with lithium technology could provide emergency backup for Digital Subscriber Line Access Multiplexers (DSLAMs). This is one area I will be expanding, and I am confident there are many more.

*...Cont'd on page 16*

*...Cont'd from page 15*

**Chris Mullings**
*Senior Manager*
*Fleet Operations*

**Chris**: I've been working within the Openreach Fleet for the past 10 years and currently have responsibility for the operational fleet team. We have responsibility for the efficient and effective running of our 24,000 vehicles.

My team have responsibility for innovation in vehicles and conversions, which is why working with partners such as Clayton Power is essential to continually improve and deliver for our drivers.

**Q: We've previously discussed what led Openreach to trial Clayton Power's onboard lithium power solution. Were there any initial concerns or hesitations you are aware of regarding the use of battery power instead of conventional generators?**

The key concern was reliability, the old technology and equipment was tested and engineers have relied upon this for years. If we moved to remove this technology, we needed to be able to assure delivery wouldn't be impacted. There was also an element of the unknown, the theory looked great, but as with so many of these things, we needed to test the real-world performance and impact and be able to demonstrate the savings would justify the investment.

**Q: What were the biggest technical or operational challenges during the early trials, and how were these overcome?**

Training - once we had expanded past the first cohort of engineers, we had to make sure that it was accompanied by thorough Learning and Development designed training, alongside driver education. Not doing this would have resulted in drivers being allocated vehicles with the lithium solution but not fully optimising it. We've addressed this by working with Clayton Power and our vehicle converters to add QR codes to the vehicles which link to training guides and videos.

**Q: In practice, how did the introduction of onboard lithium power change engineers' daily routines?**

It removed some of the (perceived) negative habits. There was no longer a need for engines to idle to heat the vehicles before use and during the day, which saved fuel and reduced emissions. There were other improvements for drivers within their days including a reduction in Manual Handling with no need to load and unload heavy petrol generators multiple times per day.

**Q: Can you share specific examples of how quieter, cleaner vehicles improved safety, efficiency, or well-being on site?**

The London night teams were often encountering issues with regards to site space and noise complaints when setting up to complete cabling activities. By having the Lithium solution, not only have they removed the noisy generator, they were also able to reduce the site space in some instances. The result was that we had happier residents and an environmentally friendly working environment, and happier engineers.

**Q: Were there any "small moments" that had a surprisingly big impact, such as break times, tool readiness, or interactions with residents?**

All of the above, reduced complaints, improvements in welfare provision and facilities for drivers and easier access for tooling, by simply plugging into the 110v socket pre-installed at the rear of the vehicle.

**Q: How has Openreach's ongoing collaboration with Clayton Power helped adapt the technology to meet real operational conditions, and what role has engineer feedback played in the evolution of the onboard lithium system over the past decade?**

Engineer feedback has been key, we've worked collaboratively to make sure that the provision of the lithium solution truly delivered. We've completed real world testing within the network to help inform decisions and understand the true capability. We've had plant running for hours, emptied hundreds of litres of water from manholes and ventilated chambers to allow safe working. All tried and tested with the end users to ensure we're aligned to deliver.

**Q: Today, over 3,000 vehicles are equipped with lithium power. What lessons from the initial trial were critical in scaling this solution across the fleet, and how have you managed adoption across different regions, depots, and types of operations?**

The biggest learning is making sure that we complete suitable allocations. It's essential that once we have incurred the spend and invested in the equipment, we maximise the output and impact this has. When engineers change vehicles, we need to make sure that their tools holdings, skills and expected outcomes match up to the capability of the vehicle. It's a huge, but worthwhile investment, as long as the use case is addressed. As we have high numbers of vehicles moving within the units, this is the key to delivering against the business case and a challenge that my fleet team are embracing.

**Q: Finally, what advice would you give to other fleet operators considering a similar technology or operational change?**

Do it! and bring your engineers with you on the journey.●

If you'd like to explore how the Clayton Power system could be integrated into your fleet, or would like to arrange a consultation or demonstration, please get in touch. Contact **Karl Jones** at **kj@claytonpower.com** to learn more.

CLAYTON POWER

# Designing a **Mobile Workshop: Key Considerations** for **Fleet Operators**

**Vehicle conversions vary widely in complexity and application, but successful outcomes depend on careful planning from the outset. For fleet operators, a well-designed conversion should do far more than simply house tools and equipment. Done correctly, it can improve productivity, enhance safety, reduce downtime and support long-term operational efficiency.**

One of the most common conversion types across essential services is the mobile workshop. Widely used by housing maintenance teams, utilities providers and field-based service technicians, these vehicles effectively function as workplaces on wheels. As such, choosing the right base vehicle and conversion specification is critical to ensuring the vehicle supports operatives rather than limiting them.

## Choosing the Right Base Vehicle

Every successful conversion starts with the base vehicle. Fleet operators must assess how the vehicle will be used day to day, considering mileage, duty cycle, payload demands and environmental objectives. Selecting an efficient, low-emission platform can support sustainability targets while helping to control operating costs.

Key considerations include daily mileage and operating environment, payload capacity once the conversion is complete, and whether an internal combustion engine, hybrid or fully electric Electric Vehicle (EV) is best suited to the role. Operators must also account for licence and Operator Licence requirements, as well as how the vehicle fits into future replacement cycles.

## Roof Height and Interior Usability

Roof height has a direct impact on how usable a mobile workshop is. High-roof vans allow operatives to stand upright inside the load area, significantly improving comfort and reducing fatigue. This is particularly important where tools or equipment are used inside the vehicle, as cramped conditions increase the risk of injury.

Fleet managers should consider whether operatives can stand safely, whether there is sufficient workspace for tasks, and whether internal access remains clear and unobstructed once racking and equipment are installed.

*...cont'd on page* **18**

Having **sufficient roof height** enhances comfort but also **ensures safety** when **operating machinery**.

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### Vehicle Length and Load Capacity

Vehicle length should be determined by the materials and equipment carried on a regular basis. Operatives transporting bulky items or large quantities of stock may require long-wheelbase vehicles to provide sufficient storage and working space.

Adequate internal room not only prevents overloading but also improves workflow efficiency on site. Future requirements should also be considered, as changes in equipment or service contracts can quickly outgrow a poorly specified vehicle.

### Access and External Storage

Ease of access plays a major role in productivity and safety. Fleet operators should assess how equipment is loaded, unloaded and retrieved throughout the working day. This may involve rear or side door access, safety steps for high load floors, roof bars or racks, and sidebars or external storage for specialist materials.

Discussing these requirements early with a conversion partner ensures the correct external fittings are installed, avoiding costly retrofits and improving day-to-day usability.

### Flooring and Vehicle Linings

Flooring is critical to protecting both the vehicle and the operative. High-quality floors should be durable, moisture-resistant and easy to clean, helping prevent corrosion and withstand daily wear.

Installation methods matter. Drilling into the vehicle floor can damage the structure and negatively affect residual value. For Electric Vehicles (EVs), no-drill flooring systems are particularly important, helping to protect battery components beneath the load area.

Weight is another key factor. Heavy flooring reduces payload capacity and can negatively impact fuel efficiency or EV range, making lightweight but robust materials essential.

### Internal Racking and Storage

Well-designed racking is central to an effective mobile workshop. Secure shelving, drawers and tool storage reduce clutter, prevent movement during transit and improve safety.

An organised layout saves time by allowing operatives to locate tools quickly, improving job completion rates and customer satisfaction. It also supports better inventory management and stock control.

Safety should be prioritised. Crash-tested racking systems offer reassurance in the event of a collision, while reusable or transferable systems improve sustainability and reduce long-term costs.

### Payload Management and Compliance

Payload capacity must account for the combined weight of flooring, racking, tools, consumables and materials. Most light commercial vehicles operate within the 3,500kg gross vehicle weight limit, suitable for standard driving licences.

If payload requirements exceed this threshold, higher-capacity vehicles may be required, potentially introducing additional licensing and Operator Licence obligations. Accurate payload calculations are essential to ensure compliance and avoid enforcement action.

*...cont'd on page* **20**

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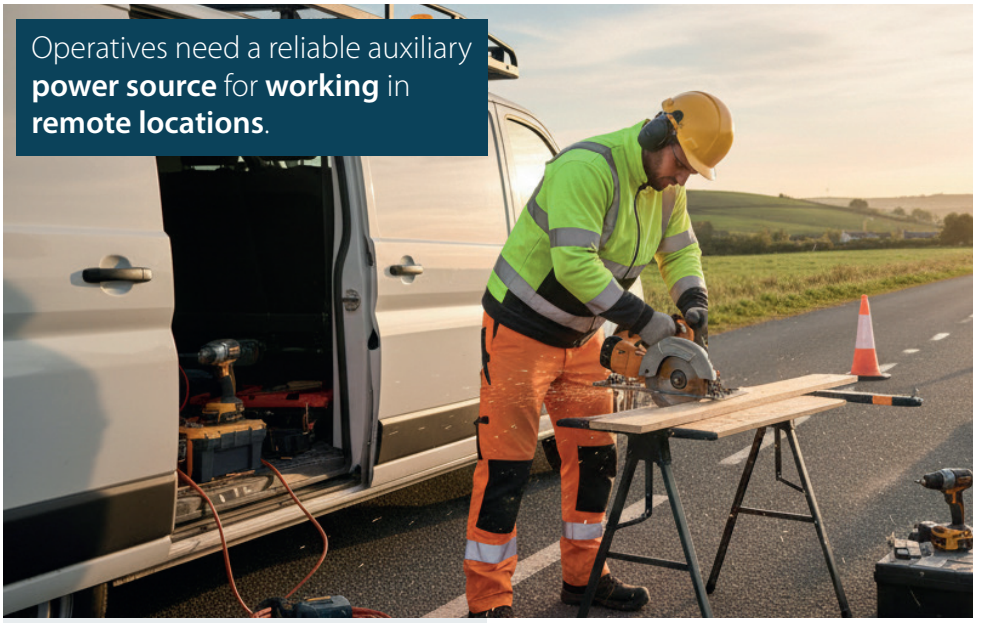
### Onboard Power Solutions

Many mobile workshops require an independent power source to operate tools in remote locations. Traditional generators often require engine idling, increasing noise, emissions and fuel consumption.

Modern onboard battery power solutions provide a quieter, cleaner alternative, delivering low-emission power without running the engine. These systems improve working conditions for operatives while supporting wider sustainability objectives.

Battery-powered onboard systems also enable operatives to charge and use battery-operated power tools directly from the vehicle. This reduces reliance on generators or external power sources, improves flexibility on site, and supports more efficient, uninterrupted working throughout the day—particularly in urban areas or locations with noise and emission restrictions.

When specifying onboard power, fleet operators should consider total tool and equipment demand, generator versus battery-based solutions, noise and emission limits, and the impact on fuel consumption or Electric Vehicle (EV) range.



Operatives need a reliable auxiliary **power source** for **working** in **remote locations**.

### Lighting, Ventilation and Safety Systems

Adequate lighting is essential for safe working, particularly during night-time or winter operations. Interior LED task lighting should be complemented by external work lights to safely extend the workspace beyond the vehicle.

Ventilation is equally important when tools are used inside the load area. Roof vents help manage heat and fumes, improving comfort and safety.

Reversing cameras, sensors and audible warnings are increasingly standard for converted vehicles, particularly in urban and residential environments. These systems reduce collision risk, protect pedestrians and help prevent costly vehicle damage.

### Security and Theft Prevention

Mobile workshops often carry high-value tools, making security a priority. Upgraded locks, deadlocks and internal lockable storage significantly reduce theft risk, while alarm systems provide an additional deterrent—especially for vehicles parked overnight at operatives' homes.

Maintaining detailed records of tools, including serial numbers and photographs, supports insurance claims and improves the likelihood of recovery if theft occurs.

**Mobile workshops** often carry **high-value tools**, making **security** a **priority**

### Seat Coverings: Protecting Interior Assets

Seat coverings are a simple but highly effective way to protect vehicle interiors in demanding fleet environments. Operatives often enter the cab wearing workwear that may be wet, dirty or abrasive, accelerating wear on original upholstery.

Durable, easy-to-clean seat covers help protect seats from damage, staining and premature wear, preserving the condition of the cab and supporting stronger residual values at defleet. They also reduce downtime and cost associated with interior repairs or replacements, while maintaining a more professional working environment for drivers and technicians.

*...cont'd on page* **22**

Richell Vehicle Conversions Ltd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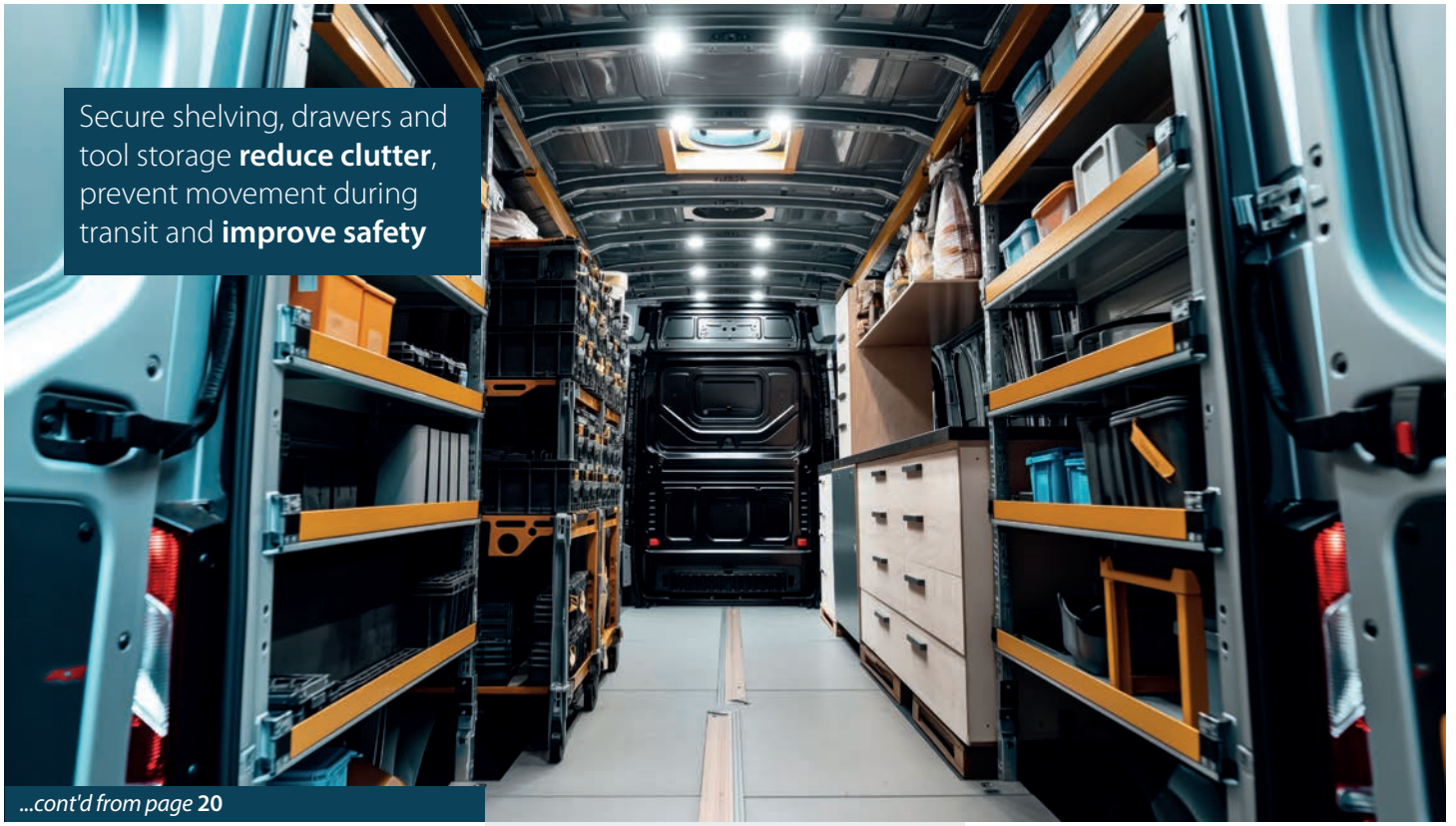

Secure shelving, drawers and tool storage **reduce clutter**, prevent movement during transit and **improve safety**

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**Telematics: Visibility, Control and Smarter Fleet Decisions**

Telematics systems are increasingly valuable for mobile workshop fleets, providing real-time visibility of vehicle location, usage and driving behaviour. When choosing a telematics solution, fleet managers should look for systems that integrate easily with existing fleet platforms and provide clear, actionable data rather than unnecessary complexity.

Used effectively, telematics can help improve route efficiency, monitor idling and fuel use, support driver safety, and provide accurate data for utilisation and maintenance planning. For converted vehicles, telematics also supports asset protection, compliance reporting and informed decision-making—helping fleet managers maximise uptime and control operating costs.

**Secure Ladder Storage and Ergonomics**

Modern vehicle conversions increasingly integrate purpose-built ladder access solutions, including systems such as the **Van Guard UTIloader system,** sliding or tilting roof mechanisms, and side-access racks. These designs allow ladders to be raised and lowered safely from ground level, significantly reducing manual handling, physical strain, and the risk of injury.

Side-access ladder systems are particularly beneficial in confined urban or roadside environments, enabling quick and safe deployment without the need to access the rear of the vehicle. During transit, ladders must always be securely restrained to prevent movement that could cause damage, injury, or hazards to other road users.

The use of lightweight materials helps maximise available payload while maintaining safety, durability, and regulatory compliance.

Training remains essential. Operatives should receive instruction in safe lifting techniques, the correct use of mechanical aids such as the UTIloader, and the routine inspection of securing mechanisms to ensure continued safe and reliable operation.

**Unsecured ladders** pose a significant risk, so invest in a purpose built **ladder system**

**Planning for Long-Term Fleet Performance**

By addressing vehicle specification, conversion design, and operational requirements at the planning stage, fleet managers can reduce risk, improve efficiency, and avoid costly retrofitting later in the vehicle's life.

A well-executed mobile workshop conversion enables safer working practices, higher productivity, and improved asset utilisation—delivering measurable value every day the vehicle is in service.●

# Why **Fleet Conversion Quality** Matters **More Than Ever**

**Fleet conversion has traditionally been viewed as a functional exercise. Vehicles are specified, ordered, and then fitted out to suit the job they're meant to do. For many fleet operators, it has been a necessary step rather than a strategic one. That mindset is changing and it's changing fast.**

Today's fleet vehicles are expected to deliver more: higher productivity, improved safety performance and clear progress against sustainability targets. As a result, the quality of the conversion - how well a vehicle is designed, built and equipped for its role - has a direct impact on operational performance.

A poorly considered conversion can slow down work, create safety risks and drive unnecessary fuel use. A well-engineered one can improve efficiency, reduce downtime and support lower running costs across the life of the vehicle.

