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Urban Driving Guide

Freight Guidance

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Introduction

Urban areas are some of the most stressful places that a professional heavy goods driver will face whilst driving. The idea of using unknown routes through built up areas, negotiating any number of traffic lanes, junctions and avoiding traffic related hazards will increase stress levels. In urban areas, the number of vulnerable road users is greatly increased. When driving in an urban area, be mindful of the vulnerability of other road users who are not aware of a truck's manoeuvring requirements and blind spots.

By following the simple steps outlined in this Guide, you can help safeguard your own safety and that of other road users:

- check your vehicle daily
- plan your journey ahead
- adjust to local advisory routes
- drive safely
- good preparation prevents stress and reduces lost time

Remember: should you find yourself becoming stressed in an urban location, understand the symptoms of stress and potential road rage:

- anger
- shouting
- gesturing
- spiteful driving
- obsessing over one driver only
- forgetting all others

Remember: if you find yourself suffering from any of these, stop and take a few minutes to calm down.

How will this guide help you?

This guide is for you – the professional driver. It offers simple advice to help:

- check your vehicle is fit for purpose
- prepare for your journey into an urban area
- adjust to local conditions and direction
- minimise lost mileage
- save you and your employer time and money
- communicate with your customers

Reducing the risk of injury and improving safety for drivers and other road users is important for everyone, but having the right advice to hand is sometimes difficult when you are out on the road. (This Guide is only a summary of how to plan for a journey through or a delivery to an urban area.)

Town and city

Centres

The following section provides information on what to look out for while driving in the urban area. The following are common situations found on the road and provide information on how to deal with these circumstances.

Driving speed

Every road has a speed limit; these limits are a safety message designed to protect the public. When you enter an urban area, the speed limit should be clearly signposted. Where speeding leads to an accident that causes a personal injury or even worse a fatality to occur, not only does the law take a very strong standpoint on the action of the drivers involved, but also how would you feel as the driver responsible? Watch your speed. Speed enforcement cameras are not the only way of reporting speeding vehicles. Today's mobile phone culture means that the public is ready to report your actions. Remember:

- do not break the legal speed limit of the road on which you are travelling, or that imposed for your vehicle
- control your vehicle's momentum by good use of your braking systems
- give yourself plenty of space from the vehicle in front
- excessive speed wastes fuel and does not actually get the job done any quicker

Lane changing

When changing lane remember:

- mirror-signal-manoeuvre
- try to make your movements clear to other road users by good use of your indicators
- when changing lanes keep a constant smooth speed and steady steering input
- check for vulnerable road users such as pedestrians, motorcyclists and cyclists before making your manoeuvre
- by planning ahead and braking smoothly, gear changes will be reduced and fuel saved

Junctions

Be prepared to pull up short of traffic signals and stop lines. Give space to other large vehicles crossing the junction in front of you and remember to move slowly, clearly showing your turn through use of the indicators. Using your blind spot wing mirrors will help you monitor other road users during a turn. Use your judgement to track a wide movement without mounting the kerb or endangering other road users and road furniture.

Negotiating junctions

When turning a combination vehicle (articulated or drawbar) at a junction the trailer will disappear from your mirrors as the vehicle bends round the pivot point. Your vehicle size may mean that you need to take up more than one lane on a mini-roundabout. Be clear in your intentions on your approach to the give way line.

Roundabouts

Approach roundabouts at a low speed allowing you to bring the vehicle to a safe stop if necessary. Identify a safe gap in the traffic before moving onto the roundabout. Be careful driving tall vehicles or tankers. High speed, adverse road cambers and sharp turns may cause a rollover. Load security is severely tested on a roundabout, please use your indicators to clearly show which exit you intend to take. Keep your steering input smooth and the vehicle at a constant speed.

Heavy traffic

When moving along with traffic be controlled with your acceleration, braking and gear changes. A loaded heavy goods vehicle will not keep up with private cars under acceleration or braking, so do not try. Save your service brakes, where possible use your exhaust brake or retarder to help slow your vehicle.

Traffic and congestion

Heavy traffic requires the maximum concentration from the professional driver. You need to constantly check braking distances and watch all of your mirrors. By knowing what to look for and adapting to the situation you can reduce your stress level and maintain a high standard of driving. Control your use of the throttle and keep the engine revs inside the green band to reduce fuel consumption

Pinch points

Approach the location slowly and be prepared to defer to oncoming traffic until it is safe to proceed. Look ahead to judge whether your vehicle can pass safely through narrow gaps. Place your vehicle in a position that allows you to pass through safely. Know the width of your vehicle, do not guess.

