



Freight Operator Recognition Scheme

A FORS for good

The Freight Operator Recognition Scheme (FORS) is making London's roads safer, cleaner and less congested. For vehicle operators, it offers peace of mind that they are meeting their legislative requirements, as well helping to increase efficiency, reduce costs and win work.

Background

More than 300,000 vans and lorries take to London's roads every day, delivering goods and services to the Capital. Whether they are welcomed, loathed or merely tolerated, the fact is they play a vital part in London's economy.

Unfortunately, they also contribute to air pollution, and congestion and collisions on the roads, many of which result in serious or even fatal injuries.

Commercial vehicle activities are governed by numerous regulations and agencies. Until three years ago, however, there was no single scheme to help van and lorry operators comply.

That all changed in 2008 when Transport for London (TfL) introduced FORS.

Key themes

The aim of FORS is simple. In creating one over-arching scheme that encompassed all aspects of safety, fuel efficiency, economical operations and vehicle emissions, TfL was seeking to make London's roads safer, cleaner and less congested.

FORS is a voluntary scheme that helps improve operators' performance in each of these areas – a 'one-stop shop', in the words of TfL's Freight and Fleet Programme Manager Steve Steele.

'It started with the bronze standard, which covers all aspects of lawfulness. Legislation can be a maze for operators to negotiate and before we introduced the bronze award there was no single point of reference for them,' said Steve.



'Improving the performance of freight in London is critically important for economic vitality and the quality of life of London's residents and workers... and I would invite all boroughs and other public bodies to follow the GLA group functional bodies in their responsible procurement practices in adopting the FORS standard in its procurement of goods and services.'

Peter Hendy,
Commissioner, Transport for London



‘Our scheme raises the bar above minimum legal requirements and gives operators the confidence that they are meeting all the legislative requirements and doing everything they should do properly’.

In 2009 a silver ‘excellence’ standard was introduced, focusing on vehicle emissions and safety.

For both bronze and silver standards, FORS provides explanatory toolkits and guidance, with workshops and seminars to help operators get to grips with them. Operators measure and record their own progress through the scheme, before being independently checked by a network of assessors.

Earlier this year, a gold standard was created. This focuses on aspects of driver and manager training and, among other things, requires drivers to undergo one day of approved safety training as part of the five days of compliance training required every five years by national legislation.

In the three years since its launch, FORS membership has grown steadily. A total of 831 freight companies are now registered, representing more than 85,000 vehicles. About 348 operators (48,000 vehicles) have reached bronze standard and 45 companies (almost 11,000 vehicles) are now at silver, with many currently working towards the gold standard.

There are several reasons for the popularity of FORS. In an industry that operates the tightest margins and at the mercy of rising fuel prices, anything that helps improve efficiency and reduce costs is bound to be welcomed. So too is a scheme that helps operators find their way through the regulatory labyrinth.

But perhaps most significant of all is the fact that FORS is increasingly becoming a standard requirement in both private and public sector procurement contracts. It also features in the Mayor of London’s Responsible Procurement Programme and his Green Procurement Code.

FORS is also supported by the London Cycling Campaign and Road Peace who in their joint petition on lorries, call for all procurement to be made responsible and for public sector procurement to lead in encouraging best practice and safe haulage. They also call for all lorry drivers to undertake approved safety training and all lorries to be fitted with side guards and blind spot warning systems. These requirements reflect the mandatory elements of FORS silver and gold awards.



‘The London Cycling Campaign supports FORS and in our petition on lorries we call for all procurement to be made responsible and for public sector organisations such as TfL and the GLA Group to lead in encouraging best practice and safe haulage through their procurement processes.’

Charlie Lloyd,
HGV Campaigns Officer,
London Cycling Campaign



Outcomes

More customers are demanding FORS accreditation as a sign that hauliers and delivery companies operate to recognised standards of safety and efficiency – and, where sub-contractors are also employed, that they do too. In short, the FORS logo is being seen as a way to identify ‘good’ operators.

Between them, the Greater London Authority (GLA) group of bodies – London Fire Brigade, Metropolitan Police Authority (and the Metropolitan Police Service), GLA and TfL – spend more than £8bn a year on goods and services. They are specifying FORS membership (or similar) in new contracts as most goods and services arrive by van or truck.

Transport operators and sub-contractors working on Crossrail are required to reach bronze standard within three months of starting the contract. They are also required to undertake safety training and fit side guards and blind spot warning systems – the mandatory elements of FORS silver and gold awards.

The result is that FORS is becoming a key component of the Responsible Procurement Programme, and consequently procuring responsibly is raising driving standards on London’s roads.

There are clear benefits to incorporating the FORS standard into relevant contracts. A study by the University of Westminster calculated that the reduced carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions by FORS silver members alone equates to around 18,500 tonnes this year which will be compounded year on year – with obvious gains to Londoners too in improved air quality.

Add to that the benefits to operators: with predicted fuel savings of around £3.3m over the next three years; an estimated 55 per cent reduction in the number of fines (from illegal parking and other infringements); and a 13 per cent reduction in collisions, and you have, as Steve Steele says, a ‘real win-win-win’.

The FORS team is now looking for a partner to help extend the scheme nationally (half of FORS members are already based outside the M25). Several European cities, including Paris, Poznan and Bologna, have also expressed interest.

‘As Europe’s largest infrastructure project, Crossrail has promoted the benefits of sustainable freight across our supply chain to ensure all contractors working on the project become bronze members of the Freight Operator Recognition Scheme. The scheme encourages safe and sustainable transport operations, and each member undergoes a safety inspection and audit. Working with the FORS team, Crossrail is committed to employing safe transport companies on the project and to date over 100 companies in the Crossrail’s supply chains have signed up to FORS.’

Greg Limna,
Head of Logistics, Crossrail

‘We have found the FORS scheme invaluable in supporting and communicating the standards to which all responsible freight operators should adhere. Our silver status demonstrates how we go beyond bronze status to show prospective clients we use best practice to demonstrate our commitment to road safety, CO₂ and costs, making DHL an obvious first choice.’

Sharon Davies,
Director of Corporate Affairs,
DHL UK & Ireland