

Spring 2018

Actively improving air quality

Sustrans round table report

Making it easier for cycling and walking to play a key role in reducing air pollution

About Sustrans

Sustrans is the charity making it easier for people to walk and cycle.

We are engineers and educators, experts and advocates. We connect people and places, create liveable neighbourhoods, transform the school run and deliver a happier, healthier commute.

Sustrans works in partnership, bringing people together to find the right solutions. We make the case for walking and cycling by using robust evidence and showing what can be done.

We are grounded in communities and believe that grassroots support combined with political leadership gives real change, fast.

Join us on our journey. www.sustrans.org.uk

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Summary recommendations

Recommendation 7

The UK Government should reframe the appraisal mechanism for bids from LEPs and by extension local authorities, so that local authorities can build cycling and walking programmes into their plans and bids to tackle air pollution with confidence.

Recommendation 8

The UK Government should prioritise direct measures to limit private vehicles as the mode of choice into city centres as a central component of Clean Air Zones. In addition, they need to help local authorities set a trajectory of measures to deliver long-term continuous improvement in air quality beyond 2020.

Recommendation 9

The UK Government should provide dedicated, continuous funding and 'over the horizon' transparency of future funding options for walking and cycling as part of a long-term strategy that enables local authorities to prepare cycling and walking programmes that are shovel-ready in order to tackle air pollution.

Recommendation 10

The air quality crisis

We face an air quality crisis. An invisible issue that kills tens of thousands of people

- How these barriers can be overcome.

The findings and recommendations from the round table are laid out below. Whilst these results specifically relate to an England context they can largely be applied at a UK level.

Making the case for cycling and walking to improve air quality

Cycling and walking air quality solutions: Identifying and overcoming barriers

Cycling and walking programmes can play a key role in tackling our air quality crisis. However, local authorities at the round table identified five key barriers that prevent them from successfully implementing these schemes:

- 1 Political leadership on air quality
- 2 Framing of acceptable solutions
- 3 Timing – the pressure for immediate success
- 4 Funding
- 5 Car dominance and lack of community engagement

These five areas are explored in more detail below with key recommendations on how some of these barriers may be overcome. The recommendations are primarily for UK and local Government but some are also directed to other stakeholders working in the area.

1. Political leadership on air quality

A lack of political leadership at all levels of Government in tackling the air quality crisis is perhaps the greatest barrier, not just to implementing cycling and walking to address the problem, but to improving our air quality overall. This lack of commitment manifests itself in a number of ways:

1.1 National lack of commitment from UK Government to solve air pollution

Multiple Governments have shown a lack of commitment to solving air pollution. Our current Government has been found guilty in court for a third time for not delivering a reduction in air pollution that will bring the country within legal limits as soon as possible. Had the Government had an ambitious, joined up and fully funded plan to begin with that had brought us within legal limits in the time necessary, then local authorities would know what to expect and could plan properly. Instead, the court cases against the Government mean that goal posts keep changing as the Government brings through rapid policy changes to meet legal NO₂ requirements. This causes uncertainty for local authorities as well as confusion over what responsibilities lie with them. As a result, the Government is looking solely at NO₂ as this is where legal limits are being broken, rather than including action on particulate matter for consistent, joined up policy. Instead, the Government's Air Quality Strategy is due out later in 2018 and will include action on particulate matter.

Brexit also creates a level of uncertainty. Whilst the UK Government has implied that it will continue with current air quality standards after Brexit, there is no indication of how the Government will be held accountable for future failures after leaving the EU.

Recommendation 1

The UK Government should show leadership by creating a new Clean Air Act that tackles all forms of air pollution; and improves and strengthens existing legislation, enshrining the right to breathe clean air into law after we leave the EU.

1.2 Lack of a joined up approach from the UK Government and across local Government

Working in silos is a problem at national and local level. At a national level, the Joint Air Quality Unit (JAQU) has respons

Recommendation 4

The UK Government should lead a national campaign to increase awareness and build momentum from communities to tackle air pollution and give politicians the mandate to act.

In addition to a good national campaign we need more cross-charity dialogue

Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) is that transport schemes must show an economic benefit. The issue is that the costs and benefits are too heavily weighted towards unconvincing economic benefits. Whilst the costs of such schemes in terms of damage to public health, for example, in respect of physical activity and exposure to poor air quality is disregarded. Health improvements are where the main benefits lie with cycling and walking projects. This makes it hard for cycling and walking to be part of the solution to air quality even in areas with lots of capital funding as the appraisal mechanism does not currently place cycling and walking projects on the same footing as big infrastructure projects.

Recommendation 7

The UK Government should reframe the appraisal mechanism for bids from LEPs and by extension local authorities, so that local authorities can build cycling and walking programmes into their plans and bids to tackle air pollution with confidence.

2.2 Clean Air Zone framing

More specifically, there has been unintended consequences from UK Government framing of Clean Air Zones (CAZs). There are two overall types of CAZ, a charging or a non-charging zone. The Government's own analysis showed that charging CAZs would be one of the most effective ways of improving air quality and cycling and walking can provide a viable alternative to entering charging CAZs. However, the UK Government has prescribed the category of CAZ it thinks each city should be pursuing with restrictions on the access of private cars being seen as a measure of last resort. This drives the response of the city. For example, if a city is prescribed a category that only includes buses, taxis, coaches and HGVs but not private vehicles, it concentrates the focus on measures that enable the transition of those industries to cleaner fuels or better practices and private cars don't come into the mix. This in effect, de-prioritises modal shift away from private cars. This is particularly difficult because if the UK Government does not lead on the inclusion of measures to limit private cars then a willing local leader is needed to take charge and say, "yes private vehicles will be included", and this is not something many politicians are happy to do. More must therefore be done by the UK Government to push clear and direct measures that limit private vehicles as the mode of choice into city centres, coupled with investment in the Cycling and Walking Investment Strategy to improve cycle links.

Recommendation 8

The UK Government should prioritise direct measures to limit private vehicles as the mode of choice into city centres as a central component of Clean Air Zones. In addition, they need to help local authorities set a trajectory of measures to deliver long-term continuous improvement in air quality beyond 2020.

Recommendation 9

The UK Government should provide dedicated, continuous funding and 'over the

Recommendation 10

Local authorities and charities need to work closely with communities from the outset on community engagement programmes that help to increase the public's understanding of the benefits of walking and cycling on air quality.

Contact us
