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Sector in focus: connecting the UK's mass fleets

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Introduction

Fleet operations are critical to the UK economy, with the road freight logistics sector contributing £170 billion and employing over 8% of the nation's workforce. Furthermore, high-performing fleets are crucial to the seamless operation of various industries, including utility providers, roadside assistance services, and waste management companies.

Unfortunately, business confidence within fleets in the UK has dropped compared to previous years. This is because operators are facing higher operational costs and regulatory pressures to modernise their fleets so they can operate more sustainably. For example, fuel duties alone generated £24.3 billion for the UK Government in 2024. Facing these economic pressures, it's unsurprising that the logistics sector saw a slight decrease in the number of businesses operating in the sector towards the end of 2024, and many fleet businesses are looking for ways to drive efficiencies and reduce their costs.

Against this backdrop, Ericsson has conducted industry research among technology decision-makers in fleet operations to gain a deeper understanding of their challenges. Our research examined how poor connectivity impacts their operations and why enhancing connectivity and resilience is crucial for them to remain competitive.

Our findings show that managers of high-performing fleets understand the importance of high-speed connectivity within vehicles, as it allows them to gain more visibility into their operations, helping them optimise routes, reduce fuel consumption, and improve overall efficiency. Unfortunately, many are still facing significant downtime, which is leading to an increase in administrative work, and more concerningly, higher rates of customer complaints and damage to their reputation.

In this report, we examine the current state of fleet connectivity, the primary barriers to optimal performance, and how fleet managers can leverage innovative solutions to enhance overall resiliency and competitiveness.

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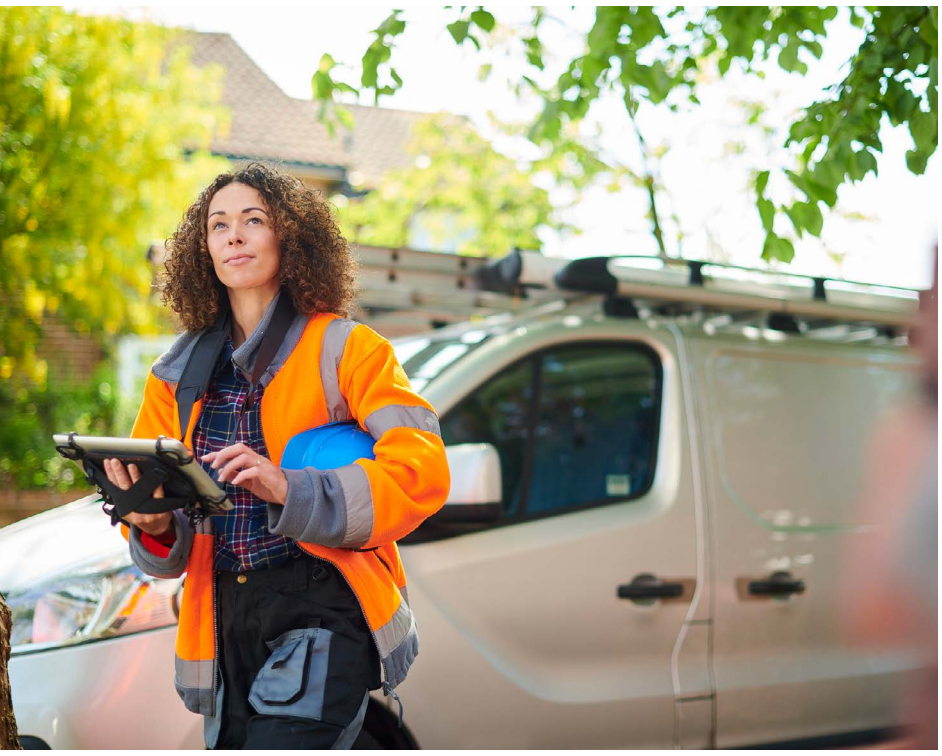
The state of fleet connectivity today

The importance of connectivity within fleets has been recognised for a long time. As early as 1920, the London Fire Brigade publicly demonstrated "wireless telephone" links from the site of a fire back to headquarters in under a minute—showing emergency-service connectivity in action. Following this, in January 1925, New Scotland Yard put radio-equipped "wireless vans" into daily use across London. Over the next 100 years, technology has continued to innovate further. With this innovation, the demands on commercial fleet connectivity have increased as more technology has been integrated into the network, making high-speed, reliable connectivity a critical operational asset for fleets.

