Tackling nitrogen dioxide in our towns and cities
A consultation – May 2017

As this magazine ‘went to press’, we received yet another consultation – the fifth one in a couple of weeks. The publication of this consultation follows a High Court ruling that in spite of the General Election the government must publish it, even though purdah* is in place.

*Purdah– The period leading up to an election, during which government departments generally refrain from making any new announcements.

We have not published the whole consultation, so we have chosen to publish as much as possible on the following pages.

This consultation sets out steps the UK Government, the Scottish Government, the Welsh Government and the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs in Northern Ireland propose to take to improve air quality in our towns and cities. Clean air is one of the most basic requirements of a healthy environment for us all to live, work and bring up families. Air quality has improved significantly over recent decades through action taken by successive governments and newer technologies but levels of pollution, particularly in urban centres, are still too high, and we need to take action now to bring them down more quickly.

Local authorities already have the powers to implement Clean Air Zones. This consultation proposes that, where the evidence shows persistent air quality exceedances, local authorities must develop plans to achieve compliance within the shortest time possible. Government will sign off these plans, ensuring that they are effective, fair and deliver air quality compliance.

We expect that implementation of Clean Air Zones will take up to three years, but Government will ensure the plans achieve compliance within the shortest time possible.

Air pollution can come from a range of different sources and activities. Many everyday activities such as industrial processes, farming, transport, generating energy and heating homes can have a detrimental effect on air quality. All of these need action but this consultation relates specifically to nitrogen dioxide (NO₂) pollution which is exceeding legal limits along specific roads in a number of urban areas. Diesel road vehicles are the main source, so the measures set out in this consultation largely relate to how we can reduce the impact of diesel vehicles and accelerate the move to cleaner transport options in a way that protects the economy of our high streets and town centres, and supports local businesses and residents.

The Government has already taken action to improve air quality by delivering a stronger economy. In 2016, the Government announced a new National Productivity Investment Fund which includes an additional £1.1 billion to relieve road congestion and deliver upgrades on local roads and public transport networks, an additional £220 million to tackle key pinch points on the strategic road network, and an additional £290 million for reducing transport emissions. The Government also committed an additional £4.7 billion for research and development to support its industrial strategy and deliver clean growth. This includes a new Industrial Strategy Challenge Fund to develop innovative technologies, such as electric vehicle batteries, that have the potential to make the UK a world leader and transform the UK economy. This consultation considers further retrofitting measures, as well as targeted scrappage schemes. Such measures would need to provide value for money to the taxpayer and target support where it is most needed.

The link between improving air quality and reducing carbon emissions is particularly important. The Government will continue to seek solutions that are compatible with reducing air pollution while delivering clean growth. Creating a cleaner transport system is central to these objectives i.e. supporting the uptake of ultra-low emission vehicles (ULEVs) and rolling out charging infrastructure for electric vehicles.

This consultation applies to England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

FIGURE 2 – Comparison of nitrogen oxides emissions for different car Euro standards, by emission limit and real-world performance (grams/kilometre)

How Did We Get Here?

Steps to reduce air pollution have included measures specifically targeted at cutting emissions from transport. This included, for instance, the shift to unleaded petrol in the 1980s and 90s.

More recently, standards on vehicle engines (known as “Euro Standards”) have been put in place at EU level to deliver reduced emissions both of greenhouse gases and of harmful pollutants. These Euro Standards should have led to major reductions in emissions of NO₂ from vehicles. However, this has proved not to be the case, particularly for diesel vehicles, whose “real world” emissions have proven to be many times higher than lab tests (Figure 2). Diesel vehicles on our roads are causing harmful emissions far above what was assumed and contributing to pollution levels that continue to be damaging to public health. Additionally, the Volkswagen scandal showed that deliberate cheating of the emissions tests was built into some vehicles.

Diesel

In the UK, this failure of the Euro testing regime has come together with increased use of diesels. Following tax incentives in the early 2000s, the number of diesel cars in Great Britain grew from 3.2 million in 2000 to 8.2 million in 2010 and the number of diesel vans grew from 1.8 million to 3 million over the same period. This growth follows tax changes made by previous governments, which focussed on fuel economy and carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions. None of this is the fault of those who chose to buy diesel vehicles and as we tackle the problem, these same people should not be penalised for decisions they made in good faith.

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But we must take action now to clean up the existing vehicle fleet. This means setting new policies and incentives to promote new technology and innovation, speeding up the move to and capturing the economic opportunities of, cleaner vehicles thereby both supporting the objectives of our industrial strategy and delivering the cleaner air we need for our towns and cities. It also means taking the opportunities that improving air quality in our urban areas bring, for example making city centres more attractive places to live, work and do business in with good public transport links.

