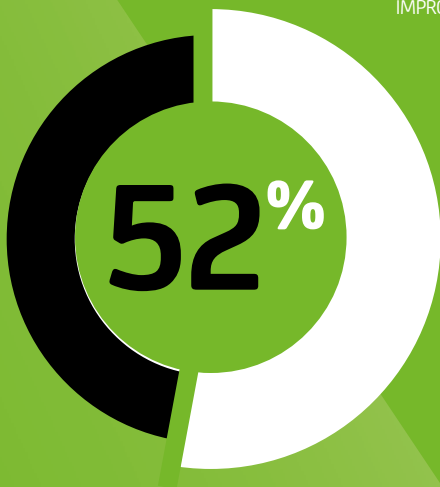


MAINTENANCE TODAY

The introduction of telematics is demanding new skills from fleet managers, such as data interpretation and enhanced computer literacy. The combination of telematics and variable servicing is making maintenance far more cost effective, with problems being quickly identified and the potential for parts to be replaced only when necessary.

OF FLEET MANAGERS/
DECISION-MAKERS THINK
AUTONOMOUS CARS WILL
IMPROVE VEHICLE EFFICIENCY



In some ways, identifying a requirement for maintenance has never been easier. Over the past decade, technology has evolved to automatically detect faults such as low oil levels, blown light bulbs or low tyre pressures.

Regular vehicle checks and risk assessments remain important though, as technology still cannot tell whether tyres are damaged and/or worn, and windscreen wipers need replacing, for example.

Although vehicles can detect many faults they cannot fix them, so it is important to remind drivers of their responsibility to act upon dashboard warnings. This includes topping up Ad Blue in the majority of new diesel engines, as the vehicle will not re-start once it has run out. These responsibilities should be made clear in driver policies.

VARIABLE SERVICING

Traditional or 'fixed' servicing requires the vehicle to be taken off the road for oil changes and parts replacements after a fixed period of time or number of miles. In-engine sensors now allow for 'variable' servicing, where the car detects when parts need to be replaced or when the oil needs to be changed, for example.

Variable servicing may reduce the frequency of services for careful and/or short-distance drivers, and ensures that parts are only replaced when absolutely necessary. However, variable servicing relies on drivers reacting to the service count downs and warning information on their dashboard – failing to take the vehicle in for servicing promptly could invalidate the manufacturer warranty or leasing agreement.

Variable servicing could also mean taking the vehicle off the road more often, sometimes at short notice, as and when parts wear out. Overall maintenance costs may be reduced, but the cost of hiring vehicle replacements may be higher. In some cases, servicing all components at once after a fixed period may still be more convenient.

CALL TO ACTION

- Drivers should be reminded to carry out simple procedures such as checking tyre pressures and topping up the windscreen wash, and of the need to regularly perform these checks.
- An organisation's driver policy document should include the need for drivers to act upon dashboard warning messages, for example by topping up the oil or arranging for the vehicle to be serviced.
- An organisation should consider whether installing telematics will reduce maintenance costs. This can only be achieved if the telematics data is being interpreted and acted upon, with drivers trained to avoid wasteful or unsafe driving habits.

MAINTENANCE TOMORROW

The move towards increased automation of maintenance procedures is set to continue as vehicles more effectively detect problems with parts before they break. Such 'preventive maintenance' should in theory result in fewer breakdowns. With technologies improving and the use of electric vehicles becoming more widespread, organisations will also be able to benefit from the lower maintenance costs typically associated with fully electric drivetrains.

As new technologies are introduced, an organisation's driving policy will need to be regularly reviewed. For example, some cars are starting to be fitted with an 'eco' mode that provides better fuel efficiency. If an organisation is paying a vehicle's fuel use in full, use of the 'eco' mode should be made obligatory.

The policy should also make clear that personal modifications to the vehicle, such as engine remapping, are not permitted unless it is with the agreement of the organisation and the relevant leasing company. Some fleet operators are already remapping engines for fuel efficiency reasons, such as installing rev limiters, supporting the actions of nearly 1 in 5 of the organisations in our survey.



OF BUSINESSES ARE LIKELY TO INTRODUCE DEVICES ON VEHICLES TO RESTRICT MAXIMUM REVS ON VEHICLES IN THE NEXT TWO YEARS



OF BUSINESSES ARE LIKELY TO RESTRICT THE MAXIMUM SPEED OF THEIR VEHICLES IN THE NEXT TWO YEARS

ELECTRIC VERSUS PETROL/DIESEL

The popularity of electric vehicles within business fleets is likely to grow in coming years despite their initial purchase or leasing costs being higher than traditional petrol or diesel models. This will mainly be down to tax incentives, but the greatly reduced number of moving parts and simpler design of electric vehicles means that organisations can also benefit from reduced maintenance costs. When combined, these make the electric vehicles' whole lifetime cost attractive.

PREVENTIVE MAINTENANCE

As telematics becomes ever more refined and integrated into every part of the vehicle, early warnings could allow a part to be replaced before it goes wrong, thus preventing serious damage to the engine. A number of manufacturers have already brought this technology in and as its use becomes more widespread, this preventive maintenance should reduce the time fleet vehicles are off the road. As with variable servicing, however, this could also result in more frequent interventions.

The amount of data generated by vehicles will continue to grow, with servicing data being circulated between vehicle owners, garages, manufacturers and fleet managers. Likewise, car manufacturers may start to share telematics data with leasing firms, so organisations can expect a more accurate idea of the wear and tear associated with different vehicles.

CALL TO ACTION

- Organisations should consider what their fleet needs will be in the future. That will direct the make-up of the future fleet and determine whether fully electric vehicles can be incorporated to enable the organisation to benefit from maintenance and tax savings, on top of providing environmental benefits.

- Driver policies should be modified to take into account new technologies, such as prohibiting any unauthorised modifications, for example engine remapping.
- With technology reducing a lot of the traditional fleet administration, the role of the fleet manager will change. Skills will be focussed on mobility management and interpreting data to deliver cost savings.