

Increase of the Maximum Authorised Weights for Certain Alternatively Fuelled Vehicles and Certain Zero Emission Vehicles

Public Consultation Synopsis of Responses

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Outcome Report - Increase of the Maximum Authorised Weights for Certain Alternatively Fuelled Vehicles and Certain Zero Emission Vehicles

1. Executive Summary

The Department for Transport (GB) carried out a public consultation seeking views on whether to permit certain alternatively fuelled vehicles or zero emission vehicles to have higher weight limits, as part of a wider consultation on phase out dates for non-zero-emission HGVs. Responses to the consultation were generally in favour of the proposals to increase weight limits, due to the need to offset the higher powertrain weight of alternatively fuelled vehicles or zero emission vehicles, to minimise any reduction in payload available and in order to ensure that domestic operators could access the same weight allowances as EU operators. As a result, GB updated their Regulations - Amendment of the Road Vehicles (Authorised Weight) Regulations 1998) S.I. 1998/3111 which came into operation in July 2023.

On 18th January 2024 the Department for Infrastructure (DfI) launched an 8-week public consultation seeking views on a proposed increase of maximum permitted weights for certain alternatively fuelled vehicles or zero emission vehicles (mainly HGVs) within the North. The increase is not a measure to improve road safety but is a focus on Climate Change which supports the reduction of harmful carbon emissions. The consultation ended on 13th March 2024 and the purpose of this report is to provide a summary of the analysis of the responses to that consultation.

A total of 13 formal responses were received: 12 were received via the Citizen Space consultation site with 1 response received via e-mail correspondence. Respondents included a trade body, road safety representative, an operator, a former driver, truck manufacturer, truck dealers and members of the public.

This document provides a synopsis of those responses.

The consultation asked the following questions:

- 1. Do you agree that maximum permissible weights for certain zero emission vehicles (mainly HGVs) on both international and domestic journeys should increase by up to 2 tonnes (without exceeding 44 tonnes)?**
- 2. Do you agree that weight limits should increase by up to a maximum of 1 tonne for certain alternatively fuelled HGVs on both international and domestic journeys (without exceeding 44 tonnes)?**
- 3. Do you agree that weight limit increases should only offset any additional weight due to the alternatively fuelled or zero emissions technology?**

Question 1

Do you agree that maximum permissible weights for certain zero emission vehicles (mainly HGVs) on both international and domestic journeys should increase by up to 2 tonnes (without exceeding 44 tonnes)?

11 respondents answered yes to this question with 2 members of the public answering no. One of the no respondents stated that more axles and tyre contact area should be added. The extra weight should be spread over more axles, as damage to roads increases exponentially with axle weight. The weight borne by axles should be reduced generally to reduce road damage. The other stated that there is already too much damage to the roads and drain covers.

Response

Having considered the responses to the consultation, the Department will commence work to adopt the weight limit increase of 2 tonnes for zero emission vehicles in the categories described in the consultation document.

Question 2

Do you agree that weight limits should increase by up to a maximum of 1 tonne for certain alternatively fuelled HGVs on both international and domestic journeys (without exceeding 44 tonnes)?

7 respondents answered yes to this question and 6 answered no. One of the yes respondents stated that they support the proposal to increase weight limits by up to a maximum of 1 tonne for certain alternatively fuelled HGVs. They did also mention that for many NI hauliers whose artic fleet is already plated to 44 tonnes, this increase will not offer any advantage and consideration should be given to increase maximum weights to allow for this change. Nonetheless, they acknowledged the potential benefits for other vehicle combinations, such as those with 5 axles.

One of the no respondents stated that more axles and tyre contact area should be added. The extra weight should be spread over more axles, as damage to roads increases exponentially with axle weight. The weight borne by axles should be reduced generally to reduce road damage. Another response stated that there is already too much damage to the roads and drain covers.

4 of the no responses were identical as they were from the same truck manufacturer or their representative groups and they stated that the domestic weights and International weight concession should be consistently applied for zero tailpipe at 2 tonne. For all EU countries there is a 1 tonne concession as discussed in the first question and given the mass of the batteries a 2-tonne weight increase is more viable.

