

Consultation response

7. How satisfied are you that the proposed measures set out in this consultation will address the problem of nitrogen dioxide as quickly as possible?

Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied

We welcome the government's consultation on air quality, which is desperately needed and must be followed by swift and concerted action. We are broadly supportive of the proposals laid out in the draft plan, including the need for more Clean Air Zones, additional measures to reduce road congestion and a potential nationwide diesel scrappage scheme. However, whilst these are positive suggestions, more innovative solutions will be needed to address what is already a critical situation.

Particularly, we would like to see the government's transport policy shift away from an emphasis on the primacy of the car, towards a sustainable vision based on cycling and walking.

9. How can government best target any funding to support local communities to cut air pollution? What options should the Government consider further, and what criteria should it use to assess them? Are there other measures which could be implemented at a local level, represent value for money, and that could have a direct and rapid impact on air quality? Examples could include targeted investment in local infrastructure projects. How can government best target any funding to mitigate the impact of certain measures to improve air quality, on local businesses, residents and those travelling into towns and cities to work? Examples could include targeted scrappage schemes, for both cars and vans, as well as support for retrofitting initiatives. How could mitigation schemes be designed in order to maximise value for money, target support where it is most needed, reduce complexity and minimise scope for fraud?

As an inclusive cycling charity and advocate of active travel, Wheels for Wellbeing strongly believes that encouraging more disabled people to cycle would be of benefit to the environment. In the UK, disabled people are half as likely as non-disabled people to be physically active, tending to be more reliant for day-to-day travel on being driven: either by door-to-door services, such as community transport services, or by taxis and private car hire. Given this, it is not unreasonable to assume that disabled people's contribution to rising levels of congestion and air pollution is marked.

Part of the reason why there are not as many disabled people cycling as there could be is that they are not commonly seen as cyclists (by local authorities, transport bodies, town planners etc.), whilst they often do not see *themselves* as cyclists. This is largely down to the widespread perception of disabled people as predominantly car users. Very seldom is any thought given to the idea that a disabled person might also be a *cyclist*, which as our own research has shown is reflected in the absence of disabled cyclists from local authority cycling and transport strategies.

This misconception is reinforced by the fact that cycles are not recognised in law as a mobility aid (unlike wheelchairs and mobility scooters), with disabled cyclists frequently being challenged for cycling in non-cycling areas and being asked to dismount – even though it may be physically impossible for them to walk and wheel their cycle. Our recent survey of disabled cyclists revealed that 69% of disabled cyclists cycle because for them, cycling is easier than walking and it therefore clearly provides a mobility aid. This legislative oversight only serves to deter disabled people who do (or who would like to) cycle, rather encouraging them to stick with forms of transport that they are more comfortable with and which are more hassle-free (e.g. cars, minibuses or taxis), but which pollute and harm the environment.

Disabled people are also highly likely to be discouraged from cycling because of inaccessible cycling infrastructure (cited as the biggest barrier to cycling in our recent survey). For instance, narrow cycle lanes, speed reduction treatments and anti-motorcycle barriers fail to accommodate for the larger dimensions of non-standard cycles that are commonly used by disabled cyclists (e.g. handcycles, tricycles and tandems).

Similarly, the failure of cycling facilities (namely cycle parking and storage) to be inclusive further prevents disabled people from seeing cycling as a viable and alternative form of transport. Most facilities only cater for standard, two-wheeled bicycles and the non-disabled cyclist.

In order to encourage disabled people to cycle more and rely less on private car hire (and consequently reduce their carbon footprint) we recommend that all local authorities take the following steps:

- Ensure they include disabled people in their plans for cycling and walking, meeting the needs of disabled people as *cyclists*;
- Improve the inclusivity of cycling infrastructure, and the accessibility of cycle parking and storage facilities;
- Adopt an inclusive cycling standard that incorporates the needs of disabled cyclists, such as the London Cycling Design Standard's (LCDS) 'Inclusive Cycle' principle or Highways England's 'Cycle Design Vehicle' (Interim Advice Note 195/16);

- Increase opportunities for disabled people to try out cycling locally, including by making available the hire of non-standard cycles and growing the number of local inclusive cycling groups.

Given that 1 in 5 people in the UK have a disability, encouraging local authorities to adapt their transport plans to include disabled cyclists could be truly transformative for disabled people's health and wellbeing, but also for the environment.

11. Which vehicles should be prioritised for government-funded retrofit schemes?

We welcome views from stakeholders as to how a future scheme could support new technologies and innovative solutions for other vehicle types, and would welcome evidence from stakeholders on emerging technologies. We currently anticipate that this funding could support modifications to buses, coaches, HGVs, vans and black cabs.

Rather than focus on cars, coaches and cabs, we urge the government to consider the merits of more sustainable and non-polluting modes of transport, including cycles. Electrical-assist cycles (e-cycles), for example, offer huge potential both in terms of an alternative form of long-distance commuting and as a means of encouraging many more disabled and older people to cycle (largely due to the reduced strain and physical effort afforded by such technology); not to mention the benefit it could bring to those living in especially hilly areas of the country.

E-cycles offer a genuine alternative to the car as a form of commuting and general travel. Therefore, we stress the importance of making such vehicles more widely available and accessible to people of all ages and ability. This should begin with a government-funded information campaign to improve awareness and understanding of e-cycles. On top of this, we would recommend increased investment and subsidies for their use.

HM Treasury, together with the Office for Ultra Low Emissions Vehicles (OLEV), should also consider the diversion of funds and subsidies for Ultra Low Emissions Vehicles (ULEVs), such as electric and hybrid cars, to e-cycles.

As is common practice in many countries on the continent and around the world, tax breaks and incentive schemes should also be piloted for employees who use an e-cycle, instead of a car, to get to work.