



## Implementing accessible and inclusive clean air zones

This briefing has been prepared by Asthma + Lung UK, IPPR's Fair Transition Unit, and Transport for All, in their shared ambition to improve health, create a fair transition to net zero, and deliver environmental policies that are equitable and inclusive.

**Toxic air is a health emergency. Urgent action is needed to address the health and economic problems that poor air quality creates and exacerbates. Air pollution contributes to up to 43,000 early deaths each year in the UK, and it's been linked to respiratory and cardiovascular diseases.<sup>1</sup> As research into the impact of toxic air increases, it also reveals connections to a broader range of health issues.**

**People on low incomes,<sup>2</sup> people from some ethnic minority backgrounds,<sup>3</sup> and disabled people<sup>4</sup> suffer a disproportionate daily and accumulating impact of being born, living, working, and aging in conditions of poor air quality. This is because of the increased risk of exposure for people living on main roads in urban areas, and the effects of our streets not currently designed to be inclusive for all users.<sup>5</sup>**

**Public support for policies aimed at reducing toxic air is evident when these policies are developed collaboratively with communities and include adequate measures to support individuals. However, policy implementation at a regional and local authority level has been stalled by a lack of ambitious targets, credible plans, and long-term funding to support a fair**

---

<sup>1</sup> Committee on the Medical Effects of Air Pollution (2018) Associations of long-term average concentrations of nitrogen dioxide with mortality. Available online: [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/734799/COMEAP\\_NO2\\_Report.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/734799/COMEAP_NO2_Report.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Public Health England (2019) Review of interventions to improve outdoor air quality and public health. Available online: [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/938623/Review\\_of\\_interventions\\_to\\_improve\\_air\\_quality\\_March-2019-2018572.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/938623/Review_of_interventions_to_improve_air_quality_March-2019-2018572.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> D. Fecht et al (2015) Associations between air pollution and socioeconomic characteristics, ethnicity and age profile of neighbourhoods in England and the Netherlands. Available online: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0269749114005144>

<sup>4</sup> United Nations (2020) Analytical study on the promotion and protection of the rights of persons with disabilities in the context of climate change. Available online: <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/3865080>

<sup>5</sup> Sustrans, Arup & Living Streets (2022) Walking for everyone: Making walking and wheeling more inclusive. Available online: <https://www.sustrans.org.uk/media/10152/walking-for-everyone.pdf>

**transition to cleaner travel. In some cases, there has also been a political element to the lack of progress. Central and local government must work together and stop using air quality as a political football.**

**When implementing clean air zones (CAZs), decision makers should also implement targeted scrappage schemes to prevent widening inequalities. Scrappage schemes should focus on reducing overall car usage by offering incentives and investing in accessible public transport and inclusive active travel, in addition to charging non-compliant vehicles. Additionally, support should be provided to facilitate access to electric vehicles and related infrastructure for those who require private transportation.**

**CAZ design must address the impact it will have on disabled people and therefore make provision for a fully accessible consultation. It is crucial to involve anyone who would be impacted by a CAZ in developing the policy, and to disseminate information about the support available in various accessible formats. This approach empowers communities and fosters a positive attitude towards measures aimed at reducing air pollution.**

The impact of toxic air

There is no safe level of air pollution. Tens of millions across the UK are breathing in levels of air pollution that are against UK law. This means that the government department responsible for levels of air pollution in the UK – the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) – is continually failing to protect public health from its greatest environmental threat.<sup>6</sup>

Air pollution has an impact on everyone breathing it in, but some groups are significantly more vulnerable to the effects of poor air quality. This includes those who are pregnant, babies and children, older people, and those living with long term conditions including lung conditions, which are both caused and exacerbated by poor air quality. Up to 43,000 early deaths every year in the UK are associated with air pollution.<sup>7</sup>

*“If I go somewhere with a lot of cars I feel my asthma, I feel I can’t breathe, versus the countryside. I fully back why it’s important and why things need to change.” (Case study from Asthma + Lung UK report)*

---

<sup>6</sup> Asthma + Lung UK (2023) Putting the brakes on toxic air. Available online: <https://www.asthmaandlung.org/putting-brakes-toxic-air>

<sup>7</sup> Committee on the Medical Effects of Air Pollution (2018) Associations of long-term average concentrations of nitrogen dioxide with mortality. Available online: [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/734799/COMEAP\\_NO2\\_Report.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/734799/COMEAP_NO2_Report.pdf)

