



Issue 15 – December 2016

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Urban congestion – How can we improve traffic flow?

In September, the RAC launched its annual Report on Motoring (full report [here](#)). The report highlighted growing concern among motorists about worsening congestion and slower journey times. In 2015, concern about congestion ranked 9th in the overall list of motorists' gripes, however in 2016, it had risen to 4th with 27% of motorists listing it either as their number one or a top four concern. Just under three-quarters of motorists (71%) agreed that local journey times are becoming less predictable and a similar proportion (70%) said the same about major roads.

This month, the RAC submitted written evidence to the Transport Select Committee as part of its inquiry into urban congestion. The RAC has identified some clear steps that Government and local authorities should prioritise and which could help reduce traffic congestion:

Calls to action



1 Smarter traffic management systems: Smarter signalling systems can play a role in improving traffic flow and local authorities should be encouraged to review existing traffic control systems to see if more sophisticated systems would deliver benefits. Local authorities could also make greater use of variable electronic messaging signs to advise motorists entering city centres where congestion may be at its worst. This use of variable message signs is common on the strategic road network and can prompt motorists to consider alternative routes to avoid thus helping to reduce congestion.

2 Road space matters: The RAC recognises the safety benefits of segregating cyclists from other road users but any plans to build cycle highways across the UK's towns and cities must reflect genuine demand. It will be a source of great frustration for motorists and bus passengers if road space is reduced and their journey times increased and yet cycle highways are underutilised. It is important that the design, construction and operation of cycle highways are done in such a way as to minimise the impact on other road users.

3 Charging schemes to manage demand must be evidence based: Whilst the RAC isn't necessarily opposed to local roads charging, if the intention is to improve traffic flow, a local congestion charge on its own will not solve

the problem. The London Congestion Charge demonstrates that even with less vehicles entering the zone, congestion is still getting worse because of road works and reduced road space. Any charging scheme must be evidence based, i.e. it must be seen by motorists as targeting those areas where congestion is worse alongside proposals to improve traffic flow with exemptions for only those vehicles with a strong case and with pricing that is seen as fair and not just a means of raising revenue.

How can we improve air quality?

In December “Doctors Against Diesel” suggested that London should follow the example of some heavily polluted cities outside the UK and ban diesel vehicles from entering the city centre. The RAC Report on Motoring 2016 found that there is broad support for charging owners of the most polluting diesel vehicles but only a minority (42%) support the introduction of charges for all diesel vehicles entering areas with the poorest air quality.

This month we explore why a total diesel city centre ban would be impractical and also how we can clean up our air without penalising motorists.



Why buy diesel and why a ban is impractical

Diesel vehicles remain attractive to motorists and to businesses because they offer high fuel economy, and because their engine characteristics, which allow the generation of high torque at low revs, make them particularly suited to movement of heavy loads or driving on rough terrain. The newest diesel vehicles on the roads (identified as Euro 6 vehicles) also emit far less pollution than their predecessors, and with the introduction of real-world emissions testing in 2017, manufacturers will need to make sure they are conforming to the strictest standards. Diesels remain popular because they are fuel efficient with, in most cases, better MPG than an equivalent petrol engine and therefore lower CO2 emissions. This makes them particularly popular among businesses and motorists who do high mileages.

Our research in the [2016 Report on Motoring](#) found that 28% of motorists still intend to choose diesel when they next change their vehicle, which is unchanged from 2015 when we asked the same question, indicating no shift away from diesel as a next vehicle choice.

RAC Calls to Action

- 1 Recognise the role new diesels can play:** While it has become clear that in real-world driving, diesel vehicles emit more nitrogen oxides than predicted, nevertheless, diesel engines compliant with the later Euro emissions standard emit only a tiny fraction of the nitrogen dioxide emitted by previous generations of diesels. New testing that will more closely replicate real-world driving is expected next year, but in the meantime we must avoid demonising all diesel vehicles; cleaner diesel vehicles have a role to play in both lowering nitrogen dioxide and particulate emissions and reducing the motoring sector's carbon footprint.
- 2 Phase out dirty buses and taxis:** Analysis shows that buses, taxis and HGVs are amongst the biggest contributors to nitrogen oxides and particulate emissions in our towns and cities. We therefore call upon the Government and local authorities to accelerate steps to retrofit or replace older buses so that hybrid electric and, over the longer term, pure electric and hydrogen fuel cell powered buses become the norm. The contribution of buses to overall nitrogen dioxide levels is illustrated by the fact that during the January 2015 bus strike, pollution levels dropped significantly in some of the areas of central London with the worst air quality.
- 3 Incentivise take-up of low emissions vehicles:** Research by the RAC Foundation has shown that a diesel scrappage scheme would be both expensive and relatively ineffective. The Government should consider implementing a Vehicle Excise Duty surcharge for the oldest, most polluting diesel vehicles, and use the revenue to reinstate a significantly reduced rate of VED in the second and subsequent year of ownership for plug-in hybrid vehicles.
- 4 Follow the Clean Air Zone Framework:** The Government's clean air zone framework will provide local authorities with a clear, consistent approach by which they can implement measures to target areas with the poorest air quality. Such measures would be evidence based and proportionate to the problem, targeting only those classes of vehicles where action is needed to effect the necessary improvement in air quality. The Government's proposals to