Response

There was a mixed response to this question with some of the no responses indicating that there should not be an increase up to a maximum of 1 tonne due to potential road damage. Other responses said no because they would prefer a 2 tonne increase rather than 1 tonne.

The Department is of the view that alternatively fuelled vehicles play an import part in reducing carbon emissions. Having considered the responses to the consultation, the Department will commence work to adopt the weight limit increase of 1 tonne for zero emission vehicles in the categories described in the consultation document.

Question 3

Do you agree that weight limit increases should only offset any additional weight due to the alternatively fuelled or zero emissions technology?

Of the 13 responses to this question 6 answered yes and 7 answered no. One of the yes responses stated that they agree that weight limit increases should primarily offset any additional weight due to alternatively fuelled or zero emissions technology. However, they also propose that extra safe weights be maximized to increase payload and reduce transport frequency effectively. This approach ensures that the benefits of alternative fuel technology are maximized without compromising safety or efficiency. They have indicated that this is being seen in parts of Europe with European Modular Systems (EMS) with increased length and weight combinations, reducing payload and removing the number of journeys needed to be undertaken, resulting in reduced emissions.

One of the no responses felt that the question was not written clearly enough and there should have been a “not sure” choice. One of the other no responses again stated that more axles and tyre contact area should be added. The extra weight should be spread over more axles, as damage to roads increases exponentially with axle weight. The weight borne by axles should be reduced generally to reduce road damage.

As with the previous question, 4 of the other no responses were identical as they were from a truck manufacturer or their representative groups and they stated that an increase on all alternative vehicle types plus a review on drive axle weights is essential.

Another no response stated that consideration should be given to weight limit increases for other reasons that would still have environmental benefit. For example, Longer Semi-Trailers and HGVs with double deck refrigeration units could particularly benefit from this change.

Response

From the responses, the Department is aware that there is a need to look at increasing alternative vehicle types as well as a review on drive axle weights and that consideration should be given to weight limit increases for other reasons that would still have environmental benefit, however this would have to be addressed through a separate consultation exercise addressing those specific issues.

The Department will implement a weight limit increase for the specified alternatively fuelled vehicle types of up to one tonne, depending on the additional powertrain weight and we will implement a flat weight limit increase of two tonnes for the specified zero emission vehicles.

Conclusion

After considering the feedback from the responses through the consultation, this Department will proceed with the increasing of maximum permitted weights for certain alternatively fuelled vehicles or zero emission vehicles (mainly HGVs) The changes being implemented in NI will align with the changes introduced in GB in July 2023.

DfI will bring forward amending legislation to put the decisions set out in this document into effect.

The vehicle categories which will have their weight limit increased if they are zero emission are:

- i. articulated lorries and road train combinations with 5 or 6 axles whose conventional technology weight limit is 40 tonnes;
- ii. articulated lorries and road train combinations with 4 axles, normally limited to 36 or 38 tonnes;
- iii. two axle motor vehicles (other than buses, which already have a higher limit), normally limited to 18 tonnes;
- iv. three axle motor vehicles, normally limited to 25 to 26 tonnes; and
- v. three axle articulated buses, normally limited to 28 tonnes.

In the first two cases an extra one tonne allowance for alternative fuelled vehicles will also be introduced. For the latter three cases the one tonne allowance for alternatively fuelled vehicles has been permitted already.

The additional weight limit for alternative fuel vehicles will offset the additional powertrain weight, up to a maximum of one tonne. Where the additional powertrain weight due to the alternative fuel technology is less than one tonne, that actual additional weight will be the limit of the additional allowance.

The additional weight allowance for zero emission vehicles will be a flat two tonne increase for the relevant vehicles. This slightly different approach is to provide the maximum possible incentive for these vehicles to be adopted, and because zero emission vehicles have heavier features not directly linked to the powertrain but still as a result of their being zero emission.

No additional weight allowance for zero emission vehicles or alternatively fuelled vehicles will apply to the heaviest weights for articulated lorry and road train combinations (of 44 tonnes) or four axles motor vehicles (of 32 tonnes). A weight limit increase above 44 tonnes could help operators, however these limits are in place to avoid problems with road structures and excessive road wear. The maximum weight limits for individual axles will remain unchanged.