

Longer semi-trailers Trial Frequently Asked Questions

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Allocations

I have an allocation for trailers for this trial. When will I get the VSO for them?

You will need to apply to VCA for your VSO once you have received the necessary model information and VIN(s) from your manufacturer. See the guidance at www.dft.gov.uk/publications (<http://www.dft.gov.uk/publications/longer-semi-trailers-outline-of-process-steps>).

I was allocated some trailers at 14.6 metres but would like to exchange these for some at 15.65 metres. Can you amend my allocation?

The Department for Transport offered some initial adjustments to the quotas following the original allocations, but the deadline for these was 31 January 2012. The revised allocations were posted on the website in early February. Because the full allocation is now held by the participants, the Department is no longer in a position to amend any of the quotas.

Participants are now free to exchange allocations with other participants in the trial, or to transfer their allocation to a company that is not currently within the trial, as long as they notify the details of the transfer to the Department at FREIGHT@dft.gsi.gov.uk. The Department needs to know the identity of the company releasing the allocation, the identity of the company acquiring it, and the number and length of the trailers involved.

It is essential to notify the Department, since the Vehicle Certification Agency uses the list of companies and the allocations provided by DfT as the basis for the issue of VSOs and will not issue a VSO to a company whose name is not on the list or whose quota appears to have been reached.

The Road Haulage Association has launched a web page to facilitate the exchange of permits: http://www.rha.uk.net/campaigning/longer_semi-trailer_permit_exchange.

I missed the deadline for applying. Does this mean I have no opportunity to get a longer semi-trailer?

While there are no immediate plans for an increase in the number of vehicles permitted under the trial, participants are free to exchange or transfer all or part of their allocations to other operators as long as they notify the details of the transfer to the Department at FREIGHT@dft.gsi.gov.uk. The Department needs to know the identity of the company releasing the allocation, the identity

of the company acquiring it, and the number and length of the trailers involved.

It is essential to notify the Department, since the Vehicle Certification Agency uses the list of companies and the allocations provided by DfT as the basis for the issue of VSOs and will not issue a VSO to a company whose name is not on the list or whose quota appears to have been reached.

The Road Haulage Association has launched a web page to facilitate the exchange of permits: http://www.rha.uk.net/campaigning/longer_semi-trailer_permit_exchange.

I don't expect to be able to acquire all my allocation in 2012. Does this mean I will have to hand some of it back?

No. The "use it or lose it" provisions will only apply where companies have not applied for VSOs for their full allocation by 31 December 2013.

On reflection, I don't now expect to use my allocation. What should I do?

The Road Haulage Association has launched a web page to facilitate the exchange of permits: http://www.rha.uk.net/campaigning/longer_semi-trailer_permit_exchange. If you get in touch with them, they should be able to tell you who is interested in acquiring some allocation.

It is essential to notify the Department of any exchange or transfer of allocations. The Vehicle Certification Agency uses the list of companies and the allocations provided by DfT as the basis for the issue of VSOs and will not issue a VSO, to a company whose name is not on the list or whose quota appears to have been reached.

The electronic address for notifications is FREIGHT@dft.gsi.gov.uk. The Department needs to know the identity of the company releasing the allocation, the identity of the company acquiring it, and the number and length of the trailers involved.

I was asking through the "swap shop" about obtaining some permits, but the companies I spoke to expect me to pay for them. I thought they were given out free?

Now that the full allocation is held by the participants, the Department has advised that companies are free to exchange or transfer all or part of their allocations to other operators as long as they notify the details of the transfer

to the Department. **However, any such exchange or transfer may not include a financial consideration. Any company that is found to be requiring payment for the transfer of allocation that it is not using will have its allocation withdrawn.**

Operating the vehicle commercially

I've been provided with a demonstration trailer but I'm told I can only operate it unladen. What's the point of that?

There are two ways in which the longer semi-trailers can legally circulate on British roads. Some of the manufacturers are providing demonstration vehicles under the "Test or trial" provisions of the Special Types (General) Order 2003 (STGO) which do not permit commercial operation, or the carrying of any load other than ballast for trial purposes, to replicate the conditions in which the vehicle would operate in service.

If the semi-trailer has been provided for a trial of commercial operation, the operator will need to apply to VCA for a Vehicle Special Order (VSO) to operate that longer semi-trailer commercially. The VSO will identify the semi-trailer by its VIN. When the operator returns the semi-trailer or acquires further ones, this must be notified to VCA who will revoke the original VSO and issue a replacement.

I am supplying some longer semi-trailers to one of my clients. My client holds the VSO for these vehicles but I don't. Does the delivery count as a movement under STGO and need to be notified two working days in advance, or can I make the delivery under my client's VSO?

The VSO states "The semi-trailers shall be operated only by, or on behalf of, XX ("the Operator)". You should satisfy yourself that the vehicles are being driven on behalf of the operator before delivering them under the VSO. Suppliers and Operators may wish to seek their own independent legal advice on this point.

