



Stopping Behaviour and Expectations of Lorry Drivers

Research Debrief v2.2
Prepared for





Illuminas has been working with Transport Focus for more than 20 years, conducting primary research amongst drivers of domestic and commercial vehicles, users of our rail and bus transport services and numerous other industry stakeholders.

On this occasion, Transport Focus commissioned Illuminas to undertake qualitative research to better understand the rationale behind the stopping behaviour of lorry drivers and the needs of an evolving workforce. This document outlines key takeaways from that work.

Key context.....●

Planning where to stop.....●

Experience of stopping locations.....●

The future workforce.....●

Logistics operator perspective.....●

Summary.....●

The need for action

The UK faces a chronic shortage of lorry drivers. While the shortage of drivers peaked in 2021, National Vehicle Contracts has stated that a **'significant shortage'** still exists. This shortage is expected to worsen **as 55% of HGV drivers are between 50 and 65 years old**, while less than 2% of drivers are under 25.¹

The **retention of drivers is also a concern**, as a recent survey of more than 500 drivers found that nearly half were frustrated about **pay**, 40% were concerned about **long hours**, and 35% of drivers reported **poor working conditions**. In all, 41% of drivers said they would **consider leaving their jobs** if conditions do not improve.²

If conditions do not improve, the UK risks another lorry driver crisis.

To help improve working conditions for lorry drivers, significant on-going investment is being made by Government and industry alike. Central to this is **National Highways' £13 million Lorry Parking Facilities Improvement Fund**, which, as a match-funded initiative, will equate to **£26 million of improvements nationally**.³

Previous research commissioned by Transport Focus found that fewer **than four in 10 drivers were satisfied with the number of stopping places** in the UK, fewer than **two in 10 were satisfied with security** at rest stops, and **five in 10 think facilities are declining**.⁴

Overall satisfaction with individual MSA, 'A' road, and truck stops range from nearly 100% to as little as 60% highlighting the vast disparity of amenities and conditions across England. Against this backdrop, qualitative research is required to provide further detail and context to Transport Focus's quantitative **Lorry Drivers Facilities Survey**.

1. [Concerns raised over HGV driver numbers](#) 2. [Britons face Christmas havoc as thousands of drivers consider strike action](#) - 'Critical crossroads'
3. [Pulling out all the stops! Major parking extension unveiled at award-winning Wiltshire lorry park](#) - National Highways 4. [Lorry-Driver-Facilities-Survey.pdf](#)

What we need to understand

As noted, a key requirement of this qualitative research is to **compliment the ongoing Lorry Drivers Facilities Survey**. The study is designed to provide rich insight into the everyday experiences of lorry drivers to better understand the rationale behind **stopping behaviours**.

Of paramount importance to us is to understand not only different driver types – e.g. younger, female etc – but also **different journey types**, in our experience a key influencing factor on drivers' stopping behaviours.



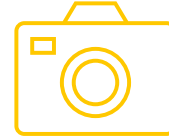
Our main areas of focus:

1. The extent to which drivers are selective about their stopping locations and what factors are influencing this behaviour.
 - What is the decision-making process around selecting a stopping location like for drivers and what sources of information do drivers rely upon when deciding where to stop/not stop?
 - To what extent do drivers actively avoid certain sites they know to be poor, and under what circumstances?
 - What contributes to some drivers' decisions to avoid roadside facilities entirely and use other types of stopping locations to MSAs, Truck stops and 'A' road sites, such as laybys?
 - Do younger and/or female drivers approach stopping selection differently or have significantly different priorities?
2. What are drivers' expectations of stopping locations in England and how might this influence driver satisfaction when rating individual site visits?
3. How might the needs of an evolving lorry driver workforce, including younger and female drivers, be different to what is currently available at roadside facilities in England. Do these needs differ to more experienced drivers?

Multiple research techniques used to cover all perspectives



We conducted **five group discussions** with lorry drivers that regularly stop at either MSAs, 'A' road services, or truck stops with 25 or more lorry parking spaces near England's motorways and major 'A' roads. We ensured a range of vehicle weight and type, as well as a range of night vs day drivers. Groups were organised by **gender** and **driving experience** in order to determine if the future workforce has differing needs/expectations.



We recruited **12 lorry drivers** to complete an **online diary exercise** over the span of two weeks. They were instructed to take photos or videos of MSAs, 'A' road services, or truck stops that they used along their route. Attached to these images were descriptions of the stopping locations and the drivers' perceptions of **what the location was doing well and what could be improved**. After the two weeks we had a short follow-up call to discuss the drivers' experience.



In addition to talking to lorry drivers, we conducted **13 depth interviews with haulage and logistics operators**. We believed that talking to these individuals would give us a better understanding of their potential role in shaping the stopping behaviour of drivers, or at least the environment in which decision-making around stopping takes place. Talking with operators could also give us important insight into the **larger industry impact** of stopping locations as they often **receive feedback from their drivers**. When recruiting, we ensured all operators oversaw lorry drivers who drove along England's motorways and major 'A' roads.