### A more demanding operating environment

The role of the fleet vehicle has expanded significantly. It is no longer simply a mode of transport, but a mobile workspace that must support people, equipment and power needs throughout a full working day, often in demanding environments. This has placed new pressure on converters to move beyond standardised layouts and off-the-shelf solutions. Understanding how a vehicle is used day to day - by drivers, engineers and frontline teams - has become essential.

Bri-Stor Systems, part of The HEX Group, has been converting light commercial vehicles since 1983 and now completes more than 8,000 conversions each year. While scale is important, the company's focus is on engineering vehicles around real-world use rather than treating conversion as a finishing process. Each project begins with an assessment of operational requirements, safety needs and workflow challenges. The aim is to ensure that storage, access, power and layout actively support the job rather than working against it.

### Reducing delay and rework

One of the recurring frustrations for fleet operators is lead time. Design changes late in the process, unclear specifications and reliance on multiple suppliers can all cause delays and added cost.

An end-to-end conversion model helps address this. By keeping prototyping, design, fabrication, coating, graphics, installation and de-fleet under one roof, Bri-Stor Systems maintains control over quality and scheduling while reducing dependence on external suppliers.

The introduction of Virtual Reality prototyping has also helped speed up the process. Customers can now review a full-scale digital model of their vehicle before production begins, allowing changes to be made early rather than during the build. This has reduced rework and cut lead times by up to 50%, while also reducing material waste.

For fleets rolling out vehicles at scale, these efficiencies can have a significant impact on delivery schedules and overall programme cost.

### Building sustainability into the conversion

Sustainability is another area where conversion quality plays a growing role. While vehicle choice is important, how that vehicle is equipped and powered day to day can materially affect fuel use and emissions.

Rather than viewing sustainability as an optional add-on, Bri-Stor Systems' HEX360 approach embeds lower-impact thinking at every stage of the conversion process. From material choices - such as the use of Vinyl360, a fully recyclable livery - to energy consumption and the way vehicles are operated, managed, and responsibly de-fleeted at end of life, sustainability is designed in from the outset.

Integrated onboard power systems such as Power360 reduce the need for engine idling by providing reliable off-grid power. Solar360 adds renewable charging capability, allowing fleets to cut emissions where solar contribution is practical. Crucially, these systems are designed to support operational performance rather than restrict it.

For fleet managers, this means sustainability improvements that do not compromise productivity or driver experience.

### Consistency at scale

Delivering large fleet programmes often raises concerns about consistency. Maintaining build quality across hundreds or thousands of vehicles requires robust processes and planning.

With on-site storage for more than 2,000 vehicles and structured engineering standards applied across every project, Bri-Stor Systems supports national fleet programmes while maintaining consistent build quality. Dedicated account management, OEM coordination and integrated pre-delivery inspection ensure vehicles arrive compliant and ready for a hard day's work.

The business works across sectors including utilities, telecommunications, infrastructure, housing and roadside assistance, and holds extensive OEM approvals alongside recognised quality and safety certifications.

### A shift in perspective

As fleet requirements continue to evolve, conversion quality is becoming central to operational success. Vehicles that are safer, more efficient and better aligned with sustainability goals deliver measurable value over their working life.

For fleet operators, the message is clear: conversion is no longer just about fitting out a vehicle. It is a strategic decision that affects performance, cost and compliance long after the vehicle enters service.

Taking a more considered, engineering-led approach to conversion is increasingly essential - not just to meet today's demands, but to prepare fleets for what comes next.●

*Find out more visit:* **www.bri-stor.co.uk**

VAN GUARD

# CASE STUDY: CONNEXUS

## DELIVERING CONSISTENCY, SAFETY AND UPTIME:

How **Van Guard Accessories** Supports **Connexus'** Maintenance Fleet

**Client**: Connexus Housing Group
**Primary Solution Provider**: Van Guard Accessories
**Installation Partner**: Vantage Vehicle Conversions

### INTRODUCTION

**For rural housing association Connexus, which manages 10,000 social housing properties across Shropshire and Herefordshire, one critical factor underpins success: keeping its maintenance fleet productive, safe, and operational at all times.**

With around 150 vans deployed across a largely rural geography, Connexus needed storage and access solutions for a fleet upgrade that would deliver operational efficiency, safety, and consistency — all while minimising vehicle downtime and long-term running costs.

Following careful evaluation, Connexus selected Van Guard Accessories to supply van racking, roof bars, ladder access systems, and pipe-carrying systems. Since 2024, in excess of 120 upgraded vehicles have been delivered through local installation partners Vantage Vehicle Conversions and with more to follow, the project will be completed during 2026.

*Connexus's Maintenance Fleet*

### SPECIFICATION BUILT AROUND OPERATIONAL NEEDS

Connexus' maintenance teams include plumbers, electricians, heating engineers, carpenters, bricklayers, plasterers, roofers, floorlayers, and grounds maintenance operatives. Each trade has specific equipment needs, but the fleet team prioritised standardisation wherever possible.

*"We need solutions that work across multiple trades but still allow us to keep the fleet fairly uniform,"* said Adam Whitlock, Fleet Manager at Connexus. *"Van Guard were able to provide racking, pipe carriers, roof bars and ladder loading systems that met those needs without overcomplicating or over-specifying the vehicle layout,"* he added.

**Van Guard Trade Van Racking** formed the backbone of each installation, offering modular layouts adaptable to different trades. Its lightweight aluminium and composite construction maximises payload while maintaining carbon-reduction targets, where weight efficiency becomes even more important.

## LIGHTWEIGHT DESIGN DELIVERING MEASURABLE BENEFITS

Payload efficiency is critical for Connexus operatives, many of whom carry a significant amount of tools, materials, and equipment across long rural distances each day.

> *"Gross vehicle weight is always a concern for us,"* Adam explained.
> *"Van Guard's lightweight racking allows us to carry more equipment safely without risking compliance issues, while improving fuel efficiency and vehicle longevity."*

**Lightweight design also supports future fleet evolution, including electric vehicles and carbon-reduction targets, where weight efficiency becomes even more important.**

*Van Guard's Lightweight Trade Racking*

## SMARTER ACCESS AND SECURE STORAGE

Ladder handling was identified as a key risk area. Van Guard's ULTILoader system allows ladders to be raised and lowered safely from the ground, removing the need to climb onto the vehicle or lift ladders above shoulder height.

> *"The ladder system allows operatives to load and unload from ground level at the rear of the vehicle, which significantly reduces health and safety risks,"* said Adam.
> *"This significantly reduces the risk of slips and falls and makes the process quicker and safer."*

**Secure storage was another important consideration. Lockable pipe carriers provide secure, organised storage, protecting equipment in transit and reducing the risk of damage.**

> *"Having well-designed, secure storage provides reassurance for our teams,"* Adam added.
> *"As the fleet evolves, we may introduce additional features to further enhance protection and peace of mind."*

*...cont'd on page* ***26***


*Lockable pipe carriers*

*...cont'd from page **25***

## RELIABLE DELIVERY THROUGH TRUSTED PARTNERS

Connexus initially planned to self-install equipment supplied by Vanguard Accessories. However, fitting a large fleet would cause excessive downtime, so options were assessed, and value for money considered fully to identify a suitable installer. Connexus appointed Vantage Vehicle Conversions, whose local presence and reputation for high quality workmanship ensured a professional, efficient rollout with minimal off-road time.

**Working in partnership:**

> *"It's very difficult for us to plan and quote reliable lead times if our suppliers don't have sufficient stock levels,"* said Matt Trow, Workshop Manager at Vantage Vehicle Conversions.
>
> *"Van Guard's stock levels are excellent, and so is their communication. They are always on hand in case of any occasional hitch, allowing us to work as quickly as possible on the required installation. If we know that equipment is readily available, then everyone benefits. By working efficiently without delays, the fleet customer's operations are far less disrupted."*

**Ease of installation was another factor:**

> *"It's not just the reliability of stock levels that contributes to efficiency; it's also the fact that Van Guard's equipment is simple to fit, which greatly reduces the likelihood of any delay due to a technical issue,"* added Matt.

**He also highlights Van Guard's balance of quality and competitive pricing:**

> *"The quality of the equipment we install directly reflects on the perception of Vantage as a quality vehicle converter. Van Guard equipment is excellent quality and competitively priced. For example, the ULTILoader ladder system matches the quality of the best of the competition, but at a significant saving — and across a fleet of this size, those savings become substantial."*



*ULTLoader Ladder System*


*ULTLoader Ladder System*

## SUPPORTING SERVICE DELIVERY NOW AND IN THE FUTURE

The benefits of Van Guard extend beyond the vehicles themselves. Safer access, consistent layouts, and secure storage enable operatives to be redeployed quickly, reducing downtime and directly improving service delivery.

> *"The flexibility and safety of Van Guard solutions help us turn vehicles around quickly and get operatives back on the road,"* Adam Whitlock, Fleet Manager at Connexus explained.
>
> *"That directly improves the service we provide to our residents."*

## LOOKING AHEAD, LIGHTWEIGHT, ADAPTABLE EQUIPMENT IS CENTRAL TO CONNEXUS' FUTURE FLEET STRATEGY.

> *"As we move towards EVs and carbon reduction targets, weight and efficiency will become even more important,"* Adam concluded.
>
> *"Van Guard's approach gives us confidence that our fleet can continue to evolve without compromising performance."*

## CONCLUSION: A SCALABLE SOLUTION FOR HOUSING MAINTENANCE FLEETS

The Connexus project demonstrates how the right accessory supplier can play a strategic role in fleet performance. By combining lightweight, safety-led design with reliable stock availability and strong partner support, Van Guard Accessories has delivered a solution that keeps vehicles productive, operatives safe, and services running efficiently — today and into the future.

## CHOOSE VAN GUARD ACCESSORIES – THE FLEET MANAGER'S FIRST CHOICE

- **High stock** availability guarantees short lead times and minimal vehicle downtime.
- **Easy installation** reduces risk of delays and ensures consistent quality.
- **Durable**, dependable equipment balances quality with competitive pricing.
- **Ongoing support** ensures quick resolution of any operational issues.

VAN GUARD

Contact **Van Guard Accessories** today to see how we can support your fleet, visit: **www.van-guard.co.uk**

# VCA TYPE APPROVAL

**This guide is for fleet operators, procurement managers, and compliance teams responsible for specifying, purchasing, or operating converted and completed vehicles in Great Britain.**

### What Is Type Approval?

Type Approval confirms that a vehicle meets the safety, environmental, and technical standards required to be registered and legally used on UK roads.

In Great Britain, this process is overseen by the Vehicle Certification Agency (VCA) under the GB Type Approval scheme.

**Without the correct Type Approval in place, a vehicle may:**

- Be refused registration
- Be delayed at handover
- Require costly rework or re-testing
- Be unusable for fleet operations

For fleet operators, Type Approval is not an abstract regulatory concept — it directly affects delivery timelines, operating costs, and compliance exposure.

### Why Type Approval Is Usually Invisible to Fleets

For standard, mass-produced vehicles, Type Approval is largely invisible. Manufacturers complete the approval process before vehicles reach the market, allowing fleets to order and register vehicles with minimal friction.

However, this changes when vehicles are:

- Converted
- Completed from a chassis cab
- Modified post-production

In these cases, Type Approval status can change during the build process, and responsibility may shift between multiple parties.

### Why Conversions Create Additional Risk

When a vehicle is converted or completed:

- The original approval may no longer fully apply
- Additional approvals or extensions may be required
- Assumptions made during the build can invalidate compliance

Problems often surface late in the process when vehicles are ready for registration. By this point, delays and remedial work are expensive and disruptive.

### The 2026 Shift to Full GB Type Approval

In 2026, the transition from EU-based approvals to full GB Type Approval is reaching its final stages.

This places converted and completed vehicles under greater scrutiny, particularly where:

- EU approvals were previously relied upon
- Documentation is incomplete or unclear
- Multiple converters are involved in the build

**For fleet operators, this means:**

- Less tolerance for ambiguity
- Greater need for early assurance
- Higher risk of delays if approval routes are not clearly defined

### Understanding the Main Approval Routes

Converted vehicles may follow different approval routes depending on volume, complexity, and build responsibility. Understanding these routes helps fleet operators assess risk and ask the right questions.

### GB Whole Vehicle Type Approval (GB WVTA)

GB Whole Vehicle Type Approval applies to vehicles produced in series that fully meet GB regulatory standards in their final form.

**What it means:**

- The vehicle is approved as a complete, finished product
- Approval covers safety, environmental, and technical requirements
- Vehicles can be registered repeatedly without individual inspections

**Fleet impact:**

- Lowest operational and registration risk
- Fastest, most predictable route to deployment
- Strong assurance for large or repeat fleet orders

**Key limitation:**

- Significant changes during conversion can invalidate the original approval unless formally managed

### National Small Series Type Approval (NSSTA)

NSSTA is designed for low-volume production, commonly used by converters and specialist body builders.

**What it means:**

- Approval is granted for a limited number of vehicles per year
- Requirements are reduced compared to full WVTA
- Approval is issued at a national (GB) level

**Fleet impact:**

- A valid and common route for specialist vehicles
- Requires careful specification control and documentation
- Annual volume limits may restrict large fleet orders

**Key risks:**

- Approval often applies only to a specific configuration
- Specification changes can trigger re-approval
- Fleets may assume NSSTA offers the same coverage as WVTA when it does not

### Individual Vehicle Approval (IVA)

IVA applies to one-off or highly specialised vehicles that fall outside type approval schemes.

**What it means:**

- Each vehicle is inspected and approved individually
- Physical inspection is required before registration
- Approval is vehicle-specific and non-repeatable

**Fleet impact:**

- Higher administrative burden
- Greater risk of delay and inconsistency
- Generally unsuitable for volume fleet procurement

**Key risks:**

- Unpredictable inspection timelines
- Late-stage failures due to minor build issues
- Rectification work is time-consuming and costly●

# Don't take short-cuts on commercial EV fit outs

**In 2025 battery electric van registrations (to 4.25T) rose by a strong 36.2% to a record 30,169 units, lifting EV market share to 9.5%.**

Whilst it's clear that increasing numbers of fleet operators are making the switch to zero emission vehicles, either leased or outright purchased, Venson Automotive Solutions is urging businesses to maximise their BEV investment by ensuring the vehicles are properly equipped for service.

A van fleet refresh can provide the impetus for changing current vehicle fit out specifications. Often there's a need to further maximise payload and help operatives work more efficiently. Considering operational needs and the right vehicle for the job is key, otherwise businesses could be waiting some time for their return on investment.

Simon Staton, Client Management Director at Venson Automotive Solutions explains, "When fitting out a commercial fleet there is always a careful balancing act to play between greater efficiency and keeping a watchful eye on Total Cost of Ownership (TCO). That's why it's so important to choose a leasing provider who can advise on how to get the right conversion and fittings, such as external roof systems and internal storage, ventilation and security, to ensure the most appropriate layout for the vehicle, maximising fleet use which in turn, will achieve operational and financial objectives. "

While it's great for an LCV to look good, a van is a work horse, not a show pony. Getting the job done efficiently is the prime concern. Key to this is getting relevant stakeholders' input into the conversion requirements. So, selecting an LCV supplier who will take time out to listen carefully and understand the job required of the vehicle means a conversion that will ensure operatives will get their work done efficiently and safely, while at the same time helping the business control its costs.

It is not only the daily functionality of vehicle modifications that need to be factored in. Fit outs can have a huge impact on TCO. With the escalating cost of fuel, electric or otherwise, commercial fleet operators should bear in mind the extra weight of certain fittings and ask themselves if they are 'nice to have' or essential.

Concludes Simon Staton, "It may not be front-of-mind when replacing vans on fleet, but businesses should always consider what will happen to the fit-out at the end of the contract. Can it be reused? Are there any additional costs that might be incurred in transferring the equipment to a different vehicle?

It's fantastic to see that commercial fleets are switching to zero and lower emission vehicles, but consideration must be made before procuring to understand the day-to-day needs of these vehicles and the de-fleeting process to maximise resale values."

## Venson's top tips for van conversions

- **Fit for purpose?** – consider what the vehicle is being used for, perhaps using a pick-up instead of a van means the driver can get closer to where the work needs to be carried out.
- **Plan** – anticipate the reuse of racking and other equipment to work out your lifetime costs for the conversion.
- **Cost savings** – running correctly specified vehicles is critical to the efficiency and productivity of the business. The right conversion ensures the best layout delivering operational savings.
- **Customised racking** – a provider that can design the maximum storage capacity will save money and time. It will also provide the opportunity to understand whether there's an opportunity to downsize the vehicle.
- **Turnkey solutions** – can lead to more efficient handovers and finance process.
- **Key-for-key handovers** – a supplier that can provide a one-stop-shop speeds up the time from vehicle order to in-service which helps support minimising fleet downtimes.
- **Reuse** – you can expect to get up to 10 years of use from some equipment. Consider equipment lifecycles when specifying conversion requirements and selecting new vehicle models.
- **Understand transfer costs** – if you are intending to transfer equipment from one vehicle to another, understand the cost implications including repairs and refurbishments.
- **Payload** – productivity and the impact on the vehicle's performance should be a key consideration when determining equipment specification.
- **DIY racking risks** – Don't try cutting costs and let a skilled workforce build their own racking to save money. This can prove costly and unproductive and can lead to health, safety and duty of care issues.

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## Supplier Insight




NIc Richell, *Founder*

# PURPOSE-BUILT FRONTLINE FLEET PERFORMANCE

Richell Vehicle Conversions Ltd

### Introduction

**Building a vehicle conversion company specifically to meet the demands of emergency response fleets takes more than technical knowledge alone. It requires a deep understanding of frontline operations, hands-on workshop experience, and the confidence to challenge established ways of working. For Nic Richell, founder of Richell Vehicle Conversions Ltd (RVC), that journey has been shaped by decades spent learning the trade from the workshop floor up, gaining insight not only into how specialist vehicles are built, but how they perform when it matters most.**

In a relatively short space of time, RVC has grown into a trusted conversion partner for police, fire, ambulance, and amber-light fleets across the UK. That growth has not been driven by shortcuts or off-the-shelf solutions, but by technical expertise, full in-house capability, and a relentless focus on real-world operational needs. Essential Fleet Manager Magazine sat down with Nic to discuss how RVC was built, the lessons learned along the way, and why a people-first, partnership-led approach continues to play a vital role in delivering vehicles fit for today's frontline challenges and tomorrow's evolving demands.

### Interview

***Q: Nic, can you start by telling us about Richell Vehicle Conversions and the journey that led you to create the business?***

Richell Vehicle Conversions was officially founded in 2022, but in reality, it is the culmination of more than 35 years in the automotive and specialist vehicle sector. I started my first full-time role in 1988, aged 16, learning the trade on the workshop floor. Those early years were hands-on, demanding, and absolutely invaluable, and they continue to shape how I approach the business today.