I've heard that one company may be offering "spot rental" of longer semi-trailers so that operators can get commercial experience of them before committing to an order. Is this allowed?

Yes, this is allowed, but the vehicle will count against the operator's allocation for the time that the operator is trying it out. Only a company that has a confirmed allocation from the Department for Transport can apply for a Vehicle Special Order to operate commercially. Manufacturers were not entitled to apply to participate in the trial and therefore have no rights to a VSO under the trial. Applications from vehicle lease and rental operators were allowed only in respect of identified end-users.

The VSO states "The semi-trailers shall be operated only by, or on behalf of, XX ("the Operator)". If a manufacturer has offered a "spot rental", it will be for the operator to apply for a VSO to operate that longer semi-trailer commercially. The VSO will identify the semi-trailer by its VIN. When the operator returns the semi-trailer or acquires further ones, this must be notified to VCA who will revoke the original VSO and issue a replacement.

I have an allocation, but I want the semi-trailers to be hauled on my behalf by a company with its own "O" licence. Is this permissible?

Yes – the VSO states "The semi-trailers shall be operated only by, or on behalf of, XX ("the Operator)". As long as the haulier is operating the vehicles only on behalf of the holder of the VSO, this is allowed under the trial.

Data requirements

Why is the Department insisting on such detailed data returns when all it needs to know is whether the trailers are safe and result in reduced fuel consumption?

While these are the highest-profile issues to be resolved through the trial, there are other aspects as well on which the Government is looking to the trial to validate the assumptions in the original report. These include possible effects if the number of longer semi-trailers introduced is significantly higher than that predicted by the research; the impacts of longer semi-trailers on road infrastructure and design and on depot and distribution centre

infrastructure and design; and the impacts on SMEs of allowing longer semi-trailers.

The calculation of fuel saving has to be made with reference to the loading factor of the vehicle. It is the way in which the vehicle is used that produces the improved efficiency – on a straight mile-per-mile comparison, a 15.65m articulated vehicle is unlikely to show lower fuel consumption than a 13.6m articulated vehicle. The savings are made at the point where the additional loading capacity brings a reduction in lorry miles.

The fields in the journey log have been selected to enable the monitoring to check whether the vehicles are being used for different types of operation to those assumed in the research, whether the type of goods being carried matches the assumptions of the research, and whether the loading factor of the vehicle converts to reduced fuel consumption per tonne-kilometre.

Although the data collection may appear complex, it has in fact been designed to be readily retrieved from normal operational planning systems. The participants with the largest number of vehicles are very likely to have telematics systems that can download the data automatically. The companies that do not have access to telematics systems are likely to have a relatively smaller pool of the longer semi-trailers. The only assumption we have made is that everybody in the trial will have access to a computer that runs Microsoft Excel, a printer that can print an A3 sheet of paper and access to the Internet.

Isn't the requirement to provide this information contrary to the Red Tape Challenge?

No. It is important to remember that this is a trial, and that one purpose of the trial is to test the assumptions on which the conclusions of the research were based. We cannot do this without gathering robust data from participants on the performance of these vehicles.

The Red Tape Challenge, on the other hand, is about reducing legislative burdens to everyday operations.

Technical queries

May I mount a forklift truck on the rear of my longer semi-trailer?

No. One of the conditions of the VSO is that there may be no rearward projection in relation to a load carried by a vehicle combination. This is to ensure that the vehicle combination will not exceed the length of 18.75 metres permissible for a rigid truck / drawbar trailer combination vehicle.

May I use a lifting axle?

Yes, lift axles which automatically deploy when adjacent axles approach their load capacity (provided that they comply with current legislation for such axles and meet turning circle provisions in the deployed state) will be permitted.

Is there a limit on the height of the semi-trailers?

No, they can be single-deck, high-cube or double-deck as required.

Is it possible to have a step-frame chassis?

Yes, as long as it can meet the turning circle requirements. The VCA has already cleared at least one step-frame chassis for operation.

Why have you insisted on three axles?

We have taken as our starting point for this trial the standard 44-tonne articulated heavy goods vehicle. We assume that operators will wish to maximise the potential load, within the overall permitted gross vehicle weight of 44 tonnes, and have therefore specified the number of axles that permits this.

Vehicle testing and plating

Why is the DfT insisting on turning circle tests for these vehicles?

The provisions on “deemed compliance” in the existing regulations for semi-trailers cannot apply to these vehicles as they do not meet the parameters to which the “deemed compliance” refers.

In order to demonstrate that the longer trailers comply with the physical turning circle provisions set out in, or referenced under, the technical provisions for the trial, a certain amount of model testing is necessary.

Will every semi-trailer be tested?

