



on the **MOVE**

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How much could a fuelcard save you?

by Bob Sturgess, managing director, Abbey Fuelcards



Bob Sturgess

If there is one thing that all architects, builders, contractors and developers have in common, it is the need to keep an eye on costs. Anything that impacts the bottom line has to be monitored, controlled and kept to a minimum. It is never easy, but can sometimes be straightforward: if you know all the possible suppliers of a given product or service, you can shop around.

Sometimes you have no choice and have to accept the inevitable, concentrating instead on something where there is more than one option. Paying the VAT man is just the most obvious example of this.

Too much choice can be just as frustrating: knowing that you could probably have found the commodity you are buying more cheaply just around the corner. The time it takes, however, can mean that just the act of shopping around wipes out any potential saving. The classic example is fuel. When you need to top up, you have no choice. In an unfamiliar area, the first forecourt you see may not be the cheapest locally, but it is not worth hunting around for a better deal — which may not even exist.

In a perfect world, you would always know where to find the cheapest fuel, no matter where in the country you might be. In fact, you would always know where to find fuel at a special discount price. The 'cherry on top' would be if you could fill the tank cheaply but delay paying for it, with a period of interest-free credit.

If you mention this to virtually any truck driver, they will look puzzled and ask why you do not have a fuelcard. Haulage companies, coach operators, taxi drivers and other high-mileage commercial users have enjoyed all of these 'perfect world' benefits, and more, for some years. Now, exactly the same fuelcard benefits are becoming more widely available. Virtually any company spending £500 or more each month on diesel or petrol, provided that it passes the usual credit checks, is likely to qualify for a fuelcard. So, what are fuelcards and could they offer you savings?

This is how it works. You apply for a fuelcard, requesting enough cards to give one to each of your drivers. With each card, you also receive a guide to all the sites where it may be used — as many as 1,400 or more



filling stations nationwide for some cards. The fuelcard provider then notifies you, typically at the same time every weekend, of its fixed national price for fuel for the coming week — normally around 2p to 3p less than pump prices. You should be able to receive your weekly notification via email, text or fax, as you prefer.

When your driver needs fuel, they quickly consult the guide and head for the nearest site. After filling up in the usual way, they present the fuelcard as they would any other type of card. That is all there is to it.

Each week, you receive a single invoice covering all of your vehicles, which is then paid automatically by direct debit. The interval between top-up and payment means that you could receive up to a fortnight of free credit for your fuel purchases. In addition, you should be able to request reports, customised to meet your needs, and ought to be able to access your account information 24/7 via the Internet. You should also be able to call the fuelcard provider with any questions regarding your account.



The obvious benefit is the day-after-day saving on fuel prices. Almost as important, there are indirect savings through the major reduction in your administrative workload: just a single invoice to manage, instead of a receipt for every fuel purchase. In addition, you gain from the account management services which enable you to monitor and control your fuel expenditure much more closely. A further advantage derives from the security gains: your fuelcard can only be used for authorised purchases and, being matched to either the driver or the vehicle, is of no value to a thief if stolen. So, would you qualify for a fuelcard and how do you go about getting one?

Firstly, you need to know the size of your monthly fuel bill. If you do not immediately know, ask whichever poor soul has the never-ending task of dealing with the pile of paper receipts from garages. Because it typically comprises a lot of relatively small bills, fuel can disappear among other costs and is rarely reported as a single company-wide cost item. It is quite common for a company to be spending more than it realises. If you are spending in the high hundreds of pounds monthly — or more — you could benefit from a fuelcard.

Your challenge is to find the right fuelcard to meet your needs. If you contact a provider which offers only one type of fuelcard, they will want to persuade you that they have the answer, regardless of your circumstances. No single fuelcard, though, can be the right answer for everyone. The trouble with fuel



cards is that people think of them as discount cards. Sometimes, this is right: a particular card's benefits can begin and end with cheaper fuel. Not all cards are the same, however, and one size does not fit all.



If most of your drivers spend their time on local journeys, a fuelcard network that focuses on motorway refuelling will probably not be ideal for you. It could be perfect, though, if you have a number of vehicles travelling up and down the motorways. So, the fuelcard provider you contact should want to know about your circumstances: do you have a couple of HGVs, a dozen small vans, a handful of pick-ups or a mixture? Remember to mention any company cars that you might also want to cover. Do all of your vehicles run on diesel, do you only need to buy petrol or do you have mixed usage?

The top-line benefit of any fuelcard will normally be cost savings at the pump, but look beyond this. A driver needs more than fuel to keep the wheels rolling. What about lubricants and, if you have one or more HGVs, AdBlue, for example? Some cards handle these, some do not. Make no assumptions: ask the question.

One major fuelcard benefit may not be immediately obvious: you are invoiced directly for fuel, rather than a driver paying for it and being reimbursed. This is important because of the European 6th Directive, which says that if your drivers buy fuel within the EU, you can reclaim the 17.5% VAT — if you have been invoiced directly for it. Choose the right 6th Directive-compliant fuel card and the administration is quick, simple and assured. Otherwise, prepare yourself to battle with bureaucracy, with the very real likelihood of wasting your time and losing your money.

Remember, a fuel card is supposed to save you money and management time. The fuel management headaches will linger, though, if you have problems keeping track of what you are spending. So, look into the service levels on offer. Can you access your up-to-date account details 24/7, via the Internet? If not, consider what that tells you about the provider. Whichever card you pick, you should assume that, sooner or later, you will want to talk to somebody. Find out whether you will be ringing a random anonymous voice in a call centre, or talking to the dedicated account manager who knows all about you. It makes a difference.



Look around at the various fuelcard options available and pick the one that best suits your particular circumstances. If you are unsure about anything, any reputable fuelcard provider will be able to answer all of your questions within a single telephone conversation. You should usually be able to apply for your chosen fuelcard at the same time, or on-line via the Internet, but remember that in either case — as you are applying for free credit — you will then be sent a standard application form which needs your signature. Think about the last time you applied for a credit card; it is much the same sort of process, only simpler and faster.



The important thing to bear in mind when considering fuelcards is that they are not all the same. So, ask about network size and scope, ask about security, ask about reporting options. Ask lots of questions. Pick a fuelcard — but don't pick just any card.

Apply For An Account Now:

To start saving now with an Abbey Fuelcard, simply call Abbey on 0845 055 1695, or

email: sales@abbey-fuelcards.co.uk or apply online: <http://www.abbey-fuelcards.co.uk/> .



About the author

Bob Sturgess has over 20 years experience in offering a range of on-the-road refuelling options and associated services to commercial road transport operators. He is the managing director and owner of Abbey Fuelcards, one of the few remaining totally independent fuel card providers. Established for more than 15 years, Abbey Fuelcards is a leading fuel solutions provider and authorised agent of Texaco, Shell, Diesel Direct and UK Fuels. Its growing range of fuel card services is used by HGV and LCV operators throughout Scotland, over a network that covers the entire UK and onwards across mainland Europe.

Abbey Fuelcards is the only fuel card company to offer both contract and 'pay as you go' payment options. It aims to stand out from the crowd through personal service via named, dedicated account managers, rather than the usual call centre. Innovative online tools have been developed for around-the-clock account access, cost control and card protection. Its card services incorporate sophisticated security features to help in preventing fraud and card misuse.

Customers are advised weekly by fax, email or text of the single nationwide fuel price for the coming week, typically 2p to 3p per litre below pump prices. A single VAT-compliant invoice, covering all users — whether for diesel or petrol — is issued weekly with payment made by direct debit.

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