## Implementing successful, accessible, and inclusive clean air zones

Charging clean air zones (class D CAZs<sup>8</sup>) are key to reducing pollution in urban areas, by getting the most polluting vehicles off the streets. According to modelling by Defra, CAZs have the largest impact on NO<sub>2</sub> compared with any other policy and produce on average an 18.3% reduction in NO<sub>2</sub> concentrations.<sup>9</sup>

However, charging measures should not penalise those who are poorer and who cannot afford to upgrade their vehicles or change their travel behaviour, or who are unable to change their car easily if they have adaptations. Local authorities who introduce a charging CAZ should therefore receive sufficient targeted funding from central government to support the transition to cleaner modes of transport – a scrappage scheme.

Several scrappage schemes have been established alongside charging measures, but these schemes have been patchy in provision, with only 20% of funding going towards private consumers.<sup>10</sup> The scheme should target those with lower household incomes and disabled people because these groups are most at risk of losing access to travel if they are not able to upgrade their transport options to comply with a CAZ.<sup>11</sup>

When implementing a CAZ, it's important to support individuals using non-compliant vehicles in transitioning to cleaner modes of transportation. This means that robust scrappage schemes must be in place that provide people with the autonomy to choose travel options that meet their needs. Individuals should have the choice of upgrading their vehicle, getting a bike/e-bike/adapted cycle, and/or getting a public transport pass, in exchange for scrapping their existing non-compliant vehicle. There is a wealth of options that could also be explored as part of a scrappage scheme to involve industry and give people more choice, including access to electric car clubs or cycle hire schemes.<sup>12</sup>

---

<sup>8</sup> UK Government (2023) Guidance: clean air zones. Available online:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/driving-in-a-clean-air-zone>

<sup>9</sup> Figure 4.6: Reduction in average NO<sub>2</sub> concentrations arising from the implementation of the charging CAZ option. Defra (2017) Draft UK Air Quality Plan for tackling nitrogen dioxide technical report. Available online: [https://consult.defra.gov.uk/airquality/air-quality-plan-for-tackling-nitrogen-dioxide/supporting\\_documents/Technical%20Report%20%20Amended%209%20May%202017.pdf](https://consult.defra.gov.uk/airquality/air-quality-plan-for-tackling-nitrogen-dioxide/supporting_documents/Technical%20Report%20%20Amended%209%20May%202017.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> Estimation by Asthma + Lung UK (2023) in Zoning in on Clean Air. In total, they estimate funding for scrappage schemes across the six existing and planned clean air zones (Bath, Birmingham, Bradford, Bristol, London, Portsmouth and York) represents £178.3 million. Their estimation is that 80% (£144.3) of this funding is directed at businesses. Report available online: [https://www.asthmaandlung.org.uk/sites/default/files/2023-03/Zoning\\_in\\_on\\_clean\\_air\\_2023.pdf](https://www.asthmaandlung.org.uk/sites/default/files/2023-03/Zoning_in_on_clean_air_2023.pdf)

<sup>11</sup> Asthma + Lung UK (2023) Putting the brakes on toxic air. Available online:

<https://www.asthmaandlung.org.uk/putting-brakes-toxic-air>

<sup>12</sup> Asthma + Lung UK (2023) Putting the brakes on toxic air. Available online:

<https://www.asthmaandlung.org.uk/putting-brakes-toxic-air>

### ***Case Study: Cleaner Travel Access Fund (CTAF)***<sup>13</sup>

In 2023, Asthma + Lung UK commissioned Ricardo to deliver a robust assessment of the health and economic benefits of the Cleaner Travel Access Fund, their proposed scrappage scheme to support the delivery of accessible clean air zones. The study focussed on the impacts on human health, exploring both the quantified and monetised impact of the policy.

Ricardo's modelling showed that the scrappage scheme was a 2.5 for 1 deal, meaning for every £1 invested in the scheme by central government, there would be a £2.50 payback to society. The modelling showed that investing in a fair transition to clean air would make a net return to the taxpayer through reduced early mortality, reduced cases of asthma, and a reduction in missed school, work and care hours linked to the improved air quality the scheme would produce.

### **Unlocking local action on air quality**<sup>14</sup>

Local authorities have many of the necessary powers to address air pollution, but to truly unlock action on air quality, national government needs to provide support. There is no single solution to tackling air pollution – it will require national and local policy makers to work together to put a holistic mix of policies in place to achieve cleaner air. Local authorities should embed air quality into their strategy to support integrated action across the council.

