

Disruption from the UK's truck driver shortage is expected to deepen with more goods failing to reach shelves on the high street, the head of Britain's largest logistics outsourcer has warned.

James Wroath, chief executive of Wincanton, said the extra strains were likely to hit the haulage industry as demand picks up ahead of the start of the Christmas shopping season on Black Friday at the end of November, The Financial Times reports.

"The number of drivers will take time to increase. That's not going to change anytime soon. At the moment, we're in the calm before the storm," he said. "The concern will be once the Black Friday and Christmas peaks come along."

The company, which traces its roots back to milk delivery and works with household names including Argos, Heineken and Unilever, has vacancies for about 600 drivers, or 12 per cent of the near 5,000 it employs.

A combination of Brexit, the pandemic, tax reforms and driving test backlogs has left the UK short of an estimated 100,000 hauliers to carry goods to the country's warehouses and retailers.

As a result, shortages of items from beer and milkshakes to building materials and furniture have emerged, while retailers have started to narrow the range of products they sell.

While noting that demand was difficult to predict this year, Wroath added that businesses most willing to pay more to secure haulage subcontractors would be least affected by the shortages.

"It will depend on what our customers are prepared to pay as the resources are squeezed. Supermarkets will be willing to pay more than most for subcontracting haulage," he said.