Putting the brakes on toxic air

Our transport plan for a cleaner, fairer future

Executive summary **April 2023**

Impact on Urban Health

ASTHMA+ LUNG UK

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At Asthma + Lung UK, we're fighting for everyone's right to breathe clean air.

Toxic air is a health emergency, causing new lung conditions like lung cancer, and worsening existing ones like asthma and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease. It can stunt the growth of children's lungs and travel deep into the lungs and brains of unborn babies. As well as lung conditions, toxic air has been linked to cardiovascular disease, cognitive decline, and poor mental health. Overall, air pollution contributes to up to 43,000 early deaths per year in the UK.

Despite the growing body of evidence showing the health impacts of toxic air, legal limits for nitrogen dioxide are still being breached across the UK. New targets set in law by the government for fine particulate matter are not due to be reached until 2040 and are not ambitious enough to protect health. If we want to protect those whose health is most at risk from the devastating effects of air pollution and ensure another generation of children are not having their future health put at risk, bold action needs to be taken.

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Polluting vehicles are fuelling toxic air and the climate crisis. Most cars on UK roads still run solely on polluting petrol and diesel, despite the government committing to phase out their sale by 2030. 24 million people across the UK are breathing in toxic air that is damaging their lungs and their ability to breathe. As our February 2023 report *Zoning in on clean air* highlighted, we already have the tools to improve this situation. Clean air zones have proved to be one of the most effective policy measures to deliver rapid and effective improvements to air quality in urban areas. Modelling by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs suggests that clean air zones are most effective when rolled out as a network in major cities across the UK.[1]

However, concerns have been raised about the financial impact of clean air zones and other emissions reduction measures on the public during a cost of living crisis which makes it increasingly difficult for people, especially those on lower incomes, to switch to cleaner modes of transport. In many cases, current financial incentives aren't enough to help people shift towards cleaner travel, and there are significant barriers to accessing public transport, walking and cycling.

Alongside being the least able to financially afford to change their travel behaviour, those on the lowest incomes often live in the most polluted areas despite contributing the least to air pollution (as many on the lowest incomes don't drive) and are also more likely to suffer from poorer underlying health. This means they often face a triple jeopardy: most exposed to toxic air, most susceptible due to poor underlying health, and less able to change their travel behaviour.

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This report will demonstrate that toxic air can be tackled if we use a joined-up, public-health approach, and we have evidenced public support for a new policy, the Cleaner Travel Access Fund, to help people make cleaner transport decisions. However, there is no silver bullet to tackling air pollution. National and local policy makers need to put a holistic mix of policies in place to transition to cleaner air.

Our policy recommendation

1 Establish a Cleaner Travel Access Fund

A scrappage scheme to be rolled out to areas that implement class D clean air zones, for people on low incomes and people whose mobility is affected by lung and other health conditions to switch their polluting vehicles in exchange for a financial grant. This can be used to buy an active travel option; to fund public transport use; or towards purchasing an electric vehicle.

This policy will be most effective when supported by the following enablers:

2 Ramp up investment in cycling, walking and wheeling

to make active travel safer to encourage use, easier for people with mobility issues, and more inclusive for people who would like to use active travel.

3 Ensure local authorities have sufficient funds to improve their public transport offering

and make it more affordable, making the scrappage scheme more attractive to those eligible for the Cleaner Travel Access Fund and increasing the likelihood of use in wider society.

4 Review the use of incentives to purchase electric vehicles

such as direct measures like help with utilities, and indirect measures like improving the electric vehicle charging network.

As many people on lower incomes cannot afford to drive, these enablers will ensure that those without cars can enjoy more affordable, convenient public transport, and safer, more accessible active travel.

