CASE STUDY

Accelerating Decarbonisation of Wholesale HGV fleets: Insights from SWA & Renault Trucks EV Discovery Programme through Vertellus

A partnership between the **Scottish Wholesale Association, Renault Trucks,** and contract hire provider **Vertellus** is helping wholesalers take practical and measurable steps towards fleet decarbonisation. Through the **Vertellus EV Discovery Programme,** wholesalers can lease electric heavy goods vehicles (eHGVs) for twelve months - at a cost comparable to traditional diesel trucks.

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Operating in the Real World

This initiative gives businesses the chance to operate **18-tonne Renault Trucks E-Tech D eHGVs** in real world conditions in their fleet, working across different seasons, and evaluate their suitability for multi-drop food and drink deliveries. Participants can assess operational performance, cost implications, emissions impact and identify barriers and enablers for wider adoption.

This case study shares insights from two participants in the programme, **United Wholesale Scotland (UWS)** and **Creed Foodservice**, highlighting their motivations, experiences, and lessons learned.

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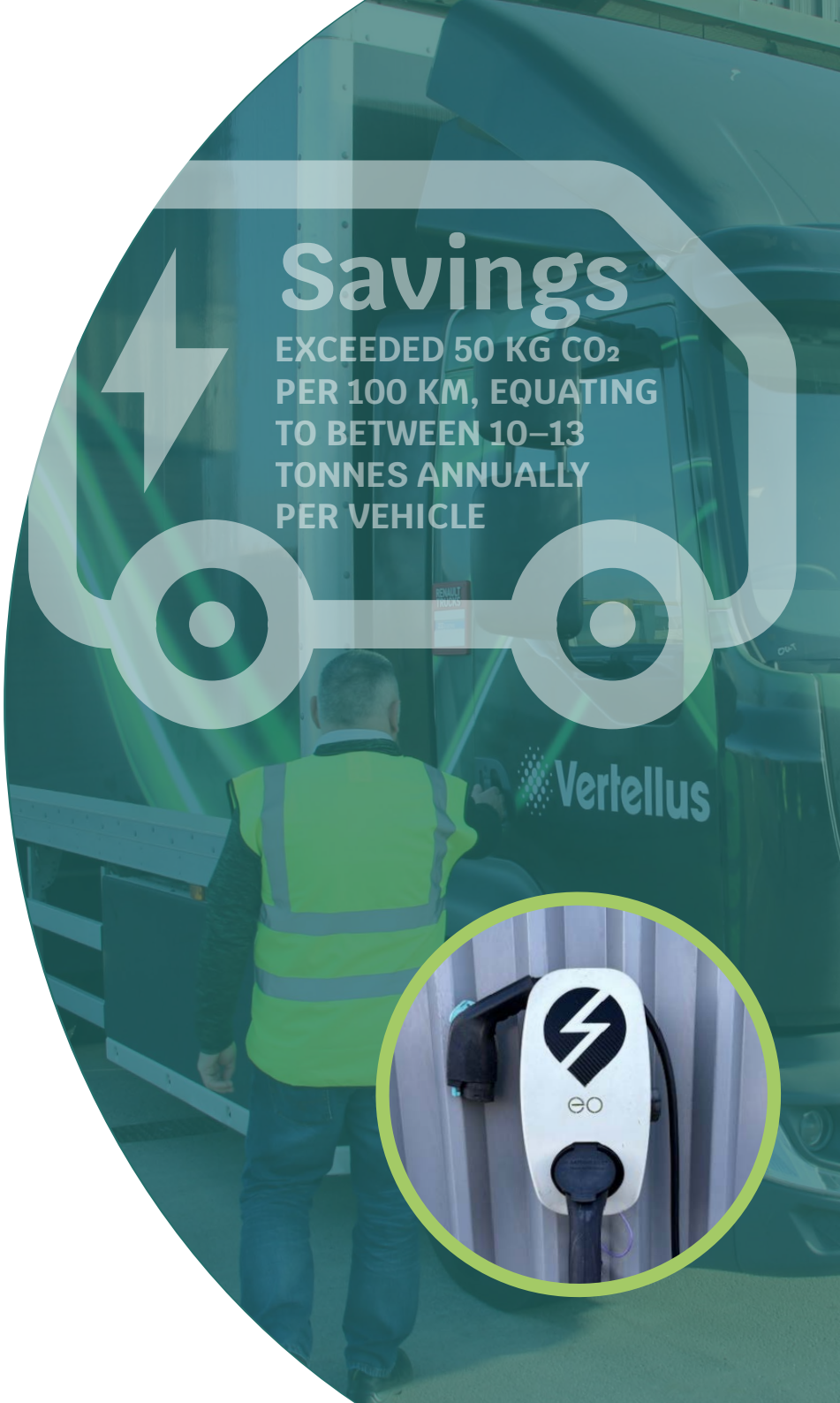
Key Findings