From there, I progressed from apprentice technician into senior management and national sales roles, working with global OEMs including Ford, Volvo, Land Rover, Jaguar, Mitsubishi, LEVC, Maxus, Hyundai, Toyota, VWG and BMW. I spent more than 20 years supporting Ford's One Stop Shop programme and played an active role in the evolution of specialist vehicle conversions in the UK. That experience gave me a unique perspective, not just on how vehicles are built, but on how they are actually used by frontline crews every day.

Eventually, the business I had helped grow began to lose momentum due to a lack of investment. That was my cue to do something different, and to do it properly. With the support of my wife, Lorraine, we launched Richell Vehicle Conversions, putting quality, people, and operational reality at the centre of everything we do.

Today, RVC operates from a purpose-built facility on the Essex and Suffolk border. Our workshop is designed to manage complex conversions entirely in-house, staffed by engineers and technicians who understand the pressures police, fire, ambulance, and amber-light fleets face. Every build focuses on safety, compliance, and real-world usability. We are not just converting vehicles, we are supporting the people who rely on them every day.

That philosophy extends to our team. I truly believe a strong company is built on strong people, which is why we prioritise ongoing training and development. In early 2025, RVC became the first emergency vehicle conversion company to put every technician through AVI compliance training. Combined with our ISO 9001 certification and continuous investment in skills and processes, delivering excellence is not just a slogan at RVC, it is how we operate.

*Quality Control and Testing*

*National Highways BZ4X Project*

***Q: What recent milestones best illustrate RVC's growth and capability***?

The past year has been incredible, and while there are too many achievements to list in full, a few really stand out.

One of the biggest was our largest single project to date, delivering 103 Toyota Corollas for National Highways in partnership with Toyota GB and KINTO UK. Coordinating a programme of that scale required working across multiple stakeholders, maintaining consistent build quality, ensuring regulatory compliance, and meeting tight delivery deadlines across the fleet.

We were also appointed as a one-stop-shop vehicle conversion partner to Volvo Car UK and Hyundai Motor Company, which reflects growing manufacturer confidence in our standards, reliability, and ability to deliver at scale.

In addition, RVC secured a place on the Blue Light Commercial BLC0157 framework in 2025. This national, multi-supplier framework enables police, fire, ambulance, and other emergency services to procure vehicle conversion services across cars, vans, HGVs, and motorcycles for a wide range of operational roles.

Operational excellence has remained central to our growth. We achieved our second consecutive ISO 9001 certification and invested further in infrastructure, including a biometric key management system to enhance security, accountability, and operational control across all vehicle builds.

We rounded off the year with a complex project for London Ambulance Service NHS Trust, converting 40 Ford Explorers and six Ford Kugas for their Fast Response Unit teams. Delivered to tight timescales, it demonstrated our ability to manage frontline-critical conversions without compromising quality.

***Q: When fleet operators are searching for a reliable partner to manage blue and amber-light vehicle conversions, what do you believe makes RVC unique?***

What really sets us apart is our combination of real-world fleet experience and full in-house workshop capability. We do not design vehicles on paper, we design them around how they will actually be used day to day. Our technicians understand the pressures faced by police, fire, ambulance, and amber-light services, and that insight shapes everything from layout and ergonomics through to electrical integration, safety, and long-term durability.

Because all conversions are carried out in-house, we retain full control over quality, compliance, and consistency. Every vehicle is tested, refined, and signed off before it leaves our workshop, resulting in a fully integrated conversion that works seamlessly with the base vehicle and is safe, reliable, and operationally ready.

Our partnership-led approach is equally important. We do not believe in off-the-shelf solutions. From the earliest discussions through to delivery and ongoing support, we work closely with customers to ensure every vehicle is tailored to its role and operating environment. That long-term mindset is why customers continue to return to us.

Our portfolio reflects that breadth of experience, covering police, fire and rescue, ambulance services, National Highways, private ambulance providers, search and rescue, and other specialist emergency agencies. Whether it is a straightforward interior conversion or a fully integrated multi-role command vehicle, every project is delivered with precision, pride, and a clear focus on frontline performance.

***Q: You have mentioned that RVC takes a partnership-led approach. How does your supplier network support that in practice?***

Our supplier network is absolutely fundamental to what we do. In an industry where reliability is critical and downtime has real operational consequences, working with trusted, proven partners allows us to deliver conversions that perform consistently in demanding environments.

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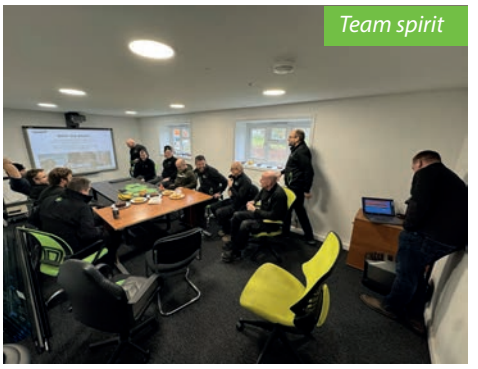
*Police Control Centre Interior*

National Highways Maxus T90 Traffic Officer Vehicle


Police Commercial Vehicle Unit


Team spirit

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We avoid off-the-shelf solutions and instead work closely with both clients and suppliers to deliver bespoke, fully integrated installations that are safe, compliant, and built for real-world use. This approach has resonated strongly with police, fire and rescue, ambulance services, National Highways, and specialist emergency agencies across the UK.

By working with all major industry suppliers, we have access to everything required for a complete end-to-end conversion, including warning lighting, sirens and PA systems, telematics and CCTV, battery management solutions, full livery application, specialist kennel and cell fabrication, climate control systems, and bespoke wiring harnesses.

All integration is carried out in-house, allowing us to control quality at every stage and thoroughly test each system. The result is a vehicle that does not just meet a specification on paper, but performs exactly as it should in the harshest operational conditions.

***Q: How important are people and culture to the way Richell Vehicle Conversions operates?***

People are absolutely at the heart of RVC. I firmly believe that if we invest in our people, they will invest in the customer. While vehicle conversions are highly technical, the quality and reliability of what we deliver ultimately comes down to the pride and professionalism of the people doing the work.

I began my own career as a YTS apprentice in the late 1980s, and the support and opportunities I received shaped my entire working life. That experience has stayed with me, and offering the same level of investment and opportunity to our team today means a great deal to me.

At RVC, we create an environment where people can develop their skills, build confidence, and feel proud of the vehicles they help produce. Investment in training, compliance, and continuous improvement ensures our team is well-equipped and well-supported. When people feel valued, quality follows naturally.

We are also grateful to our customers, partners, and suppliers who have supported us on this journey. We work hard, take real pride in what we do, and genuinely enjoy the process. That shared sense of purpose is what keeps us focused on delivering the very best for the frontline services we support.

***Q: How do you see Richell Vehicle Conversions supporting essential service fleets now and into the future?***

Emergency service fleets are under more pressure than ever. Operational demand is increasing, public expectations are higher, and fleets are also being asked to meet ambitious decarbonisation, efficiency, and compliance targets. In that environment, choosing the right conversion partner is critical.

At RVC, we combine a proven project portfolio with recognised quality standards, strong manufacturer partnerships, and in-house workshop expertise. That allows us to deliver vehicles built with real operational reality in mind, not just specification sheets. Whether it is a single specialist vehicle or a nationwide fleet rollout, our focus is always on improving performance, reliability, and crew well-being.

Looking ahead, fleets will continue to evolve, and so will the vehicles they rely on. Our commitment is to innovate with purpose, working closely with customers and partners to ensure every vehicle leaving our Essex facility is ready for today's challenges and future operational demands.

***Q: On a lighter note and to conclude, what is one thing that really shows the RVC team spirit or work ethic?***

The pride the team takes in getting things right really stands out. Everyone understands how important the vehicles we build are and how they will be used, so doing the job properly is non-negotiable. There is a strong sense of camaraderie in the workshop, and we work hard to maintain that.

My door is always open, and I actively encourage feedback, ideas, and suggestions from everyone, regardless of role. It keeps the atmosphere positive and collaborative. We work hard, we support each other, and we enjoy the challenge together. That is what makes RVC more than just a workplace, it is a proper team.●

Richell Vehicle Conversions Ltd

# Max Automotive Group Ltd: Supporting Growth, Fleets, and the Future

By Nathan Bell EngTech MSOE MIRTE, Managing Director, Max Automotive Group Ltd


**As fleet operators face growing pressure from electrification, cost control, compliance requirements and the constant need to keep vehicles on the road, the role of a reliable maintenance partner has never been more critical to daily operations.**

Marking its first anniversary, Max Automotive Group Ltd reflects on a year of strong growth and outlines how it continues to support fleet operators across the UK with responsive, flexible and nationally supported maintenance services during a period of rapid change.

Over the past 12 months, the business has established itself as a practical, fleet-focused service partner, supporting cars, vans and specialist assets. From launch, the focus has been clear: minimise downtime and keep fleets operational. This operational mindset has resonated with fleet operators, local authorities and service providers alike, enabling growth while retaining a hands-on, service-led approach.

*"Fleet operators need a maintenance partner that understands uptime, compliance and the realities of day-to-day operations,"* said Nathan Bell, Managing Director. *"Our service model is designed around operational needs, with fast response times, clear communication and solutions that help vehicles return to service quickly."*

## National Coverage with Local Service Delivery

Max Automotive Group Ltd delivers fleet maintenance support through a combination of strategically based mobile technicians, a fully equipped workshop and a fully approved nationwide repair network.

Mobile technicians are based in Manchester, Milton Keynes and Oldbury, covering surrounding regions, while national coverage is provided through a trusted network of repair partners. This structure enables consistent service delivery for operators managing fleets across multiple locations, combining local responsiveness with national reach to help reduce downtime wherever vehicles operate.

## Supporting the Transition to Electric and Hybrid Fleets

With many operators now managing mixed fleets, Max Automotive Group Ltd is expanding its capability to support electric and hybrid vehicles alongside traditional internal combustion engine (ICE) assets.

Investment includes Electric Vehicle (EV) trained technicians, specialist diagnostic and safety equipment, and service processes aligned with sustainability and compliance requirements. This enables fleet operators to work with a single maintenance provider as they transition towards lower-emission vehicles.

*"Many operators are running mixed fleets, and they need one service provider that can support every powertrain,"* Nathan added.

## More Than Cars and Vans

Max Automotive Group Ltd supports a broad range of fleet assets through both mobile and workshop-based services. Capabilities include cars and vans, EV and hybrid vehicles, specialist vehicles, plant machinery, powered access equipment, planned maintenance and repairs, breakdown and on-site diagnostics, vehicle & asset recovery, and vehicle and asset movements.

This breadth of support enables fleet operators to consolidate maintenance across multiple asset types with a single provider, helping simplify management, improve control and enhance operational efficiency.

## Focused on What Comes Next

As the business enters its second year of operation, the focus remains firmly on service reliability, technician capability and scalable national support. Continued investment in people, equipment and infrastructure ensures Max Automotive Group Ltd can respond effectively to evolving fleet and operational demands.

For fleet operators, the company offers a maintenance partner focused on uptime, responsiveness and practical support throughout the fleet lifecycle, delivered locally and supported nationally.●


*To learn more about how* **Max Automotive** *can meet your fleet needs, call* **0121 728 4114** *or visit:* **www.maxautomotive.co.uk**

## SUPPLIER INSIGHT

# Trusted, Tailored, and Made in Britain: Woodall Nicholson's Fleet Expertise

With **John Randerson**, CEO


*John Randerson, CEO*

## INTRODUCTION

**With a history spanning over 200 years, Woodall Nicholson began life as a manufacturer of horse-drawn carriages and has since evolved into a leading designer and manufacturer of specialist vehicles for UK fleets. Today, the company combines its renowned craftsmanship with a forward-looking approach to sustainability, advanced technologies, and integrated vehicle solutions.**

Operating across multiple specialist segments, including emergency services, passenger transport, ceremonial vehicles, and bespoke conversions, Woodall Nicholson supports its customers through a nationwide network and a culture of innovation. The group has expanded through organic growth and strategic acquisitions, encompassing respected brands such as Mellor Bus, Treka Bus, VCS (specialist emergency service vehicles), and Coleman Milne (ceremonial vehicles).

Over the decades, Woodall Nicholson has built a reputation for merging traditional engineering expertise with modern design and manufacturing techniques. Its in-house teams manage every stage of the conversion process, from concept and design to build, testing, and delivery, ensuring vehicles meet both operational requirements and regulatory standards.

As the fleet sector evolves, Woodall Nicholson continues to support modern demands, including electrification, low-emission vehicles, and complex multi-purpose conversions, all while maintaining the craftsmanship and reliability that have defined the company for generations.

Essential Fleet Manager spoke with CEO John Randerson about how Woodall Nicholson has become a trusted partner for essential fleet operators and how investment in people, skills, and innovation is shaping the company's future.

***Q: To begin with, John, could you broadly describe the types of vehicles available across the brands within the Woodall Nicholson group, and how they serve different fleet needs?***

Woodall Nicholson operates across a deliberately broad range of specialist vehicle sectors, because fleet needs are rarely uniform. Through brands such as Mellor Bus and Treka Bus, we design and manufacture small buses for local authorities, specialist education transport, adult social care, and community services, offering both low-floor and high-floor solutions depending on operational requirements.

Alongside this, VCS provides highly specialised emergency service vehicles, particularly for police forces, while Coleman Milne focuses on ceremonial vehicles for the funeral sector. What unites all of these brands is that they are purpose-designed, not adapted as an afterthought. Each product exists because there is a clear use case, whether that is transporting vulnerable passengers with dignity, supporting frontline emergency services, or serving long-established ceremonial traditions.

The advantage for fleet operators is that, across the group, we can provide tailored solutions rather than forcing customers into a one-size-fits-all product.





*Managing every stage of production with modern design manufacturing techniques*

***Q: Woodall Nicholson possesses a rich craft heritage. How does this craftsmanship integrate with modern technology to fulfil both current and future fleet needs? In your view, how have fleet requirements changed in recent years?***

Craftsmanship remains central to Woodall Nicholson, but it now sits alongside a highly developed engineering capability. Over the last decade in particular, we have invested heavily in building a fully automotive grade engineering function, using advanced CAD and FEA systems and working closely with OEM partners, and conducting extensive third-party approval and durability testing.

All of our components begin life as engineered parts, not improvised solutions on the shop floor. That allows us to deliver repeatability, safety, regulatory compliance, and quality at a level that modern fleet operators quite rightly expect.

Fleet requirements have also evolved significantly. Cost control and uptime remain critical, but customers are increasingly focused on total cost of ownership, reliability, warranty support, passenger experience, and sustainability. In sectors such as education and social care, there is also much greater emphasis on dignity, accessibility, and how the end user actually feels when using the vehicle. Our blend of traditional craftsmanship and modern engineering allows us to respond to those changing expectations.

***Q: In what ways do you think investing in engineering skills and workforce development benefits the business, its customers, and the wider community?***

Investment in people and skills is fundamental to everything we do. From apprentices through to colleagues who have been with the business for over forty years, our workforce represents a depth of experience that simply cannot be replicated by importing finished products, rebadging and ultimately offering customers a generic vehicle solution.

For customers, this investment translates directly into better vehicles: safer designs, higher quality vehicles, and solutions that genuinely meet their operational needs. For the business, it allows us to move beyond simple conversion and operate as a true vehicle manufacturer, with control over design, engineering, and production.

For the wider community, the benefits are even broader. We support UK manufacturing jobs, UK supply chains, and long-term skills development. That inward investment has a multiplier effect within the UK economy and helps sustain specialist engineering expertise that would otherwise be lost.

*Operating as a true manufacturer, with control over design, engineering and production*

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*With dedicated design and production facilities right here in the UK, our vehicles are fit-for-purpose and designed for ease of operation and maximum passenger comfort*

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***Q: As a manufacturer that proudly carries the Made in Britain mark, what are the advantages of manufacturing in Britain and sourcing materials locally, both for the company and for customers?***

We are, indeed, extremely proud to have achieved Made in Britain Accreditation. Aside from a significant contribution to the UK economy, the business enjoys significantly more control over quality, supply chains, lead times, and engineering standards. We work closely with UK-based suppliers, sending them detailed drawings and specifications, this means that we can be flexible in our product offering, and that same flexibility helps with speedy aftermarket solutions as well as build time flexibility.

For customers, this means transparency, consistency, and confidence in what they are buying. It also shortens supply chains, reduces risk, and supports faster collaboration when changes or improvements are required.

There is also a wider social value that should not be underestimated. By investing in UK manufacturing, we are investing in jobs, apprenticeships, and skills. That, to me, is a far more meaningful contribution than superficial sustainability claims that ignore where and how products are actually made.

***Q5. Do you feel that Woodall Nicholson should be seen as a vehicle manufacturer rather than a converter, and why is this distinction significant for fleet operators?***

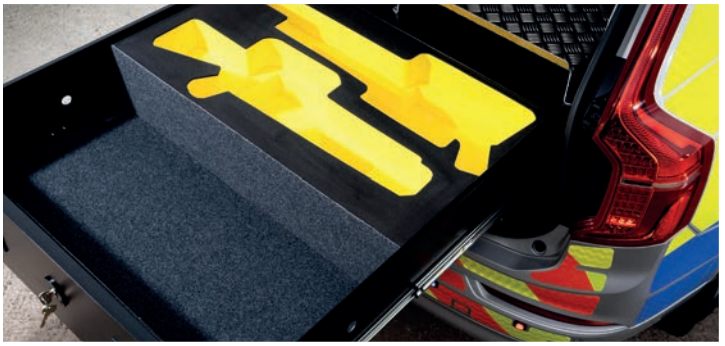
Yes, very firmly. While we do take base vehicles and transform them, the level of engineering involved means we operate as a vehicle manufacturer rather than a simple converter. That shift has been driven by sustained investment in engineering capability, processes, tooling and industry leading durability testing of our product range over many years.

For fleet operators, the distinction is important because it speaks to accountability, safety, and quality. A manufacturer designs systems holistically, understands how components interact, and takes responsibility for performance over the vehicle's lifecycle. That gives customers greater assurance around compliance, durability, and long-term support.

***Q: What key factors have driven the company's recent successes with new and existing customers, and which milestones or achievements stand out as particularly notable?***

Our success has been driven by customer trust, quality, and an ability to innovate in response to real-world needs. We are fortunate to work with an exceptionally loyal customer base, ranging from independent funeral directors purchasing a single


*Providing highly specialised emergency service vehicles, particularly for police forces*



vehicle, to local authorities ordering fleets of buses, and to major police forces who would order hundreds of our vehicles each year.

One notable example is the continued success of our small bus operations, including long-standing deployments with Transport for London and other authorities, where vehicles remain in frontline service years after delivery. More recently, product launches such as Mellor's Maxima have demonstrated how focusing on passenger experience, not just specifications, can resonate strongly with customers.

