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Rural Driving Guide

Freight Guidance

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Introduction

Driving a Heavy Goods Vehicle (HGV) on minor roads in rural areas presents particular challenges to the professional lorry driver. Planning your route to safely travel through such areas and avoid getting stuck on inappropriate roads is very important. You need to know the size and weight of your vehicle and understand how your vehicle moves and reacts on different road surfaces. You will also have to adapt your driving style and speed to suit the road conditions.

It is also important to understand how your vehicle affects the surrounding environment. Rural towns and countryside life can easily be disturbed by the noise and vibration of large vehicles. By following the simple steps outlined in this Guide you can ensure your own safety and that of other road users.

This guide is only a summary of how to prepare and drive in rural areas – it is not comprehensive advice.

Route navigation

Unlike city streets and major roads, rural routes can change their nature suddenly in a short distance, often without much notice. What might look like a wide open and inviting route choice when leaving a major road may well be completely unsuitable for the size or weight of your vehicle.

In a rural area the shortest path shown on the map is not necessarily the best. You should find out as much about your route as possible before you depart. For timber operations you can access 'agreed route maps', these are available from the Forestry Commission website details are in the Appendix.

Planning tools

Use a specialist truckers' atlas or a suitable Satellite Navigation tool to pre-plan your route through a rural area. Plan to navigate around any obstacles (low or weak bridges, very steep routes and tight bends) that can't be negotiated safely.

Remember: do not over rely on Satellite Navigation – rural routes may have obstructions that are not marked on the software – always double check your route !

To prepare for rural operations consider:

- does your journey plan have accurate details of where you are expected to drive
- who has a copy of the journey plan and how can they contact you
- are you appropriately equipped and trained for working alone
- in the event of a breakdown or accident what is your company's procedure for reporting incidents
- can you make a phone call - if you can't make a phone call where is the closest location that you can get a signal for your mobile phone
- what time are you expected to return to your depot
- if parking overnight, did you report your location to another party?

Looking ahead

Whilst driving look out for useful signposts giving you early warning to divert around hazards.

Remember: don't ignore road signs - they are your best defence against getting stuck!

Operating on rural roads

It is essential that you understand how to safely drive your vehicle through rural areas. Your vehicle may handle differently along narrow undulating roads than when on a motorway or major road. Rural roads can also contain blind junctions and gates into fields. Other traffic can often appear with very little warning. This section of the Guide helps you to understand some of the basic information you need to know when operating in these circumstances.

Line of sight

Your line of sight is vitally important in order to spot junctions, oncoming traffic, warning signs and other obstructions on your route. Please remember:

- keep your windscreen, mirrors and windows clear of stickers, emblems and other unnecessary items
- control your speed around corners and when cresting hills
- give yourself space from other traffic ahead
- when approaching blind corners slow to a speed where you can stop safely if other vehicles approach
- don't assume the road is clear, other road users such as pedestrians, cyclists and horses may be travelling close to the verge

Vehicle length

Many rural roads have very tight corners around which it may be difficult to get your vehicle without straddling the verge or the opposite carriageway. Articulated and draw bar vehicles are particularly at risk from such problems. If you misjudge your turns, damage to both your vehicle and the road side can occur and may present a danger to other road users. Always:

- control your speed on approach to the corner
- know the length of your vehicle
- understand how your trailer or rear axle tracks behind the cab on sharp bends
- where necessary safely use all the road space to steer the vehicle around tight corners
- give consideration to other road users

Vehicle weight

Rural roads may not have the same strong build quality as motorways and trunk roads. Their wearing surface may be much thinner and easily damaged by the weight of heavy vehicles. Weight restrictions may appear on rural roads and bridges with very little warning, therefore make sure you have planned your route around these limits. Please consider:

- know the maximum gross vehicle weight (GVW) of your vehicle for every journey
- if necessary use a weighbridge to provide an accurate weight for your vehicle
- check your journey plan against the weight of your vehicle
- watch out for all warning signs showing restrictions ahead
- if diverting because of a weight restriction, find a safe place to turn your vehicle

Level crossings and grounding

There are many places where 'grounding' your vehicle is possible on rural routes. Rough roads, farm tracks, uneven road surfaces and level crossings all present dangers to your vehicle. Always:

- know your ground clearance before you depart
- make sure your landing legs and other equipment (tail-lifts, Hiab support legs, etc.) are fully retracted
- look ahead down the road and plan the safest path for your vehicle
- drive slowly on rough and undulating roads
- if necessary use 'air suspension' to pump up the vehicle to avoid striking the ground (remember to return it to level afterwards)

Traction and gradient

Rural roads carry different types of traffic. Agricultural tractors may deposit mud on the road surface making the road slippery to drive on. Be aware of the reduced grip and the need for longer braking distances where this occurs. Steep gradients on rural roads present extra dangers. You need momentum and grip to help the vehicle climb the hill but you also need to give consideration to other road users. Please remember to:

- look at the road surface condition and adjust your vehicle's speed accordingly
- when approaching a steep climb try to carry momentum into the gradient. This will reduce your chances of 'spinning out' the drive tyres on slippery surfaces
- if necessary use the differential lock (where fitted) to add traction to the drive axles
- on descents, balance the use of service and auxiliary brakes (exhaust, retarder) to ensure the service brakes stay cool and ready for use when really needed.

