



Department
for Transport

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From the Secretary of State
The Rt. Hon. Patrick McLoughlin

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De Boris

Thank you for your letter of 30 July, suggesting a number of measures that the Government could take to improve air quality. I have also seen a copy of your letter of 1 August to Owen Paterson.

I agree that all levels of government have a shared responsibility to improve air quality, and I am pleased that the Department has been able to support many of the innovative measures you have introduced in London. I am glad that these are starting to deliver real results.

Improving air quality is a particular priority for this Department. There is much that we are doing which will help, including our support for cleaner buses, for cycling, for rail electrification and for local sustainable transport measures. The additional £500 million support for ultra low emission vehicles (ULEVs) over the period to 2020 that we announced in the recent Spending Round, on top of the £400 million of support that we are already committed to during this Parliament, is a very real demonstration of our commitment to reducing emissions from transport as well as to supporting the UK automotive sector in the move towards a low carbon economy. There are excellent synergies here with your own plans for an Ultra Low Emission Zone for central London from 2020, which I know my officials are already discussing with yours.

As for the particular, detailed measures that you suggest in your letter, I will ask my officials to give careful consideration to them, working closely with Owen's officials and your own team.

Any new measures will clearly need to strike an appropriate balance between the Government's environmental and other commitments. Fiscal measures such as tax incentives for cleaner vehicles are, of course, a matter for the Chancellor, and the Department works closely with the Treasury on these, particularly as they relate to ULEVs. Of the other measures:

- The Department is already involved in the work to develop an international retrofit standard for pollution abatement equipment, which should help ensure that consistent standards can be applied in different areas. Emissions from new heavy duty vehicles should also be significantly lower in urban conditions from 2014 when the new Euro VI standard becomes mandatory.
- We are also pressing for the earliest feasible introduction of a new, European test cycle for light-duty vehicles (cars and vans) to ensure that their real-world, on-road emissions performance is closer to what they are achieving under laboratory test conditions. You may be aware that this discrepancy has been a particular issue in recent years, particularly for diesel vehicles in urban areas, and has been one of the reasons that air quality has not improved as fast as earlier modelling suggested that it would.
- I accept that the current £20 fixed penalty notice, which rises to £40 if the fine is unpaid after 28 days, for "idling" (in other words, leaving a vehicle's engine running unnecessarily whilst stationary) may not be a significant deterrent to motorists, but I am not sure whether a punitive regulatory solution is the right way forward here. Your own "anti-idling" publicity campaign, for example, was a good way of raising awareness among motorists of the need to be considerate to others. Serious idling offences can also be enforced by the police, and the offence can then carry a maximum fine on conviction of £1,000.

I am copying this letter to Owen Paterson.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Patrick McLoughlin', written in a cursive style.

THE RT. HON. PATRICK McLOUGHLIN