

LETHAL AND ILLEGAL

London's air pollution crisis

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60-SECOND SUMMARY

Air pollution has significant impacts on public health. Across the UK as many as 40,000 deaths a year are attributed to outdoor air pollution, mainly from nitrogen oxides (NO_x), including nitrogen dioxide (NO₂), and particulates (PM10 and PM2.5). The problem is particularly acute in London, where the mortality impact of PM2.5 and NO₂ pollution in 2010 was estimated at 141,000 life years lost, or the equivalent of up to 9,400 premature deaths. *Air pollution is therefore the second most significant factor impacting on public health in London, after smoking.*

KEY FINDINGS

- **London is breaking legal and WHO limits for NO₂ and WHO limits for particulate matter.** Under the existing policy regime the capital is not set to reach compliance with the legal limits on NO₂ until 2025 or beyond.
- **Most air pollution in London is caused by road transport, of which diesel vehicles are the most polluting.** Efforts must be made to reduce the number of diesel vehicles on the road, both by increasing the proportion of cleaner and greener vehicles and by a continued shift towards alternative forms of transport, including public transport, walking and cycling.
- **It is likely that diesel cars will have to be completely phased out on London's roads over the next decade** in order to reach compliance with safe and legal levels of air pollution. Such a shift would not be easy to achieve in such a short space of time, but it would not be impossible.

RECOMMENDATIONS

New modelling undertaken by King's College London for this project shows the scale of the changes required. **Policy will be required at European, national and local levels.**

European policy changes

At the European level **tighter emissions standards** will be required, as well as **bringing forward the 'real world' emissions**

testing regime (with conformity factor 1.5 or less) which is not currently being planned until 2021.

National policy changes

At the national level, the UK government will need to **progressively reform vehicle excise duty (VED) to disincentivise diesel vehicles.** If it is unwilling to go far enough at the national level to drive compliance in places with acute air pollution problems like London, the government could **devolve VED rates to those cities that wish to go further.** Finally, to increase the pace of transition towards a diesel-free car fleet, **the government could introduce a scrappage scheme for older diesel cars** across the UK or in areas of non-compliance with air pollution laws.

Local policy changes

At the local level the new mayor of London has already indicated a willingness to take much more radical action than his predecessor. Policy measures that are likely to be needed in order to achieve compliance with legal air pollution limits include:

- the **expansion of the new ultra low emissions zone (ULEZ)** across the whole of inner London
- the **progressive tightening of emissions standards** within the low emissions zone (covering the whole of London) for lorries, vans, buses and taxis, with the **aim of progressively phasing out diesel buses and taxis altogether**
- the introduction of **new policies to promote alternative forms of sustainable transport.**

For the full report, including all references, data sources and notes on methodology, see:
www.ippr.org/publications/the-chancellors-choices-how-to-make-the-spending-review-as-progressive-as-possible-while-still-delivering-a-surplus

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