Vehicle height

Low and arched bridges should be well signposted and will indicate which part of the bridge is safest to pass under. Be aware that in rural areas it's unlikely that bridges will have automated height warning sensors. Always:

- control your speed on approach to the bridge, be prepared to stop and let other road users pass safely through
- for arched bridges try to stay in the middle of the highest part of the arch
- keep the vehicle in a straight line until the rear of it has safely cleared the bridge
- if you have to, find a safe place to turn around and navigate away from the bridge

Other obstacles at height

Small rural roads often have very little traffic. When a large HGV passes it may well be the tallest vehicle along that road for many months. Trees and hedgerows can grow over the road surface and may well change in height from one month to the next as snow, rain and seasonal growth weigh down the foliage. On these routes overhead power and telephone lines can also present a hazard to very large vehicles as high wind and poor weather can result in damage to poles and sagging cables.

Your impact on the rural environment

Heavy Goods Vehicles (HGVs) moving through rural areas can have a large impact on the environment through road noise, vibration and visual intrusion. HGVs can be seen and heard from a long distance away. Ask yourself how your vehicle affects other road users, the rural towns and villages you pass through, livestock in the fields and the lives of the people in the area?

Vulnerable road users

Your vehicle is much larger than most others on the road and some types of road users are particularly vulnerable. Look out for:

- agricultural machinery
- pedestrians
- cyclists
- horses
- horse drawn vehicles
- livestock, both on the road and the verge
- vulnerable road users

When approaching vulnerable road users slow your vehicle to an appropriate speed. When passing livestock, horses or horse drawn vehicles be mindful that animals can react unpredictably. When passing pedestrians or cyclists give them time and room to get clear of your vehicle. Ensure that the rear of your vehicle is safely past other road users before pulling back into your lane.

Noise, pollution and visual intrusion

At 105 decibels a fast moving HGV can sound as loud as a jackhammer from the kerbside. Think about the impact of your vehicle passing through rural areas. Rural communities can be more sensitive to HGV movement and you need to drive with consideration.

Intrusion

Please remember to:

- keep to the legal speed limit
- think of each farm or rural community as a potential customer for your business
- remember that your company livery may be on the side of your vehicle
- don't let your vehicle idle unnecessarily
- drive with consideration – don't over-rev your vehicle's engine and stamp on air brakes to make your presence felt

Remember: your vehicle may carry your company livery, drive safely and considerately and don't invite complaints from other road users.

Vibration and other damage

Ground impact from repeated axle movements over the road surface can result in vibrations through the ground well into neighbouring houses and buildings. On road/off road operation brings other potential for damage whilst driving in rural areas such as loose mud, loose chippings and debris striking roadside objects. Please remember:

- vibration and other damage
- control your speed over rough and undulating roads, vibrations can be felt a long way from the road surface
- in rural towns and villages be aware that repeated HGV movements cause vibration and other nuisance to residents
- remember if you have to operate off the main carriageway, remove foreign objects from your wheels and tyres afterwards
- vehicle vibration might be your first clue to damage – pull over and inspect your vehicle immediately

Communication and parking

Communication

Operating in rural areas can present problems for mobile phones, wireless laptops and other in-cab communication devices. Mobile phone and Satellite Navigation coverage can be poor in very hilly areas as their reception can be interrupted. Make sure that you are aware of areas with low strength mobile phone reception along your route. If you regularly rely on SatNav ensure that you have an appropriate map of the area as backup. When working alone make sure that you have the appropriate training to operate the systems and machinery onboard your vehicle.

Check in with your traffic office at regular intervals. Keep a list of emergency contact information in the cab. Ensure that you have read and understand Health and Safety information regarding your daily duties.

Rural parking

Some rural areas may not have secure lorry parking facilities. If you have to park away from home in a rural area try to make sure that you follow a few simple rules:

- is it safe to park there, look for street lighting, evidence of crime
- can you park with other vehicles, try to find safety in numbers
- is the surface you have parked on level and solid, don't get stuck on loose or muddy ground
- does your traffic office know where you have parked, improve security for both you and your vehicle
- if you are carrying goods for a third party is the parking location approved, you may be breaking your terms of carriage if you park in an unsecured location



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