Local people, like councillors, are best placed to design local solutions to improve air quality where they live. But they need financial support from central government to deliver. Instead of short-term competitive funding rounds, central government should provide long term financial support for action on clean air. Interventions that are perceived as fair receive more support, so local authorities must carry out meaningful engagement when designing solutions. Polling carried out last year suggested that councillors are sometimes reluctant to act because although they themselves are concerned about air pollution, they do not think it is something their constituents are worried about.

### **Ensuring a fair transition to clean air**

If not supported by adequate investment and infrastructure, CAZs present a risk of a strong negative distributional effect. This is due to both the transport system being inaccessible, leading to a reliance on private vehicles for door to door travel, and the fact that many disabled

---

<sup>13</sup> Ricardo (2023) Cleaner Travel Access Fund Campaign – Economic modelling research. Available online: <https://www.asthmaandlung.org.uk/saving-your-breath-economic-benefit-cleaner-air>

<sup>14</sup> Singer Hobbs M., Marix Evans L., and Frost S. (2023) Unlocking local action on clean air, IPPR. Available online: <https://www.ippr.org/articles/unlocking-local-action-on-clean-air>

people own non-compliant vehicles<sup>15</sup> which could be due to financial barriers or a lack of choice over the type of vehicle.<sup>16</sup>

Older, more polluting vehicles that would be non-compliant with a class D CAZ are more frequently owned by poorer individuals or small businesses. There is also a risk of a negative impact on disabled people and their access to employment, goods and services, leisure and support. CAZs encourage the use of public transport, which currently is often inaccessible to disabled people, as well as the adoption of cleaner vehicles which disabled people may not be able to afford.

*"I deeply care about climate justice and desperately want to use greener and more sustainable modes of transport, but these are often inaccessible to me. I can't cycle, pavements are atrocious which makes wheeling difficult, the Tube is mostly out of bounds, and buses take forever. It means I am sometimes forced to take taxis." (Case study from Transport for All report)*

Transport for All conducted research in August 2023 to assess how disabled people are being impacted by CAZs through one-on-one interviews with those from the respiratory and wider disabled community in Birmingham and Bristol, where CAZs have recently been implemented.

Those interviewed in the wider disabled community felt that during local authority planning processes for a CAZ, their views and needs were not prioritised. This was especially noticeable when considering the time and money required to obtain an adapted vehicle that meets CAZ requirements.

*"One of my friends that does like PA support for me when I don't have anyone, she lives the other side of town and her car didn't comply. [Now the CAZ has been implemented] ... it makes the journey about an hour and obviously adds to her fuel price. So that's been a barrier to getting support." (Case study from Transport for All report)*

---

<sup>15</sup> Figure 86: Types of vehicle. Transport for All (2023) Are we there yet? Barriers to transport for disabled people in 2023. Available online: [https://www.transportforall.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/NATS\\_Full\\_PDF.pdf](https://www.transportforall.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/NATS_Full_PDF.pdf)

<sup>16</sup> In 2022 88% of vehicles through the Motability scheme were diesel or petrol. Motability (2022) Annual reports and accounts. Available online: [https://www.motabilityoperations.co.uk/media/tezi0smz/annual\\_report\\_2022.pdf](https://www.motabilityoperations.co.uk/media/tezi0smz/annual_report_2022.pdf)

When CAZs were implemented, they felt there was not enough information easily accessible about what they needed to do to be compliant, how the CAZ would impact them, and what support they could get.

Disabled people felt that for them to be less reliant on cars, public transport provision and accessibility needed to be an area for key investment and consideration.

*"You're gonna have to invest in public transport to get it to the point where it is affordable, although thankfully for many disabled people, the concessionary bus pass eases that burden. But certainly punctual, reliable, getting that right and sufficiently frequent with a good selection of routes. When you've got that right, then it's much easier to convert... to persuade people to not use their private motor car." (Case study from Transport for All report)*

The respiratory disabled community shared similar themes, but they also reported feeling positively about measures to improve air quality, because they themselves had suffered the impacts of poor air quality from traffic.

The co-production of clean air zone policies with communities helps to improve outcomes by delivering policies that are more accessible and inclusive because they are better designed to fit a wider range of needs. This approach empowers communities to engage in the journey to clean air by involving them in shaping policies from the start.

March 2024

For more information, contact Chloe Owen, Senior Policy and Public Affairs Officer at [cowen@asthmaandlung.org.uk](mailto:cowen@asthmaandlung.org.uk)