standardise the framework approach will be seen by motorists as preferable to a piecemeal approach which would be confusing for motorists and businesses alike.

5 **Recognise and promote the benefits of plug-in hybrid vehicles:** Pure electric vehicles are not yet a practical alternative for the majority of motorists because of their range limitations and time to recharge. However, motor manufacturers are introducing plug-in hybrid options for an increasing proportion of their most popular models. These offer an immediate and practical ultra-low carbon alternative to conventional petrol or diesel vehicles and their purchase should be encouraged until such time as the limitations of the current generation of pure electric vehicles have been overcome.



Bringing transparency to fuel prices

December has seen OPEC agree to an output cut, whilst non-OPEC countries have also committed to reducing production in an attempt to increase the price of oil. On 12th December 2016, the price of oil reached \$56 a barrel, its highest price since July 2015. The pound has steadily risen against the dollar which has offset any immediate rise, however motorists can expect to pay higher prices as we head into Christmas and 2017 with up to 4ppl being added at the pumps.

Year on year: Prices are significantly higher

Year on year comparison 12th December 2015 to 12th December 2016

The average UK price of unleaded on 12th December 2016 was 8.9ppl more expensive than it was on 12th December 2015. This represents a 8.4% price rise in the year. The average UK price of diesel on 12th December 2016 was 8.8ppl more expensive than it was on the 12th December 2015 representing a 8.1% price rise in a year.

	12 th December 2015	12 th December 2016
Fuel Type	Average pump price ppl	Average pump price ppl
Unleaded	106.15	115.09
Diesel	108.73	117.54

Monthly price comparison: Prices marginally lower for now, expect a rise shortly

Monthly price comparison 14th October 2016 to 16th November 2016

The average UK price of unleaded on 12th December 2016 was 1.7ppl cheaper than it was on 11th November 2016. This represents a 1.5% price fall in a month. The average UK price of diesel on 12th December 2016 was 1.1ppl cheaper than it was on 11th November 2016 representing a 0.9% price fall in a month.

	11 th November 2016	12 th December 2016
Fuel Type	Average pump price ppl	Average pump price ppl
Unleaded	116.79	115.09
Diesel	118.62	117.54

The facts - the cost of filling a typical family car:

Fuel	Petrol	Diesel
Fuel tank in litres	55	55
Avg forecourt price in per litre	115.09	117.54

Total cost to motorist	£63.30	£64.65
Duty	£31.87	£31.87
VAT @ 20%	£10.55	£10.77
Cost of fuel	£20.88	£22.00
Exc VAT	£52.75	£53.87
VAT & duty	£42.42	£42.65
% tax of fuel cost	67%	66%

*Source: Experian Catalist – UK prices as of 13th December 2016

For further information, please visit our fuel pages: <http://www.rac.co.uk/advice/fuel-prices-explained>

What is the RAC doing in your constituency?

RAC publishes 'all you need to know about smart motorways'

With £15bn being invested in the strategic road network, smart motorways are becoming a more familiar experience for motorists. Smart Motorways include either a 'dynamic hard shoulder', where the hard shoulder is opened at peak times to increase capacity, or 'all lane running', where the hard shoulder is permanently removed and converted into a running lane; both contain 'emergency refuge areas'. The RAC published advice for motorists who use these types of motorways and what they should do in the event of a breakdown.

<http://www.rac.co.uk/drive/advice/driving-advice/all-you-need-to-know-about-smart-motorways/>



RAC advice on winter driving

Ahead of the onset of cold weather, the RAC has been busy updating its driving advice for motorists this winter.

We now provide clear guidance for motorists on driving in different weather conditions, including fog, snow, ice and wind, hail and rain. We've also added advice on how best to demist your windscreen and have provided tips on how to look after your car this winter.

www.rac.co.uk/drive/advice/winter-driving



As the Motorist's Champion, the RAC is expertly placed to advise and guide effective road and motoring policy. Should you wish to discuss anything within this newsletter or any wider policy issues, please contact:

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