Size of HGV fleets

- Four respondents less than 25 vehicles
- Four respondents had 25-100 vehicles
- Three respondents had 100-500 vehicles
- One respondent had over 500

Executive summary – Selecting stopping locations



How **selective** are drivers when choosing a stopping location?

Unless there is no choice – e.g. a tacho break, essential needs – **drivers are highly selective** as to where they stop. Operators typically allow drivers a good deal of freedom of choice.



What is the **decision-making process** around selecting a stopping location like for drivers and what sources of information do drivers rely upon when deciding where to stop/not stop?

The nature of the **cargo** and the journey being made, particularly **distance/ time on the road**, coupled with the **size of vehicle**, are critical factors. These physical considerations are balanced with the driver's own **experience, word-of-mouth, online forums** and, for some, **apps** e.g. Motorway Buddy, intruck.



To what extent do drivers **actively avoid** certain sites they know to be poor, and under what circumstances?

Drivers will often have **no choice** but to avoid locations that are not suitable for their vehicle, e.g. 'A' road services, and will on occasions do their **utmost to avoid certain MSAs or chains of MSAs**.



What contributes to some drivers' decisions to **avoid roadside facilities entirely** and use other types of stopping locations to MSAs, Truck stops and 'A' road sites, such as laybys?

Drivers making relatively short-haul, frequent trips can often use their **operator's depot** by default. Others have built relationships with **customers** and use their facilities (secure, free parking, refreshments etc) while some use **industrial/ retail estates**, which on occasions will be patrolled/ have CCTV.



Do **younger and/or female drivers** approach stopping selection differently or have significantly different priorities?

There is **little to suggest the selection process is greatly different** for younger and/ or female drivers, though personal security can be of elevated importance for female drivers. Looking to the future, there is similarly **little to suggest that the expectations and needs of tomorrow's drivers will be greatly different to those of today**, notwithstanding forward planning for greater EV usage.

Executive summary – Delivering against expectations



What are drivers' expectations of stopping locations in England and how might this influence driver satisfaction when rating individual site visits?



We live, for the most part, in a predictable world, what we experience slow to change over time. Repeated experiences reinforce those expectations which, in turn, shape how we perceive – and ‘rate’ – each on-going experience.

So, in practice, what does this mean for lorry drivers and where they stop?

- 55% of drivers are aged 50 to 65 years, so **experience is plentiful**;
- While drivers have favoured stopping locations, and those definitely not favoured, stop selection is driven heavily by the **specifics of each journey** being made – length of trip, size of vehicle, cargo etc;
- **Truck stops**, in aggregate the most highly rated category in the ‘Lorry Drivers Facilities Survey’, are relatively scarce and are seen as suited to a relatively small proportion of journeys. When they are used, however, they **deliver very well against high expectations**;
- ‘A’ Road services, however, are more commonplace, though are not suitable for all vehicles and have limited facilities. As such, **expectations of ‘A’ Road services as a category is limited**, and while each visit may be fine and align with these expectations, this is **very different to them being ‘high quality’ stops**;
- **MSAs** is the most nuanced category. They are vitally important stopping sites for HGVs using our major trunk roads, but experience has tempered expectations of this type of stop. For brief, essential stops, MSAs are by and large ‘fine’, but fall short when the stakes are raised. **Given MSAs are for many default stopping sites, this can be a major frustration for drivers when rating ‘overall quality’**;
- **As experience grows yet quality of MSAs does not, we can assume that this pervasive feeling of frustration and ‘world-weariness’ intensifies.**

✧ Illuminas

Key context

Journeys made by HGVs and LGVs on the UK's SRN

There is a temptation when we think of Heavy and Large Goods Vehicles to pigeon-hole them as five or six axle, 40+ plus tonne (UK Maximum Gross Weight) articulated lorries making cross-country journeys, often requiring nighttime driving or overnight stays for the driver in their cab.

While there are of course many such lorries and associated drivers, for whom working conditions are of paramount importance, **the HGV/ LGV universe spans a wide spectrum of vehicle type and, critically, vehicle and journey purpose.**

The SRN is used on a daily basis not only by drivers of artics, but by domestic and commercial refuse collectors, deliverers of letters and parcels to Royal Mail sorting offices, providers of skips to domestic properties and so on. Some of these drivers will rarely require the services of a truck stop, and only occasionally those provided by motorway services, as part of their typical working day in the way other HGV drivers do. **However, their stopping requirements need to be accounted for all the same.**

Understanding the breadth of the HGV/ LGV and 'journey purpose' universe allows us to appreciate the **wide range of driver needs that stopping locations need to cater for.** We can understand intuitively that the requirements of a refuse collector when on the road will be different to those of an HGV driver travelling from, let's say, Scotland to Cornwall.

It is the specific requirements of each driver and each journey that shape their expectations, overlaid with prior experience, particularly so for seasoned drivers.



Drivers' requirements and expectations of stopping locations

What drivers **expect** of a stopping location is to some extent driven by **personal requirements** e.g. suitable facilities for female drivers, drivers with specific dietary requirements and so on.

We should also acknowledge that while relatively rare at the moment, **electric trucks will become more common**, certainly for shorter-haul trips. This means that by default stopping locations will be expected to have **charging stations**.