***Q: What is the consultative process you follow to ensure the best outcomes for customers, and how does this approach differ for new versus long-standing clients?***

Having end-to-end control of the products we manufacture, our approach is fundamentally consultative, regardless of whether a customer is new or long-standing. We spend time understanding how the vehicle will be used, who the end users are, and what value really means in that context.

With long-standing customers, there is often a deep understanding and trust that allows us to evolve products collaboratively over time. With new customers, the process may involve more detailed guidance and education from all parties, but the principle is the same: we interpret needs and translate them into engineered solutions. Because we control design and manufacture in-house, we can be far more responsive than businesses reliant on off-the-shelf products.

***Q: How does your ongoing support and engagement post-delivery help build long-term customer relationships and reinforce trust in the business?***

Delivery is not the end of the relationship; it is the beginning. Ongoing support, aftermarket provision, and open engagement are critical to maintaining uptime and customer confidence.

We work closely with customers throughout the vehicle's operational life, whether that involves maintenance support, feedback on performance, or future product development. That long-term engagement reinforces trust and ensures that customers see us as a partner rather than simply a supplier.

***Q: With a diverse set of in-house skills, Woodall Nicholson can adapt to evolving fleet needs. With increasing demands for safety, sustainability, and quality, how is the company preparing to meet these challenges in the years ahead?***

Preparation starts with continued investment in people, engineering capability, and facilities. Safety and quality are embedded in our design and manufacturing processes, while sustainability is addressed pragmatically through responsible material choices, reuse where possible, and shorter supply chains.

As a low-volume specialist manufacturer, we are realistic about what can be achieved, but wherever we can reduce environmental impact or extend vehicle life, we do so. More broadly, our ability to adapt quickly, work closely with customers, and retain control over engineering decisions positions us well to meet the evolving expectations of fleet operators in the years ahead.●


With **Tom Fenton**, Van Conversion Divisional Manager at **SM UK**

## Introduction

**In a fleet landscape where operational demands are becoming increasingly complex, SM UK has built its reputation on delivering vehicle conversion solutions that are as practical as they are robust. Working closely with fleet operators across utilities, highways, infrastructure and other essential services sectors, the business takes a consultative, engineering-led approach to every project, with a deep understanding of how vehicles are used in the real world.**

**This philosophy underpins both SM UK's fully bespoke conversions and its recently launched Blueprint Series: five proven conversion types developed from years of hands-on experience delivering tailored fleet solutions. Designed to streamline procurement without compromising flexibility, the Blueprint range offers fleet managers faster lead times, transparent pricing and layouts that have been tried, tested and refined in live operating environments.**

**Quality, safety and sustainability sit at the core of everything SM UK delivers. As an approved converter for the majority of major OEMs, the company combines certified base vehicles with rigorously tested components, supported by 25 years of engineering expertise and full type approval capability.**

**Q: SM UK works with fleet operators that often have complex and varied operational requirements. How would you describe your approach to designing conversion solutions that consistently meet those diverse needs?**

Our approach begins with consultation and truly understanding each customer's operation. We invest time in learning how vehicles will be used day to day, ensuring we understand typical payload requirements, access needs, and the specific operational challenges our customers face.

This consultative approach allows us to identify requirements that might not be immediately obvious. For example, a utility company may need specific mounting solutions to account for frequent loading and unloading, while a highways maintenance fleet may prioritise visibility and safety features. By understanding these nuances from the outset, we ensure our conversions deliver practical, long-term value rather than simply ticking boxes on a specification sheet.

**Q: Alongside your fully bespoke conversion service, you now offer a range of five Blueprint conversions. Could you outline these options, explain which types of fleet operators they are best suited to, and describe how your experience delivering fully bespoke projects has influenced their design, specification, and flexibility?**

Our Blueprint range represents the culmination of years of experience delivering fully bespoke conversions. We've identified five conversion types that we are frequently asked to design and build, and realised we could streamline the process for customers by developing a base Blueprint — a starting point from which finer refinements can be made.

Our Blueprint Series includes Smart Repair, Welfare, Mobile Service, Drainage, and Crewfare vehicles.

What's important to understand is that these aren't theoretical designs — each Blueprint conversion is based on proven solutions developed through close collaboration with customers in the field. The specifications reflect real-world operational requirements, common pain points we've solved, and best practices established across many bespoke builds.

This experience means our Blueprint Series isn't just a streamlined alternative to bespoke work — it's distilled expertise. Customers benefit from layouts that have been tried, tested, and refined; component

selections we know perform reliably; and installation approaches that maximise durability and ease of maintenance.

**Q: How do you ensure that each conversion, whether bespoke or Blueprint, balances quality, safety, and sustainability while still meeting operational requirements and fleet-specific challenges?**

Quality starts with quality. We work exclusively with leading manufacturers and OEMs, and we are approved converters for the majority of vehicle manufacturers. This means we install tested, certified products onto tested, certified base vehicles. That foundation is crucial, but what sets us apart is what happens next — that's where our 25 years of engineering expertise comes in.

Every conversion, regardless of whether it's bespoke or Blueprint, follows the same rigorous quality processes. Our team of skilled engineers and auto-electricians ensures installations meet or exceed industry standards for safety and durability. We're not just bolting equipment into vans; we're creating integrated solutions designed to perform reliably over the vehicle's operational life. We also offer full type approval, confirming that our conversions meet all safety, environmental, and performance standards.

From a sustainability perspective, we're conscious that the conversions we deliver today will be on the road for years to come. That means selecting durable materials to reduce early replacement, designing layouts that maximise payload efficiency to reduce unnecessary journeys, and increasingly working with electric and hybrid base vehicles to support our customers' decarbonisation goals.

**Q: Quality, safety, and sustainability are central to your offering. How do you select and work with suppliers to ensure your conversion range continues to meet the increasingly stringent standards expected by fleet customers and essential service operators?**

Our supplier relationships are built on the same principles we apply to our customer relationships: partnership, quality, and proven performance. We carefully select suppliers who share our commitment to excellence and who have demonstrated strong track records in the commercial vehicle sector.

We maintain close working relationships with our material and equipment suppliers, which gives us several advantages. First, it ensures access to the latest innovations and products that benefit our customers. Second, it allows us to provide the technical support and warranty backing fleet operators need for peace of mind. Third, these partnerships give us insight into product development roadmaps, enabling us to anticipate and prepare for evolving fleet requirements.

*Quality **van racking**, supplied by trusted partners, built for performance*

Our preferred supplier status with key OEMs such as Stellantis Group, Ford, and MAN is testament to the standards we maintain. These relationships are earned through consistent delivery, technical competence, and our ability to work collaboratively to solve complex conversion challenges. We're regularly audited and assessed, which keeps us accountable and drives continual improvement.

**Q: From a cost and lead-time perspective, what advantages do Blueprint conversions offer fleets compared with fully bespoke builds?**

Familiarity breeds efficiency. Our Blueprint Series conversions significantly streamline the entire process from enquiry through to delivery. Because these five core conversion types provide a substantial head start, we can produce drawings, pricing, and specifications almost immediately rather than reinventing the wheel for every quote.

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*Fleet of **Utility** vehicles supplied to **L&G Utilities***

*...cont'd from page **39***

*Examples of SM UK's **Mobile Service** and **Crewfare** vehicles*

**Q: How much flexibility is available within the Blueprint Series range when it comes to adding or removing features?**

We're completely flexible. "Blueprint" doesn't mean rigid or unchangeable — it's exactly what it says: a blueprint. Think of it as a proven foundation that can be adapted to meet specific requirements.

If a customer looks at one of our Blueprint Series vehicles and says, "This is perfect, but we also need X," or "We don't require Y," we can accommodate that. The Blueprint provides a starting point with proven design, tested functionality, and transparent pricing, but features can be added, removed, or modified as needed.

**Q: Looking ahead, are there plans to expand the Blueprint conversion range further to support additional vehicle types or operational use cases?**

The initial Blueprint range reflects conversion types we've spent years developing and refining with our clients. It allows us to make that accumulated knowledge immediately accessible to new customers with similar operational needs.

As we continue delivering fully bespoke conversions, we constantly assess opportunities to develop new Blueprint offerings. If we see conversion types being repeatedly requested and clear value in creating a standardised approach, we'll absolutely expand the range.

The key is ensuring any new Blueprint conversion genuinely meets a market need and benefits from our proven experience. We won't expand the range for the sake of it — each addition must deliver the same combination of quality, efficiency, and value as our current five Blueprint Series options.

**Q: Finally, could you summarise the key reasons why fleet operators should choose to work with SM UK when specifying and converting their vehicles, and share what you would say have been the highlights for SM UK over the past year, as well as your objectives for the future?**

At heart, we are engineers and auto electricians. That technical expertise is part of our DNA. We combine this engineering focus with serious capability, including 60,000 square feet of indoor workshop space and 25 years of experience supporting some of the UK's most demanding fleet operators.

Whether customers require something as straightforward as beacon installation or a fully bespoke conversion designed around highly specific operational requirements, we have the skills, facilities and supplier relationships to deliver. What truly differentiates us is our consultative approach. We are not just converting vans, we are solving operational challenges.

Looking back at 2025, two highlights stand out. Achieving preferred partner status with Stellantis Group validated the quality and consistency of our work at the highest level. Completing a 100-vehicle build programme for Zenith demonstrated our ability to deliver large-scale fleet projects without compromising on quality or timelines.

Looking ahead in 2026, our objectives are clear. We aim to establish the Blueprint Series as a trusted and efficient route to market for fleet operators who value proven quality and faster delivery, while continuing to deliver the fully bespoke conversions that remain central to our business. Demand for electric and hybrid vehicle conversions is increasing as fleets transition towards zero-emission operations, and we are well-positioned to support this shift through our engineering expertise and OEM partnerships. We are ambitious about growing our customer base, but never at the expense of the engineering excellence that underpins our success.●

*Customer Story:*

# **Generator Power** working with **SM UK**

**Martin Sinar**
Fleet Manager, **Generator Power**


**Generator Power supports many of the UK's essential service organisations with generator hire, enabling operations in off-grid environments — often in remote or hard-to-access locations. A tough, reliable van fleet is critical to delivering these services.**

**Fleet Manager Martin Sinar explains how SM UK met a complex set of requirements with a complete, one-stop-shop approach.**

**Q: What challenges did you face when sourcing vehicle conversions before working with SM UK?**

Before working with SM UK, we often had to deal with multiple suppliers for different aspects of each vehicle — the van itself, racking, electrics, and signwriting. That made the process time-consuming and difficult to manage.

With SM UK, I can provide all my requirements upfront and they handle the rest. They offer a range of vehicles based on our needs at the time and complete the racking, power systems, and livery all in-house. This saves time and money and makes fleet management much easier. I know the total cost from the start, receive a single invoice, and when the vehicle is delivered, it is genuinely ready to get to work.

**Q: What are the primary requirements for your vehicle conversions?**

Given the size and scope of our operation, our vehicles have a wide variety of requirements. Reliability is critical, and the interior layout must support our operational needs.

Our engineers need to be productive while on the move, so each van is more than just transport — it is a vital tool for the job. A high specification is essential to ensure efficiency, safety, and reliability in demanding environments.

**Q: You've had around 50 vehicles from SM UK. What keeps you coming back?**

We value working with local businesses, and SM UK has taken the time to genuinely understand our operations. Every vehicle delivery has been a collaborative effort.

While some designs required trial and error, we worked together to develop solutions that now provide consistency across our fleet. I have an excellent relationship with SM UK and know that any challenge I bring to them will be met with expertise and a high-quality solution.

**Q: What benefits has Generator Power seen from using SM UK-adapted vehicles?**

As Fleet Manager, I have peace of mind knowing our team has vehicles that are robust, fit for purpose, and fully equipped to enable them to carry out their jobs effectively. This reliability and operational confidence make a real difference across the business.●

# *Customer Story:* **DWV** working with **SM UK**

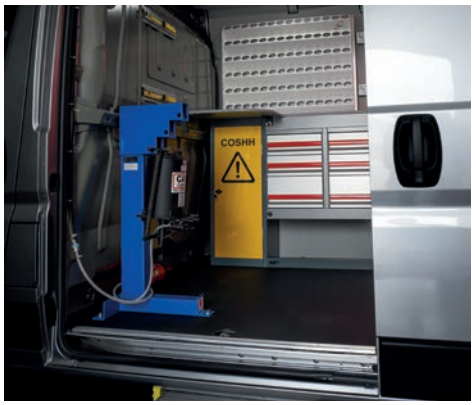
**Colin Weir**
General Manager, **DWV**


**For mobile vehicle repair specialists DWV, it is vital that services are supported by a fleet of fully equipped, specially converted vehicles. Colin Weir, General Manager at DWV, explained how SM UK was able to meet complex requirements while demonstrating the flexibility of Blueprint standard specifications.**

**Q: What were the primary requirements for your recent vehicle conversion?**

We have been on a continuous journey of development and refinement with our mobile workshops for a number of years, and they have come a long way in that time. As a business, we are always looking to improve the environment in which our technicians work, so workspace ergonomics are a top priority. Having the right tools and equipment in the right places helps our technicians perform efficiently.

Build quality and longevity are equally important. Our vehicles and technicians work hard, so the build needs to withstand the demands of providing high quality repairs on every driveway we visit.




**Q: How closely did the SM UK conversion meet your specific needs?**

We gave SM UK a tight brief, building on observations from previous iterations of our standard mobile workshop. We already had a very clear list of improvements and requirements from our technicians, who are the ones in the driving seat. SM UK then engineered these requirements into a standard package that we can roll out across our fleet in the future — a job they have done to great effect.

**Q: What has been the reaction from your workforce to the new vans?**

The prototype and early production vehicles have been very well received by our staff. They have commented on the attention to detail, the final finish and the quality of components used across the build.

**Q: How did you find the process from consultation to delivery and post-delivery support?**

Tom and his team have been excellent throughout the process, providing regular updates and design meetings to assess progress and make changes where necessary.

What we have ended up with is a product we are very happy with. We will continue to refine the design going forward with SM UK as a partner, further improving the efficiency, safety and aesthetic profile of our fleet. Anything we have needed has been accommodated by SM UK staff, so thank you to the team!●


# Stellantis **Approved Converter Programme**

**Stellantis has developed a comprehensive, manufacturer-backed conversion strategy designed to support businesses that rely on specialist commercial vehicles.**

**Through its Stellantis CustomFit programme and an extensive network of approved conversion partners, Stellantis ensures that converted vehicles meet OEM standards for safety, quality, durability and performance across its multi-brand LCV portfolio, including in the UK; Peugeot, Citroën, Vauxhall and Fiat Professional.**

### Stellantis CustomFit – Factory-Integrated Conversions

At the heart of Stellantis' conversion offering is CustomFit, a factory-level programme that integrates vehicle conversions directly into the production process or through certified end-of-line partners. This approach allows conversions to be designed alongside the base vehicle, ensuring seamless integration with vehicle systems, body structures and powertrains.

CustomFit covers a wide range of conversion types, from practical upfits such as ply-lining, racking and electrical installations, through to complex body solutions including tippers, dropsides, Luton boxes, refrigerated vehicles and fully bespoke specialist builds.

By carrying out conversions at approved facilities, Stellantis maintains strict quality control and consistency across all applications.

### Third-Party Approved Converters

Beyond direct factory conversions, Stellantis also accredits independent conversion specialists through its quality certification system. These approved converters are certified to meet the manufacturer's standards, meaning their work is recognised by Stellantis and retains compliance and, where applicable, warranty coverage.

### Manufacturer Assurance and Warranty Protection

One of the key advantages of the Stellantis Approved Converter Programme is manufacturer reassurance. Conversions carried out under CustomFit or by authorised partners are designed to work in harmony with the base vehicle, helping to protect factory warranty coverage where approved guidelines are followed.

This gives fleet operators confidence that converted vehicles will perform reliably throughout their lifecycle, supported by Stellantis' dealer and aftersales network.

### Designed for Fleet and Business Use

Stellantis' approach to conversions is firmly focused on commercial operators. The programme is designed to reduce lead times, improve build consistency and provide scalable solutions for fleets of all sizes — from single vehicles to large multi-vehicle orders.

With growing demand for electric and low-emission vehicles, the programme also supports conversions on electrified platforms, ensuring that specialist bodies and equipment are compatible with battery-electric powertrains where available.

### Why Stellantis Approved Conversions Work for Fleets

- **OEM-aligned quality**: Conversions engineered to manufacturer standards for safety, performance and durability
- **Wide conversion choice**: From simple upfits to complex, industry-specific specialist bodies
- **Warranty confidence**: Approved conversions designed to protect factory warranty coverage
- **Fleet-focused delivery**: Reduced lead times, consistent builds and scalable solutions
- **Nationwide support**: Backed by Stellantis' dealer network and certified conversion partners

Whether businesses require standard body conversions, temperature-controlled transport, trade-specific vehicles or fully bespoke fleet solutions, the Stellantis Approved Converter Programme delivers flexible, manufacturer-backed conversions built for real-world commercial use.●

# **Modul-System**: Leading the Way in **e-LCV Solutions**

**For more than 50 years, Modul-System has been developing smart, modular solutions for commercial vehicles. As the industry accelerates toward electrification, that experience matters more than ever. Electric light commercial vehicles (e-LCVs) introduce new demands on vehicle conversions—where range, weight, energy efficiency, and sustainability are critical factors.**

Modul-System meets these challenges with solutions engineered specifically for electric vans, while also delivering measurable efficiency gains for diesel and petrol vehicles. Through lightweight construction, drill-free installation, and smart connectivity, Modul-System helps fleets remain productive today and future-ready—regardless of powertrain.

## LIGHTWEIGHT RACKING WITHOUT DRILLING

When fitting out an electric van, protecting the vehicle body is essential. Drilling into floors or walls can damage wiring, battery systems, corrosion protection, and may even affect manufacturer warranties. That's why Modul-System pioneered drill-free installation methods.

Inspired by the aviation industry, Modul-System introduced a high-strength adhesive mounting technique in 2017. Instead of drilling, mounting points are bonded directly to the vehicle body using the same type of adhesive technology used in aircraft construction. The result is a solution that is strong, reliable, and proven in real-world fleet applications.

One option is the Modul-Floor, which is bonded into the vehicle and features integrated T-tracks for mounting racking systems. Wall rails can also be bonded directly to the vehicle walls, allowing secure installation without creating any holes.

*Lightweight racking on Volkswagen ID. Buzz*

For vans already fitted with wooden or plastic floors, the SMART solution offers a flexible alternative. SMART floor brackets are bonded directly to the vehicle body, with racking mounted onto the brackets. This ensures a robust, adaptable setup while keeping the vehicle completely intact.

All drill-free installation methods are used globally and have been extensively tested to ensure long-term safety and durability.