Now, a connected vehicle is a powerful tool rather than just a mode of transport. It is able to provide connectivity for telemetry information, on-board cameras, and mobile devices like tablets which enable workers to access critical information while in the field. However, a third (33%) of fleet operators still rely on hotspots from their mobile devices or tablets to provide connectivity, which is simply not robust enough to meet modern day needs. Likewise, our research shows fleets experience an average uptime of just 75%, which equates to three to four days of downtime per month.

To overcome this challenge fleet operators should learn from the 53% of fleet managers who have adopted a Wireless WAN solution using dual-SIM or multi-network routers, which can provide the most reliable connectivity. For example, if one network doesn't cover the area the vehicle is operating in, then it can seamlessly switch to the secondary network, which may have more reliable coverage.

As enterprises continue to integrate technology, such as IoT devices and telematics to track vehicle performance or monitor goods in transport, and AI analytics for processing live fleet data, pressure on connectivity infrastructure is only going to increase. Decision makers need to learn from their peers and adopt solutions which can provide the necessary bandwidth, low latency, and back-up connectivity options to support their operations across urban, rural, and remote areas.



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Reassuringly, it appears many fleet enterprises are aware of these challenges, with 42% of C-Suite or strategy leaders now involved in the decision making for fleet connectivity. However, enterprises are overlooking a key source of information, with just 23% working with external consultants or managed service providers. These organisations can provide valuable guidance on which solutions are best suited to their needs. For example, utility fleets responsible for repairing infrastructure across different environments will likely require multi-SIM routers to enable them to access the best network in each area. Meanwhile, emergency services need to ensure security and compliance levels are met.

Consequences of poor performance

As vehicles move between warehouses, urban environments, and rural locations, it can be challenging to avoid dead zones, which 27% of fleet managers cite as a key challenge. Many vehicles have been in use for years, which is why 27% of enterprises struggle to find devices that are compatible with them, leading to poor connectivity.

Unfortunately, enterprises can no longer afford to ignore this problem. Poor connectivity has a direct impact on the bottom line, with fleet managers reporting unreliable connectivity has led to an increase in admin or manual work (34%), missed service level agreements or customer complaints (33%), and frustration and reduced morale among workers (32%). Another challenge is keeping trained staff, with 29% willing to consider alternative roles or employers if they face repeated unreliable connectivity, and 28% believe it hurts the employer's reputation.

Overcoming these challenges is not straightforward. Organisations are concerned about the high cost of connectivity (24%), security and compliance requirements (23%), and the complexity of software updates or system integration (23%).

If enterprises want to unlock next-generation connectivity, they require fleet managers to look for solutions that don't add workload to teams, are easy to install, and can adapt to any future demands placed on them. For example, by using cloud-based management tools, IT teams can monitor data usage and adjust plans as needed, thereby saving money by avoiding unnecessary data costs. Likewise, these tools can enable them to push out software updates to all routers simultaneously, ensuring they are protected against the latest threats without needing to manually update them individually.

How fleet managers can stay competitive

As connectivity continues to become increasingly vital to the efficient operation of fleets, the race is on to integrate even more capabilities to help stand out from the crowd and provide fleet managers with even greater visibility over their operations. For example, 31% of technology decision makers state that remote access to onboard devices, such as cameras or digital signage, is an important capability for them. This is followed by the ability to push security policy updates remotely (30%), secure data transfers to and from the corporate network (30%), and real-time location tracking (29%).

To meet these requirements, fleet managers need a solution which is resilient, flexible, and secure by design. In this scenario, 5G and cellular networks are the clear answer. By enabling real-time insights and remote control over fleet operations, 5G-driven visibility allows businesses to optimise efficiency, enhance security, and respond faster to issues—delivering a competitive edge through smarter, more agile decision-making.

These networks can be easily scaled up and down as needed, meaning enterprises aren't spending extra for services they don't need, and can handle the increase in data transfers due to their high bandwidth and low latency. Similarly, by integrating zero-trust principles, network managers can be confident that sensitive data is protected. Finally, by working with a carrier to provide network slicing, they can also ensure that there is always enough bandwidth available to support critical applications within their fleet, thereby reducing the likelihood of operations being interrupted.

