

Retailer actions to reduce the environmental impacts of online shopping and last-mile deliveries

If carried out in an efficient, careful manner, online shopping has the potential to reduce total shopping-related transport activity and its associated environmental impacts including greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and local air pollution. Online shopping can also result in other environmental, social and health impacts related to packaging use and waste, international freight transport including air freight, computing and building energy use, and the behaviour and treatment of last-mile delivery personnel.

Improvements in existing online shopping and last-mile delivery strategies and operations require behaviour-change among the various stakeholders involved including retailers, delivery operators, consumers and policy makers. Online retailers have an important role to play in reducing the environmental and other negative impacts of online shopping and deliveries and there are many actions that can be taken to help achieve this which meet financial as well as environmental criteria. This set of actions for policy makers comes from SRF Policy Briefing 'Online Shopping and Last Mile Delivery' which is available at: <http://www.csrf.ac.uk/publication/future-mapping/>.

- **Devise sustainability and decarbonisation plans for online shopping and last-mile delivery operations** and implement schemes to monitor the impacts of these operations.
- **Offer 'green' checkout option to consolidate items into single consignments** (thereby achieving larger order sizes and fewer shipments by delaying delivery).
- **Reconsider returns policies**, as they can encourage consumers to over-order and return goods. **Specific issues include free returns, and sanctions for customers who often return large volumes.**
- **Group delivery time slots offered at checkout** based on inter-drop distances between them (and flag these up as a 'sustainable' delivery option).
- **Request alternative delivery address details from consumers** at checkout to help reduce the number of redeliveries required.
- **Obtain grid coordinates of the entrance point at delivery locations from customers** and make these available for use by the delivery operator (especially useful for commercial addresses).
- **Make online tools and product information available to help customers select the correct item** at the point of ordering (and thereby reduce the likelihood of returns).
- **Incentivise consumers to ensure returned items are in good condition** (to retain value and reselling potential).
- **Implement delivery charges that reflect operating and external costs** (including removal of 'free' delivery offers).
- **Reconsider same day and instant delivery service offerings** given their negative impacts.
- **Offer agnostic collection point services and locker bank networks well located for non-car access.**
- **Reconsider the sourcing strategy and despatch location of items sold**, as a minimum to make clear to customers any items that are delivered direct from overseas .
- **Develop and implement packaging reduction, reuse and recycling plans.**
- **Use vacant shop space for last-mile logistics services** (such as collection, returns, and showrooms/fitting rooms services).
- **Join sustainable last-mile delivery certification schemes** (if and when they exist).