## LIGHTER VEHICLES MEAN REAL SAVINGS

Minimising weight is crucial for electric vans, as it helps maximise driving range. But the benefits extend well beyond that. Lighter vehicles consume less energy, handle better, brake more effectively, and improve overall safety.

Lower weight also reduces fuel consumption in ICE vehicles—demonstrating how solutions developed for electric vans can deliver efficiency gains across mixed fleets.

## EV-READY ELECTRICS WITHOUT COMPROMISING RANGE

Vehicle conversions often require additional electrical equipment such as work lights, beacons, inverters, and climate systems. To prevent unnecessary drain on the vehicle's 12 V chassis battery—or any reduction in driving range—Modul-System connects auxiliary equipment to a separate battery system.


*e-Power System (e-Power, e-Heater, e-Inverter)*

To support this setup, Modul-System offers the e-Power solution with a built-in DC–DC charger. The charger links the vehicle's 12 V system to the auxiliary e-Power battery, enabling charging both while driving and when the vehicle is connected to shore power using the OEM charging cable. This ensures that both the vehicle and the auxiliary system start each day fully charged and ready for work.


*Modul-Connect® Now Integrated into OEM Infotainment Systems*

## MODUL-CONNECT: CENTRALISED MONITORING AND CONTROL

Modul-Connect is the hub of Modul-System's connected solutions, enabling wireless monitoring and control of auxiliary equipment such as heaters, lights, security systems, and vehicle weighing systems—directly from a smartphone.

A major recent advancement is infotainment integration, allowing the Modul-Connect app to be mirrored directly on the vehicle's built-in display. This innovation was recognised at the WhatVan? Awards 2026, where Modul-System won the Technology Award. The judges highlighted Modul-Connect's infotainment integration as a standout example of practical, safety-led innovation for fleet operators.

For fleet managers, Modul-Connect provides real-time access to key data including vehicle location, routes, weight, battery status, climate, and tools—supporting smarter planning and more efficient daily operations.

## EFFICIENT HEATING FOR EVERYDAY COMFORT

Comfort plays a vital role in productivity, particularly in working vehicles. Modul-System's e-Heaters are designed specifically for electric vans, providing efficient and reliable heating during colder months.

Using PTC heater technology, the e-Heater delivers safe, electrically insulated warmth ideally suited for vehicle applications. It provides emission-free heating for both electric and fuel-powered commercial vehicles, helping reduce environmental impact without compromising comfort.

Integrated with Modul-Connect, the e-Heater can be remotely controlled, allowing drivers to schedule heating or switch it on and off from a distance.

## READY FOR MIXED FLEETS

Many fleets currently operate electric and combustion vehicles side by side. Modul-System's solutions are designed to perform equally well across both. Lightweight materials, drill-free installation, bespoke interiors, and connected electrical systems deliver clear benefits regardless of powertrain.

This makes it easier for fleets to standardise vehicle interiors, simplify training, and transition toward electrification at a pace that suits their business.

*Van Racking Optimisation*

## BUILT WITH SUSTAINABILITY IN MIND

Sustainability is embedded throughout Modul-System's processes—from design and testing to manufacturing and installation. Life cycle analysis shows that vehicle weight has the greatest environmental impact.

*"According to our life cycle analysis, our biggest contribution to the environment is that we work with the lightest materials available. This limits the impact our solutions have throughout the entire life of the vehicle."*

**David Mickelson, CEO, Modul-System**

By combining lightweight racking, drill-free installation, EV-adapted electrics, and smart connectivity, Modul-System helps fleets reduce emissions, lower operating costs, and maximise vehicle efficiency.

## A TRUSTED PARTNER FOR THE FUTURE OF COMMERCIAL VEHICLES

With more than five decades of experience in modular vehicle solutions, Modul-System combines proven expertise with forward-looking innovation. By addressing the needs of electric vans while continuing to deliver value for ICE fleets, the company offers solutions that are practical, efficient, and built to last.

From lightweight, drill-free installations to EV-adapted electrics and smart connectivity through Modul-Connect, Modul-System enables fleets to operate more sustainably—without compromising everyday performance. This blend of long-standing knowledge and future-ready thinking is what makes Modul-System a trusted partner for the next generation of commercial vehicles.●

*To learn more about how* **Modul-System** *can meet your fleet conversion needs, visit:* **www.modul-system.co.uk**

# Environment Agency Adds Mercedes-Benz Unimogs to Incident Response Fleet


**The Environment Agency has strengthened its fleet of specialist emergency vehicles with the addition of two Mercedes-Benz Unimogs, purpose-built to support nationwide incident response operations. These vehicles will play a key role in transporting excavators, machinery, and essential equipment to critical locations, ensuring rapid deployment during flood events and other environmental emergencies across the country.**

The Unimogs were selected for their exceptional off-road capabilities, enabling the Environment Agency to access remote or challenging locations that are often unreachable by conventional trucks. Equipped with portal axles, high ground clearance, and advanced all-wheel drive systems, the vehicles can traverse mud, waterlogged fields, and uneven terrain with ease. Their wading capacity also enables them to deliver pumps, fuel, and materials directly into flooded areas, keeping emergency operations running even under extreme conditions.

The vehicles were specified to meet the unique demands of emergency response work. This includes ADR compliance, enabling the safe transport of large fuel cells required to operate pumps and generators continuously during prolonged incidents. Their high towing capacity and versatility as both off-road and on-road commercial vehicles make them ideal for rapid deployment scenarios where time and access are critical.

The Environment Agency tendered for a vehicle that could combine the performance of a specialist off-road truck with the capabilities of a commercial operator-licensed vehicle. The Unimog delivered on all fronts, providing a flexible solution that can transport heavy machinery, support emergency teams, and maintain operational reliability in extreme conditions.

## End-to-End Support and Handover

Sale, product support, and specialist handover training for the new vehicles were provided by South Cave Tractors Ltd, the Mercedes-Benz Unimog bodybuilder and dealer. This included hands-on operator training, ensuring the fleet can use the vehicles safely and effectively from day one.

Ross Paterson, Head of Special Trucks at Daimler Truck UK, said:

*"Adding two Unimogs to the Environment Agency's incident fleet will help them provide emergency response activities in locations that require specialist equipment. The support, handover, and training provided by South Cave Tractors have been exceptional and demonstrate the level of service we can offer to our customers."*

Abbie Levitt, from South Cave Tractors, added:

*"Having been involved with this project from the initial tender, it has been incredible to put together a concept that meets the high demands of this critical role. We always knew the Unimog would be a perfect fit, with its proven off-road ability. Now that it meets the stringent GSR Safety Regulations as a commercial vehicle, seeing them in action is a proud moment for our whole team."*

## A Fleet Built for the Most Demanding Conditions

With their combination of off-road performance, towing capacity, wading depth, and ADR-compliant fuel transport, the new Unimogs are set to become vital assets in the Environment Agency's incident response fleet. Their deployment underscores the importance of choosing specialist vehicles that are not only capable of carrying heavy equipment but also flexible enough to operate in the most demanding and unpredictable conditions.

By integrating these Unimogs into its nationwide operations, the Environment Agency has ensured it can respond quickly, safely, and effectively to incidents requiring heavy machinery and specialist equipment, wherever they occur.●

# **Mercedes-Benz Van Conversions**: Tailored Solutions **for Every Fleet**

**Mercedes-Benz vans such as the Sprinter, Vito and Citan are among the most popular commercial vehicles on UK roads, valued for their durability, efficiency and versatility. That flexibility is enhanced by a wide range of conversion options, from ready-to-work pre-bodied vehicles to highly specialised builds by accredited partners.**

Whether a fleet requires a dropside, refrigerated van, people-carrier, wheelchair-accessible vehicle or bespoke build, Mercedes-Benz offers solutions designed to meet operational demands, helping maximise productivity, safety and uptime.

### Factory-Ready Conversions: Sprinter Dropsides, Tippers and Lutons

Mercedes-Benz offers a selection of ready-to-drive conversions assembled by trusted bodybuilders working closely with the manufacturer. These include the Sprinter Dropside for quick access to tools and materials, the Sprinter Tipper with robust steel construction for heavy loads, and the Sprinter Luton, providing high-volume load space with tail-lift access.

Available directly through Mercedes-Benz dealerships, these pre-bodied vans allow fleets to take delivery and get straight to work. Full manufacturer warranties and roadside assistance simplify compliance, ownership and maintenance.

### VanPartner and Specialist Bodybuilders

For more complex requirements, the Mercedes-Benz VanPartner programme recognises bodybuilders meeting OEM standards for quality, safety and technical integrity. Accredited partners deliver conversions for sectors including temperature-controlled logistics, welfare vehicles, passenger transport, and emergency and essential services fleets.

### Crew Vans, Minibuses and Passenger Conversions

For fleets transporting people as well as equipment, specialist converters such as CoTrim offer M1-certified passenger conversions for Sprinter and Vito, including Duovan double-cabins, Duoliner flexible seating layouts and Multiliner minibus configurations. These solutions support construction crews, schools, shuttle services and community transport, with full certification ensuring compliance and safety.

### Bespoke and One-Off Builds

Mercedes-Benz vans are also a popular platform for fully bespoke projects, including welfare units, command vehicles, wheelchair-accessible vans and specialist fleet operations. These custom builds allow operators to tailor vehicles precisely to their workflows, making Mercedes-Benz vans a flexible, long-term fleet asset across a wide range of applications.

**Sprinter Chassis**

- Choice of four-cylinder and V6 turbocharged common-rail diesel engines
- For single cab models, Front wheel drive is available on L1 and L2 lengths
- Rear wheel drive is available on L1, L2 and L3 lengths

**Sprinter Dropside**

- 314 Progressive L3 Chassis cab with RWD
- Internal bodywork lengths of 3409 mm or 4308 mm and width of 2035 mm
- Available payloads of 1306 kg or 1213 kg


## New Workshop on Wheels

**Mercedes-Benz Vans has launched a brand-new Mobile Service offering — a fully equipped workshop built into a specially configured Mercedes-Benz Sprinter panel van, designed to bring authorised maintenance directly to customers wherever they are.**

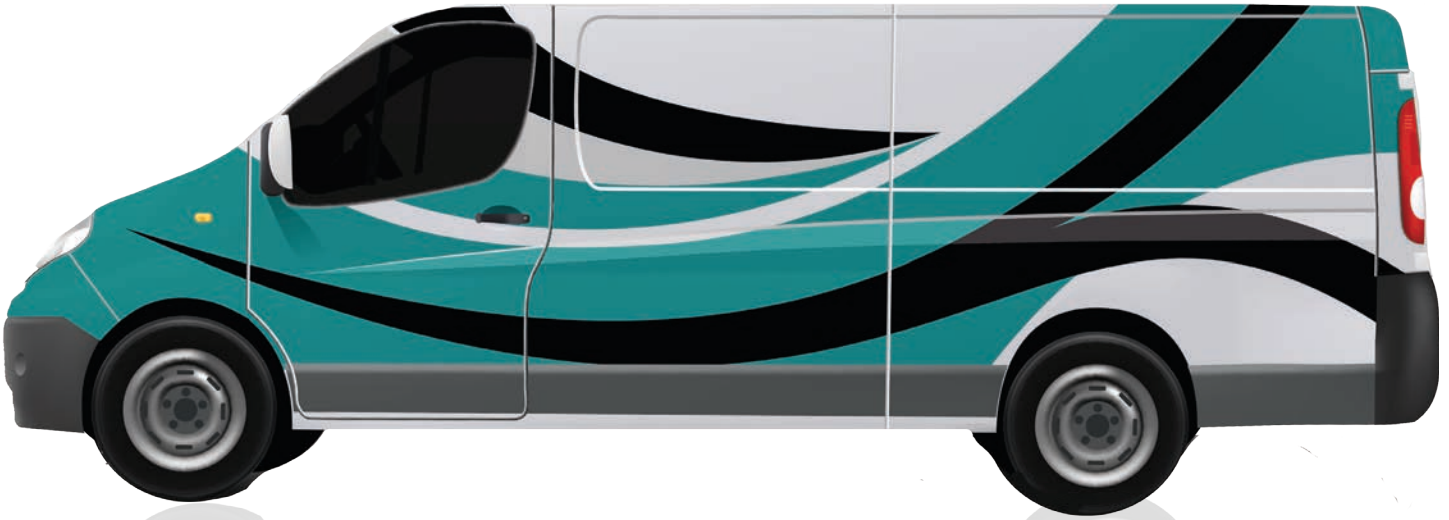
The Mobile Service vans allow businesses and drivers to have their vehicles serviced, inspected or tested on site, eliminating the need to travel to a workshop or take vehicles out of operation for extended periods.

Each unit can accommodate vehicles of up to six tonnes GVW, with an electric hydraulic lift that safely raises vans in a fully flat position. This enables technicians to carry out thorough underbody inspections and servicing with the same level of capability and safety found in a fixed workshop. The vans are also equipped to conduct on-site brake testing, allowing for pre-MOT-test preparation at customer premises.

Technicians will carry out all required Service A and Service B tasks on location, including oil changes, engine checks, fluid top-ups, lighting tests and underbody inspections — offering customers a convenient and flexible alternative to a traditional workshop visit. The vehicle can also complete a full software upgrade remotely, using an available mobile network connection.

The first Mobile Service vans will begin operating this month across the North-East of England and Scotland, with additional units joining the Mercedes-Benz Dealer Network throughout 2026 to extend coverage nationwide.●

*To learn more about the* **MERCEDES-BENZ** *van conversion range, visit:* **https://www.mercedes-benz.co.uk/vans/ready-to-work.html**



# BRANDING THAT WORKS FOR YOUR FLEET

## Designing **Fleet Graphics** for **Safety**, **Compliance** and **Value**

**As a fleet manager, when you are specifying a new vehicle conversion or planning a fleet upgrade, branding should be considered as early as possible. Done well, it reinforces professionalism, improves visibility, and supports safety. Done poorly, it can introduce compliance risks, operational problems, and unnecessary cost. This is why your involvement, particularly at the specification stage, is essential.**

You understand how vehicles are used day to day, how doors are accessed, how roof equipment is deployed, and how vehicles are repaired and maintained. That operational knowledge plays a vital role in ensuring graphics and livery layouts do not obstruct doors, access panels, sensors, or ancillary equipment, while still protecting critical safety features such as lighting, reflective markings, and Chapter 8 chevrons. Early input also helps you standardise branding across the fleet, simplify repairs, and reduce whole-life costs.

When reviewing branding proposals, it is important to be clear about the purpose. Are you looking to improve visibility, reinforce professionalism, modernise fleet appearance, or demonstrate sustainability commitments? A clear brief helps ensure branding performs in real-world operating conditions, rather than simply looking effective on paper.

### Designing for Legibility, Visibility and Safety

As you know, fleet vehicles are viewed at speed, from a distance, and in varying light conditions. High-contrast colour schemes, clear typography, and minimal messaging are essential to ensure branding remains legible. This applies across all vehicle types, from cars and vans to specialist assets such as refuse collection vehicles, gritters, and highways maintenance units. Visibility is not just a branding consideration; it is also a safety issue, particularly for vehicles operating on highways or at the roadside.

### Avoiding High-Impact Areas

Your day-to-day experience also informs where graphics should and should not be applied. You are aware of where minor bumps, knocks, and scratches are most likely to occur during normal operations. Avoiding door edges, wheel arches, loading zones, and areas around external equipment helps reduce repair and maintenance costs, keeps graphics intact for longer, and avoids unnecessary replacement.

### Consistency Across Vehicle Types

Most fleets are made up of a wide range of vehicle types, and branding needs to work across all of them. A design that looks effective on a panel van may not translate directly to a refuse vehicle, tipper, or specialist body. Thinking ahead about how branding scales across different platforms allows you to maintain a consistent identity while ensuring designs remain practical, compliant, and readable on every asset.

### Communicating Corporate and Community Messages

For many fleet managers working in local authorities or utilities, vehicle branding also plays a role in communicating wider corporate and community messages. Fleet vehicles are highly visible assets operating daily within the communities you serve. Well-designed graphics can be used to promote recycling schemes, waste reduction initiatives, or other public service messages, reinforcing organisational priorities without adding operational burden.

### Sustainability and End-of-Vehicle-Life Planning

Sustainability is increasingly part of fleet decision-making, and branding should be no exception. Each year, large volumes of vehicle graphics are removed during refurbishment, redeployment, or disposal, much of which has historically gone to landfill. By specifying durable, removable, and recyclable materials, and considering modular or interchangeable elements, you can reduce waste and support recycling strategies.

Planning for defleeting is equally important. When vehicles leave the fleet through sale, lease return, or redeployment, branding must be removed efficiently and without damaging paintwork or panels. Poor material choices or complex designs can increase removal time, raise costs, and reduce residual values. Considering defleeting at the design stage helps protect both asset value and environmental performance.

### Integrating Chapter 8 and Regulatory Requirements

If your vehicles operate near live traffic, Chapter 8 compliance is non-negotiable. Rear chevrons and reflective materials should be integrated into the livery from the outset and applied consistently across relevant vehicle types. Where possible, coordinating reflective elements with brand colours allows you to maintain visibility while meeting regulatory requirements.

### Designing Around the Vehicle

Ultimately, effective fleet branding must work around the vehicle itself. Doors, windows, access panels, and safety systems must remain fully functional, while materials need to withstand daily wear. Ease of repair should also be considered, allowing damaged panels, decals, or chevrons to be replaced quickly without excessive downtime.

By involving yourself and your fleet team early, thinking carefully about high-contact areas, and taking a whole-lifecycle approach from specification through to defleeting, you can ensure your fleet branding supports safety, compliance, operational efficiency, and long-term value on the road.

### **Choosing** a **Branding Partner** and **Defining Service Levels**

Selecting the right branding partner is an important part of any fleet branding strategy. Many vehicle conversion companies now offer in-house branding services, allowing livery design, application, and vehicle conversion work to be coordinated through a single supplier. This approach can simplify procurement, improve consistency, and reduce lead times. Alternatively, some organisations choose to work with independent branding specialists, particularly where fleets require complex graphics, multi-vehicle rollouts, or ongoing maintenance support across multiple locations.

Whichever approach you take, it is important to establish a clear Service Level Agreement (SLA).

This should clearly define what is included beyond the initial application, including the repair of minor scuffs and damage, replacement of individual panels or decals, updates to corporate messaging, and support during defleeting. A well-structured service level agreement helps control costs, minimise vehicle downtime, and ensures fleet branding remains compliant, professional, and fit for purpose throughout the operational life of the fleet.

## **Fleet Branding Checklist**: A **Whole-Lifecycle** Approach

**Think Long Term**

Consider branding from specification through to defleeting to maximise operational efficiency, safety, and long-term value.

**Early Involvement**

Involve the fleet department from the outset to ensure designs reflect operational realities.

**Define Clear Objectives**

Be clear whether the aim is to improve visibility, reinforce professionalism, or support sustainability commitments.