Bridge weights

Be aware of weight restrictions as damage done by repeated HGV movements across a weak bridge may result in expensive repairs or even route closure. Know your vehicle's operating height and plan your route away from low bridges.

If you find yourself facing a low bridge, safely find a place to turn around and continue on your journey. Always report any bridge strikes. Most bridges will have a plate attached stating who to call in that situation. Modern HGV design means that their size is not always compatible with old town and city centres. Be careful when approaching these areas so you do not damage buildings or present a danger to pedestrians or cyclists.

Vehicle access

If you are concerned about making a turn get out and walk the route first. Check if there is a site report or a risk assessment to help you make the delivery in a safe manner. Take care not to mount kerbs or hit buildings. If there are obstacles that can be moved to make your access easier, ask a member of staff for help.

Route choice and navigation

Route planning

Planning your journey helps to choose the safest and most efficient route. Check the route on a map or SatNav to see if it is suitable for the length, width, height and weight of your vehicle. When planning a route through an urban area, where possible:

- stick to major routes
- take the most direct route possible
- try not to travel at peak rush hours
- avoid streets with low bridges and weight restrictions
- stay away from heavily congested junctions
- avoid pedestrian precincts and schools

Getting lost wastes time.

Satellite Navigation (SatNav)

If you use Satellite Navigation you should double check the route with a suitable map or atlas to ensure that your route is appropriate for your vehicle type. There are Satellite Navigation products designed for the professional truck driver. These can be programmed with your vehicle's height and weight. The software will then choose a suitable route avoiding obstacles on your route. Double check your SatNav route against a Truckers' Atlas or other approved information source.

If a Freight Quality Partnership (FQP) exists, it may have produced freight area maps that show preferred freight routes. These will aid your planning as they detail relevant retail or industrial areas and suitable routes.

Freight area maps

For more rural towns and villages, local street maps and guides are commonly available from petrol stations, post offices and local paper shops. If you are new to an area it may well be worth your time (and expense) picking up this type of map.

Local street mapping

Freight Routes exist to aid the professional driver through urban areas. They are marked by clear white on black signage. These are found in areas such as ports, shopping centres and industrial estates.

Freight route signage

Before setting off you should know where safe parking is located near your destination, in case you need to wait in a town or city before delivering. Be aware of this sign for approved lorry parks.

Finding a safe place to park

You will come across help such as route signs that will guide you along designated routes into and out of a particular town centre.

Using road signs to navigate

White on blue road signs are used for indicating directions when on a motorway. White on green signs are used to indicate Primary or A-class roads. Black on white road signs are used for general direction signs commonly for local routes within urban areas. Try to keep to the highest grade of road on the network, as this will help ensure that you remain on a route most appropriate for a large vehicle

Your best defence against getting lost or stuck in traffic is forward planning. Local radio is one of the best and most up to date tools for negotiating urban areas. You can tune your in-cab radio by using the Traffic Programme (TP) or Traffic Announcement (TA) button and choosing the 'Local Update' setting. This function will tune into local as well as national traffic reports.

Radio advice for the route ahead

Variable Message Signs (VMS) are used on Motorways and some other main roads to transfer short sharp messages to road users and provide accurate and up to date information on local traffic delays. It only takes a couple of seconds to take on board information, which may help you save hours on the road.

Point of delivery

The point of delivery can create many challenges. This section provides details of what information you the driver need before the point of delivery. It shows you how to interpret loading and parking restrictions and what you should consider before arrival. It also provides safety advice when parking at the kerbside. Read carefully any special instructions on your driver and delivery notes. Make sure you get all delivery notes signed by the customer.

Delivery and load documentation

You should plan the route and load the vehicle in the most efficient way to make your Deliveries. Think about which side of the vehicle is easiest to access the goods. If you need to use a tail-lift or crane, make sure you can operate the systems safely.

Use your load plan to schedule your deliveries efficiently, follow any special delivery instructions detailed on your documentation (where available):

- delivery notes and/or driver's notes
- the load plan
- site/location report
- load your vehicle last drop first, first drop last so you have easy access to the goods (if offloading from the rear of the vehicle)
- if you do not load your own vehicle, check in which order your deliveries have been loaded

Delay and lost mileage costs time, fuel and money!

Delivery, load plan, and location feedback

Make a note of any delivery problems and report back to your traffic office. If you visit a new location complete a site/location report (if available) to aid other drivers delivering to the same location in the future to avoid stress. Give feedback to your planners about issues with the suggested drop order – if you do not tell them, they will assume that the plan was acceptable. Do not let your fellow drivers suffer in the future, make sure you give feedback.