Where to Target Action

Unlike greenhouse gases, the risk from NO₂ is focused in particular places: it is the build-up of pollution in a particular area that increases the concentration in the air and the associated risks. So the action needs to be targeted to problem areas, which are specific roads located mostly in cities and towns.

The actions to reduce NO₂ also need to be targeted on the sources that make the biggest contribution to the problem. The charts below show that the dominant source of NO₂ at the roadside is diesel vehicles (Figure 3) and that different types of vehicles contribute different amounts on average per vehicle (Figure 4). The total emission from vehicles depends on a combination of both average emission per vehicle and the number of vehicles.

FIGURE 3 – Breakdown of UK national average roadside concentration of nitrogen oxides¹ into sources, 2015²

The ‘Roadside Increment’ in the large pie chart is the estimate of the proportion of roadside concentrations contributed by local traffic, which is shown in greater detail in the smaller pie chart. NRMM = Non-Road Mobile Machinery; LGV = Light Goods Vehicles; HGVr = Rigid Heavy Goods Vehicles; HGVa = Articulated Heavy Goods Vehicles.

This Consultation

This consultation document sets out in response to the challenges above our proposed UK plan for tackling nitrogen dioxide. The draft UK Air Quality Plan for tackling nitrogen dioxide and technical report give fuller details of our approach. The Government will finalise the UK Air Quality Plan for tackling nitrogen dioxide, following consultation, by 31 July 2017.

Improving air quality in a fair way

This Government is committed to improving air quality in our towns and cities. We believe that doing so will have a positive impact on economic growth and make our towns and cities more attractive places to live and work. We must deliver our legal obligations on air quality as quickly as possible. We are clear, however, that this must not be done in a way that unfairly penalises ordinary working families who bought diesel vehicles in good faith as a direct result of tax changes made by previous governments that focused on fuel economy and CO₂ emissions.

Targeted scrappage scheme for vans or cars

Some have suggested that a targeted scrappage scheme for older, more polluting vans or cars could be developed to contribute to the cost of purchasing a cleaner vehicle. Such a scheme would have to be targeted at those most in need of support and be limited in scope. In devising mitigation measures, it will be important to consider the viability of any scheme and its overall cost. If, following this consultation, scrappage is identified as an appropriate mitigation measure, any scheme would need to provide value for money, target support where it was most needed, be deliverable at local authority level and minimise the scope for fraud.

National measures to support the plan

As the problems of NO₂ are specific to local areas it is right that the key actions need to be developed and implemented locally, but the Government will take steps at national level to enable and support progress. This includes the following measures:

Supporting uptake of ultra-low emission vehicles (ULEVs) across the UK

The Government recognises the opportunity offered by ULEVs to support an innovative sector of our economy whilst tackling poor air quality and greenhouse gas emissions. Technology continues to improve, with battery prices falling and their range extending. The UK is currently among the frontrunners in Europe in terms of electric vehicle manufacture and its offer to turn its fleet electric: in 2016, UK-manufactured Nissan Leafs accounted for almost 20% of battery electric car sales across Europe and the UK saw the highest number of ULEVs registered of any country in the EU.

The Government is committed to cementing this position and has committed more than £600 million between 2015-20, supplemented by an additional £270 million in the 2016. The Plug-in Grant schemes offer up to £4,500 towards the cost of a new ULEV car; up to £8,000 towards the cost of a new ULEV van; and up to £1,500 towards the cost of a new ULEV motorcycle. In March 2017, the Office of Low Emission Vehicles launched a new £50 million Plug-in Grant scheme for taxis which offers up to £7,500 of the cost of a new vehicle. This is accompanied by £14 million government investment in dedicated chargepoints infrastructure for electric taxis in ten council areas.

Government grant support and tax incentives for charging infrastructure are also available

In September 2016, the Government announced up to £24 million of competition funding for business projects to develop new vehicle technologies that deliver low emissions. The successful applicants will be announced in 2017.

In the Spring Budget 2017, the Government announced that the first wave of challenges funded from the new Industrial Strategy Challenge Fund will include leading the world in the development, design and manufacture of batteries that will power the next generation of electric vehicles, helping to tackle air pollution.