- Up to 95% of short and regional journeys are achievable using eHGVs across both operators' fleets based on real-world data.
- The eHGVs in service consistently matched or exceeded diesel performance in local multi-drop operations.
- Range is often underestimated in practice, with trial vehicles using just 36% of battery capacity on average, reflecting cautious deployment and clear headroom to increase utilisation as confidence improves.
- Emissions savings exceeded 50 kg CO_2 per 100 km, equating to 10–13 tonnes annually per vehicle.
- Depot charging enabled lower running costs than diesel.[1]
- Driver and customer feedback was positive, with confidence increasing through experience.
- Charging infrastructure and operational challenges remain, although more charging solutions are emerging rapidly across the UK.
- Planning and training are critical for both transport managers and drivers to enable successful deployment at scale.

[1] Excludes the initial installation cost of the charging equipment.



Colin Smith
Chief Executive
Scottish Wholesale Association

“Our goal is to be the driving force behind a well-connected, skilled, and sustainable wholesale food and drink supply chain.”

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Scottish Wholesale Association

As Scotland’s official wholesale trade association, our mission is to protect and advance our members and the sector, serving as the gateway to Scotland’s food and drink supply chain.

Our goal is to be the driving force behind a well-connected, skilled, and sustainable wholesale food and drink supply chain – supporting a sector equipped to modernise, grow, and deliver for businesses and communities across Scotland.

Vertellus

Vertellus is a specialist commercial vehicle contract hire provider, offering a fully managed solution designed to keep businesses moving. Built on the principles of expertise, partnership and sustainability, Vertellus works alongside customers to deliver reliable, efficient and future-ready fleet operations.

Supporting businesses of all sizes, Vertellus provides a flexible, end-to-end contract hire service that simplifies fleet management. From vehicle sourcing and maintenance to compliance and ongoing support, customers benefit from a single, trusted partner focused on maximising uptime, controlling costs and ensuring operational performance.

With a fleet of more than 2,000 vehicles across long haul, construction and distribution sectors, Vertellus offers comprehensive coverage across both HGV and LCV requirements, from 2.7 tonnes up to 44 tonnes.

Through its EV Discovery Programme, Vertellus also supports customers on their decarbonisation journey, with access to a growing range of fully electric vehicles and sustainable transport solutions.

Vertellus is backed by the strength and expertise of the Renault Trucks network, providing customers with the reassurance of manufacturer support and a nationwide footprint of more than 60 approved partner locations. This combination of scale, experience and practical support ensures customers have the confidence and capability to keep their fleets running efficiently, now and into the future.

Renault Trucks

Renault Trucks, the French truck manufacturer, has been providing professionals with transport solutions since 1894, from light commercial vehicles to heavy duty tractors. Committed to energy transition, Renault Trucks offers fuel efficient vehicles and a complete range of 100% electric trucks, with their operating life extended through a circular economy approach.

Renault Trucks is part of the Volvo Group, one of the world’s leading manufacturers of trucks, buses, construction equipment and industrial and marine engines. The group also provides complete financing and service solutions.

