

London's Low Emission Zone



TfL are proposing to introduce a “Low Emission Zone” in London. This will attempt to improve air quality by deterring older, more polluting vehicles, from entering any part of the GLA area.

Only HGVs, LGVs, and buses will be affected, not private cars. In practice, any older vehicles that do not meet the latest “Euro III” standard by 2008, and the “Euro IV” standard by 2010 will have to pay a hefty fee to enter any of the London Boroughs.

This matter has now gone to public consultation and you can read the full report and submit comments by going to the following web site: www.tfl.gov.uk/tfl/low-emission-zone/

The basic intention of the proposals is to cut the level of PM10 (particulates) and NO2 in the atmosphere. A high proportion of these in the atmosphere come from road transport, particularly diesel engines in the former case. They are also claimed to have negative impacts on health. The report claims that the cost benefits in terms of health would be in the range of £130 to £180 million over the years 2008 to 2015 but does not substantiate that with any figures (*Editors Comments: I am exceedingly sceptical that this is the case*).

The scheme would be enforced by a network of cameras, as with the congestion charging scheme, and it will cost approximately £130 million to implement and operate it until 2016. This will of course have to be paid for mainly by Londoners as it is expected to generate less than £50 million in fees and penalties from the vehicle operators.

In addition, the cost for goods vehicle operators to comply with the scheme, partly to modify their vehicles to cut emissions, will be up to £180 million, which of course they will pass on to their customers.

Only 5 Years Benefit

One remarkable comment in the TfL report is this: “*Work undertaken by TfL estimates that the introduction of a London LEZ would bring forward by some 4 – 5 years reductions in PM10 emissions in 2010 than would otherwise be achieved under the natural vehicle replacement cycle*”.

In other words, this enormously expensive project will only expedite improved air quality by about 5 years, because it would improve anyway as older vehicles are replaced. New vehicles must conform to much tighter emission standards so the problem will be much reduced in a few years time.

Why Such a Complex and Expensive System?

The report also points out that there are alternative ways of achieving the same results. For example in Sweden they introduced such a system in some of the major cities by simply banning older vehicles from town centres.

(Editor: Of course once you have this amazingly expensive infrastructure in place, will it ever get dismantled? Probably not because it will provide TfL with a great opportunity to regulate even more of our lives.

The following is what I said last time on this subject, and a reading of the report hasn't changed my views: As with most of Ken Livingstone's plans, financial probity seems to have been ignored, and this proposal is a sledgehammer to crack a nut. It is certainly a good idea to introduce a low emission zone in those parts of London that are badly affected by pollution from such vehicles, but such areas are relatively small. For example, Bromley has minimal problems in that regard. But to introduce the proposed scheme over the whole of London will be enormously expensive for vehicle operators.

Of course there could be another reason why Ken and TfL are so keen on this scheme. Once the cameras have been installed over the whole of London, introducing a London wide "congestion charging" scheme would be trivial.)

Don't forget to send in your comments on this scheme to TfL.

Roger Lawson, BBRAg, 19/3/2006