Additionally, the nature of each individual journey in itself shapes drivers' requirements and in turn their expectations. **The facilities on offer are of far greater salience to some types of driver, on some types of journey, than others.**

What drivers expect of a stopping location is impacted by a range of factors related to each journey

Journey distance	Less frequent, long-haul journeys make demands of drivers – and their stopping locations – that frequent, short-haul trips do not e.g. range/ quality of food available, washroom facilities
Overnight stay?	The stakes are raised significantly if the journey requires an overnight stop e.g. availability of rooms, showers, laundry services, social amenities, arrangements for early morning departures
Size of truck	Simply put, some large trucks cannot access smaller locations. Other sites lack the necessary space for larger trucks and/ or do not consider large trucks potentially requiring an early AM exit
Value/ nature of cargo	High value cargoes highlight the need for safe and secure stopping locations, refrigerated/ perishable goods requiring access to a power source

How requirements impact on stopping behaviour

How these variables weave together is by no means straightforward; the specifics of each journey are key. However, in principle, **the broader and deeper the set of requirements, the more appropriate and appealing truck stops become.**

How each stopping location measures up against drivers' expectations is important to understand. **Much is expected of truck stops**, and while by no means *all* deliver, many do, and in doing so **leave a long-standing positive impression that can be a stark contrast to the highly variable MSA experience.** With less expected of 'A' road services, a broad – though not perfect – hierarchy appears, reflected in the Lorry Drivers Facilities Survey.



Lay-bys/ Public Conveniences → 'A' road services → MSAs → Truck Stops

As **journey distance** increases, so does the need for quality subsistence, amenities, etc

If the trip requires an **overnight stay**, the greater the need for security, showers, social amenities, etc

The larger the **size of truck**, the more important is ease of access, parking facilities, and so on

The greater the **value of the cargo**, the more essential is secure – ideally gated/ manned – parking



Planning where to stop

Drivers are typically able to decide where to stop and most will form a plan about their stopping location

Of course, drivers are subject to regulations that dictate how often they *must* stop and for how long, but **most companies allow them to decide where exactly they want to stop.**

Drivers' plans and preferences about where to stop are mostly based on prior experience. The more they are on the road the more they understand how traffic, road closures, and time of day may impact their ability to stop where they want to. **In addition to personal experience, many use word-of-mouth, online forums, apps, and websites to identify stopping locations.**

Inevitably, 'uncontrollable' factors (traffic, disruption etc.) make it difficult to be precise about exactly where to stop and many drivers have 'back up' locations in mind in case something goes wrong. But they are sometimes forced to stop on laybys, slip roads, or other **unsuitable areas.**

Assuming all runs smoothly, **location** along the route tends to be the most important factor in deciding where to stop.

'We would give them a lot of freedom on where to stop. Some of them have their preferred services or they may just want to stop on the side of the road for their 45-minute break. The only time I would ever tell a driver where to stop is if they're new or if they were on a very tight schedule that had to be very planned.'

-Logistics Operator

'I am in a forum for truck drivers online. A lot of information gets spread on there like 'don't go here' or 'the food is really good here'. Or for instance, there's a new Welcome Break on the M1 and a lot of people are recommending that, it's apparently very modern and up to date.'

-Female Driver

'Much of it is experience - you learn pretty much as you go. There's certain services, you think, 'I'm not going there again'. Then for some of the truck stops, it is word of mouth. For example, I don't go to Scotland very often – so if I was going to go up there, I'd ask some of the other truck drivers.'

-More Experienced Driver

A range of factors impact drivers' decisions on where to stop, when circumstances allow them to exercise a choice



Location

'As long as it's not that far off my route - because the further off my route is, the longer my day is going to be. So as long as it's closer.'



Practicality

'Just somewhere I know the parking is good. Sometimes you'll pull in and there's nowhere for you to park, so I like going to the ones I know there's enough space.'



Food options

'The food choices is a big one for me because if I'm hungry I want to eat what I like. You can't eat McDonald's every day, so having a choice is important as well.'



Amenities

'It depends, but I'll look for certain amenities. Like last night I slept on a layby and today I wanted to take a shower, so I decided to stop at the services.'



Cleanliness

'I'm really fussy about where I'll go to the bathroom. So, I'll try and pick the best ones that I know of along the way - the ones that are clean as you're going to get in the services.'



Security

'I would say security. I'm lucky that I'm never left with the load overnight, but obviously I do have to worry about the fuel and myself as well, so I'll try to avoid the dodgy areas.'



Welcomeness

'I look for community. It's just nice to be around other truckers. When you're out on the road, you're just on your own, so it gets a bit lonely sometimes. But it's nice to see other truckers.'



Experience of stopping locations

As noted, the nature of the driver's journey shapes their requirements and expectations at stopping locations

Type/size of the vehicle, journey distance, time of day, and company policy all impact the types of amenity they are looking for and therefore the locations they choose to stop at. Short-distance, day-drivers have mostly straightforward needs and as such, their expectations of different sites are more limited as compared to long haul drivers making multi-day trips.