No. The Vehicle Certification Agency does not need to test every single trailer - it just needs to test representative types in order to produce "Model Reports" that can be used to provide reference data for other trailers of that type.

Are VOSA going to pull my drivers over for having an extra-long trailer?

VOSA are fully aware of the trial and will not be targeting the longer semi-trailers for enforcement. Operators may nonetheless wish to provide their drivers with a copy of the VSO to carry in the cab in case of any queries.

Driver training

The Undertaking requires me to provide appropriate training – what will this be?

The Department for Transport has deliberately not specified any training requirements as these are likely to vary between operators. However, aspects that have been identified by some of the trial participants relate to low-speed manoeuvring, including driver awareness of the risk to vulnerable road users from increased kick-out and rear overhang.

The Department will welcome feedback from trial participants on any particular training needs they identify from their own experience with these longer semi-trailers.

Safety aspects

Is there any specific safety equipment I need to fit to these semi-trailers?

The Department has not required any specific safety fitments on these trailers beyond those that are already a matter of legislation. One of the purposes of the trial is to determine how these semi-trailers compare in terms of safety.

Do these semi-trailers have greater tailswing than existing semi-trailers?

The degree of tailswing is likely to depend on the axle configuration. The calculations in the TRL research assumed that these semi-trailers would be fitted with tri-axles. In practice, the longer length has allowed manufacturers scope to experiment with different axle configurations.

The “worst case” identified in the TRL research was still within the performance of other types of road vehicle.

Is stability an issue in windy conditions?

Drivers of any high-sided vehicle should always take extra care in high winds. There is a small increase in the risk for the longer semi-trailers in those conditions if they are returning empty or carrying a very low-mass load, but

this should be partially offset if steering axles are fitted, because of their greater weight.

Local Authority / access queries

I've received a letter from a Local Authority asking me whether I'm going to be operating on roads in the area, and if so, which. Do I have to give this information?

Under the trial, the only requirement on notification of route is where the vehicle is being moved under the "Test or trial" provisions of the Special Types (General) Order 2003 (STGO), which do not permit commercial operation. In these circumstances the company concerned needs to provide two clear working days' notice of the routes concerned to all the police forces along the route. The Department recommends contacting the local Police Force's Abnormal Loads Officer, who will be able to advise on the notification process.

Once the vehicles are operating commercially under a Vehicle Special Order there is no obligation to notify any body of the routes involved, but clearly if an operator has major distribution centres or clients within the area covered by the Local Authority that sent the letter, that operator will have an interest in showing a reasonable level of co-operation. This could particularly be the case if there are known to be existing concerns over the use of 44 tonne articulated vehicles on roads in that area. In those circumstances it may be helpful for the company to advise where it expects to use the longer trailers.

I am concerned about the potential impact of these vehicles on our local road infrastructure. Can my Local Authority ban them from our roads?

Local Authorities have powers, subject to undertaking consultation, to issue Traffic Regulation Orders (TROs) that restrict vehicular access on the grounds of height, weight or length. However, the longer semi-trailer vehicles are within the maximum permitted length for other types of goods vehicle and comply with all the relevant requirements of Construction & Use Regulations. So we see no justification for imposing more stringent restrictions on them than already exist for 44-tonne goods vehicles.

The operators taking part in this trial know that these longer semi-trailers will not necessarily be appropriate for all the routes they use. Many of them have already indicated that they intend to use them chiefly for trunking – in other

words, taking loads between distribution centres that are generally based close to the major road networks.

These are not “abnormal loads” – they are within the 44 tonne Gross Vehicle Weight limit, less than 18.75 metres long and 3 metres wide, and the axle load does not exceed 11.5 tonnes. Moreover, they are being tested to ensure they meet the turning circle requirements of the Construction & Use Regulations.

Are these vehicles going to be limited to certain types of road?

The longer semi-trailers operating under Vehicle Special Orders (VSOs) will be subject to any existing restrictions that apply to 44-tonne lorries. We see no justification for imposing any additional restrictions on them, as they are within the maximum permitted length for other types of goods vehicle and comply with all the relevant requirements of Construction & Use Regulations.

Will you be monitoring trials of these vehicles through small communities or on narrow roads?

The trial will be monitored to identify any incidents and “near-misses”, which we would expect to include vehicles being stuck at junctions or having difficulty negotiating tight corners. However, this will be done through the obligation on the trial participants to report any such incidents in the course of their normal operations. This will provide the Department with evidence of whether or not the longer vehicles are being used on roads to which they are unsuited.

It's not in the operators' interests for their vehicles to get stuck or to risk hitting roadside objects, so if a company knows that a particular route is difficult for a standard articulated vehicle to negotiate, it is likely to think carefully before trying to operate a longer vehicle there. A number of companies are carrying out assessments of their delivery routes and their customers' facilities to make sure they do not schedule the longer vehicles along routes or to sites where the additional length is likely to cause problems.

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