In March 2017, the Government announced a new £23 million fund to accelerate the uptake of hydrogen vehicles and roll out more cutting-edge infrastructure. This announcement builds on the launch of the industrial strategy Green Paper in January 2017. Hydrogen fuel providers will be able to bid for funding in partnership with organisations that produce hydrogen vehicles to help build high-tech infrastructure, including fuel stations. The funding will boost the creation of hydrogen fuel infrastructure and uptake of hydrogen-powered vehicles. A competition will be launched in Summer 2017, and will invite proposals from public organisations, businesses and hydrogen operators. The UK Government will provide match funding for successful bidders as part of its plans to cut carbon emissions, improve air quality and deliver economic opportunities for the UK.
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Tighter vehicle emissions standards across the UK

Alongside supporting the uptake of ULEVs, the Government continues to press for innovative solutions to help reduce emissions from diesel vehicles. The failings of the vehicle testing system have been the key reason why NO₂ emissions have not reduced as they should have. The UK has led the way in pushing for tougher emissions tests for vehicles, and from later this year new testing requirements focussed on “real-world driving emissions” will come into force. This will improve consumer confidence in manufacturers and deliver real improvements for air quality.

Supporting public information and buying choices across the UK

People should have access to reliable information on emissions when they are choosing a car. There are requirements already for carbon emissions, but not for NO₂. The Government is conducting a review of vehicle labelling supported by the Low Carbon Vehicle Partnership, to consider the most appropriate way to give consumers the information that they need. This work should be completed within a year and the results will be fed into the UK Air Quality Plan for tackling nitrogen dioxide.

How you can have your say – Who can respond?

This is a public consultation which is open to anyone with an interest in providing comments. It is likely to be of particular interest to local authorities, environmental groups, the transport and public health sectors, and other organisations with an interest in air quality. This consultation will run for six weeks from 5 May 2017 to 23:59 on 15 June 2017.

Please respond to this consultation using the Citizen Space consultation system: https://consult.defra.gov.uk/airquality/air-quality-plan-for-tackling-nitrogen-dioxide

Private Hire News POLL

In edition 77 of Private Hire News we asked the question?

If a Private Hire driver’s vehicle is completely off the Public Highway (for say lengthy holiday periods or whilst undertaking prolonged repairs) in some areas, they must keep their ‘Hire & Reward’ insurance policy running and cannot suspend or transfer the insurance to another vehicle. Do you think this is fair?

This question was framed because of the fact that TfL had put into place a mandate for vehicles to be insured for expensive Hire & Reward insurance at all times whilst licensed.

Shortly after putting the poll up, on the 3rd March 2017, the High Court quashed this poorly thought out regulatory requirement in London, so we decided to withdraw the poll as justice had been done.

Our latest poll question asks the question: Do you think the proposed costs of TfL TPH’s new Operator Licence Fees are justified?

Background:

On page 6 you can see the table of proposed fees published by TfL TPH, which at best could be described as illogical, disproportionate and beyond belief.

London Operators face a range of charges that reflect increases for the smallest operators, reductions for slightly bigger operators, massive increases for mid-range operators, enormous increases for bigger operators and gigantic increases for the largest operators.

Since the inception of licensing in London, Operator Compliance has naturally improved from the very early days and licensing fees were pretty much in line with inflation. In fact, in recent years as technology has improved and the industry got bigger, scale of economy savings kicked in and fees were held or made below the inflation rate.

With even more savings possible, Operator Licensing fees should if anything be coming down not going up. We do however feel there is now a strong case for Operator’s fees to be proportionate to the time involved in undertaking their inspections.

ISSUE 79 POLL QUESTION

Do you think the proposed costs of TfL TPH’s new Operator Licence Fees are justified?

Get involved and answer now at www.PrivateHireNews.co.uk

Sshhhhh-ushi!

A taxi service in Japan has banned ‘small talk’ from drivers

One of the perks of driving in the industry has always been being able to chat to a variety of different passengers and clientele in the back of your car, all different walks of life, going through many different circumstances.

However, a taxi service in Japan has recently banned ‘small talk’ from drivers. Miyako Taxi, a company based in Kyoto, Japan, is ridding customers of this burden, introducing a new service that forbids drivers from initiating ‘small talk’.

“This service is currently in a trial stage, with the goal of creating an in-car atmosphere that provides the most comfortable ride for passengers through limiting the driver’s speaking,” said the company in a statement.

The cars look like any ordinary taxi but a notice written on the back of the passenger seat will inform passengers that they have entered one of the new silent fleet.

The company made the move after hearing reports from passengers that they were fed up with being forced to indulge in chit-chat with their drivers.

We are not sure if PHV and Taxi drivers would welcome such a move, as there is a value in being able to converse with passengers and talk through their issues, big or small. As always, following the rule of good communication with a fare paying passenger, by allowing the passenger to start and determine the amount of conversation.

So valuable was the conversation in the back of London Black Cab driver Mark Solomon’s vehicle, that he produced and published a book ‘Black Cab Wisdom’, where he documented all the best bits of advice and wisdom that his passengers had given him.