- Security is not a major concern during daytime but is **a key concern for those parking up overnight when most theft takes place**
- Day-drivers do not need 24-hour services and are therefore less concerned about extended **restaurant or shop opening hours**
- Longer-distance and especially overnight drivers need **'extra' amenities** such as showers, entertainment areas, accommodation for sleeping etc.
- Day-drivers are less reliant on **food at services**. They can get home for their evening meal, so are often only looking for light meals, snacks, drinks etc. when using services.

Reflecting the above **'A' road services, MSAs, and truck stops** often **serve different clientele with different expectations.**

'Normally if I'm stopping in services or a layby it's to have my legal break. If I'm staying out for the night I try and plan where I'm stopping and if I'm running short that I've got a backup. But if I'm loaded, part of our policy is to be in services to try and prevent things from being stolen.'

-More Experienced Driver

'I don't know how to score this service. Cheap, XXL size, 12 fuel stations and drivers can pay at the pump, truck wash, food court, and accessories shop. It is understandable that all truckers will find some reason to stop here. Score on this particular occasion is 2, usually would be strong 4, especially during daytime.'

-Less Experienced Driver

'I take cooking utensils with me, so I'll find like an Asda en route, buy some food, put it in the fridge and then cook it myself. That way I'm not always desperate for the 24-hour food and things like that. As long as they have toilets and showers, that's my main priority.'

-More Experienced Driver

‘A’ road Service Areas are typically seen as offering sufficient amenity but only for shorter breaks

Used less frequently than MSAs, ‘A’ road services are nonetheless sometimes the only option for drivers, depending on their route. A-road services are less likely to be a planned destination than an MSA or Truck stop.

Generally used for short visits. Drivers’ expectations are limited (quick, food/ toilet/ rest break) and against these criteria A-road services perform adequately

- Key benefit is location: they can be accessed without having to divert from the route
- The prices for food and drinks are generally seen as reasonable
- And fuel typically somewhat cheaper than MSAs

‘Usually, you're pulling in there to fill up with diesel, have a quick break, or you need some sort of snack or coffee, a toilet break. That's basically what most of them have.’

-More Experienced Driver

Beyond the short-break criteria, A-road services amenities are seen as very limited

- Drivers of larger vehicles can struggle to find room to park, meaning that for even short breaks an A-road service area is not suitable
- For those working shifts/ overnight, limited opening hours at A-road services can be a problem
- Few have any extra facilities for drivers overnighing

‘A road services aren’t brilliant. I mean on the A303, the bases there are very limited. The shops and the Burger King shut down at 10pm. There's no showers there. We’ve got no access to any toilets after then as well.’

-More Experienced Driver

Motorway Service Areas generally work well for core needs but and are often lacking for overnight stays

Nearly all drivers will use MSAs on at least some occasions and they deliver all the basic amenities. For short, functional stops, expectations are largely met

Again, location is key: MSAs are on the road, relatively frequent, and drivers know what they can expect in terms of core facilities even if unfamiliar with the individual site

- These are the preferred stops for shorter distance drivers with straightforward needs from a stopping location: toilet, fuel, hot drink, snack/ light meal
- MSAs that are particularly liked are ones with ease of access for larger vehicles, and a wide variety of food and shop outlets

For overnight and longer-distance drivers, with more complex needs, MSAs are often seen as lacking in some respects

- Food options limited - expensive, lack of 'home-cooked' meals/ healthier options
- Parking availability variable and spaces often tight, short and difficult to use
- Lorry parking far from building and no meeting hub for drivers
- Hygiene standards for toilets and showers often felt to be very poor
- For overnight stays, capacity can be an issue later in the day
- Lack of security is a major issue

'I prefer to stop at a service that is direct from the motorway. I don't want to be pulling off and driving through a town or coming out of my way. Once I'm finished, I go home, so I'm quite keen to get on and complete my route with as little disruption as I can.'

-Female Driver

'Some of the services are not fit for purpose. Especially the motorway services. The showers – the food. It's all fast food. No wonder drivers are so unhealthy, because all they can ever get is Burger King, McDonald's or, you know, there's no proper food like in the early days.'

-More Experienced Driver

Truck Stops, while most often used by those staying overnight, often offer the best experience for drivers

There is a more emotional dimension for drivers who spend more time on the road, including feeling welcome, having their own space, entertainment / socialising. Truck Stops provide a more 'community' feel, offering home cooked meals and extra amenities. Despite being off the main roads, many night-drivers will opt to stop at a Truck stop, if possible.

Being 'designed for truck drivers', many feel that their needs are well catered for

- Employ active security measures, surveillance, fenced, segregated (trucks only)
- Better food service – 'home-cooked', generous portions, affordable
- Community and camaraderie with like-minded people in the industry
- Parking is easy and well organised
- Generally seen as good value for money

'Smokey Joe's down in Devon, Cornwall Way. That's a lovely place. They give you a meal, the parking overnight is very cheap and you get discount on the meal and you get unlimited coffee. Every time I actually travel down that way, then I always make sure I do go even if it's a half hour detour. I always make sure I'm staying there for the night, because I know for sure that it's welcoming.'

