

Vehicles as weapons: a threat and policy assessment for the UK vehicle rental sector

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Foreword by Gerry Keaney, Chief Executive of the BVRLA

Recent years have seen vehicle rental join a growing list of industry sectors to have been directly targeted by terrorists.

Vehicle as a weapon (VAW) attacks in Nice, Berlin, and closer to home in London have provided a brutal example of just how easy it is for extremists to misuse cars, vans and trucks, turning them into instruments of terror. As well as killing or maiming innocent people, these attacks are also carefully designed to have a wider impact on society, creating fear and anxiety and threatening business continuity.

As a result, the BVRLA and its members are increasingly working closely, and more frequently, with law enforcement organisations and policymakers. As an industry we are determined to improve many of our operational

procedures, including the way we train and communicate with staff, serve customers and manage our vehicular assets. We need policymakers and insurers to support us in this task by providing a regulatory and insurance environment that enables rental companies to continue providing the flexible, affordable mobility that they do today.

This work is still underway. We hope that this report will provide some useful context and insight into the threat we are facing and the ways this can be dealt with.

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Gerry Keaney, Chief Executive, BVRLA
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1. Executive Summary

Road transport remains the dominant form of transport in the UK, responsible for 90% of passenger traffic and 73% of domestic freight carried.

Vehicle rental is an integral part of this picture. In the UK the rental sector manages well over 500,000 cars, vans and trucks, operating from car club bays, city centres, suburbs, industrial estates, vehicle dealerships, ports, airports and railway stations.

UK residents make around 15.5 million rental transactions in this country each year, with 10.9 million involving cars and 4.6 million involving vans. Demand for vehicle rental continues to increase as the economy grows and more people and businesses adopt a 'pay-as-you-go' approach to road transport.

In recent years, there has been an increasing recognition amongst Western security and counter-terrorism experts of the challenge posed by terrorists targeting public spaces. Many of these attacks have involved the use of rental vehicles as weapons.

The UK rental sector believes that these attacks also pose a significant threat to its ability to provide customers with an affordable and convenient service.

It is determined to work with law enforcement organisations and policymakers in developing an effective and proportionate response to this challenge, exploring both operational and regulatory options.

1.1 The Threat

- Terrorists are increasingly relying on home-grown, 'low-tech', lone-agent attacks against public spaces in the West, because they are easier to operate under the radar of security services and can spread fear amongst civilian populations.
- The July 2016 truck attack in Nice – which killed 86 people and injured 434 – was a 'game changer' in terms of how terrorists perceived vehicle attacks as an effective modus operandi.
- Between March and June 2017, London saw three terror attacks in which individuals used rental vehicles and knives to kill and maim members of the public. Tourists, revellers, worshippers and a police officer were all targeted. A total of 14 innocent people lost their lives in the attacks, and almost 90 more were injured.
- Security services have acknowledged that the scale of the terrorist threat facing the UK is unprecedented in terms of the number of current investigations and the overall number of individuals of interest.
- Keeping track of, assessing and applying proportionate investigative resources to such a large number of individuals is an extremely challenging task for the intelligence and security community. It is essential that the vehicle rental industry plays its part in supporting this work.
- Operators must also address the threat posed by 'insiders' – terrorists that seek to use their employment as an opportunity to undertake an attack.



1.2 Recommendations

- The scale of the threat requires a comprehensive approach, in which the different parts of government and the UK rental sector work together, debate and develop overall strategies, and do their part in the ongoing fight against terrorism.
- The BVRLA supports the idea of a compulsory national accreditation scheme that would require all vehicle rental businesses to meet minimum standards in terms of their counter-terrorism security practices and procedures. Agreed by industry, government and law enforcement organisations, these standards should be accredited through existing industry-based structures, including the BVRLA's own Code of Conduct and governance regime.
- The vehicle rental industry will publicise the security actions it is undertaking and its collaboration with counter-terrorism agencies, thereby exploiting any 'early detection' or 'mission failure' anxieties of potential terrorists. This should include active participation in the national counter terrorism awareness campaign, 'ACT'.
- The vehicle rental industry will increase the amount of counter terrorism training and guidance that is available for all parts of the sector.
- The vehicle rental industry will work with policymakers and law enforcement organisations to develop more effective ways of sharing information and undertaking background checks.
- The vehicle rental industry will work with policymakers and law enforcement organisations in embracing new security technology and sharing best practice with other countries and industry sectors.
- The BVRLA will work with relevant law enforcement agencies and policymakers across Government to ensure that any new measures are carefully co-ordinated, easily understood and can be adopted enthusiastically across the full breadth of the UK vehicle rental industry.
- Policymakers should try to avoid any initiatives that cause undue disruption to businesses and citizens, or that introduce costs that cannot realistically be absorbed by operators. The UK vehicle rental industry is a key provider of flexible transport and reducing access to these affordable services, as well as causing wider economic harm, is a stated aim of international terror groups.
- Online and digital platforms are being used by terrorists to inspire vehicle attacks and provide guidance on effective tactics. This must stop. The BVRLA endorses efforts by the UK government, industry and other partners in the West to remove extremist content from the internet. This includes recent announcements by the Home Secretary around the development of new technology to automatically detect terrorist digital content. The Home Office says that these tools can be integrated into the upload process on any online platform, so that the majority of video propaganda is stopped before it ever reaches the internet.¹
- BVRLA members have a long and successful track record of managing the risks associated with their vehicles. Any new policy initiatives should build upon existing industry security, safety and asset management protocols and standards.
- The vehicle rental and leasing sector would like Government support in working with the insurance sector to provide a fair and workable way of pooling the risk associated with vehicle as a weapon terror attacks. This is vital in ensuring that vehicle rental operators can access affordable self-drive hire insurance cover.