

WEEK IN WESTMINSTER

Week ending Friday 14 March

Government publishes recommendations of the Low Emission HGV Task Force

The Department for Transport (DfT) has published papers and recommendations setting out plans to facilitate the move to biomethane/natural gas as a lower carbon fuel option for HGVs. This follows a series of recommendations made by SMMT and its members contributing to the Low Emission HGV Task Force. As part of a range of new and emerging technologies, SMMT and the Task Force consider the use of natural gas and biomethane in HGVs as an important part of reducing carbon emissions from freight operations. This option is seen as particularly important in the regional and long-distance freight sectors, where there are a limited number of realistic technological options for substantial CO₂ reduction in the short to medium-term. The Task Force's recommendations are based around the three pillars of removing financial and legislative barriers, facilitating implementation and delivery and improving the evidence base.

(Source: DfT)

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/low-emission-hgv-task-force-recommendations-on-use-of-methane-and-biomethane-in-hgvs>

Government announces centralisation of DVA services

Transport Minister Stephen Hammond has announced that services provided by the Driver and Vehicle Agency (DVA) in Northern Ireland will be centralised to the DVLA in Swansea which will allow motorists in Northern Ireland to take advantage of services such as automated vehicle licensing for the first time. These changes mean that the DVA will no longer deliver vehicle registration and licensing services to Northern Ireland motorists and this will therefore entail the closure of local DVA offices. However, the DVA's local offices will remain open to support vehicle registration and licensing services until the end of 2014 while new services bed in. (Source: DfT)

<https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/vehicle-registration-and-licensing-in-northern-ireland>

DPM announces City Deal for Sunderland

Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg and Minister for Cities Greg Clark have announced that Sunderland, South Tyneside and the North East Local Enterprise Partnership have agreed with the government a multi-million pound City Deal to strengthen the foundations of economic growth in the region. As part of the deal, the coalition government is investing £5 million for the development of an International Advanced Manufacturing Park and more than £80 million of funding is in place to build a bridge over the River Wear. The investment in the manufacturing park will be used to support the planning, design and assembly of the new site, which will help to expand the auto-related manufacturing industry around Nissan in Sunderland. It is seen as the first step in creating a development of national significance that will help to create thousands of jobs and bring in an estimated £295 million in private sector investment for advanced manufacturing. The new park aims to build on the success of Sunderland's car industry, boosting the local supply chain and revitalising local businesses and craftsmen. Government expects that the advanced manufacturing park will be completed by 2027, creating 5,200 new manufacturing jobs, with more than 500 new jobs being created every year from 2018. Government also says that a further 3,700 jobs could be created by 2031 through the development of a new Central Business District. Sunderland has committed to building the New Wear Crossing by November 2017.

(Source: Deputy Prime Minister's Office)

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/city-deal-marks-new-era-of-prosperity-for-sunderland>



Government announces Catapult network review

Government has announced that technology entrepreneur Hermann Hauser will lead an independent review on the Catapult network. Mr Hauser will consider the future scope and scale of the network including looking at the different Catapult models, recommendations on future funding models, international strategy and how a future Catapult network links with other government organisations such as the British Business Bank and Green Investment Bank. His recommendations will be delivered to ministers by the summer 2014 to feed into the Science and Innovation Strategy for the Autumn Statement 2014. There are currently seven Catapults covering a range of sectors, with public and private sector investment of over £1.4 billion over their first 5 years of operation. Two additional Catapults – Energy Systems and Precision Medicine – are scheduled to open next year (2015). They focus on complementing existing research and innovation efforts by providing a business led, capital intensive infrastructure. (Source: BIS)

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/independent-expert-to-push-forward-catapult-network-to-new-heights>

Business to help reform enforcement of regulation

Government has announced a new initiative entitled “Business Focus on Enforcement” which aims to industry groups such as trade associations to challenge problems like duplicated paperwork, inconsistent advice or unhelpful guidance and present the case for change directly to regulators and ministers - who will be required to respond to the evidence industry presents. Groups will have the opportunity to apply for a government grant of up to £4,000 per project, to cover up to half the cost to a business group of running the 6-week reviews. Review teams will be supported throughout the process by government officials. Business Focus on Enforcement will test whether better results and reforms can be gained from giving industry a greater role in identifying issues and driving reform in their sectors. The bidding process is open from Monday 10 March 2014 and all bid applications must be received by 5pm on Monday 7 April 2014.

(Source: BIS)

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/business-invited-to-help-reform-enforcement-of-regulation>

CBI report demands action on growing skills vacuum

The CBI has launched a report entitled “Engineering Our Future” which calls for action to make careers in science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM) more attractive and easier to access. The CBI argues that front-running British sectors of the future, from the advanced manufacturing and creative industries to the green economy, are facing a skills crunch in key industrial strategy sectors - especially for skilled technicians. To help solve this shortage the CBI is calling for:

- A possible reduction of fees on some STEM courses to attract more students and the development of one-year crossover courses at 18 for young people to switch back to STEM in preparation for a related degree - an approach used by the legal profession after graduation.
- New collaborative training solutions to progress apprenticeships and retraining to meet the pressing need for skilled technicians.
- 6th forms, colleges and universities to set and report on 'Davies-style' gender diversity targets to boost women's participation in key subjects like physics and maths.
- Use of UK Commission for Employment and Skills funding in key sectors to help firms retrain older workers in STEM shortage areas.

Week ahead

Commons Committees

Tuesday 11 March

Energy and Climate Change Committee (9.30am, Wilson room) Low carbon innovation

Westminster Hall

Wednesday 19 March

4.00pm - 4.30pm: Zero-hours contracts (Alison McGovern, Lab, Wirral South)

Lords Committees

Tuesday 18 March

Science and Technology Committee (10.30am, room 4) International STEM students

Thursday 20 March

External Affairs (EU Sub-Committee C) (10.00am, room 1) Transatlantic trade and investment partnership