-More Experienced Driver

Location can be an issue: fewer and further between than MSAs and not always close to driver's route

- While generally very good, facilities and opening hours vary from one site to another to another
- Can also have capacity issues (but less so than MSAs)
- For shorter distance and lower need drivers, truck stops added little benefit when in need of quick toilet breaks or somewhere to eat a packed lunch

'I think the issue is the location of them and whether they're convenient for the drop offs that they're making. If they happen to go out of their way to find and use a truck stop, then in their minds that's going to extend the route, you know, and their working day.'

- Logistics Operator

Sometimes drivers choose to, or are forced to, take their breaks at other locations

Not all drivers will take their breaks at 'A' road services, MSAs, or Truck stops—instead, opting for **laybys**, **industrial estates**, or simply going back to their **depot**.

In many cases, this is out is out of **necessity**—there is no room at an MSA, and the driver is getting close to their regulated hours.

In some cases, drivers are **incentivised** by their employers to avoid the overnight parking fee, and in other cases they simply prefer to **avoid the often-busy services**.

Laybys can work for a short stop but have many issues for longer stays: no security, no toilets or other amenities, difficult to get in and out of.

Industrial estates can sometimes offer a better alternative: easy parking, security (sometimes)

'I know some laybys in the area that are relatively close to major supermarkets where I can use their toilet and restock on cheap food for the way, I will not stay at this service station again during the night, unless I had no time to look for laybys.'

-More Experienced Driver

'I like to park at an industrial site off the M11—it has a Tesla warehouse in it, and they have a security guard that walks around at night. He's not going to stop someone at your truck, but he stops people wandering around and the services don't want to pay for that kind of thing.'

-Less Experienced Driver

'I'm fortunate that sometimes I'll have a break at the depot if I can get back. I tend to avoid going into motorway services and stuff like that because afternoon time it can be busy and obviously it can be difficult to park in them depending on where you are.'

-Less Experienced Driver

'The guy that I work for, he'll give me £15 extra if I park on a layby so that I avoid the £30 service fee I'd have to pay at the services. Sometimes I'll go and use one of the showers at the services and then go park somewhere else.'

-Less Experienced Driver

'There's a reason why a lot of drivers that stop out at night stop in industrial estates, and that's because there's a lack of parking. I'll go past an MSA and I know if I pull in there, I'm not getting a space after 4 or 5pm. And if you go to a truck stop at 7pm, you're not getting parked.'

-More Experienced Driver

'We get easy parking and fuel at the depot so I avoid petrol stations when I can and opt to go back to the depot.'

-More Experienced Driver

Capacity and condition of HGV parking areas can make it difficult for drivers to stop when they need to

Practical challenges surrounding the capacity and conditions of HGV parking areas 'A' road services, MSAs, and truck stops was one of the most important factors in determining drivers' satisfaction with the stopping location:

- Locations get busy around lunch time and in the evening when drivers stop for the night— drivers may be turned away due to **lack of spaces**, or may end up blocking one another in or parking in unofficial spots
- Access roads often described as **pothole ridden** and poorly maintained. Delays and cost due to damaged tires can be a headache
- Similarly, **poorly maintained parking areas** can reduce the available spaces even further and make parking an ordeal
- Some drivers with additional requirements (e.g. refrigerated trucks, extra-large trucks) can be **turned away** altogether as there is no space big enough for them, or the location requires refrigeration units to be turned off over night



'The photo attached shows the HGV parking area at Blyth Services off the A1. Despite having overnight patrols and a friendly staff, I can only rate this place a 2 out of 5 due to the parking. An already small lot had flooding and potholes — an all-too-common occurrence at services across the country.'

'I am struggling to find anywhere to park here. Other drivers decided to stop on a road leading to a lorry park, making it a real struggle to drive past the one-way system without damaging anything. Another, probably forced by driving time regulations, decided to just block others knowing they will be woken up later on to move their truck, to let them out.'

-Less Experienced Driver

Food options can be insufficient, especially those working early or late shifts

Some drivers choose to avoid buying food at services, instead opting to cook in their cab, but drivers who are on the road for days at a time do not always have the time, energy, or supplies to cook for every meal. Many who do purchase food at stopping location are dissatisfied:

- Complaints about the **lack of healthy options**, or choice in general, were common amongst drivers
 - A particular issues for drivers who stay overnight as many food **outlets are closed** by the time they park up or when they set out in the morning
- **Price of food is** also an issue —vouchers often not covering the entire meal and food being expensive despite its poor quality
- **HGV drivers ‘eat-out’ a lot and miss the home-cooked experience**; the better truck stops are able to provide this



‘For lunch there’s a £7.50 meal deal from WH Smiths. That and a coffee from the machine comes to just over £10. To buy that every day for a month is over £200 which is lot! Not much healthy on offer for lunch or for evening if I was staying here overnight. There is the fresh food café and a pasta outlet, but these are both closed so not much use. Overall, I would say 3 out of 5. Parking, security, cleanliness is good, however food options are a bit limited.’

