

Together in electric dreams

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In order to move towards net zero carbon emissions, more and more companies are looking at electrifying their fleets. A competitive spirit emerges amongst food retailers on the road to transport sustainability.



Ben Sillitoe,
Founder and Editor of Green Retail World

UK supermarket chain Asda said in July that its fleet of staff vehicles will comprise only electric company cars by 2025, as the retailer accelerated its sustainable transport plans amid the environmental awakening taking place in the world of commerce. The grocer's switch away from diesel and petrol to electric is expected to

remove 2,411 tonnes of CO2 from its operations over the next four years – all important when considering the commitment of individual businesses and the whole UK to net zero carbon emissions by 2050, in line with the Paris Accord climate goals.

The move is driven from within too, with Asda saying the change comes after 85% of its workforce who opted for a company car as part of their benefits package chose to go electric. Petrol and diesel vehicles will be off Asda's fleet by June 2025 – five years before the UK government's general ban on new petrol and diesel vehicles comes into force – in evidence the retailer is taking this particular transportation policy very seriously indeed.

Build back better

I'm not one for government slogans in general, but the 'build back better' mantra that has gained traction among politicians following the easing of pandemic lockdown measures in the UK is one I support. Particularly, the push for a greener economy within that wider call to action. And it appears many retailers are on board with it too, highlighted by their propensity in recent months to kick start new environmental drives, embed more eco-conscious processes into operations, and appoint dedicated directors of sustainability strategy.

From a transportation perspective, the big grocers operate the largest distribution fleets – and they are all battling to make their collection of vehicles more sustainable, which would make a significant difference to retail's overall impact on the environment as it moves goods from A to B. Companies are acknowledging the seriousness of the climate crisis, which is motivating them into action. However, it seems the UK's grocers' perennial competitive spirit is also a factor in bringing about change.

Other retailers

Tesco is aiming to fully electrify its home delivery fleet for its dotcom business by 2028. Currently, the UK's largest retailer operates just over 5,000 vehicles, of which only a small percentage are electric-powered. Co-op procured its first electric vehicles for online home delivery, last December, and aims to replace its fleet of fossil-fuel powered home delivery vans with electric alternatives by 2025. Sainsbury's, meanwhile, claims to be the first UK grocer to introduce fully electric refrigerated trucks to its delivery fleet, which it says do not emit carbon or particulate matter such as dust, dirt, soot or smoke into the air. In addition to its company car policy, Asda has also turned to electric transportation to ferry its click and collect orders from stores to pick-up points.

Electric avenue

At the turn of the millennium, the grocers were involved in a highly competitive race for space - as the number of supermarkets in the UK ballooned and different formats materialised. Now the race appears to be centred on who can electrify their transportation quickest.

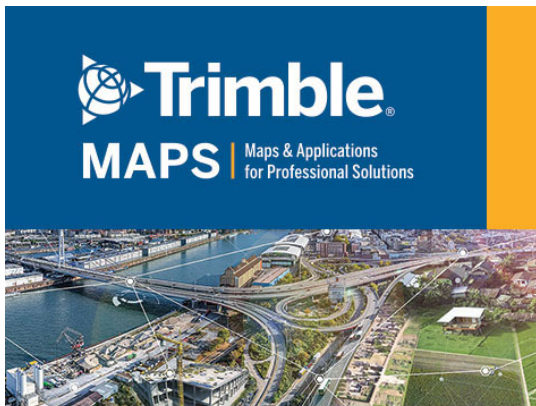
The good news is that with environmental benefits attached to such strategies, we're all victors in this particular battle. We'll then hope to see that competitive spirit continues in other areas of transportation strategy, such as warehouse and distribution efficiency, which will also go a long way to making retail a more sustainable industry.

Green Retail World is an online trade title monitoring best practice in greener retailing, and covers stories ranging from retailer recycling strategy to sustainable retail supply chain practice. Take a look at <https://greenretail.world/>

Challenges in transport management

Electrifying transportation leads to new challenges in transport management. “Accelerating the switch to electric goes beyond simply buying new vans more quickly. Final mile delivery fleets also need to adapt their fleet management systems to maintain operational efficiency while transitioning at speed”, says David Quin, Strategic Partnerships Director at Trimble MAPS.

“Although electric vehicles are generally well-suited to high density deliveries in an urban area, their introduction may require revised operational planning, route optimisation based on range constraints and the ability to include charging stops during a working day.”



For more information go to:
maps.trimble.com

Manhattan Partner Trimble MAPS provides cloud-based route optimisation, mapping and in-vehicle navigation technology for many of Europe’s leading parcel and home delivery fleets.

Need to rethink sustainability

The majority of global companies need to rethink the way they look at sustainability within their supply chain. “While companies that are moving fleets from petrol and diesel to electric are leading the way, many companies may not have private fleets, or the private fleets make up only a percentage of all of the freight that company is responsible for”, says Christian Piller, Vice President Research and Sustainability at Project44.

“There are three high-level challenges that must be solved prior to truly rethinking supply chain sustainability. The first is accurate and real-time fuel consumption, weight, and emissions data. The second challenge is decreasing inefficiencies that cause trucks to idle and pickup and delivery. And last but not least: companies need to create the ability for planning systems to contemplate emissions in addition to cost and lead time.”



Manhattan Partner Project44 connects, automates and provides visibility for shippers and third party logistics firms into key transportation processes to accelerate insights and shorten the time it takes to turn those insights into actions.

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