However, it is essential to remember that many fleets operate in remote areas where cellular coverage is not always available. In these situations, hybrid connectivity solutions are essential, meaning routers can automatically switch over to alternative solutions, such as satellite. This creates a more resilient network, ensuring enterprises can continue to operate and provide a high quality of service to their customers.

Building resilience into mobile operations

Connectivity failures can be hugely disruptive for fleets. For logistics companies, it can mean customers can't get real-time insight into when a delivery will arrive, which can affect production timelines or result in their customers not receiving the products they need. Likewise, for roadside assistance, it can mean that engineers are unable to see where a part is in stock, leading to delays in repairs and frustration for clients.

This was a challenge that faced the AA, which needed a connectivity solution that could perform up to 25 meters from the vehicle. After installing the Ericsson Cradlepoint R1900 router, which included a primary SIM and a backup SIM, the company achieved 98.5% high-value connectivity. Such reliable connectivity ensures that patrols have real-time access to data analytics, allowing them to identify their next call-out location more quickly, query information, and improve emergency response and repair times on each job.

Unfortunately, many fleet operators are currently not taking advantage of business continuity measures, which can help them improve their network's overall resilience by minimising downtime, safeguarding productivity, and preserving customer trust. For example, less than half (46%) have a cloud backup, and only 41% have failover networks, both of which ensure that operations remain uninterrupted during outages or disruptions, protecting data integrity and maintaining critical connectivity.

At the same time, less than a quarter (23%) only sync data when vehicles return to the depot, and a worrying 17% still rely on manual processes, such as using USB drives and hard drives. This means managers could be examining data that is days or even weeks old, which prevents them from making informed decisions in real time.

Image courtesy of the AA

Encouragingly, enterprises recognise that change is necessary, with 39% planning to upgrade their mobile network technology to 5G, 37% planning to add in-vehicle connectivity or IoT systems, and 36% investing in satellite connectivity for remote operations. However, many are only planning to make these investments in the next two years, even though 5G solutions can be rolled out within 3-4 months and provide an immediate positive effect. Fleet managers should look to accelerate this process where possible, or risk being left behind by the competition.

Cellular routers with multi-carrier failover helps company improve uptime in service vans by nearly 10%

The AA's always-on connected fleet helps motorists get back on the road

Challenge

The AA, the UK's No. 1 roadside assistance provider, was facing critical connectivity challenges. The company's roadside technicians needed reliable access to their digital tools inside and outside their vans. The company was using a solution that was yielding unacceptably frequent downtime and that could only be managed in person, which was too inefficient.

Solution

The AA deployed an enterprise wireless solution built around Ericsson Cradlepoint routers and managed through Ericsson NetCloud Manager. This solution improved fleet vehicle uptime by leveraging multiple modems for seamless roaming between two cellular operators.

Benefits

With multi-carrier resiliency in place, The AA team saw its uptime increase by almost 10%.

"I couldn't ever imagine going back to how we had it previously, with SIM cards in phones and tablets. The connected van routers have been an absolute game changer for us," said Antony Hausdoerfer, group chief information officer, The AA.

NetCloud Manager helped The AA's IT team achieve substantial time savings. Using a cloud-based network management portal enables them to monitor and manage connectivity from anywhere, which is essential for a fleet of thousands of vehicles spread across the map.