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United Wholesale Scotland

United Wholesale (Scotland) Ltd is Scotland's largest independent wholesale and cash and carry operator, supplying thousands of independent retailers with a wide range of food, drink, and household products.

Operating multiple depots across Scotland and beyond, the company combines distribution, retail support, and symbol store networks, including Day Today and USave, to help local businesses compete and grow within the convenience sector.

Creed Foodservice

Creed Foodservice, founded in 1972, is one of the UK's leading foodservice providers, with family values at its core. Supplying an extensive range of multi-temperature products, Creed supports the hospitality, care and education sectors nationwide through reliable, efficient distribution. Delivering over 600 orders a day, 6 days a week, Creed is known for its industry-leading service levels and customer support.

Committed to a more sustainable future, Creed is working towards achieving net zero emissions by 2040. As part of this journey, the company is actively exploring innovative solutions to reduce its environmental impact, including electric vehicle trials within the network, supporting a lower-emission approach to wholesale logistics while maintaining the high standards that customers rely on.

"Driving the EV has been great, a smooth and quiet drive compared to diesel. Acceleration is highly responsive for the vehicle size, even with a full load. Environmentally it adds a sense of purpose that I'm contributing to lower emissions."

Tim Coombes
Driver, Creed Foodservice

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Motivations

Research by the Scottish Wholesale Association shows that HGV fuel use accounts for 63.7% of the sector's Scope 1 emissions, making transport the largest contributor[2].

For both United Wholesale Scotland and Creed Foodservice, cutting transport-related emissions is a priority as they work towards ambitious environmental goals.

"Joining the EV Discovery Programme offered both companies an opportunity to accelerate their journey towards carbon neutrality by testing eHGVs in real-world operations, while gaining practical insights into electric vehicles in fleet operations."

Ylva Haglund
Head of Sustainability & Communications, Scottish Wholesale Association

[2] SWA - Decarbonising the Scottish Wholesale Sector

Steve Rich
Operations Director
Creed Foodservice

“Without doubt, the electric vehicle performs just as well, if not better than the diesel equivalent.”

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Performance, Range and Charging

Both Creed Foodservice and UWS report that the electric trucks have been reliable in operation, matching or exceeding diesel performance on local deliveries.

Creed Foodservice successfully operated its vehicle on multi-drop routes (12–15 drops per day within ~50 miles), with strong performance across chilled and frozen deliveries.

“Without doubt, the electric vehicle performs just as well, if not better than the diesel equivalent.” Creed Foodservice

Range - Real World Performance

While the majority of routes were complete at low-medium payloads throughout the trial, operational data shows vehicle range capability is often underestimated in practice:

- Vehicles regularly achieve 200–220 km per day, with potential for 280 km+ using newer battery configurations
- Real-world consumption (1.06 kWh/km) outperformed expected modelling (1.4 kWh/km)
- Only ~10% of operating days used more than 60% of available battery capacity

Route Suitability

Route analysis based on actual performance data shows that a high proportion of existing delivery routes currently using diesel trucks across both fleets can be supported by the practical operating range of the eHGVs.

For the purposes of this analysis, routes travelling up to 250km per day were considered to be within the expected operating range of a Renault Trucks E-Tech vehicle equipped with the latest battery technology. Actual fleet operating data was then analysed to assess how many existing diesel routes could potentially transition to electric operation.

While real-world range is influenced by factors such as payload, route profile, topography, driving style and energy regeneration, the findings provide a practical indication of where electric trucks could be deployed today and where additional planning or charging infrastructure may be required.

Creed Foodservice (fridge bodied vehicle):

- 81% of routes achievable within expected eHGV range
- 95% achievable based on actual performance data

United Wholesale Scotland:

- 96 – 100% of routes achievable within the box bodied vehicle range
- 84–96% of routes achievable within the fridge bodied vehicle range

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Charging Integration

The trial highlighted that overnight depot charging is sufficient for the majority of routes, supporting day-to-day operations without the need for public charging. Using the 60kW DC fast charger supplied through the Discovery Programme, vehicles can be charged from 0–100% in approximately 5 hours. Even at a lower charging rate of 40kW, a full charge can be achieved in around 8 hours, demonstrating that charging can be completed comfortably within a typical overnight depot dwell period.