**Legibility and Safety**

- Use high-contrast colours and clear typography.
- Keep messaging to a minimum so it remains readable at speed or from a distance.
- Ensure graphics do not obscure reflective markings, lights, or Chapter 8 chevrons.

**High-Impact Areas**

Avoid placing graphics on door edges, wheel arches, loading zones, or near external equipment, where damage is most likely to occur.

**Consistency Across Vehicle Types**

Ensure designs scale and adapt across cars, vans, refuse vehicles, tippers, and specialist bodies.

Maintain a consistent brand identity throughout the fleet

**Corporate and Community Messaging**

Use fleet graphics to communicate recycling, waste reduction, or other public service messages where appropriate.

**Sustainability and Defleeting**

- Specify materials that are durable, removable, and recyclable.
- Plan for end-of-life removal and select products that will not damage existing paintwork or panels.
- Consider modular panels or interchangeable signage to support reuse and recycling.

**Regulatory Compliance**

- Integrate Chapter 8 chevrons and reflective materials from the start.
- Ensure compliance across all relevant vehicle types.

**Design Around the Vehicle**

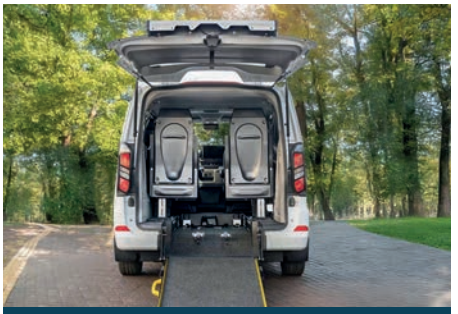
- Ensure doors, windows, access panels, and safety systems remain fully functional and unobstructed.
- Choose durable materials and consider ease of repair for damaged graphics.

**Service Level Agreements (SLAs)**

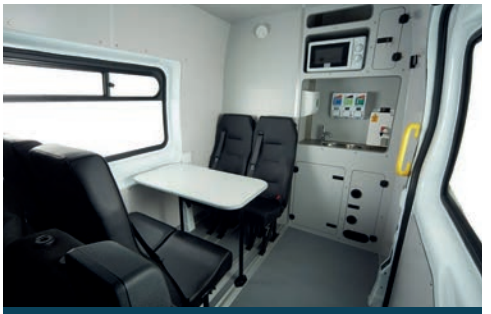
- Be clear about what is included in your SLA.
- Confirm whether it covers repairs for minor scuffs and damage.
- Check whether defleeting and graphic removal costs are included.●

# **Ford Pro™**: A Complete **Conversion Ecosystem**

*Tippers and Dropsides*



*Wheelchair Accessible Vehicles*



*Welfare Vehicles*

*Racking Systems*

*Connected Systems*

*Refrigerated Vehicles*

**Ford Pro™ is Ford's manufacturer-led programme for commercial vehicle conversions, designed to simplify fleet procurement while ensuring consistency, safety, and reliability. By combining core Transit models with a network of accredited converter partners, Ford Pro™ delivers work-ready vans and pickups — from standard tippers and dropsides to bespoke specialist vehicles — all fully integrated with the base vehicle, supported by warranty, and built to exacting technical and operational standards.**

### A Structured Approach to Specialist Vehicles

Converting commercial vehicles has traditionally required managing multiple suppliers, bodybuilders, finance providers, and aftersales teams, which can result in fragmented responsibility. Ford Pro™ streamlines this process by bringing conversions into a single, manufacturer-led ecosystem.

Using models from the Transit range, including Transit, Transit Custom, Transit Connect, and E-Transit — Ford Pro™ works with accredited converters who meet Ford's technical, safety, and quality standards. This ensures consistency across fleets, reduces the risk of non-approved modifications, and protects operational and warranty integrity.

For essential services fleets, this consistency is crucial. Vehicles must be dependable, compliant, and fully supported throughout their working life, particularly when operating in regulated or safety-critical environments.

### One Stop Shop: Reducing Complexity

Procurement speed and administrative simplicity are recurring challenges for fleet managers, especially in public sector and utility organisations. Ford Pro™'s One Stop Shop addresses these issues by delivering ready-built, work-ready vehicles on a single invoice.

Options include:

- Tippers and dropsides for highways, parks, and infrastructure teams
- Welfare vans with integrated rest and sanitation facilities
- Load carriers with tail lifts for stores and logistics operations

Fleet managers benefit from reduced lead times and clearer accountability: vehicle, conversion, finance, and warranty are all handled in one transaction, eliminating the need to manage multiple suppliers and contracts.

### Bespoke Conversions for Specialist Roles

While off-the-shelf vehicles meet many needs, essential services often require bespoke solutions. Ford Pro™ supports fully tailored conversions via accredited partners, ensuring vehicles are configured to operational requirements and safety standards from the outset.

Examples include:

- Racking systems, secure tool storage, ladder access, and vehicle-mounted power solutions for utilities and infrastructure fleets
- Refrigerated vehicles for medical supplies, pharmaceuticals, and temperature-sensitive logistics
- Mobile workshops for field engineers and maintenance teams
- Specialist transport, including wheelchair-accessible vehicles, community transport, and emergency support units

Integrating these conversions at source ensures equipment is installed safely, correctly, and in line with manufacturer guidance.

### Integration and Technology

Modern essential fleet vehicles often carry complex auxiliary equipment. Ford Pro™'s Vehicle Integration System allows auxiliary equipment to communicate directly with the vehicle's electronics, improving operational efficiency and safety.

For fleet managers, the benefits include safer operation of powered equipment, fewer electrical conflicts, simplified diagnostics, and improved reliability over the vehicle lifecycle — particularly important in high-utilisation fleets where downtime can have immediate operational consequences.

### Lifecycle Support Beyond Delivery

Ford Pro™ provides ongoing support beyond the conversion itself, offering:

- Connected telematics and fleet management software for real-time visibility of vehicle health and performance
- Predictive maintenance tools to align servicing with operational needs
- Flexible finance options covering both the base vehicle and conversion
- Aligned warranty support, often covering approved conversions alongside the vehicle

This lifecycle approach helps essential services fleets maintain uptime, manage costs, and meet duty-of-care and compliance obligations.

### Meeting the Challenges of Modern Fleets

Essential services fleets face increasing pressure from rising demand, decarbonisation targets, skills shortages, and budget constraints. Ford Pro™'s integrated approach reduces operational risk, enhances reliability, and improves fleet resilience.

As electrification accelerates, with the E-Transit and E-Transit Custom entering frontline service, manufacturer-backed, integrated conversions like Ford Pro™ will become increasingly vital in ensuring that fleets remain safe, compliant, and fully operational.

### A Strategic Shift in Fleet Thinking

Fleet managers are now asking not just how to convert vehicles, but how to do so in a way that is scalable, compliant, and future-proof. Ford Pro™ positions converted vehicles as fully engineered operational tools, supported by a single manufacturer framework from procurement through to disposal.

In sectors where failure is not an option, this level of integration — combining vehicle, conversion, technology, and lifecycle support — is as critical as the vehicle



# Northumbrian Water Strengthens Operations with New Sewer Cleansing Vehicles

**VLS has recently purchased two state-of-the-art sewer cleansing vehicles from Bucher Municipal. Developed in close collaboration with Northumbrian Water (NWL), Bucher, and Scania, these vehicles represent some of the most advanced sewer cleansers currently operating in the UK.**

The vehicles were rigorously tested and benchmarked against a number of alternative manufacturers. They consistently ranked highest for reliability, durability, and overall performance. From the initial enquiry through to final delivery, the process took more than two years, highlighting the complexity of specifying, testing, and delivering specialist vehicles of this calibre.

VLS is proud to support Northumbrian Water with these new assets and will continue to work closely with the Sewerage Maintenance team to ensure the vehicles perform reliably and efficiently throughout the contract period.

Peter Rollins, Sewerage Maintenance Manager at Northumbrian Water (NWL) said:

*"Working very closely with VLS we visited and trialled various sewer cleansing vehicles from various manufacturers throughout Europe, looking for performance, value for money and resilient support throughout the vehicle's life being key factors in our choice.*

*With driver/operators being involved throughout, they shared their experience and thoughts on what would be the ultimate machine for the work we do in Sewerage Maintenance.*

*"It was a real team effort to get us to this point with the delivery of these two-specialist sewer cleansing vehicles from Bucher. Its also a significant improvement to our previous trucks and has future-proofed Northumbrian Water through the current challenges and will take us forward this AMP and beyond.".*●

# North Lanarkshire Council Accelerates Fleet Transition with FOR EV

**North Lanarkshire Council's Fleet Department has awarded FOR EV a landmark tender to support its transition to an electric fleet, marking a significant step towards a sustainable future. This pioneering project, at the Council's Old Edinburgh Road site in Bellshill, is the first in Scotland to use private-sector capital to fund fleet charging infrastructure on a service model, with no upfront capital cost to the Council.**

The project is delivered through FOR EV's *"Charging-as-a-Service"* model, designed specifically for fleet operators. The Bellshill site will feature six cutting-edge DC charging bays, providing essential infrastructure to support North Lanarkshire Council's ambitious journey towards a zero-emission fleet. The site can also support other registered public-sector fleets with access to rapid charging at a key location near Scotland's major motorway network.

A foundation of this initiative is its unique financing model, achieved entirely without government funding. This approach reinforces the immense potential for private-sector investment to drive the rapid expansion of electric-vehicle infrastructure, demonstrating a financially sustainable pathway for nationwide EV adoption.

*"We are incredibly proud to partner with North Lanarkshire Council on this transformative project,"* said Lindsay Yeoman, Head of Sales at FOR EV. *"Our Charging-as-a-Service model is proving that the transition to electric fleets can be achieved efficiently and cost-effectively, without relying on public funds. This project sets a new precedent for how local authorities can embrace electrification, and we believe it will serve as a blueprint for similar initiatives across the UK."*

John McElhinney, Fleet Business Manager at North Lanarkshire Council, said: *"Across our fleet, we are moving to electric vehicles and installing more charging points to support the transition to electric vehicles. The new facility at our Bellshill depot, delivered by FOR EV, is a significant and innovative development in the council's strategy to achieve net zero."*

FOR EV is a leading solutions provider that simplifies the transition to electric-vehicle fleets and is supported by funding from The Scottish National Investment Bank.●


# VCS Showcases Police Cell Van Conversions with 13 Vivaros

**VCS has delivered a fleet of 13 bespoke cell vans for two UK police authorities, working in close partnership with Vauxhall and the Stellantis Specialist Fleets team. Based on the Vauxhall Vivaro, the conversions demonstrate how collaboration between manufacturer, specialist converter, and end user can deliver vehicles that meet highly specific operational and safety requirements.**

The Vivaro was selected as the base vehicle due to its versatility, durability, and suitability for specialist police applications. However, transforming a standard light commercial vehicle into a fully compliant cell van required a detailed and tightly controlled conversion process, guided by precise specifications set by both the manufacturer and the police authorities.

As an approved police vehicle converter, VCS worked closely with the newly formed Stellantis Specialist Fleets team throughout the build programme. This collaboration ensured the vehicles met the latest standards for safety, performance, and compliance, while also aligning with manufacturer requirements to protect vehicle integrity and warranty.

Each vehicle was fitted with a high-strength, crash-tested detainee cell, designed to provide maximum security and occupant protection during transport. The conversion also included the installation of a low-profile, high-visibility lightbar, ensuring the vehicles remain clearly identifiable in operational use without compromising aerodynamics or vehicle height restrictions. The final stage of the process saw the application of each police force's livery, delivering a consistent and professional appearance across the fleet.

The project required careful coordination to meet strict delivery timescales, with all 13 vehicles completed and delivered on time, despite the complexity of the specification and the demanding nature of police vehicle conversions.

### About VCS Police & Special Projects

VCS is a UK specialist in the design, engineering and manufacture of frontline emergency and response vehicles, delivering bespoke conversions tailored to the unique needs of service fleets. Operating from state-of-the-art facilities and working closely with leading vehicle manufacturers and frontline service providers, VCS applies precision engineering and quality-first processes to every project — whether a one-off specialist vehicle or a fleet rollout. The experienced engineering team ensures vehicles remain at the cutting edge of technology while delivering exceptional standards of quality and reliability. ●

*For more infromation visit:* **https://vcs-police.com/**

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# **Defender** Hard Top

**In the world of light commercial vehicles, most contenders are judged on load volume, payload and miles per gallon. The Defender Hard Top doesn't ignore those metrics; it simply adds a few others that many fleets rarely see outside specialist niches: legacy 4×4 capability, go-anywhere composure, and a visual presence that does more than just move goods.**

**Offered exclusively in the UK as an N1-classified light commercial vehicle, the Defender Hard Top borrows its rugged architecture from the standard Defender. That means a robust ladder-frame chassis and permanent four-wheel drive underpin a body with unmistakable lines and an exterior signage panel that practically begs to wear a company livery.**

**What sets it apart from typical vans is its Defender pedigree. This is a vehicle designed and tested for conditions that would have others turning back.**

### Two Versions Under the Hard Top Badge

There are two distinct personalities under the Hard Top badge. The Defender 90 Hard Top feels like a commercial vehicle trimmed for agility. Its shorter wheelbase and relatively compact footprint make it easier to place in traffic, yet it still offers a useful 1,355 litres of loadspace and around 670 kg of payload. Inside, the utilitarian cabin accommodates two adults front and centre, with a practical front jump seat available when an extra pair of hands is needed, particularly useful in fieldwork or rescue support roles.

The Defender 110 Hard Top, by contrast, leans into heavier-duty work. With over 2,000 litres of cargo space and payloads approaching 800 kg, it comfortably swallows Euro pallets and boxes of kit in equal measure. Access is straightforward via full rear doors, and generous underfloor compartments ensure tools can be stowed out of sight but close at hand.

Both versions share rugged load bay finishes, durable waterproof flooring and a partition that separates cab from cargo, reinforcing the vehicle's role as a workhorse rather than a passenger stalwart.

### Power and Terrain Performance

Under the bonnet, UK Defender Hard Tops typically employ 3.0-litre Ingenium diesel engines, commonly the D250 mild-hybrid unit, paired with an eight-speed automatic gearbox and permanent 4×4. This combination isn't designed for sprint tests, but it delivers steady torque for towing, load-carrying and engaging uneven terrain.

Official combined fuel economy sits loosely around 32–33 mpg, with $CO_2$ emissions near 227 g/km, credible figures for a vehicle of this size and purpose.

Where the Defender Hard Top really shines is when the going gets tough. Its 3,500 kg braked towing capacity, combined with Advanced Tow Assist, which automatically handles counter-steering when reversing a trailer, makes negotiating crowded work sites or shifting small plant and machinery almost effortless. Add in the optional electric winch, capable of pulling over 4,500 kg, it's clear this is a vehicle built to tackle extraction, recovery, or any demanding task that comes its way.

Off-road performance is more than skin-deep. Generous ground clearance, short overhangs, and systems like Terrain Response and Wade Sensing allow the Defender to traverse muddy tracks, water crossings up to 900 mm deep, and rutted service roads with confidence — making it well-suited to utilities, rural services, and blue-light support groups that must operate where paved roads end.

### Tech and Usability Where It Counts

Though rugged at heart, the Hard Top still delivers modern usability. The Next-Generation Pivi Pro infotainment system is displayed on a 13.1-inch central touchscreen, with intuitive menus and smartphone integration helping drivers manage navigation and connectivity on the go. A 360° Surround Camera improves precision in tight spaces, while a configurable digital driver display keeps telematics and vehicle data front-of-mind.

Seating is firm and supportive, built to cope with all-day driving, and noise suppression around the cab is impressive given the commercial focus.

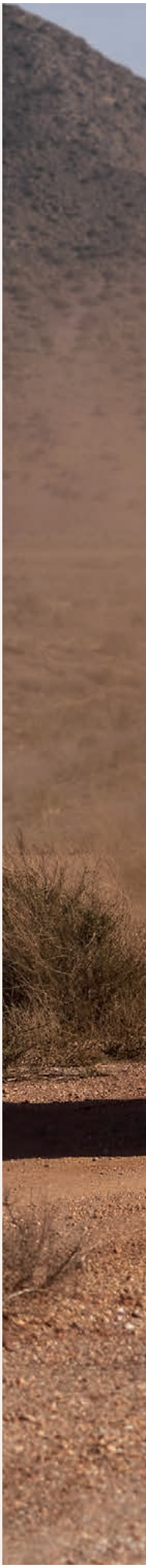
### Colours with Character

The Defender's presence extends to its palette. UK operators can specify a range of finishes, from solid Fuji White to metallics such as Eiger Grey, Gondwana Stone, Hakuba Silver, Pangea Green, Santorini Black, Tasman Blue, and premium options including Carpathian Grey and Silicon Silver. These hues not only reflect taste but also help fleets integrate vehicles into branded liveries or high-visibility schemes.

### Fleet Sense Beyond the Data

For fleet managers, the Hard Top's N1 classification brings important financial relief. In the UK, it qualifies for a fixed commercial VED rate, attracts favourable benefit-in-kind treatment, and can be eligible for VAT recovery and capital allowances when used wholly for business purposes. These considerations significantly improve its whole-life cost profile compared with a similarly capable passenger SUV.

But this isn't a vehicle chosen by an Excel sheet alone. The Defender Hard Top excels where others falter: off-road access, towing heavy equipment, handling adverse conditions and projecting a presence on site. It's conceivable that a single Hard Top could replace a conventional van paired with a separate 4×4 — a compelling proposition for specialist sectors such as utilities, environmental services, search and rescue support groups and field-based operations.




*Pictured Defender 110 Hard Top*

If your work takes you where others hesitate to tread, the **Defender Hard Top** is not just a tool — it's a statement that **capability still matters**.

**In Summary**

The Defender Hard Top is rare in the commercial world: a hard-working van that can truly go anywhere. It carries its load well, tows with competence, and combines modern technology with serious off-road capability. For fleets that operate beyond urban streets, where infrastructure is sparse and demands are high — few light commercials offer this blend of performance, presence and practicality.●

**www.landrover.co.uk**

# London Fire Brigade Leads in Decarbonising Fleet with Electric Vehicles


**London Fire Brigade (LFB) has taken a decisive step towards decarbonising its operational fleet with the introduction of its first fully electric large goods vehicles (LGVs) and a new all-electric driver training fleet, reinforcing its leadership in sustainable emergency services.**

The Brigade has commissioned two Renault Trucks E-Tech D 16-tonne electric lorries at its Operational Support Centre (OSC), replacing diesel vehicles that have served for more than two decades. These electric LGVs will continue to deliver essential equipment across the capital and respond to operational requirements with zero tailpipe emissions, helping reduce the Brigade's carbon footprint while maintaining frontline readiness.

