

Low Bridge Ahead

A campaign to make drivers of high vehicles aware of the risks of approaching bridges has been launched.

According to figures from national transport agency Transport Scotland, bridge strikes, frequently caused by lack of driver awareness of bridge heights, is costing the public purse around £0.5 million a year.

Transport Minister Stewart Stevenson launched the 'Strike it Out' campaign at the annual industry TruckFest show in Edinburgh today.

Mr Stevenson said:

"Bridge strikes impact heavily on road users, both in terms of delays whilst an incident is being dealt with and later as repairs are carried out, often at substantial cost.

"While it is fortunate that to date there have been no serious injuries or death as a result of a bridge hit, it is important that for a small investment we can raise awareness of these risks and help provide advice to prevent bridge strikes happening in future.

"We are working with a number of industries, including road and freight hauliers, farming, ferries and ports to help communicate the message to drivers of high vehicles to check and plan their route before setting out and carefully consider bridge signs on approach."

The standard height for a bridge is 16 feet 6 inches (approx. 5 metres) however the majority of strikes occur on trunk road bridges above this height.

In Scotland at least ten road bridges are hit each year, at a danger to both the vehicle driver and the public, and a significant cost – in the region of £500,000 each year for

repairs alone. The most commonly hit road bridge is the Chartershall Bridge, crossing the M9, which has been struck 17 times causing it to now be closed, whilst the Challoch Rail Bridge (spanning the A75 at Dunragit) is the most frequently struck rail bridge in the UK, hit 18 times during 2009 and causing frequent closure of the A75.

Phil Flanders, Director Road Haulage Association (RHA) Scotland said:

“Whilst the number of bridge strikes compared to journeys made is very small they can have a very serious knock-on effect and the RHA fully supports the Transport Scotland campaign to increase awareness amongst drivers of high vehicles”

Chris MacRae, Head of Policy – Scotland, for the Freight Transport Association, said:

“FTA supports this initiative to raise awareness and provide routing information for vehicle operators. The consequences of bridge strikes for safety and network disruption are severe. We work with Network Rail and other authorities in this area and will be helping to distribute the leaflet produced by Transport Scotland as part of this campaign.

“A main cause of bridge strikes has been an over reliance from some drivers on their sat-navs, which is why FTA worked closely with industry to produce a lorry-friendly unit. It is hoped that this will help end those all too familiar stories of lorry drivers coming unstuck after using sat-nav designed for cars.”

The standard height for bridges is 5.03m (16 feet 6 inches). There are only five low road bridges and 15 low rail bridge crossings the Scottish trunk road network.

Bridge strike costs: Costs for repairs alone are estimated at £0.5 million per annum. This does not take into account costs for delays to road users from operations to clear the

aftermath of bridge strikes or during the repair works. Last year rail delays due to bridge strikes accumulated 143,932 minutes and affected 15,123 trains, with 973 part-cancelled and 330 cancelled across the UK.

Transport Scotland, the national transport agency for Scotland, is investing £21,000 in the Strike it Out campaign.

The Chartershall Bridge on the M9 near Stirling has over 5.03 metres clearance and is located immediately north of Junction 9, making it vulnerable to overheight vehicles joining the motorway at this point. A £2.5m scheme is under preparation to replace the bridge as it is now beyond repair. Other examples include the A726 Lindores Drive Footbridge in East Kilbride, which cost over £0.5 million to replace and the M8 Hillington Footbridge near Renfrew, which is estimated to cost over £1.2m to replace.

As part of the planned £15.6 million A75 Dunragit bypass the trunk road will no longer pass underneath the Challoch Rail bridge.

Drivers of over height vehicles are being asked to proactively plan their journeys to avoid bridges using the Freight Scotland / Traffic Scotland websites or helpline on 0800 028 1414.