Air quality operational asks

July 2019

Working to improve air quality is a key challenge and priority across our members. All are in agreement that the following set of five policy asks would greatly assist in this endeavour.

These asks sit below the higher level strategic asks developed by bodies such as UK100 and focus instead on measures that would be of practical help to officers tasked with developing and delivering air quality plans on the ground.

National agencies and other government departments

Highways England and Network Rail to work closely with the city regions on operational and strategic issues to reduce air pollution and help ensure a coordinated approach.

Why?

Air pollution generated by infrastructure managed by Highways England (motorways and major A roads) and by Network Rail (railway infrastructure) affects air quality in urban areas. Examples include air pollution caused by motorway congestion drifting into population centres; the use of diesel trains in city centre railway stations; and changes to motorways leading to increases in local traffic.

These national agencies need to work with transport authorities to understand the impact of their decisions on local air quality and how these might be reduced or mitigated. Such a relationship would also help to ensure that Highways England and Network Rail priorities were in tune with those of the city regions.

Highways

Activate Part 6 of the Traffic Management Act 2004 for non-London local authorities

Why?

Part 6 of the Traffic Management Act 2004 made provisions for local authorities in England and Wales to be granted powers to enforce and issue penalty charges for various ‘moving traffic offences’ such as banned turns and blocking of yellow box junctions. The provisions also allow for local authorities to apply for powers to take

on further enforcement themselves, rather than relying on the police who lack the time and resources to tackle these issues.

Activating these powers for local authorities would help keep traffic moving, reducing the idling and stop-start conditions that cause congestion and a build-up of toxic air.

The relevant provisions of the Act are available in Wales but have not yet been activated for England because the Government has not introduced the necessary secondary legislation.

In London, separate legislation has given traffic authorities the power to enforce certain moving traffic offences resulting in – among other things – improved traffic flow.

It seems logical that these provisions should be available in England too.

Public transport

Implement a long-term plan and consistent funding support for greener buses

Why?

Any action to tackle poor air quality must include measures to increase the proportion of journeys taken by public transport and active travel. Just one double decker bus can take 75 cars off the road. A modern diesel bus emits 10 times fewer NOx emissions per passenger than a modern diesel car. Air pollution can be cut still further as bus technology evolves.

However, these and other benefits of the bus are threatened by cuts to all six of its main sources of public support[1]. We propose a new 'Connectivity Fund' which would bring together the existing Bus Service Operators Grant with additional top slicing from other Government departments benefiting from the bus. The fund would help safeguard the benefits of the bus by providing an enhanced, ring-fenced pot for local government to support bus services and encourage their use.

The Government should also continue to fund the Ultra-Low Emission Bus Scheme, targeting the areas most affected by poor air quality. In 2016 there were around 4,000 green, low emission buses in operation, saving around £8 million in air quality damage costs[2]. In Great Britain as a whole, local bus operators run around 40,000

[1] See Urban Transport Group (2019) 'The cross-sector benefits of backing the bus' http://www.urbantransportgroup.org/system/files/general-docs/UTG%20%E2%80%93%20Bus%20Sector%20Benefits%20report%20WEB.pdf for more details on cuts to bus funding.

[2] LowCVP (2017) A green bus for every journey

vehicles[3] meaning that – whilst vehicle standards are continually improving - there is still a long way to go before we can realise the full potential for a cleaner, greener fleet.

The 2018 round of the Ultra-Low Emission Bus Scheme is set to deliver 263 new zero emission buses plus supporting infrastructure[4]. Further funding rounds would provide an additional boost as transport authorities seek to green the fleets operating in their cities and accelerate their journey on the 'road to zero'. Funding allocations should prioritise those areas where air quality problems are the most marked.

Public sector fleets

Government to provide leadership and an overarching strategy for the greening of the public sector fleet together with targeted financial support, maximised through joint procurement and economies of scale

Why?

With the public sector responsible for vast swathes of vehicles – from rubbish trucks to ambulances and from school buses to pool cars – there is considerable scope to lead by example in transitioning to low emission vehicles. Whilst many local authorities are in the process of making the shift, progress is piecemeal and constrained by budget cuts.

The time is right for the Government to set a frame for the greening of public sector fleets together with targeted financial support as it has done for other vehicle types such as buses and taxis. This should offer leadership and an overall strategy for activity together with financial support for local authorities and other public sector bodies – such as the NHS – to retrofit or upgrade their fleets to reduce emissions. Opportunities for savings through joint procurement of vehicles and larger orders between multiple authorities should also be explored.

Planning and land-use

Require the NHS to consult with transport authorities when making decisions on healthcare locations to minimise negative impacts on health, the environment and communities. The DfT and DHSC

[3] DfT Bus statistics table BUS0602

[4] https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/774207/ultra-low-emission-bus-scheme-winning-bidders.csv/preview

should co-commission good practice guidance on ensuring sustainable transport access to healthcare to support this.

Why?

NHS-related traffic is associated with 753 deaths from air pollution and 8,844 life years lost from air pollution according to the Royal College of Physicians[5].

Evidence gathered from our members suggests that consultation by the health sector with transport bodies about decisions to open, close, merge or re-locate healthcare settings is patchy.

Consulting with transport bodies at an early stage would help to ensure that any new sites are well connected to walking, cycling and bus routes and that measures are put in place to encourage patients, staff and visitors to use these rather than access sites by car, contributing to congestion and air pollution.

This could help the NHS to significantly reduce its contribution to air pollution, something that is highlighted as a priority in the NHS Long Term Plan[6].

[5] Royal College of Physicians (2018) Outpatients: The future – adding value through sustainability

[6] NHS (2019) The NHS Long Term Plan https://www.longtermplan.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/nhs-long-term-plan.pdf