

Emission data: The next critical criterion for purchasing of heavy road freight transport?

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The heavy road freight transport industry in Sweden is responsible for major emissions of greenhouse gases. By researching what environmental purchasing criteria some of the largest industries in Sweden use when buying freight transport, new findings have been made related to the potential use of emission data as an environmental purchasing criterion.

Most people are aware of environmental issues stemming from today's transport solutions. While cars and airplanes are part of the problem, heavy trucks account for just over 3 million tonne CO₂e (carbon dioxide equivalent) or approximately 7% of national greenhouse gas emissions. Freight transport is mainly bought by companies (not individuals), and environmental aspects have only been of limited importance historically – with no direct consideration of emission data. However, the situation is evolving. Many of the companies are now setting goals and strategies for reducing their climate impact. In addition, it is also becoming more popular for companies to calculate and report emissions deriving from transport to accommodate this.

The researchers were set to discover the forces impacting a potential future scenario of emission data becoming a purchasing criterion of heavy road freight transport. Two identified drivers (forces pushing for adoption) were the transport buyers' internal management and their own customers' demand for more environmentally friendly transportation. Simultaneously, a major problem for using emission data as a purchasing criterion is the current lack of standardization for the companies on how to calculate the emissions. The subject of how to do this in a standardized manner is still under development and for example the European Commission is currently working actively with an initiative called CountEmissions EU. Without clear and strict guidelines, comparing data from different transport sellers become worthless as it might be vastly misleading of actual environmental performance.

Earlier research has put the foundation and confirmed the importance of understanding the environmental perspective of purchasing of freight transport. However, this is the first-time emission data has been in focus specifically. With the purpose of examining the purchasing of heavy road freight transport in Sweden, the authors conducted interviews with the industries buying the largest share of transport services. The results represent the findings from 12 large companies in Sweden which buy or sell transport on a regular basis.

Given the growing trends for a more sustainable society, the study might prove to be of interest for both transport sellers looking to differentiate themselves from their competitors and the on-going development of new emission calculation standards.