Our approach

We want the government to set out a programme across England to help those who need it most, the people on the lowest incomes and with lung and other health conditions, to switch their polluting vehicles for cleaner options. Asthma + Lung UK are calling on the government to prioritise strategies which encourage and enable the population to make cleaner transport decisions. We know that clean air zones are one of the most effective ways to reduce air pollution fast. Further to our February 2023 report, *Zoning in on clean air*, we recommend that the programme be rolled out initially through local governments who commit, or who have already committed, to implementing a class D clean air zone* or similar charging measure to reduce road transport emissions. This approach has several benefits:

- There is extra incentive for local areas to implement clean air zones. Through this programme, local areas will be able to unlock funding from central government for their communities to mitigate the financial impact of these policies on those least financially able to change their travel behaviour.
- Local government and national government are incentivised to work together in their shared interest to protect public health.
- Central government is able to go further in their aims to decarbonise transport, and move faster towards net zero by 2050.
- Local government is able to detoxify public debate around the implementation of clean air zones, which several areas have felt forced to pause or scrap plans towards for various reasons.

* There are four different classes of charging clean air zones, class A–D. These define the types of vehicles that will be charged within the zone. Class D includes buses, coaches, taxis, private hire vehicles, heavy goods vehicles, vans, minibuses, cars, and the local authority has the option to include motorcycles.

Who should be eligible for the scrappage scheme, and what's the investment needed?

Asthma + Lung UK is calling for the government to invest a total of £777million to create the Cleaner Travel Access Fund to provide the support needed for the people we have identified need the most help to transition to cleaner modes of transport:

Live in an area covered by a new or existing clean air zone, and either:

a. Have a household income of less than £20k a year, or

b. Have a long term health condition that impacts their mobility and hold a Blue Badge

The annual health and social care costs caused by road transport are currently £2.3bn and are expected to rise to £5.3bn by 2035 unless ambitious action is taken.[2,3] A problem of this scale requires political courage to overcome.

Euro emissions standards limits (g/km) for NO_x for passenger vehicles are part of the EU's air pollution framework, which noted that considerable reductions in NO_x (which, when it reacts with the environment becomes NO_2 and is then harmful to human health) would be needed to improve air quality, and emission standards would be a determining factor in helping member states comply with air pollution limits.[4] So that the Cleaner Travel Access Fund aligns with class D clean air zones already in place, we propose that the same emissions standards are adopted – cars below these standards would be charged under the clean air zone and so would be eligible to access the scrappage scheme.

Table on Euro standards (g/km)

Euro standards	Diesel	Petrol
Euro 3	0.5	0.15
Euro 4	0.25	**0.08***
Euro 5	0.18	0.06
Euro 6	**0.08***	0.06

***Ultra Low Emission Vehicle standards**

We believe people should be supported to use the cleanest transport option they can access, but that they should also have agency over their travel decisions. We also know that people with lung conditions and other health problems are some of those worst impacted by air pollution exposure, and for those with mobility problems caused by their condition may still need to use a car. These people need to be supported to access cleaner transport and should be eligible for the Cleaner Travel Access Fund. For people with lung conditions that impact their mobility, reasons for reliance on private vehicles can be due to breathlessness, and other flare ups in their symptoms caused by active travel, or the risk of respiratory infection on public transport.

We propose that grants of £3,000 be given for people to:

Scrap your car for a grant for a bike/e-bike pass

Scrap your car for free public transport

Scrap your car for money towards purchasing an electric vehicle

See appendix one for more information on the methodology on costing the policy.

This report contains policy recommendations for England however we expect that implementation will lead to Barnett Consequentials allowing it to be funded in the three devolved nations as well.

Key findings

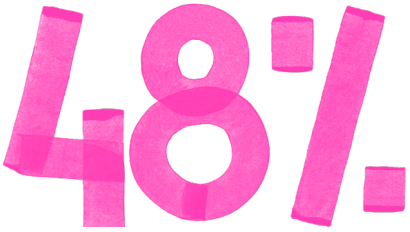
In 2023, we conducted new research into people's views and barriers to making cleaner transport decisions. We asked the general public what their current travel behaviours were, what was stopping them from using cleaner transport, what support they might need, and what their views and awareness was on air pollution.

We found:

The public are concerned about air pollution levels in the UK.

are concerned

People want to use cleaner transport, but they say there are no good options for their journeys.



agree

The public would like to see investment in active travel, to make it safer and more accessible.

agree

The public would like to use electric vehicles, but they'd need support to purchase one.

agree

The public want to see more investment in public transport.

agree

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