

# PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

HOUSE OF COMMONS  
OFFICIAL REPORT

Sixth Delegated Legislation Committee

DRAFT ROAD VEHICLES (AUTHORISED WEIGHT)  
(AMENDMENT) REGULATIONS 2023

*Tuesday 23 May 2023*

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**Saturday 27 May 2023**

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**The Committee consisted of the following Members:**

*Chair:* PETER DOWD

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| † Clarke-Smith, Brendan ( <i>Bassetlaw</i> ) (Con)                                   | † Mullan, Dr Kieran ( <i>Crewe and Nantwich</i> ) (Con)       |
| † Fletcher, Colleen ( <i>Coventry North East</i> ) (Lab)                             | Osamor, Kate ( <i>Edmonton</i> ) (Lab/Co-op)                  |
| † Furniss, Gill ( <i>Sheffield, Brightside and Hillsborough</i> ) (Lab)              | Rimmer, Ms Marie ( <i>St Helens South and Whiston</i> ) (Lab) |
| Gibson, Peter ( <i>Darlington</i> ) (Con)  | † Sambrook, Gary ( <i>Birmingham, Northfield</i> ) (Con)      |
| † Holden, Mr Richard ( <i>Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport</i> ) | † Stewart, Bob ( <i>Beckenham</i> ) (Con)                     |
| † Hudson, Dr Neil ( <i>Penrith and The Border</i> ) (Con)                            | Sultana, Zarah ( <i>Coventry South</i> ) (Lab)                |
| † Lavery, Ian ( <i>Wansbeck</i> ) (Lab)  | † Villiers, Theresa ( <i>Chipping Barnet</i> ) (Con)          |
| † Leadbeater, Kim ( <i>Batley and Spen</i> ) (Lab)                                   | † Young, Jacob ( <i>Redcar</i> ) (Con)                        |
| † Mohindra, Mr Gagan ( <i>South West Hertfordshire</i> ) (Con)                       | Susie Smith, <i>Committee Clerk</i>                           |
|  | † <b>attended the Committee</b>                               |

The following also attended, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(2):

Newlands, Gavin (*Paisley and Renfrewshire North*) (SNP)

# Sixth Delegated Legislation Committee

Tuesday 23 May 2023

[PETER DOWD *in the Chair*]

## Draft Road Vehicles (Authorised Weight) (Amendment) Regulations 2023

2.30 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Mr Richard Holden):** I beg to move,

That the Committee has considered the draft Road Vehicles (Authorised Weight) (Amendment) Regulations 2023.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Dowd. The draft regulations will be made under the powers conferred by sections 41(1), (2)(d), (3) and (5) of the Road Traffic Act 1988. They implement increases in weight limits by up to a maximum of 1 tonne for certain alternatively fuelled heavy goods vehicles and by a flat 2 tonnes for certain zero-emission vehicles. In all cases, the maximum weight limits for individual axles will remain unchanged.

No additional weight allowance for zero-emission or alternatively fuelled vehicles will apply to the heaviest articulated lorry and road train combinations, of 44 tonnes, or to four-axle motor vehicles of 32 tonnes. The extra weight allowances do apply to articulated lorries and roadtrain combinations with five or six axles, normally limited to 40 tonnes. They also apply to four-axle combinations, normally limited to 36 or 38 tonnes, and to certain smaller zero-emission lorries with two or three axles. In addition, they apply to zero-emission three-axle articulated buses. Two or three-axle alternatively fuelled versions of these types can already operate at up to 1 tonne above the normal limits.

Implementing these changes will provide domestic operators with the flexibility already available to those from the EU operating in Great Britain. Within the EU-UK trade and co-operation agreement, under appendix 31-C-1-1, the maximum authorised weights for certain vehicles carrying out movements under the agreement have been increased.

**Theresa Villiers (Chipping Barnet) (Con):** I very much welcome the instrument the Minister is bringing forward. It will help to deliver the Government's net zero strategy by encouraging the adoption of ultra low and zero-emission vehicles. Does he agree that encouraging the switch to lower-carbon and zero-carbon driving is a better way to address climate and pollution matters than trying to drive vehicles off the road through things such as the ultra low emission zone in London?

