

# Air pollution and transport campaigning

## Transport and air pollution

Air pollution poses a critical threat to the health and wellbeing of people across the UK, particularly in built-up areas.

Dangerous levels of particulates in the air we breathe causes tens of thousands of premature deaths every year. With legislation and changing technology having tackled much of the pollution from industry and domestic heating, the main offender is now vehicle emissions.

Petrol engines emit more carbon monoxide (CO) and hydrocarbons (HC): diesel engines, the worst for air pollution, emit more nitrogen oxide and nitrogen dioxide (together known as NOx), sulphur dioxide and particulate matter (PM). There are an estimated 23,500 UK deaths each year from nitrogen dioxide (NO<sub>2</sub>) concentrations: exposure to small particulate matter pollution (PM<sub>2.5</sub>) is estimated to have an effect on mortality equivalent to nearly 29,000 deaths in the UK each year.

A [report](#) by the Royal College of Physicians and the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health has found that outdoor air pollution is linked to around 40,000 deaths a year, and more with indoor pollution. It estimates that the adverse impact on public health caused by pollution costs the UK economy more than £20bn per year, which is just under 16% of the annual NHS budget.

It found that air pollution plays a role in many chronic conditions such as cancer, asthma, heart disease, and neurological changes linked to dementia. It concluded that the concentration limits set by the government and the World Health Organization are not safe for the whole population and leave certain groups vulnerable.

On average transport is responsible for 80% of NOx emissions at the roadside, with diesel vehicles the largest source of emissions. Recent scandals on how motor manufacturers have been flouting vehicle emissions testing has only added to the need for urgent action.

Road schemes can usefully address pinch points and poor maintenance that encourage stop-start traffic causing pollution buildup. However, we oppose new roads that will simply add to the amount of traffic and therefore increase air pollution.



## The policy context

The UK Government has consistently failed to meet legally binding targets to reduce air pollution. In April 2015, *the Supreme Court ruled* that the UK Government must take urgent action to address breaches of air quality standards.

The Government's *action plan* was published in December 2015. It identifies six cities in England with the most serious air pollution problems - London, Birmingham, Leeds, Nottingham, Derby and Southampton - where statutory clean air zones will be introduced (including London's Low Emission Zone).



Overall 38 of the 43 Air Quality Zones across the UK failed to meet the targets. Within these zones, councils have identified over 700 active Air Quality Management Areas. Local authorities in these areas are responsible for helping deliver reductions in air pollution.

So whether the road scheme you are opposing is on a local road – where the council takes the decision – or the Strategic Road Network, the need to tackle air pollution will be an important part of your case.

## Campaign resources

Campaign for Better Transport is part of the *Healthy Air Campaign* who produce a range of resources, including a clean air *campaign pack*. See the *Healthy Air Campaign website* for more information.

The British Lung Foundation has a *network of Breathe Easy groups*. Your local group may be useful allies when campaigning on air pollution issues.

Campaigning against air pollution is an important strand of campaigns against new roads and a good way to engage a wider range of people. The messages are simple and effective: air pollution kills; motor vehicles are the main source of air pollution. New roads generate more traffic, increasing pollution: we need a clean air alternative to new roads.

### Air quality-themed ideas for your roads campaign include:

- demanding a full air quality impact assessment of the proposed new road, citing the legally binding air pollution reduction targets
- mapping facilities such as health centres, schools and nurseries, care homes, etc close to the proposed new road, to show that vulnerable people will be affected.
- photo-opportunities with campaigners in face masks and warning signs at current and future air pollution hot spots.
- asking your local doctors and pharmacists to speak out against the road on health grounds.



Healthy Air Campaign

## Air quality data

DEFRA has set up the *UK-Air* online air quality resource which includes the latest information on *air pollution at each monitored location* on a daily basis.

*Northern Ireland*

*Scotland*

*Wales*

Kings College London has a dedicated site with daily information on *London's air quality*.

*Air Quality England* provides live data for a selection of local authority areas including Liverpool, Manchester and Wiltshire. Other area-specific sites include:

*Bristol*

*Essex*

*Leeds*

*Southampton*

*West Midlands*

## Think air pollution is bad but have no evidence?

With cuts in local authority funding and in air pollution monitoring generally, there may be no records to show how bad air pollution is in your area. However, help is at hand as you can order your own diffusion tubes for monitoring nitrogen dioxide and measure the pollution yourself.

You can order the diffusion tubes and associated kit online from professional companies, the cost of which includes the analysis of the results. The cost is under £10 a tube and if you repeat the testing (and keep the associated kit), the cost of the tube is closer to £7 a tube.

One company that provides this service is *Gradko International* who also do a range of monitoring equipment for other types of pollution.

### If you decide to go down this route you should:

- Carefully follow any instructions in terms of timing (how long the tubes are left in place and how long you have to use them), location (they need to be placed near the kerb between 2 and 3 metres above the ground) and handling. You should avoid school holidays and bonfire night if possible in the period you are monitoring as these could skew the results up or down.
- Record exactly where each tube is placed making sure they are correctly numbered (house number or some other landmark as well as road name). Take photographs if you can so you can show where they were positioned in case you are challenged later. You may also want to put a sticker on them to say what they are and why people should leave them alone and who to contact if they have any queries.
- Consider leafleting the local community to let them know what you are doing, or wait until the results are in and then tell them about them, which could include calling a public meeting and generating publicity in the local media.