While integrating charging into daily operations requires planning, this becomes easier with experience and operational data. The UK charging landscape is also evolving rapidly, with continued infrastructure expansion expected to support wider adoption of eHGVs over time.

Range anxiety and cautious deployment were observed in both fleets during the trial period. Vehicles were not always operated to their full range capability, and deliveries beyond local routes were sometimes treated as higher risk, particularly where access to en-route charging is uncertain.

“We can’t just send it out without thinking. The planning has to be really tight, and that’s not always practical in a busy transport environment.” United Wholesale Scotland

In practice, this reflects the need for greater confidence in route planning and vehicle capability, rather than a fundamental limitation of the vehicles themselves.

Integrating charging into daily routing represents a shift from diesel operations, particularly for wholesale models that rely on out-and-back routes within a single day. However, with structured planning and targeted training for both transport teams and drivers, depot-based charging can be integrated effectively and vehicle utilisation increased.

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Cost Comparison and Savings

Both operators found that running costs for electric HGVs are already cost-competitive, particularly when using depot-based charging.

United Wholesale Scotland stated that costs were approximately £10–£20 lower per 100 km than diesel.

Creed Foodservice reported an estimated annual saving of £6,630*.

While EV operations require more structured planning, this is quickly embedded into daily processes.

Planning and charging considerations are part of a new operating model, but one that is offset by lower energy costs, reduced maintenance, and greater cost predictability over time.

Figures are based on February 2026 prices. The cost savings are likely to be even greater following recent volatility in global energy markets driven by geopolitical tensions in the Middle East.

* Savings are based on 30,000 km driven per year and a diesel price of £1.40 per litre.

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Climate Change Emissions Impact

- UWS: **>50 kg CO_2 saved per 100 km** on operating days.
- Creed: **15.88 tonnes of CO_2 saved in the last 12 months** [3]

Results are promising; on the days in operation, each vehicle is cutting more than 50 kg of emissions per 100 km, compared to a diesel HGV.

Even though the overall fleet-wide impact is still modest, given that the vehicles are only used for local deliveries, and are not deployed every day, the Renault trucks in operation are already demonstrating the emission reduction that zero-emission HGVs could deliver.

Driver and Customer Feedback

Driver feedback has been largely positive, with many highlighting:

- Improved comfort
- Smoother driving experience
- Reduced noise

While some initial range anxiety exists, confidence increases as drivers gain experience and understand real-world vehicle capability.

Customer feedback has also been encouraging, with many recognising and valuing the move towards lower-emission deliveries.

At Creed Foodservice, the EV HGV has been met with enthusiasm from drivers.

“The drivers were excited about the arrival of the electric truck, with many conversations about ‘Is this the future?’ and ‘How will we best utilise the vehicle?’”

At United Wholesale Scotland, the response has been more mixed. Some drivers quickly embraced the quieter ride and smoother acceleration, describing the driving experience as more modern and comfortable. Others were more hesitant, with range anxiety emerging as a recurring theme.

The UWS team anticipates that confidence will grow naturally as the vehicle becomes embedded in day to day operations.

[3] Based on Renault Trucks Optifleet data May 2025–May 2026. “Tank-To-Wheel” process.

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“The drivers have mentioned to the customers that they are delivering on an electric truck. Some have taken the opportunity to come out and take a look, with very positive feedback.”

Customer Reactions

Customer reactions have been positive across both companies, with many appreciating the wholesalers’ efforts to adopt greener practices.

“Customers have noticed and said it’s great to see us trying to go greener.” United Wholesale Scotland

At Creed Foodservice, where the electric vehicle was showcased at the annual food festival and highlighted to customers on delivery routes, feedback has been especially strong—particularly from larger national accounts.

