

Haulage industry delivers stinging criticism of new govt plans to ease driver shortage

A haulage industry body has rounded on the latest government plans to help ease the shortage of drivers – still estimated at 100,000 and delivering disruption across the economy as a result.

Ministers including Transport Secretary Grant Shapps wrote an open letter, published via their Twitter accounts, to insist they understood the severity of the crisis and thanked the sector for its efforts to keep the nation supplied.

Almost a fortnight after [restrictions on drivers' working hours were relaxed](#), a consultation was launched on proposals to streamline the application process for drivers seeking heavy goods vehicle (HGV) licences, increase the number of driving tests, help improve working conditions, and cut the cost of training.

Today, [@theresecoffey @DWP](#), George Eustice [@DefraGovUK](#) and I have written an open letter to the road haulage industry setting out a package of measures to help it tackle the HGV driver shortage.

This Gov is listening & doing what we can to support during this challenging time. pic.twitter.com/fiJ8xzy5cM

– Rt Hon Grant Shapps MP (@grantshapps) [July 20, 2021](#)

Other proposals included giving drivers more official parking spaces and boosting standards of lorry parks to aid retention.

“The driver shortage is well documented and its impacts on the wider economy are becoming more evident,” the ministers wrote.

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But they again refused to bow to demands from the Road Haulage Association (RHA) for temporary access to drivers from EU nations.

The [COVID-19](#) pandemic prompted many foreign workers to return home during lockdown, never to return.

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A slew of businesses have reported disruption to the movement of goods and the RHA has warned of a risk to supplies at supermarkets – an industry already struggling with staffing issues because of current [isolation rules](#).

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RHA chief executive Richard Burnett said of the latest government announcements: “This is a step in the right direction long-term, but it doesn't address the critical short-term issues we're facing.

“The problem is immediate, and we need to have access to drivers from overseas on short-term visas.

“The idea to simplify training and speed up testing is welcome; along with encouraging recruitment it will only improve things in a year or two's time.”

Mr Shapps said: “I understand the challenges faced by drivers and operators right now and while longer-term solutions must be led first and foremost by industry leaders, today we are saying this government is here to help.

“This set of measures will kickstart that help, easing pressure on the sector as we work together to attract new drivers, improve conditions and ensure the industry’s future is a prosperous one.”