**Mr Holden:** I thank my right hon. Friend for that intervention, and I wholeheartedly agree. The best option is providing alternatives through public transport and also, wherever possible, assistance to those wanting to switch, as we are doing today with the HGV sector. That will also include hydrogen, which will be important for some of the longer-distance lorries, as well as for electric vehicles. My right hon. Friend makes an excellent point.

The agreement applies to vehicles used on international journeys and to EU vehicles operating in the UK on cabotage. The allowances are to accommodate the additional weight of alternative fuel technology up to a maximum of 1 tonne and, for a zero-emission technology, 2 extra tonnes.

To put the regulations in context, transport is the biggest greenhouse gas-emitting sector of our economy, and road freight is a significant contributor to that. In 2021, HGVs produced around 20% of greenhouse gas emissions from our domestic transport network. Utilising zero-emission and alternatively fuelled freight vehicles can contribute positively to freight decarbonisation and help with achieving the UK's commitment to reach net zero by 2050.

A vehicle's powertrain consists of the components that generate power and then transmit it to the road to move the vehicle. Currently, alternatively fuelled and zero-emission heavy goods vehicles may have a heavier powertrain technology than traditionally fuelled internal combustion engine heavy goods vehicles. For example, a pressurised fuel tank in an alternatively fuelled vehicle, or batteries in a zero-emission vehicle, can be significantly heavier than a conventional petrol or diesel fuel tank—I saw some examples recently on a visit to DHL in the midlands.

The typically heavier powertrains of these vehicles mean that, under current regulations, alternatively fuelled and zero-emission HGVs may have to carry a reduced amount of cargo than comparable fossil fuel vehicles. This places them at a competitive disadvantage. The higher weight of the empty vehicles acts as a payload penalty, which then decreases the commercial viability of zero or lower-emission vehicles.

The regulations would afford zero-emission vehicles a weight increase of 2 tonnes, as opposed to the maximum 1 tonne increase offered to alternatively fuelled vehicles, as the features that make them zero emission—particularly the batteries—are likely to be heavier, although I think we all hope that these provisions will be needed less as the technology continues to improve over time. This approach further incentivises the uptake of zero-emission vehicles, bringing potential benefits via emission reductions.

A public consultation asking whether to permit alternatively fuelled or zero-emission vehicles to have that slightly higher weight limit was carried out between 14 July and 3 September 2021 as part of a wider consultation on the phase-out dates for sales of new non-zero-emission heavy goods vehicles. Of the responses received, 59% were in favour of the increase in weight limits, with only 6% opposed and the remainder being "Don't know". A Government response confirming our intention to introduce these changes was published on 12 May 2022.

Let me turn to the contents of the statutory instrument. Amendments will be made to the Road Vehicles (Authorised Weight) Regulations 1998 by making provision to increase the maximum authorised weight for certain alternatively fuelled and zero-emission vehicles. Amendments will also be made to add a definition of "zero-emission vehicle". The regulations provide for the Secretary of State to undertake a review of the regulatory provision contained in these regulations on a five-yearly basis. That is to account for the rapid deployment of technology and to ensure that increased weight limits remain suitable.

To conclude, the regulations are essential for supporting the commercial viability of zero-emission and alternatively fuelled commercial heavy goods vehicles. They do not involve any regulatory burden on domestic road freight operators. Instead, they aim to give flexibility to those using zero-emission or alternatively fuelled HGVs. The de minimis assessment identifies a best-estimate monetised net present value over the years of £18.2 million, which relates to the greater business efficiency as a result of these measures. There are also unmonetised costs, such as infrastructure costs, and unmonetised benefits, such as a reduction in greenhouse gas emissions. The regulations will also ensure parity of regulation, meaning that domestic operators will not be placed at a disadvantage to their European counterparts. I hope Members will join me in supporting the regulations, and I commend them to the Committee.

2.37 pm

**Gill Furniss** (Sheffield, Brightside and Hillsborough) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairpersonship, Mr Dowd. Decarbonising our roads is a vital part of meeting our net zero obligations. As our haulage sector moves towards electric and alternatively fuelled HGVs, it is right that regulations adapt to the heavier powertrains these vehicles carry. I note that the consultation outcome was largely in favour of that approach, but there are a few points that I hope the Minister can address.