In addition, eight Volvo XC40 electric cars have been rolled out at LFB's training centres in Ruislip, Beckton and Croydon, making London Fire Brigade the first fire service in the UK to operate a fully electric driver training fleet. These vehicles will be used to train and refresh blue-light driving skills for senior officers, replacing older petrol and hybrid models.

Equipped with advanced telematics and real-time performance monitoring systems, the new electric fleet will provide valuable data to inform future zero-emission vehicle deployment and support continuous improvement in operational efficiency.

The move supports both the Mayor of London's target for a zero-carbon city by 2030 and LFB's Carbon Net Zero strategy, addressing emissions reduction, improved air quality and sustainable public service delivery. The Brigade has already reduced its $CO_2$ emissions by 59 per cent since 1990 and generates more than 10 per cent of its energy from on-site renewable sources.

Deputy Assistant Commissioner Mark Davidson said:

*"London Fire Brigade is proud to lead the way in decarbonising the fire and rescue sector. By investing in electric training cars and LGVs, we are not only meeting our own sustainability commitments but also setting an example for others to follow. These innovations are vital in reducing our carbon footprint, improving air quality, and helping London reach its net zero goals."*

Renault Trucks UK & Ireland Managing Director Carlos Rodrigues added:

*"We are proud to support London Fire Brigade on its journey towards a zero-emissions future. The Renault Trucks E-Tech D vehicles demonstrate that electric technology can deliver the performance, reliability and capability required for demanding public service roles."* ●

# **Nexus Rental** 2026 **predictions**

**Gerry McCaig**, *Chief Operating Officer, Nexus Rental*

**We've always believed that having the right vehicle, in the right place, at the right time should be a hygiene factor, not an enhancement. As we move into 2026, this belief is increasingly becoming reality. Service levels are stabilising, availability is returning to normal, and the industry is no longer wrestling with the supply shocks and disruption that defined the early 2020s.**

Instead, the challenge for fleet rental is shifting to something more complex and strategic: how to best harness technology and data to deliver consistent, high-quality rental experiences regardless of location or timing.

Here is what we expect to see in 2026.

### Market growth in an increasingly stable, but still uncertain, economy

The wider UK outlook for 2026 remains mixed. Economic uncertainty continues, and global decisions still have a knock-on effect domestically. Despite this, fleet rental is expected to return to steady growth, although this growth will look different from previous cycles.

There are renewed signs of confidence across the market, with investors gradually re-engaging in the fleet and mobility space. Rental remains a vital component of fleet strategy, offering both suppliers and customers greater control over fixed costs and reducing the need for long-term capital commitments—an increasingly attractive proposition in uncertain times.

As supply issues ease, growth is no longer driven by simple access to vehicles. Instead, success will depend on which businesses can operate the most efficient, reliable and scalable networks. Performance benchmarking, transparent pricing structures and consistent service delivery will become essential expectations rather than differentiators.

### Enhanced and considered use of AI

Artificial intelligence is already embedded in the fleet rental landscape, but its role will deepen further in 2026. Importantly, the industry is becoming more realistic about what AI can achieve and how it should be implemented responsibly and sustainably.

The true value of AI lies not in adopting the latest technology for its own sake, but in supporting thoughtful, data-driven decision-making across the entire rental ecosystem. From booking and vehicle allocation through to collection and return, the rental journey generates vast amounts of data. When used effectively, this data can inform future processes, improve efficiency and enhance service quality.

AI's role is not to replace the people behind fleet operations, but to connect processes, highlight inefficiencies, predict issues and support smarter allocation of vehicles. People remain at the heart of the process, maintaining strong relationships and ensuring insights are applied in a practical and meaningful way.

Crucially, AI must be integrated carefully to ensure inefficiencies are not simply transferred from the road to a data centre. The most sustainable use of AI is in removing repetitive, manual tasks so teams can focus on service, problem-solving and value creation. The strongest fleets will be those that successfully combine human judgement with machine intelligence.

### Further growth in the EV market

Electric vehicles will continue to grow within rental fleets in 2026, but this will be a gradual evolution rather than a sudden surge. Availability and pricing are improving, and EVs are increasingly able to compete with petrol and diesel vehicles, particularly for longer-term rentals. For short-term rental, however, costs remain more volatile due to broader economic pressures.

What will make the biggest difference is a shift in perception. While infrastructure still has progress to make, the key challenge is less about 'range anxiety' and more about 'change anxiety'. Fleet managers remain cautious about how EVs will integrate into their operations and whether they are the right solution for their business.

Data is critical to overcoming this challenge. By identifying which drivers, routes and usage patterns are best suited to EVs, fleets can integrate electric vehicles in a controlled, evidence-based way, minimising disruption and addressing perceived risks.

Policy and government support must also improve to match the ambition of decarbonisation targets. Whether the 2030 ZEV mandate remains in place or shifts closer to Europe's 2035 target, stronger and clearer support mechanisms will be required. While EVs may not yet be the right solution for every fleet, in the coming years this will increasingly become a necessity rather than a choice.

### Data becomes the driving factor in the industry

Data will continue to grow in importance across fleet rental. Cost, availability, performance, telematics and utilisation are all measurable elements of the rental journey, but only if they are connected, analysed and acted upon effectively.

The businesses that thrive will be those that can aggregate and interpret data across extensive networks of suppliers and vehicles. Data underpins smarter allocation decisions, effective benchmarking and the successful integration of both EVs and AI.

As vehicles across brands become increasingly similar, intelligence and insight will be the key differentiators. The future of fleet is not simply about owning vehicles, but about understanding their role within a business, how they are utilised, and how their full lifecycle can be managed at a granular level.

Ultimately, the goal is to bring greater control, transparency and consistency to an increasingly complex and dynamic fleet environment.

*"As the industry moves back towards a more stable phase, the challenge is no longer just access to vehicles, but how consistently and intelligently rental can be delivered. At Nexus, we are focused on using data and technology to ensure our extensive network is frictionless from start to finish. By combining human expertise with AI integration, we enable stronger decision-making, greater transparency and smarter EV integration, delivering better outcomes for clients and suppliers alike."*

– Gerry McCaig, Chief Operating Officer, Nexus Rental.●

*To learn more visit:* **www.nexusrental.co.uk**

nexus Never stop

# Maxus **Electric Van** Conversions

**As fleet operators seek to reduce emissions and improve sustainability, electric van conversions from Maxus are a compelling option. These conversions deliver bespoke commercial vehicles that combine zero-emission driving with practical, purpose-built designs tailored to a wide range of sectors.**

### What Is an Electric Van Conversion?

An electric van conversion adapts a standard battery-electric Maxus model to meet specific operational needs, whether that's a crew van for transporting people and cargo or a low-floor Luton for easy loading. Unlike generic conversions on older petrol or diesel vans, Maxus EVs are engineered from the ground up as electric vehicles, delivering strong performance and reliability for commercial use.

### The Benefits for Fleet Operators

There are several advantages to choosing a Maxus electric van conversion:

- **Tailored for purpose**: Conversions are designed around your requirements — from payload and cargo space to driver comfort and ease of loading.
- **Reduced emissions and operating costs:** Electric vans eliminate tailpipe emissions, helping businesses meet environmental goals and reduce charges in Ultra Low Emission Zones (ULEZ) and Clean Air Zones (CAZ).
- **Government incentives:** Eligible businesses can benefit from schemes such as the Plug-in Van Grant, lowering the initial cost of electric vans.
- **Smart fleet management**: Maxus's Intelligence Onboard system provides real-time insights into vehicle usage, battery charge and energy costs, helping operators manage their fleets efficiently.

### Popular Conversion Options

Maxus offers a broad range of conversion body types to suit different commercial applications:

- **Maxus eDeliver 3 Aduro XS Sliding Sides:** Featuring sliding doors on both sides for easy access, this compact electric van offers a payload of up to 920kg (including body) and a city driving range of up to 344km (213 miles) on a single charge.
- **Maxus eDeliver 9 Crew Van:** Designed to transport both people and equipment, this versatile model seats up to nine passengers while retaining a generous load area. It offers a WLTP city range of 288km (179 miles).
- **Maxus eDeliver 3 Chassis Cab**: With a payload ranging from 840kg to 1,095kg (excluding body), this model provides flexibility for specialist conversions. Driving range varies depending on the chosen body type.
- **Maxus eDeliver 9 Low-Floor Luton**: A robust yet stylish option with a low loading height and large cargo volume, ideal for distribution and delivery work. Range is dependent on the selected body configuration.
- **Maxus eDeliver 9 Tipper Conversion**: For construction, landscaping, and maintenance operations, the tipper conversion offers a practical electric solution for heavy materials handling, with easy tilting and safe unloading.

***Maxus eDeliver 3** Aduro XS Sliding Sides*

***Maxus eDeliver 9** Crew Van*

***Maxus eDeliver 9** Tipper Conversion*

***Maxus eDeliver 3** Chassis Cab*

### Supporting Your Transition to Electric

Adopting electric van conversions often goes beyond purchasing vehicles. Many businesses invest in charging infrastructure at depots and may need additional driver training to maximise range and efficiency. However, the total cost of ownership can be significantly lower over time, thanks to cheaper energy costs and reduced maintenance requirements compared with internal combustion engines.

With more than 60 dealers across the UK and comprehensive aftersales support, including roadside assistance, Maxus's electric van conversion programme aims to make transitioning to an electric fleet as seamless as possible for operators of all sizes.●

*To learn more about the* **MAXUS** *conversion range, visit:* **www.saicmaxus.co.uk**


# **Looking Back** at **2025**: A **Strong Year** for **Manheim** and the **UK Vehicle Market**

**In 2025, the UK wholesale vehicle market delivered a year of stability, resilience, and consistent performance. Across both the used car and light commercial vehicle (LCV) auction sectors, firm values, steady supply, and sustained buyer appetite underpinned strong results. For fleet managers, the year provided confidence in remarketing channels and predictable pricing, helping make lifecycle and fleet planning decisions more reliable.**

## Used Car Market: Stability and Confidence

Kevin Blincowe, Head of Auctioneering at Manheim Auction Services, summarises the year:

*"As we look back on 2025, it's clear that the year has delivered real progress for the used car remarketing sector. After several turbulent years, this period has been marked by stability rather than dramatic shifts. Supply remained steady, conversion rates were strong, pricing held firm, and buyer confidence was maintained throughout the year."*

ICE vehicles, particularly well-specified petrol and diesel cars under five years old, remained the backbone of trade. Meanwhile, the UK used EV market matured, with values stabilising, volumes increasing, and buyer appetite broadening.

*"The right EV — sensible range, clean history, tidy condition — has become a reliable, predictable part of the wholesale auction mix,"* **Kevin adds.**

Autumn trading highlighted the market's resilience: units sold were up 15 percent year-on-year, conversion rates rose four points, and average prices increased by 10 percent. Buyers became more selective, with retail-ready cars selling instantly while lower-grade vehicles required sharper pricing. SUVs remained plentiful, small petrol cars dominated demand, and EVs held steady.

## LCV Market: A High-Performing Year

**Stuart Peak, National LCV Manager at Manheim Auction Services, reflects on the commercial vehicle market:**

*"November continued a trend of stability and confidence in the UK used van market. The average selling price rose to £8,832, the highest in 18 months, and stock levels tightened in the second half of the year, increasing competition in the lanes. First-time conversions remained strong, showing continued demand across UK LCV auction channels."*

CAP/HPI guide prices remained well aligned with actual auction performance, helping maintain market stability. Chassis-derived vans, including Tippers, Dropsides, and Lutons, saw significant uplift — in some cases rising more than 12 percent.

*"It's been a strong, steady year for the LCV sector,"* **Stuart adds**. *"With strong foundations in place, 2026 is shaping up to be another successful year for UK LCV remarketing."*

Manheim capped 2025 with recognition at the WhatVan? Awards in London, winning Remarketing Provider of the Year, reflecting the team's outstanding performance throughout the year.

## Operational Highlights and Strategic Wins

2025 was also a year of operational success for Manheim UK:

- The successful launch of Lookers delivered high volumes and strong engagement across both in-lane and online auction channels.
- Hybrid auction models thrived, with buyers valuing the opportunity to inspect vehicles in person.
- Long-term vendor retention strengthened Manheim's market position.

*"Our 2025 volume targets were ambitious, but the team surpassed them,"* **Kevin notes**. *"It has been a year of consistent performance, strong vendor partnerships, and steady progress across the UK wholesale vehicle market."*

Looking back, 2025 demonstrated the value of a stable, predictable vehicle market. For fleet managers, the key takeaways include:

- Consistent returns on both ICE and EV vehicles
- Strong demand for retail-ready and fleet-specific stock
- Reliable remarketing channels and operational support
- Confidence in pricing, supply, and auction outcomes

## Looking Ahead to 2026

With strong foundations and operational momentum, Manheim enters 2026 well positioned for continued growth. Fleet managers can expect stable pricing, reliable stock availability, and insight from auction channels to support strategic fleet planning and remarketing decisions.●

*To learn more visit:* **www.manheim.co.uk/**

# Isuzu **D-Max EV** and **Fleet Conversion Centre**: Tailored Solutions for **Operational Fleets**


**In 2025, Isuzu UK partnered with National Grid Electricity Distribution (NGED) to test and refine the upcoming D-Max EV ahead of its market launch. NGED deployed eight field engineers to trial the vehicle under real-world conditions across the Midlands, South Wales, and South West regions. The collaboration builds on four years of work between NGED and Isuzu, with NGED's Fleet Technical Specialist Jane Nicholson providing input to design groups in Japan and Europe.**

*"Isuzu has been keen to have our input from the start,"* **Nicholson said**. *"We helped design the D-Max alongside specialist vehicle converters Strongs, shaping features and storage solutions for fieldwork, including off-road capability, towing, and winching."*

NGED operates one of the UK's largest and most diverse fleets, with1,200 EVs comprising 400 commercial vehicles and 800 cars. **Transport Manager Chris Mayell highlighted the importance of this collaboration**: *"This is a unique chance to shape not just the vehicle but also how it's fitted out for fieldwork, supporting our goal of a decarbonised fleet."*

Technicians trialing the vehicle praised its performance. Cornwall-based David Cassidy said the D-Max EV felt similar to current diesel models, making the transition easier, while Cardiff-based Richard Gadd highlighted its off-road capabilities and sustainability features.

The new D-Max EV combines a zero-emission drivetrain with Isuzu's 4×4 pick-up architecture. Key specifications include dual-motor full-time 4WD, 140 kW total power, 325 Nm torque, a 66.9 kWh battery pack, 3.5-tonne towing, 1-tonne payload, 210 mm ground clearance, and 600 mm wading depth. These specifications make it particularly suited to demanding utility, fleet, and commercial applications.

**Mark Hayes, Fleet Sales Manager at Isuzu UK, said**: *"NGED's frontline insights ensure the D-Max EV is fit for purpose, delivering towing, loading, and off-road performance while enabling zero-emission operation."*

Alongside its EV programme, Isuzu UK supports operational fleets through the Isuzu Fleet Conversion Centre, a dedicated facility offering tailored vehicle solutions while maintaining the manufacturer's warranty. Situated on a 32-acre site in Sheerness, Kent, the centre serves organisations requiring customised pick-up conversions, livery applications, and full fleet modifications. With five workshops and an on-site body shop capable of handling up to 6,000 vehicles, it unites Isuzu's technical, homologation, and fleet sales teams to deliver a comprehensive service for businesses with specific operational needs.

Unlike typical post-purchase modifications, vehicles converted at the centre remain under Isuzu's warranty, ensuring capability, safety, and regulatory compliance. Each conversion begins with a technical consultation, during which trained technicians collaborate with customers to understand fleet goals, assess weight and safety constraints, and craft solutions that meet operational and legislative requirements. Customers can review and approve a prototype before the full conversion begins. The centre's status as a VCA second-stage manufacturer allows it to produce vehicles with full Type Approval or N1 enhancements, providing assurance rarely offered by independent converters. Each vehicle leaves the centre registered and ready for use, often with telematics, livery, and third-party modifications integrated into the final build.

Isuzu UK's national fleet team supports operators throughout the process, from specification to on-road use. Its extensive dealer and service network, spanning over 104 locations across the UK and Northern Ireland, ensures minimal downtime. The three-year warranty covers both conversions and standard pick-up parts, keeping fleets operational even in demanding conditions.

Whether businesses need a durable vehicle for utilities and infrastructure or a specialised pick-up for remote sites, the Fleet Conversion Centre allows operators to customise an Isuzu D-Max for any task.●

# Toyota **Van & Pick-Up Conversions**

**Toyota commercial vehicles are renowned in the UK for their reliability and robust build quality. Supported by the Toyota Professional network and a nationwide network of authorised converters, they offer a wide range of van and pickup conversions tailored to the needs of operators in the Essential Services sector.**

### A Trusted Conversion Network

Toyota's conversion ecosystem offers both standard authorised conversions and bespoke options tailored to specific operational needs. Work is carried out by a network of Toyota Authorised Converters that have passed Toyota's stringent quality assessments, ensuring every conversion meets high standards for durability, safety and aftersales support.

This network combines Toyota's own commercial vehicle expertise with specialist partners who provide conversions ranging from practical storage and access solutions to fully specialised bodies. Each converter operates within Toyota's defined quality framework, helping fleets maintain reliability and resale value.

### Key Conversion Options

Toyota's conversion programme includes several widely used, well-engineered body types, available across Hilux pickups and Proace vans:

- **Hilux Tipper Body**: A lightweight yet robust aluminium tipping body, designed to fit Toyota Hilux Single and Extra Cab pickups. Ideal for construction, landscaping and grounds maintenance, the tipper helps operators unload soil, aggregates and loose materials efficiently.
- **Storage & Racking Solutions**: Toyota's authorised converters provide smart, durable and compliant racking and storage systems tailored to fleet requirements, improving organisation and operational efficiency.
- **Refrigerated Conversions**: Through specialist partners, Toyota offers professional refrigerated van bodies that maintain safe, stable temperatures for perishable cargo, suited to food distribution, pharmaceuticals and medical logistics.
- **Wheelchair-Accessible Vehicles:** Collaborating with converters, Toyota supports accessible vehicle conversions that help organisations deliver safe, inclusive transport solutions for passengers with reduced mobility.
- **Standard Van & Pickup Conversions:** Beyond tippers and refrigerated bodies, the conversion range includes additional adaptations such as dropside, platform cab and other specialist builds to serve broad commercial needs.

