



Stop the **buses of death!**

The spate of horror bus crashes this year on South African roads, which has left many citizens querying why so many people are dying on our roads, has also highlighted the need for greater implementation of fleet management solutions

Let's face it: our bus industry is getting some seriously bad press. Just take the recent *Carte Blanche* investigation into bus safety – which focused on a possible reduction in the speed limits applicable to buses, more stringent roadworthy tests, as well as the dangers of drowsiness amongst bus drivers – as an example.

It's clear that something needs to be done, and according to Gert Pretorius, managing director of MIX Telematics, that "something" is additional investments in fleet management solutions.

Pretorius says that these solutions are already well entrenched across the UK, Europe and the rest of the world. With an installed base totalling many thousands of

vehicles, MIX Telematics is a leading provider of fleet management solutions in the bus and coach sector.

One just needs to speak to someone like David Brown, managing director of Surface Transport – Transport for London, to appreciate the value of implementing such a solution.

"This is an initiative which all bus operators should look at. It helps drivers do their job, improves customer care and ultimately will save the company money. We thoroughly recommend it," says Brown.

Pretorius says commercial telematics solutions have proven themselves as tools for fundamentally changing the way fleets are managed.

"They are not potential changers, they are

proven changers. Telematics has the potential to fundamentally change the way in which fleets are managed. However, locally, the integration of telematics into fleet management has been far slower than in the rest of the world," says Pretorius.

Given the importance of on-time delivery and the high cost of fuel, and knowing exactly where vehicles are and monitoring their drivers, seem like definite advantages in an industry where profit margins are habitually low. For a fleet manager, vital information about a vehicle trip can greatly assist in the planning and managing of fleet operations.

Perhaps one of the greatest advantages of telematics to fleet operators is the improved security it provides.



"Fleet management solutions, designed specifically for this sector, can substantially reduce accident rates; drive improvements in fuel economy and CO₂ emissions, lower maintenance costs and enhance the overall passenger experience and safety," says Pretorius.

Few operators really appreciate the significant impact driver behaviour has on operating expenses. The in-cab display from MIX Telematics provides an ideal solution. Conveniently located on the dashboard, it rates driver performance according to five key areas, including harsh acceleration, harsh braking, excessive idling, over-revving and speeding. "The beauty of this feature is that it acts like a permanent in-cab trainer providing

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the driver with continuous feedback that helps him to correct his driving immediately," says Pretorius.

This, in turn, is linked to the FM Communicator – MIX Telematics' flagship onboard computer – that records all driver behaviour and rates this in a report. Information about the improvement in a company's fleet can be viewed in real-time from any internet-ready PC. One will be forwarded a dashboard of measures and reports.

MIX Telematics is one of the first companies to be able to "plug" directly into the CANbus fitted to buses.

"Through telematics we can minimise unnecessary expenses that impact on a company's bottom line. This allows operators to manage their fleets in such a way that they can achieve fuel consumption savings of up to 15% in six to 12 months. It also reduces wear and tear on vehicles and reduces accident rates," says Pretorius.

Fuel theft is always a concern for any fleet as it has such a huge influence on the bottom line. With the FM Communicator and the FM Tracer, when fuel disappears in large quantities the route of the vehicle can be monitored to check for any unauthorised stops where fuel could have been taken from the vehicle.

"By being able to connect directly to the CANbus of the vehicle, information can be accessed directly from the engine of the vehicle, which ensures far more effective fleet management. There are still companies that do not utilise telematics to build their fleet companies, but as the consumer is becoming more educated, the benefits and savings in the long term are becoming a necessity for any fleet," says Pretorius.

Ultimately, these improvements impact on improved safety and customer comfort too. At the end of the day, owners can make better-informed decisions when it comes to buying new vehicles and really benefit from substantial long-term value savings.

"We know companies are looking to get an optimum return on their investment and believe an investment of this nature will deliver that objective," concludes Pretorius. ■