

New window pain?

By Ainsley Fraser

New proposals announced by the cycling Mayor of London, Boris Johnson MP, would see lorries operating in London required to have a new and additional side window in the lower section of the nearside door – to improve driver vision of pedestrians and particularly cyclists.

The thinking behind this latest idea is that many casualties occur when a lorry turns across the path of a cyclist or pedestrian that the driver cannot see. If a window was installed in the lower half of the passenger-side door, then a dangerous blind spot would be reduced.

The plan, which is out for consultation, would include retrofitting all existing vehicles in order to operate in the capital. All new trucks would have to be compliant to be able to work in the zone. A range of industry bodies have already criticised the plan – which sources say would cost typically between £1000 and £1500 per vehicle. The only exceptions allowed would be the small handful of vehicles where retrofitting would be physically impossible.

The Mayor has said, “The danger caused by HGVs to other road users is unacceptable and we have to reduce it. With the launch last year of my Safer Lorry Scheme, we have already made real progress. Nine cyclists were killed in London last year, the second-lowest number ever and by far the lowest ever per journey. But seven of those nine cyclist deaths involved lorries and that is why we have to press on to the next stage. The cost per lorry is modest. The benefit to Londoners’ safety will be significant.”

The consultation asks Londoners whether they support the principle of the scheme and what would be the best way to enforce the new windows – whether through an extension to the Safer Lorry Scheme, or higher charges for non-compliant lorries under the congestion charge or Low Emission Zone regulations. It also asks whether the restrictions should be full-time, part-time or route-specific.

From the practical point of view of our sector of the industry – skip hire and waste – the significant majority of our vehicles have day cabs – so the passenger seat well is very often the only safe place to stow extra boots, PPE and other equipment whilst at work. Passenger seats are seldom used – not least because most drivers operate on their own – and many companies forbid the carriage of passengers anyway. Thus keeping the nearside well area clear in order to be able to see through a window in the lower half of the door could easily become an issue.

It’s probably not as simple as it has been made to sound either. What happens when we try to retrofit a big window into the door of an existing vehicle, where the inside of the panel is already fully occupied by the window mechanism and other parts essential for strength and structural integrity?

Then my question to ‘Boris’ would be, will he now want to see his proposals enshrined as part of ECWVTA – European Community Whole Vehicle Type Approval? Probably not!

Whilst fully understanding the desire we all share to make our roads safer, it would seem that there is an assumption that all the protection, prevention and cost can be dumped on our industry. We have already adopted proximity sensors, alert systems, cameras and dashboard screens – not to mention additional training and promoting driver vigilance. When are our partner road users going to recognise that they share some of the responsibility as well?