First, these extra weight allowances will inevitably put extra pressure on the condition of our already crumbling roads. The latest annual local authority road maintenance survey shows a drop in the number of roads in a good state of repair, fuelled by real-terms cuts in highway maintenance budgets. With that in mind, what assurances can the Minister offer that this extra weight on our roads will not lead to yet more misery for motorists?

Industry leaders are warning that car parks and bridges could face collapse due to the added weight of electric vehicles, including HGVs. That is a growing concern for the public, so will the Minister outline what his Department is doing to ensure that our car parks and bridges remain safe?

I want to ensure that, with bigger size, there is more charging. Will the Minister let me know exactly what the programme is to accelerate the roll-out of the charging stations that people will rely on throughout their journey?

To conclude, we must not miss this opportunity to decarbonise our transport sector and encourage a switch to zero-emission vehicles. The Labour party will therefore not oppose these regulations.

2.39 pm

**Gavin Newlands** (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (SNP): It is a pleasure to see you in the Chair, Mr Dowd. My party will not be voting against the measures that the Government are bringing forward; in fact, we support them. However, as usual with my support for anything Conservative, there is a “but”, and it is in the form of a couple of queries for the Minister.

I have heard from industry that what is essentially 2 tonnes of extra payload for most HGVs would overload the rear axle. The Minister may be aware of that, so perhaps he can tell us what he plans to do about it. As it stands, some of what is proposed may be undeliverable for the industry.

Secondly, the regulations are limited to a number of vehicles and do not include 44-tonne HGVs, which currently make up a quarter of the UK fleet. Could the Minister tell us why the weight limit has not increased for the 44-tonne HGVs as well? That would give us a clue about the future direction, because an increase to 48 tonnes overall could potentially be accommodated.

That being said, as the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside and Hillsborough mentioned, the road network will not be any easier to maintain with all these weight increases to HGVs. What will the Government do to make sure that councils have the money to ensure that local road networks are adequate? As I saw on the Transport Committee visit to Buckinghamshire, local roads have been badly impacted by HGVs related to High Speed 2.

Those are my three questions for the Minister. If he could address them, I would be grateful.

2.41 pm

**Mr Holden:** I will attempt to address some of the points that have been raised. The common theme in the comments from both Opposition Front Benchers was road maintenance and repair. I hope that, like me, they will welcome the extra £200 million announced in the Budget this year, as well as the £950 million a year that we put in, split between councils and National Highways. I would also point out that as parts of our motorway network, in particular, including bridges and other important structures, move towards the end of their life over the next few years and need to be replaced, an enormous and increasing amount will go into that space to address some of those issues. So a huge amount is going into the maintenance of the network, not just to repair potholes but to carry out major structural improvements as well.

The hon. Member for Paisley and Renfrewshire North made a point about 44-tonners, and the decision on them was taken specifically to match our European counterparts so that we are not at a disadvantage. There may be further consideration in that space, but we are not doing that at the moment.

As I said in my opening speech, the provisions will be reviewed every five years. We are hoping to see technological change, and we have already seen a major shift in the weight of electric batteries, for instance. As other products—perhaps not even known today—become available in terms of conductivity, there is the possibility of reducing the weight of some of these elements. Hopefully, in time, there will be a large change. As I said in my opening speech, the limits per axle are not changing; it is just the overall weight.

The hon. Lady talked more broadly about our road network. It is important to reflect on the fact that the UK Government are still investing in our road network and making substantial improvements. I was up in the north-west recently and saw a road being built to better connect Blackpool to the M6. It is a shame that some of the devolved Administrations across the country, and particularly Wales, are rejecting any form of new road building, especially when we are now seeing this major shift, in terms of our road network capacity, to low-emission and zero-emission vehicles. The road network has an important role to play in decarbonising our economy, while ensuring that opportunity for people is spread right across the country and that they can remain as connected as possible.

[Mr Holden]

To conclude, I hope the Committee has found the debate informative and that it will join me in supporting the regulations, which will amend legislation to allow weight increases by up to 1 tonne for alternatively fuelled vehicles and by 2 tonnes for zero-emission vehicles. These changes are to support the commercial viability of those vehicles and to ensure regulatory harmony

with our international competitors. Adaptation of these vehicle types will help reduce emissions from what has to date been a hard-to-abate part of the transport system, moving us closer to our 2050 net zero target.

*Question put and agreed to.*

2.43 pm

*Committee rose.*