### Specialist and Bespoke Builds

For operators with specific requirements that go beyond standard conversions, Toyota's Authorised Converter network delivers bespoke solutions built around individual use cases:

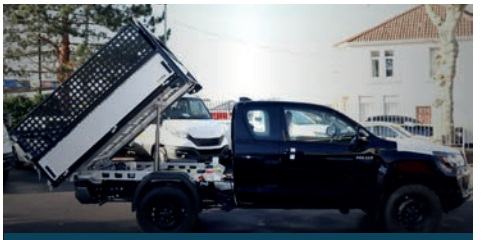
- **Custom Van Racking & Interiors**: Expertly engineered storage and fit-out options for trades such as plumbing, electrical, HVAC and facilities management.
- **Mobile Workshops & Tailored Bodies**: Converters can design and install specialised bodies, from fully equipped mobile workshops to custom logistics units.
- **Sector-Specific Builds**: Whether it's secure service vans, insulated transport or other specialised configurations, Toyota Authorised Converters provide options that match industry standards and fleet workflows.

### Why Toyota Conversions Are Right for Fleets

Toyota's conversion offering delivers a combination of practicality, quality and flexibility that fleet managers value. Whether your fleet requires a robust tipper for site work, a temperature-controlled van for perishables, or a highly configured bespoke vehicle, Toyota's authorised van and pickup conversions deliver capable, dependable and fleet-focused solutions that help businesses get the job done.●

*Wheelchair-Accessible Vehicles*

*Refrigerated Vehicles*



*Hilux Tipper Body*

*Specialist Hilux Conversions*

*Specialist Hilux Conversions*

*To learn more about the* **Toyota** *conversion range, visit:* **www.toyota.co.uk/fleet-business/lcv/toyota-lcv-conversions**


# Volkswagen Vans: A Flexible Foundation for Specialist Conversions

**Volkswagen vans have long been regarded as a benchmark in the light commercial vehicle market, valued for their build quality, versatility and adaptability across a wide range of professional applications. From emergency services and utility fleets to bespoke commercial and support vehicles, the Volkswagen Commercial Vehicles line-up provides a robust foundation that converters can tailor to precise operational requirements.**

The current Volkswagen range — including the Caddy, Transporter, Crafter and chassis-cab models — offers multiple wheelbase and roof height options, strong payloads and advanced powertrains, making it well suited to specialist conversions across numerous sectors.

## Manufacturer-Supported Conversion Programmes

A key strength of Volkswagen's approach is its Recognised Conversions programme, which partners with a nationwide network of approved independent converters to deliver specialist solutions for business and fleet customers. Recognised converters are independently audited to ensure their designs, processes and build quality meet Volkswagen Commercial Vehicles' technical and safety standards, helping ensure converted vehicles retain warranty and aftersales support where applicable.

This programme allows customers to specify vehicles with confidence, knowing that conversions are designed to integrate seamlessly with the base vehicle and meet demanding operational and compliance requirements.

## Emergency Services and Public Sector Conversions

Volkswagen vans are widely converted for use across the emergency services and public sector, including police support vehicles, incident response units, welfare vans and specialist operational vehicles. Platforms such as the Transporter and Crafter are particularly well suited to these roles, offering the load space, payload capacity and electrical capability required for complex equipment installations.

Typical conversions in this sector can include secure storage systems, reinforced interiors, auxiliary electrical systems, emergency lighting, communication equipment and bespoke internal layouts, all tailored to the vehicle's operational role.

### Commercial and Utility Applications

Volkswagen's recognised converters also deliver a broad range of commercial and utility conversions, supporting industries such as construction, maintenance, logistics and infrastructure services. Common conversion types include:

- Dropside and tipper bodies
- Mobile workshops with racking, tool storage and onboard power
- Crew vans and passenger modules
- Refrigerated and temperature-controlled vehicles
- Specialist lifting, crane or access platform installations

These conversions can be specified through the Volkswagen Van Centre network, allowing customers to manage the entire process, from vehicle selection to conversion and delivery — through a single point of contact.

### Accessibility and Specialist Support Vehicles

Volkswagen vans are also frequently converted into wheelchair-accessible and mobility support vehicles, helping organisations and service providers improve accessibility and passenger safety. Conversions can include lowered floors, ramps or lifts, secure wheelchair restraint systems and adapted seating configurations, depending on vehicle size and intended use.

Models such as the Caddy, Transporter and Caravelle provide flexible platforms for these specialist adaptations while maintaining comfort and drivability.

### Built for Professional Adaptability

With ongoing advancements in vehicle technology, safety systems and powertrain options, Volkswagen vans continue to evolve in line with the needs of modern fleets. Combined with a structured recognised conversion programme and a strong network of specialist converters, they remain a trusted platform for professional, safety-critical and mission-specific vehicle applications.

As operational requirements become increasingly complex, Volkswagen vans offer the adaptability and engineering integrity required to support specialist conversions across multiple sectors.●


## **Rushlift** adds **55 Volkswagen Crafter Vans** to its **UK Fleet**

**An example of Volkswagen Crafter vans supporting field engineering operations is at Rushlift, a nationwide materials handling equipment supplier, which took delivery last year of 55 new Volkswagen Crafter vans as part of its fleet renewal programme.**

All 55 vehicles have been converted with bespoke rear racking, a 350-watt inverter and an integrated workbench, enabling Rushlift's Field Service Engineers to operate efficiently while supporting customers across the UK. The tailored conversions ensure tools, equipment and parts are securely stored and easily accessible, helping engineers maximise productivity on site.

The Crafter is the largest model in the Volkswagen Commercial Vehicles range, offering up to 18.4m$^3$ of load space and a maximum payload of up to 2.4 tonnes. With a load height of up to 2,196mm, it delivers excellent loadability and flexibility for demanding service and maintenance roles.

Recently upgraded with a suite of enhanced driver assistance systems, the Crafter is designed to make everyday work safer and more comfortable. A redesigned interior features a new 10.4-inch infotainment display, integrated eSIM connectivity, and access to mobile online services via We Connect, supporting both driver convenience and fleet efficiency.

**Alina Sirghi, Fleet Controller at Rushlift, said:**

*"We were proud to invest in the first phase of our service vehicle replacement programme, with 55 new Volkswagen vans now on the road for our Field Service Engineers. This marks an important step in supporting our growing customer base across the UK. These vehicles not only enhance the reliability and efficiency of our service operations but also reflect our commitment to equipping our engineers with the best possible tools for the job.*

*"Partnering with Volkswagen Commercial Vehicles ensures we maintain a fleet that meets our high standards for safety, performance and sustainability. This investment reinforces Rushlift's dedication to delivering industry-leading service and remaining at the forefront of material handling support."*

**Craig Cavanagh, National Fleet Manager at Volkswagen Commercial Vehicles, added:**

*"Rushlift's decision to select the Volkswagen Crafter is a testament to our commitment to providing the best possible work tools for trade and fleet customers. With its comfort, upgraded dashboard and advanced driver assistance systems, the Crafter is a reliable, safe and versatile solution for Rushlift's engineering teams."* ●

*To learn more about the* **VOLKSWAGEN VANS** *conversion range, visit:* **www.volkswagen-vans.co.uk**

# From **EV Growth** to **Compliance Pressure**: Why **2026** Is a **Defining Year** for **Automotive Skills**

By Simon King, CEO,
**Autotech Group**

**The automotive aftermarket has spent the last decade talking about skills shortages. In 2026, that conversation is no longer enough. The issue is no longer awareness, but risk. Accelerating vehicle technology, tightening legislation and sustained workforce pressure have combined to make capability a defining factor in the sector's future.**

### A Market Moving Faster Than Capability

Recent figures from the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders (SMMT) show the UK new car market has exceeded two million registrations, with almost one in four new cars now fully electric. This reflects strong momentum, even as petrol and diesel vehicles continue to dominate much of the existing parc.

For the aftermarket, the challenge is not electrification in isolation, but the growing complexity across a mixed powertrain vehicle parc. Workshops are now expected to support vehicles equipped with advanced driver assistance systems, connected diagnostics and software-defined architectures, often within the same working day. Expectations around accuracy, safety and compliance are rising accordingly.

### From Skills Shortage to Capability Gap

Vacancies remain stubbornly high, around 3.0 %, above the UK national average, and the workforce continues to age, But the more pressing issue is a widening gap between what modern vehicles require and how prepared the workforce is to support them. Industry data shows that while electrified vehicles are rapidly increasing, fewer than a third of technicians are currently qualified to work safely on EVs, and only a small fraction hold formal ADAS calibration qualifications. Today's technicians must do far more than diagnose mechanical faults. They are expected to interpret data, calibrate safety-critical systems, operate manufacturer software and navigate evolving regulatory frameworks.

This is not about whether people are willing to work in the industry; it is about whether training, career pathways and workplace structures reflect the reality of modern automotive work as the pace of change has outstripped many traditional models. This also requires the industry to take a broader view of talent, recognising and retaining neurodiverse individuals whose strengths in pattern recognition, focus and logical problem-solving align naturally with the increasingly data-driven, software-led nature of modern vehicles.

### Technology Raises the Bar

Advances in AI-supported diagnostics, connected platforms and predictive maintenance are reshaping workshop operations. When implemented effectively and supported by the right skills, these technologies improve efficiency, accuracy and safety. Moreover, this also means rethinking how work is carried out, from reducing manual admin through voice-to-text reporting, to using digital workflows that allow technicians to focus on technical tasks rather than paperwork.

As systems evolve, workshops must also develop the capability to integrate new software, manage data confidently and adapt workflows as vehicles become more connected and software defined. The ability to draw on remote expertise, share diagnostic insight securely and collaborate beyond the physical workshop is becoming part of day-to-day operations, particularly as skills remain stretched.

In a safety-critical industry, human judgement remains central. Technology will undoubtedly enhance decision-making, but it won't replace it. Technicians must still interpret outputs, apply experience and ensure compliance as regulatory expectations rise, and cyber security becomes an operational concern rather than an IT afterthought. As vehicles increasingly resemble mobile digital platforms, workshops must treat secure systems, controlled access and digital resilience as fundamental to business continuity.

### Regulation Is Changing the Operating Reality

Legislative developments are adding urgency to this shift. The Automated Vehicles Act, alongside tighter requirements around EV safety, ADAS calibration and data access, reinforces a clear direction of travel: responsibility does not disappear as vehicles become more automated; it becomes more defined.

Frameworks governing access to vehicle systems, such as SERMI, underline this point. Opportunity comes with accountability. Access to technology will depend on competence, process and traceability at workshop level. Capability is no longer a competitive advantage; it is a condition of participation.

### Why 2026 Is a Game Changer

What makes 2026 different is the convergence of pressures. Market growth, electrification, regulation and workforce change are all landing at once. On their own, each would be manageable. Together, they fundamentally change how the aftermarket must operate.

This is no longer a discussion about future skills needs. Workforce capability now underpins compliance, access to vehicle systems, customer trust and the ability to realise value from technological investment. Treating recruitment, training and technology as separate issues is no longer viable.

### From Recognition to Action

The industry does not lack insight. It lacks alignment. As vehicles, regulations and expectations evolve together, workforce readiness must evolve with them. That means clearer career pathways, training that reflects real-world complexity and a more integrated approach to how people and technology are deployed.

Cars may increasingly diagnose faults, update software and schedule maintenance automatically, but responsibility for safety, security and trust will continue to sit firmly with people.

As 2026 unfolds, the question is no longer whether the aftermarket understands the scale of change ahead. It is whether it is ready to operate confidently within it.●

*For more information, visit: autotechgroup.co.uk*


## **Queclink** Launches **Low-Cost** Fleet **Tracking Hardware**

**Queclink Wireless Solutions, a global provider of IoT devices and hardware, has introduced a range of entry-level vehicle tracking devices to meet the growing demand for low-cost, high-volume fleet telematics deployments.**

The GV30 Series combines compact size and powerful features, making it an ideal solution for a wide range of monitoring applications including fleet tracking, stolen vehicle recovery (SVR) and automotive lease management.

*"Our GV30 Series is designed to provide long-term deployability, simple installation and stable performance for high-volume, rapid roll-out tracking requirements that keep operating costs under control,"* explains Vernon Bonser, UK Sales Director at Queclink Wireless Solutions.

*"It delivers a future-proof solution – with IoT connectivity, BLE expansion and wide voltage support – that is suitable for both traditional and electric vehicles."*

Built with LTE Cat 1 connectivity with 2G fallback, the GV30 Series offers a low-cost alternative for real-time fleet telematics. The devices also support BLE accessories for wireless feature extension, enabling driver identification functionality and sensor monitoring such as door status and fuel management.

The tracking unit's compact design, measuring just 76mm x 39mm x 16mm, 9 to 90V input range and modular cable design supports easy and covert installation. A detachable connector allows replacement or service without rewiring, reducing installation time and operational disruption, while streamlining maintenance. The device is available with an IP67 waterproof enclosure for wet or harsher operating conditions.

*"We are committed to developing the widest range of fleet telematics hardware solutions to ensure we are best placed to respond to evolving market needs. The GV30 Series will be an important addition to our offering that will deliver clear business and operational value for our customers,"* adds Bonser.●

*For more information, visit:* **www.queclink.com**

COMMERCIAL VEHICLE SHOW
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# Why **Fleet Operators** Should Attend the **CV Show 2026**

**For fleet operators across the UK, the Commercial Vehicle Show (CV Show) remains the most important event in the calendar for evaluating vehicles, technologies and services that directly impact day-to-day operations and long-term strategy. In 2026, the show goes further than ever—bringing together vehicle manufacturers, solution providers, policymakers and industry experts under one roof to help operators navigate a rapidly changing commercial vehicle landscape.**

From decarbonisation and compliance to cost control, uptime and driver wellbeing, the CV Show is designed to support informed fleet decision-making.

### A One-Stop Shop for Fleet Decision-Makers

The CV Show provides fleet operators with unrivalled access to the latest HGVs, LCVs and alternative fuel vehicles, alongside the systems and services that keep fleets moving. For operators managing mixed or specialist fleets, the show offers a rare opportunity to compare solutions side by side, speak directly with manufacturers and suppliers, and assess which technologies are ready for real-world deployment.

With emissions targets tightening and operational costs under constant scrutiny, the CV Show focuses on practical solutions—those that can be implemented today as well as those shaping fleet strategy over the next decade.

### Destination Net Zero: From Ambition to Implementation

Located in Hall 4, Destination Net Zero is a core feature of the CV Show, supporting fleet operators on their journey to lower-emission operations. This dedicated area showcases the latest battery-electric, hydrogen and alternative fuel commercial vehicles, as well as the infrastructure and energy solutions required to support them.

Operators can explore electric HGVs and vans, hydrogen fuel cell technology and highly efficient hybrid powertrains, while also engaging with experts on charging strategies, depot planning, energy management and total cost of ownership. Rather than focusing on theory, Destination Net Zero connects vehicle technology with operational reality—helping fleets understand what works, what's viable, and how to scale decarbonisation without compromising reliability.

### Ride & Drive: Reducing Risk in Fleet Investment

The Ride & Drive Area is a key draw for fleet operators looking to validate purchasing decisions. In a safe, controlled environment, attendees can get behind the wheel of the latest vehicles, experiencing performance, handling,

comfort and technology first-hand.

For operators transitioning to electric or alternative fuels, Ride & Drive offers critical insight into drivability, range behaviour, braking systems and advanced driver assistance features. These real-world impressions help reduce uncertainty, support driver acceptance and ensure new vehicles are fit for purpose before investment decisions are made.

**Collaboration Zone: Insight, Funding and Policy Access**

New for 2026, the Collaboration Zone sits at the centre of Hall 4 and brings together government departments, public bodies and leading industry associations. Designed as an informal, open space, it allows fleet operators to engage directly with experts on regulation, compliance, funding and strategic planning.

For fleets navigating grant applications, infrastructure funding or evolving legislation, the Collaboration Zone provides direct access to trusted guidance and the opportunity to ask specific operational questions—saving time and accelerating pro Why Fleet Operators Should Attend the CV Show 2026

**Bus Expo: Extending the Value for Passenger Transport Fleets**

Alongside the CV Show, Bus Expo broadens the event's appeal for operators running bus and coach fleets. This dedicated addition brings passenger transport into sharper focus, with vehicle displays, technology solutions and expert insight tailored to the specific needs of bus and coach operations.

A key feature is the Bus & Coach Leaders Forum, which brings together senior figures from across the passenger transport sector to discuss policy, funding, decarbonisation and innovation. For fleet operators, it offers valuable context around regulatory direction, funding opportunities and the future shape of public and private transport services.

**Essential Attendance for UK Fleet Operators**

Whether managing vans, trucks, buses or mixed fleets, the CV Show 2026 delivers practical insight, hands-on experience and direct access to expertise that fleet operators cannot get anywhere else. With Bus Expo enhancing the offer for passenger transport fleets, the event provides a comprehensive, future-focused platform to support smarter, more confident fleet decisions.●

**Exhibitors** you may wish to visit:

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Alphabet | **5B15** | KIA | **5C95** |
| Bott Limited | **5D10** | Locks 4 Vans | **5B30** |
| Bradshaw Electric Vehicles | **5A60** | Modul-System | **5F110** |
| CheckedSafe | **4A21** | National Highways | **4D60** |
| Clayton Power | **EVP8** | Nexus | **5C50** |
| CPD Bodies | **5A100** | Qi Van Systems | **5B22** |
| DVSA | **5G114** | Renault | **5F84** |
| Exeros Technologies Ltd | **5B51** | Rhino Products Ltd | **5F50** |
| Ford | **5E10** | Sortimo | **5E50** |
| Harris Maxus | **5D120** | Stellantis | **5F110** |
| ISUZU | **5D60** | Strongs | **5F60W** |
| IVECO | **5A70** | Wilcomatic | **5F70** |

*To learn more and to* **book your FREE PLACE** *visit:* **www.cvshow.com**

# **RHA** Launches **Compliance Guidance** for **Van Operators**

**The RHA recently launched the RHA Van Standard, a new best-practice compliance guide designed to support van operators navigating an increasingly complex regulatory environment. It reflects our commitment to our values - relevance and quality.**

The guidance is aimed at businesses operating goods vehicles up to 3.5 tonnes gross vehicle weight, including operators who may primarily run HGV fleets but rely on vans to support local, time-critical or specialist work.

In recent years, van operators have faced growing regulatory pressure, increased DVSA enforcement activity and confusion over how rules apply – particularly around drivers' hours, working time, international operations and employment responsibilities.

The RHA Van Standard brings together the key areas operators need to manage effectively, including driver requirements, vehicle maintenance, employment contracts, health and safety, working time and tachographs. The guidance sets out some industry best practice and what would reasonably be expected of a professional van operator.

Richard Smith, Managing Director of the RHA, said:

*"Van operators are doing more than ever, often with tighter margins and greater scrutiny.*

*"We hear consistently that the rules can feel unclear, fragmented and difficult to navigate – especially for operators running mixed fleets or working across borders.*

*"The RHA Van Standard is designed to show what good looks like in practice, reduce uncertainty and help operators protect their businesses."*

Alongside the guidance, the RHA offers a dedicated van membership, giving operators access to compliance advice, legal and employment support, training, insurance services and campaigning representation.

The RHA Van Standard is free to download and available to both members and non-members.●

*To learn more visit:* **www.rha.uk.net**

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