‘I had no choice but to eat at the McFatFood franchise as it was the only one opened at this location. Eating healthy is one of, if not THE, biggest challenge of being an HGV driver.’

-More Experienced Driver

Cleanliness at stopping locations, especially MSAs, is often poor

Cleanliness, of both parking area and facilities, is another major issue for many drivers:

- Toilets are often left uncleaned and even basics such as **hot water and soap** can be missing altogether
- Shower facilities are **not cleaned** often enough, sometimes causing drivers to skip washing all together
- Toilets are sometimes **out-of-order** or the building they are in is locked, leaving drivers with no available facilities
- Parking areas can **lack sufficient bins**, meaning trash is strewn about
- Again, drivers have more **complaints about MSA and 'A' road services** than they did about truck stops



‘The photo attached is the toilet in the fuel station at Newport Pagnell services northbound. Absolutely disgusting. There was no hot water, just a dribble of cold water with no soap. In the past week I have stopped at private truck stops where the toilets are immaculate. Why can't one of the biggest motorway services companies (Welcome Break) do this? Although capacity, location, and security are all acceptable, this gets a 1 out of 5 due to cleanliness.’

‘More bins are needed in the parking areas. A lot of drivers urinate in a bottle and then just chuck them out because the bins are absolutely rammed, so I think that's where the smell of pee comes from. It's really disgusting.’

-Female Driver

Security is more reliable at Truck stops than MSAs and 'A' road services

Security is a major concern for drivers. Many have experienced theft from their vehicle and there are some concerns about personal security. The security at 'A' road services, MSAs and truck stops vary drastically, some having nothing at all:

- **Truck stops are generally viewed as the most secure locations:** fenced off, trucks only and with staff presence
- At MSAs and A-road services, areas for lorries are generally not secure, **often lacking fencing, CCTV or any human security presence**
- Even at stopping locations with **CCTV**, drivers can feel there is a lack of security—citing incidences where they were told the camera is broken or the footage is not monitored
- Some drivers mentioned the **staff at services not caring** when a security incident took place
- Given the cost of parking, many feel that operators should invest more in security



Blyth Services off the A1

‘Yeah, there are some services with CCTV, but I don't rely on them because usually when something happens and you go over, they will be saying that, ‘Oh, sorry, that camera doesn't work.’ and it feels that they don't want to get involved. So, it's a fake security, really.’

-Less Experienced Driver

‘Truck stops are all mainly all locked in. They actually have static security guards in there and they're all night. They walk round, keep checking. So yeah, you know if you've got high value load on, you're going to be all right.’

-Less Experienced Driver

Other concerns highlighted during our discussions with drivers

INSUFFICIENT FUELLING

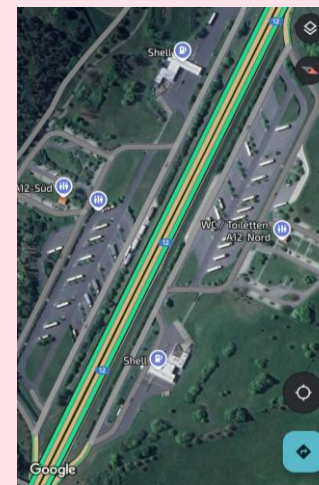
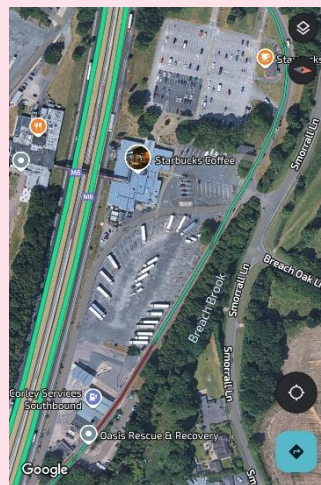


‘Worth mentioning is the lack of the roof above mentioned pumps. On average, lorry drivers need to refuel around 350 litres of fuel, this takes time and I would like not to get wet during refilling time in the rain. Not here I’m afraid. I was trying to understand why pumps also need to be pre-authorized by the cashier and not by the driver himself at the pump with the terminal. Shouldn't be difficult to install these.’

Various concerns were flagged about fuelling up:

- Not having a roof over the HGV fuel pumps
- Not being able to pay for fuel at the pump
- Small fuel nozzles, making the process take twice as long
- Fuel nozzle automatic latches breaking, forcing drivers to hold the pump down the entire time

POOR MSA LAYOUTS



‘Unfortunately, in this country that layout is the norm since ‘design’ reasons were and still are more important than practical aspects. On the continent the norm is to have "drive through" HGV bays, and in general the same layout and signage of the service

areas so no driver is left to the curvy maze of tight turns and dark twists at a typical entrance of UK service labyrinth.’

Concerns voiced about MSA layouts included:

- Confusing /limited signs causing drivers to go through the parking area while looking for fuel or truck washes
- Tight corners and awkward parking spaces making manoeuvring difficult
- Spaces too close together, making it too noisy for overnight drivers parked next to others (like refrigerated lorries)
- Parking often distant from amenities, meaning drivers spending valuable break time getting to and from services

Issues around capacity, food offerings, cleanliness, security, and even simple things such as fuelling up all feed into feelings of welcome (or a lack thereof) for lorry drivers

Stops are generally for functional reasons (food, toilet, rest) but as noted, there is also a more emotional dimension for drivers, particularly those who spend more time on the road.