Pedestrian areas

Keep your speed down and turn on your lights, take your time passing so that your vehicle does not obstruct shop doors or pavements. Do not park on or near corners as this can result in overtaking by other vehicles that may have only limited sight of pedestrians. Modern vehicle engines are very quiet; a pedestrian might not hear you approach.

Delivering in built up areas

Try to find a safe and level space for your vehicle to stop. Do not leave your vehicle idling unnecessarily, where necessary use cones or barriers to help guide pallets or trolleys across pedestrian areas. Ask your customer to help you set up a safe place to offload your delivery.

In the city centre, parking may be at a premium. You must use your best judgement to find a safe place to stop and offload your vehicle. Tail lift operation can present a danger to pedestrians. Always put safety first. Look out for local delivery restrictions shown on signs in addition, lamp posts. These will provide you with information on when and if you can deliver in this location.

Delivery restrictions may also be for whole areas of a town or city, such as a low emission zone charge area. Make sure you know what to expect on your journey. Loading Bays may be marked on the road surface, look for one, which fits your size and type of vehicle.

Delivery restrictions

Be aware of bus lane operating times Look for preferred delivery times and local restrictions. Look out for steep road camber when operating close to the kerb. Road markings are still enforceable if your vehicle overhangs the end of the bay.

Onboard systems, cranes and forklifts

Look out for overhead cables and height restrictions if operating hook loaders, loading cranes or tippers. Use footplates under crane legs or landing gear to avoid damage to pavements, car parks or road surfaces. Use safety equipment, cones, tape, barriers, or signs to keep the public out of your working area. If working across a pavement ensure that, you have good visibility. Remember that hoses are a trip hazard, and should be signed as such. When moving roll-cages keep looking around you to spot potential hazards.

Is your vehicle fit for purpose?

Urban areas are particularly taxing on a driver's concentration. It is equally as hard on the vehicle's controls and systems; multiple gear changes, repeated braking and accelerating, as well as turning sharply all place additional stress on the components of your vehicle.

Within this section, you will find information on how to check over your vehicle. In addition, advice is provided on what to look out for and why these checks are so important for your own safety and the safety of other road users.

Defects or problems should always be recorded, reported and if necessary repaired. The Vehicle and Operator Services Agency (VOSA) has the right to stop the vehicle at the roadside, carry out spot checks and issue prohibition notices if necessary.

Vehicle checks should be carried out before starting any journey. These should be part of your every day responsibilities as a professional driver. Your vehicle walk-round should be done before each journey. You, the driver, are legally responsible for:

Safety checks

- checking the vehicle is roadworthy
- ensuring that all equipment is present and serviceable
- not driving the vehicle if major faults are present.
- when you start your shift, test your brakes before pulling onto the public highway. Check your brakes before every journey

Brakes

- charge up your air tanks and turn off the engine
- listen for leaks in hoses and brake components
- monitor your air tank readouts on the dashboard
- before leaving your rest area or yard, test your brakes
- sympathetic use of service brakes ensures they last longer, give better performance and save you money

Tyres

- urban driving places extra strain on tyres through increased scrub in tight turns, the risk of 'kerbing' and damage to side walls through potholes and manhole covers
- inspect dual tyres for even wear
- look for damage and cracks
- remove debris trapped between twin tyres
- replace worn or damaged tyres immediately
- flat spots can indicate a locking brake
- regular tyre pressure checks ensure that your vehicle is operating at peak performance, saving you fuel and money

Wheel alignment

Urban driving and kerbside delivery increases the risk of knocking wheels out of alignment through scrubbing against kerbstones and slow speed manoeuvring. The condition of your tyres is your earliest sign of problems with wheel alignment.

Tyres which have scrubbed on the shoulder may be an indication of a wheel, which is out of alignment. The added 'drag' on the tarmac will typically wear the suspension and steering components. When driving in an urban environment any number of dangers may present themselves to you, the driver. To ensure that your windscreen stays clear.

Windscreen and windows

Regularly clean the glass on all cab windows. Do not cover air vents with paperwork and clothing. Save fuel by using your night heater instead of engine idling to demist your cab before starting a shift. A heavy truck engine at idle uses half a gallon of fuel per hour.

Mirrors

Before starting your journey make sure your wing mirrors are correctly positioned so that you can see all around the vehicle. To ensure the best all round view of the vehicle and performance from your wing mirrors; wipe clean your mirrors before every journey.

Load safety

If your vehicle has a sheeted load, take the opportunity to stop during the journey and check your vehicle. Make sure there are no loose lashings, which may break loose and endanger other road users and pedestrians. Where the weather may be bad or your load is over normal width or length use extra straps and chains to keep your load safe.



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