“The drivers have mentioned to the customers that they are delivering on an electric truck. Some have taken the opportunity to come out and take a look, with very positive feedback.”

Creed Foodservice emphasises that for most customers, reliable and punctual deliveries remain the top priority, but the trial shows electric HGVs can deliver this while adding the benefit of lower-emission transport.

Barriers to Wider EV Adoption in Wholesale and How They Are Being Addressed

Creed Foodservice and United Wholesale Scotland remain cautiously optimistic about expanding their electric HGV fleets, with the trial identifying several challenges.

Solutions to these challenges are already emerging:

- Range: increasing battery capacity is extending vehicle range to 280 km+
- Charging infrastructure: expanding rapidly across the UK, with new depot, public and shared charging models
- Driver confidence: improves significantly through training, planning and real-world use
- Vehicle specification: a wider range of models and bespoke configurations is now available, including refrigerated solutions

For operators, this means that barriers are not fixed constraints, but areas of active progress.

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As vehicle range improves and charging infrastructure becomes more widely available, both companies would look to expand electrification across a larger share of their fleets, while continuing to monitor the role of alternative fuels.

Security was also identified as a consideration. There are concerns that vehicles carrying stock may be more vulnerable when stationary at public charging locations for extended periods. Emerging models, such as secure shared depot charging at third-party sites, could help mitigate this risk.

Both wholesalers also highlighted the need for a wider choice of electric HGV models that meet their operational requirements, alongside further development of refrigerated units. Renault Trucks noted that the Discovery vehicles used in the trial are rental vehicles specified to cover a broad range of use cases, and that its electric range spans from vans through to 42-tonne tractor units. Bespoke vehicle specifications are also available for customers procuring their own vehicles, which may help address specific requirements such as refrigeration.

For Scottish operators in particular, United Wholesale Scotland noted that expanded charging provision beyond the Central Belt will be important before electric HGVs can fully replace diesel vehicles in day-to-day operations.

Jason Butler
Head of Operations
United Wholesale
(Scotland)

“Expanding charging infrastructure beyond Scotland’s Central Belt will be essential before electric HGVs can fully replace diesel vehicles in everyday operations.”

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“While investment in vehicles and charging infrastructure is essential, successful deployment at scale will also require investment in people. ”

Conclusion

Customer reactions have been positive across both companies, The Scottish Wholesale Association, Renault Trucks and Vertellus collaboration has given United Wholesale Scotland and Creed Foodservice a valuable opportunity to introduce electric HGVs to their fleets and test them under real operating conditions.

Their experiences clearly show that eHGVs can perform well on local, multi drop routes and deliver meaningful carbon savings. Driver and customer feedback has also been encouraging, with many responding positively to the quieter, modern driving experience and visible commitment to greener practices.

While full fleet electrification across the sector will require continued infrastructure and technology development, as well as access to training support, the findings clearly show that wholesalers can begin their transition today, starting with the routes that already work. While investment in vehicles and charging infrastructure is essential, successful deployment at scale will also require investment in people. Training transport managers, planners and drivers to work confidently with new technology will be critical to unlocking the full potential of eHGVs.

For operators looking to explore electrification with minimal risk, the 12-month EV Discovery Programme provides a straightforward and structured route to trialling electric HGVs in their own operation. The programme combines a fully operational 19T electric Box, Curtainsider or Fridge vehicle with charging infrastructure surveys and installation, route and operational assessment, performance monitoring, and expert guidance throughout the trial period. This enables businesses to understand vehicle performance, energy consumption and operational suitability using real-world fleet data before making longer-term investment decisions.

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Open to Other Operators

The EV Discovery Programme is open to other operators interested in assessing how electric HGVs could fit within their fleet. To find out more and to discuss a potential trial, see: **https://www.vertellus.co.uk/electric-vehicle-contract-hire/**

Contact: **info@vertellus.co.uk**, or on 01926 898 400

To learn more about SWA's work to support the transition to zero-emission vehicles, visit: **www.scottishwholesale.co.uk** or email us at: **info@scottishwholesale.co.uk**

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