In this context, truck stops provide a space 'for lorry drivers' where they don't feel judged, which understands their needs (often family run) and where they can socialise with peers. In contrast, drivers often feel that at MSAs they are 'second class citizen as evidence by:

- Lack of capacity: trucks deprioritised for cars
- Limited, expensive food options showing lack of understanding of drivers' needs for nourishing, 'home cooked' meals
- Limited and unhygienic toilet and washing facilities, making drivers feel uncared for
- Poor security and a feeling that this is not an issue that operators take particularly seriously

'You don't want to eat inside an MSA, You get people looking at you because you're in work clothes and it's embarrassing sometimes. They just look at you like, you're scruffy as hell. I mean, all I do is go in there, use facilities, grab my food and leave again as quick as I can, basically.'

-More Experienced Driver

'The amenities like showers need to be improved and there are too many fast-food outlets, not enough proper food. Trucks drivers are not well catered for. We are just a means to make money.'

-Less Experienced Driver



The future workforce

Female Drivers

Security was a particular concern for female drivers. Vehicle security was a concern for overnight drivers regardless of gender, but female drivers had heightened concerns about personal safety.

- Poor lighting in stopping areas is a sources of anxiety. Areas with few people around are avoided. Similarly, laybys are typically avoided entirely for breaks that would require exiting the vehicle. Concerns about personal safety are seen as a deterrent to women joining or remaining in the industry
- The poor general cleanliness and maintenance of toilet and shower facilities was important for many drivers but of higher priority for women. Some locations would be avoided entirely because of a lack of hygiene, regardless if other criteria were met
- Availability of menstrual products at MSAs can be a problem

‘There are not enough parking spaces every night for the amount of wagons and trucks that need to park up on the UK roads. I know three women that have left the industry because of the parking situation. They had to park on laybys if they couldn't get parking spaces elsewhere and they didn't feel safe.’

-Female Driver

‘For me, I plan my route out, whereas some people will just go spontaneously. But not for me. It's not really about the facilities available. It's about knowing that I've got a safe place to go to, especially as a woman driver.’

-Female Driver

‘I needed some ladies' toiletries and I couldn't find any within six motorway service areas. I ended up driving into town and running into the shop there. At truck stops, I'll literally just go up to the counter and ask the wife whether they have any sanitary products and she'll bring me a couple. I normally don't pay for them. That's how like family it is at truck stops, you know.’

-Female Driver

Younger Drivers

Some operators suggested that younger drivers had higher standards and greater expectations from stopping locations and facilities.

They argue that this reflects a degree of conditioning: more established drivers are perhaps ‘desensitised’ to poor standards and have limited expectations.

That said, our younger driver respondents did not appear to have markedly different priorities as compared to their older colleagues, with journey length, and vehicle size being more important variables in driving needs and expectations.

‘With stopping locations, the older generation tends to just go with the flow. They've done it for so long, they know what to take with them. They know what to expect. With regards to the younger generation - they tend to expect a little bit more.’

- Logistics Operator

‘Some of them prefer to stop at truck stops. There's a whole community of them and they get to see each other, and I they get to know people. The younger drivers tend to prefer the creature comforts – they're more focused on getting a hot meal and generally being comfortable.’

- Logistics Operator



Logistics operator perspective

Operators' role in setting stopping locations is limited

Logistics operators take a **pragmatic approach** to setting routes for their drivers and, as part of that, take a similarly **pragmatic approach to prescribing stopping locations**.

Overall, **a good deal of flexibility is afforded to the driver**; operators appreciate that drivers have to make alterations to their route while on the road, this in turn impacting on stopping locations.

Operators also appreciate that **drivers can have preferred stops**, for a variety of reasons. Operators try to accommodate such preferences, needless to say within reasonable parameters.

Occasions on which operators may consider setting, or recommending places to stop, include:

- The driver is **relatively inexperienced** and/ or is **unfamiliar with a route** on which the operator has experience
- When an **overnight stay** is required
- When the **largest sizes of truck** are being used
- When the cargo is of **high value** or is **perishable**

Even on these occasions, it is common for the driver to be afforded a good deal of discretion as to where exactly they stop, all of this course within the constraints set by the tachograph.

'I like to put trust in the driver. You know, there might be a nice cafe that's halfway along the way they want to stop at and if there's no advantage for doing it a different way, then I'm more than happy with that. That said, obviously I do keep an eye on things and think 'Hang on, you've made a 10 mile detour there, what's that about?'

- Logistics Operator

'Someone had had their container nicked when they parked in an industrial estate. So the rule is now that we have to ring up and just let the operator know where we are to make sure that we're in a secure enough place.'

- More Experienced Driver

The importance of driver safety and security

Operators are **acutely aware of the risks many lorry drivers take on a daily basis**, not just on our crowded SRN but in respect of their vulnerability to cargo theft and associated confrontation. That they are keen to allow drivers to use their discretion (within reason) when stopping, can present something of a challenge: when is it the right thing to do to prescribe a location with excellent security controls, even if it is not the drivers' first choice?