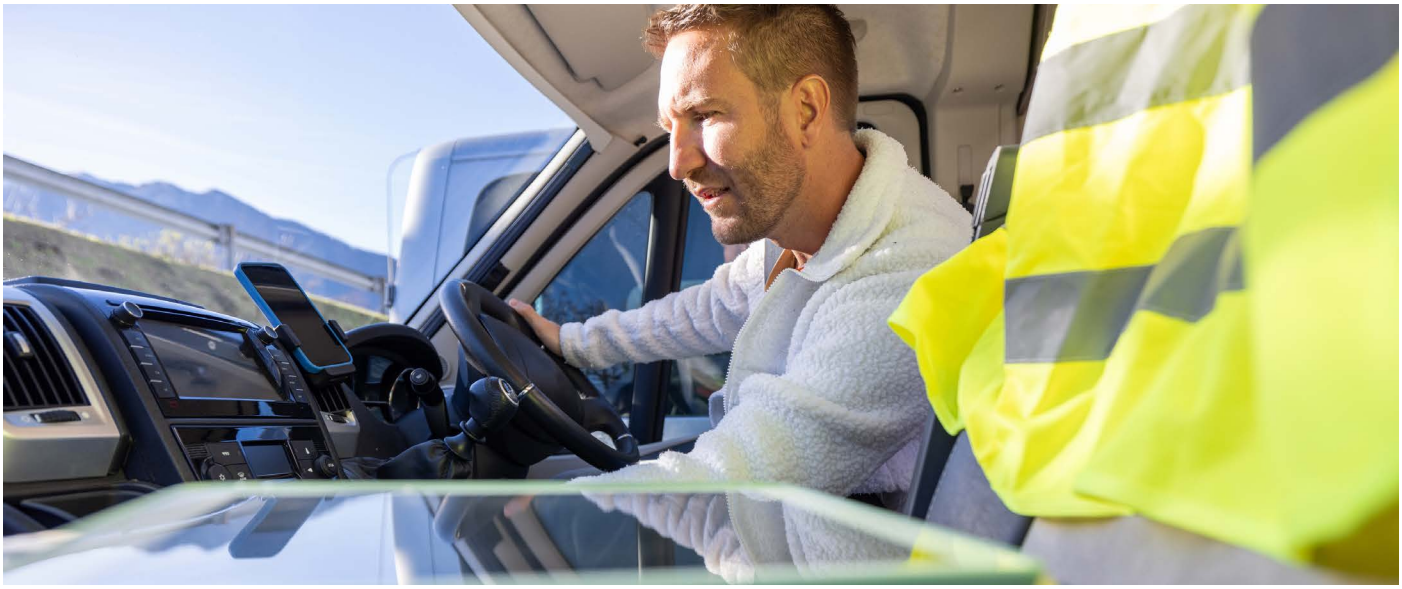
Opening the door to AI and next generation technologies

AI can greatly simplify the management of 5G networks for fleet operations by automating routine tasks, accelerating troubleshooting, and continuously optimizing connectivity. Agentic AI systems can detect anomalies and diagnose issues in real time, then coordinate corrective actions—such as rerouting traffic, updating configurations, or invoking specialist workflows— with minimal human intervention needed. AI can also adapt network policies dynamically: when congestion arises it can reprioritize traffic, so mission-critical vehicles and applications retain the necessary bandwidth. By reducing manual effort and improving responsiveness, AI helps fleets maintain more resilient, higher-performing 5G connectivity and lowers operational overhead.

Within fleet operations themselves, AI can help process the vast amounts of data collected from IoT devices and cameras and identify areas where savings can be made. For instance, if a delivery van is only half full, it could combine it with other deliveries to avoid unnecessary travel. Similarly, it can use real-time traffic, weather, delivery windows, driver availability, and vehicle constraints to plan efficient routes and assignments. The result is reduced fuel use, faster deliveries, better utilization of drivers and vehicles, and improved on-time performance. AI models can also be used to analyze vehicle telemetry, sensor data, and historical repair records to predict component failures before they occur. This enables proactive servicing, reduces unplanned downtime, lowers repair costs, and extends asset life by scheduling maintenance at optimal times. Additionally, AI and Computer Vision can be used to process in-cab video and sensor feeds to detect risky behaviors (distracted driving, fatigue, harsh braking) and road hazards. AI can then deliver real-time alerts which reduce accident rates and insurance costs.

Unsurprisingly, the potential of these use cases has led to half of fleet managers already using AI analytics within their fleet operations, with another 40% planning to implement it in the near future.

To ensure fleet managers get the maximum value out of this new technology, investment must go hand in hand with 5G. These networks are the only ones that can provide the high bandwidth and low latency needed to handle the increasing amount of data that will be ingested and produced by technologies like AI.



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Conclusion

Advanced connectivity within fleets is no longer just a technological decision but also one that is critical for operational performance. As fleets continue to face pressure from mounting costs and regulatory requirements, they will need to adopt next generation technology to remain competitive. Cellular connectivity is the necessary foundation for these new tools, which can improve customer experience and improve the overall efficiency of the entire fleet.

By investing in these technologies, fleet managers can be confident they will have the necessary resiliency, flexibility and future proofness to respond to almost any challenge. It will also enable them to unlock new revenue streams and retain key staff.

Methodology

The research was conducted by Opinion Matters, among a sample of 400 UK, Channel Islands & Republic of Ireland-based fleet managers. The data was collected between 29.07.2025 and 11.08.2025.

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