The concern operators feel is born largely of genuine **human compassion**; operators can be ex-lorry drivers and appreciate first-hand the inherent dangers. More pragmatically, however, operators are fully aware that drivers are in short supply and as such are a **valuable business asset**; they need to be protected and safe-guarded for the sake of the business.

As such, driver safety and security overlay all factors taken into account by the operator when setting routes and, on occasions, stopping points.

'If we knew they were going to be out overnight we would always plan it and make every effort to make sure that they're in a decent and safe environment. The goods are high value but my view is that it's the man behind the steering wheel that's worth more to me, you know. You hear some horror stories about people in laybys and we don't want to put the blokes at risk like that. We just don't need to.'

- Logistics Operator

'We had one younger girl drive for us for a couple of weeks and you really had to be sure about where she was parking. We would tend to drive her maybe out of her way to get her to somewhere we know is 100% secure, that there's barriers that are secured through the night places and that there's female facilities.'

- Logistics Operator

Driver welfare

Broader than the driver safety and security is **driver welfare**. In terms of being able to manage the general well-being of their drivers, operators are quick to focus on the two key axes of quantity and quality:

- **There is a fundamental lack of stopping locations.** The overall network of services is insufficient for the number of drivers on the road. This is particularly true for certain areas of the country, such as the East of England, where services are few and far between
 - This can be a particular issue for refrigerated lorries that can be denied entry at services unless they turn their units off overnight
- **The quality of stopping locations.** The lack of overall quality refers to a litany of issues, including cleanliness, welcomeness, security, and food offerings
 - Importantly, when the quality of services is poor, logistics operators note a clear impact on driver morale and productivity

'I think there are shortfalls. I don't think there are enough service stations across the country. Every one of them is full and it's full for a reason. I don't think the quality of the amenities are kept as good as it should be. Driving in the UK motorway network can be pretty grim.'

-Logistics Operator

'Basic human dignity is lost in the UK, I find. Simple things like the parking areas, for there to not be rubbish thrown all around and just for them to be treated humanely, which is kind of a harsh thing to say, but I find in the UK they do not enjoy staying there. The food quality is worse. They're treated poorly. The parking isn't secure.'

-Logistics Operator

There's definitely an effect, the mood drops. If you have a guy going in and out through the UK a few times in the month, you'll generally see a drop in their positivity. And they'll tell you they don't enjoy it.'

-Logistics Operator

The quality of the roads

A related issue mentioned by most operators echoes the views of many road users we have interviewed for Transport Focus in recent months and years i.e. **road quality**.

In this instance this is not only the quality of motorways and 'A' roads, but the quality of slip roads into/out of service areas and even the quality of the roads within services and truck stops. Potholes can damage tires, costing the company hundreds of pounds and delaying shipments.

'The quality of the roads - you know, we're talking big vehicles, and they can take a hammering. But as soon as we see something, and it could be a three-day old tyre, but If it's got damage from a pothole that tyre is going in the bin and getting replaced at a cost of £400.'

-Logistics Operator

'I slept at London Gateway in the city centre and it looked like a time capsule going back 30 years, at least. There's potholes in roads that just shouldn't be there. £36 just to stay overnight and they cannot even repair the road and people really struggle to drive through.'

- Less Experienced Driver



Summary

Summary of findings

1.

A perceived **lack of suitable stopping locations** is the key frustration for lorry drivers and operators. Whether we have in mind lay-bys (often full or cordoned off), public conveniences (closed/ re-purposed) or truck stops at the other end of the desirability spectrum, there's simply not enough places to stop.

When an 'A' road service can be accessed by larger trucks – which is very far from always the case – it can occasionally come to the rescue. However, they are suitable only for brief breaks.

2.

Compounding this frustration is the commonly held perception that **MSAs**, the most widely available stopping point for larger lorries, **vary enormously quality-wise**. Some will be fit for purpose, others will have little in the way of secure parking, will seemingly pay scant attention to drivers' sanitary requirements or will have limited or unhealthy refreshment/ meal options, if such facilities are open at all.

Lorry drivers have often been doing what they do for years and are familiar with MSAs, whether they be certain chains (Moto, Roadchef etc) or individual sites. As such, drivers' expectations in respect of MSAs can be limited, with **drivers frustrated that MSAs too frequently deliver against these low expectations**.

3.

Conversely, the 'Rolls Royce' of stopping locations, **truck stops, come with high expectations that are, for the most part, met**. Truck stops are seen as not suited to all drivers or journeys e.g. shorter distance, frequent journeys, but are highly praised by those needing longer breaks or overnight stays.

Key to drivers' high regard for truck stops is that they are 'tailor-made for them' and as such invoke an **in-built sense of being made welcome**. Whether it be security, food quality/ variety or basic cleanliness, we need to learn what we realistically can from truck stops to improve the MSA experience.



Thank you!



www.illuminas.com

[Illuminas | LinkedIn](#)

