



The Alliance of British Drivers

London Region: PO Box 62, Chislehurst, Kent, BR7 5YB

Tel: 020-8295-0378

Web: www.freedomfordrivers.org

Attn Julia Regan
London Borough of Merton

Via email: Julia.Regan@merton.gov.uk

30 July 2017

Scrutiny of Decision to Implement Permit Parking Surcharge for Diesel Vehicles.

Dear Julia

Please accept this as our submission to the Scrutiny Meeting on the 14th December.

The Alliance of British Drivers (ABD) is a national body that promotes and represents the interests of motorists. I am responsible for the London Region of the ABD and for certain campaigns.

Before addressing the specific questions that councillors wish answered, let me give our general views on the question of air pollution in London.

We accept that there are serious problems with air pollution in London that affects the health of the population, and severely in some cases. But air pollution tends to be a problem concentrated in the central London boroughs and on specific locations only in the outer London boroughs (for example where there are large numbers of HGVs/LGVs and buses).

These problems have been made worse in recent years in relation to NOX because of the encouragement of diesel vehicles by taxation that involved a focus on CO2 emissions to the exclusion of other parameters. This has meant that vehicle owners have tended to purchase diesel vehicles for tax reasons and also because of the good fuel economy they provide. The negative aspects of diesel vehicles and their emissions have only become apparent in the last couple of years, wrong-footing both consumers and vehicle manufacturers (the latter have long lead times on model changes).

It would seem that Merton intends to penalise those residents who responded to past (and indeed current) Government incentives for a "greener" and more "sustainable" economy which is very unfortunate.

As regards the actual impact of air pollution in boroughs such as Merton, and in London as a whole, regrettably the position is often exaggerated. For example, the Agenda for the Meeting on the 7th November said "around 40,000 deaths are attributable to exposure to outdoor air pollution" (Page 1). That gave a lot of evidence on the damaging effects of air pollution but was more of a polemic as it simplified a lot of the evidence.

Kings College London who have produced some data on air pollution in London have also fallen into this trap. Their original estimates were based on the likely shortening of lifespan that results from air pollution (i.e. premature deaths). This was necessary because there are almost no cases where specific deaths are attributable to air pollution. So allegations of simple numbers of deaths are simply wrong.

The other problem with a lot of these allegations is that the estimates on which the "premature deaths" (or number of years of life lost) are based are exceedingly suspect and not based on good science. Even the producers of these estimates acknowledge that the "confidence" limits in statistical terms are wide.

It is worth bearing in mind that emissions from vehicles have been falling quite rapidly as the vehicle fleet is replaced with newer purchases and older vehicles scrapped. Indeed the historic data on the negative effects of air pollution may already be out of date. The Mayor of London has of course encouraged the purchase of newer vehicles with his proposals for the Ultra Low Emission Zone (ULEZ) and where there will also be a surcharge very soon for older, more polluting, vehicles.

We concede that it would be preferable from what is now known to encourage vehicle purchasers to upgrade to a modern vehicle which is either petrol or electric powered, or the latest standard for diesel (Euro 6). The Mayor of London is encouraging the Government to introduce a "scrappage" scheme for diesel vehicles which we support, although whether the Government will agree to this seems doubtful because of the cost.

The Mayor of London is introducing the Ultra Low Emission Zone (ULEZ) and this will actually extend to the whole of London within the M25 so will cover the borough of Merton. We do not understand why the Borough of Merton wishes to compound these efforts by introducing a scheme that will have little impact and will be exceedingly costly for a minority of residents (effectively those unlucky enough to have purchased a diesel vehicle and who rely on on-street parking).

Legal Issues Regarding Revenue Raising from Permit Parking Charges

We suspect the motivation for imposing charges on diesel vehicle owners is not simply health concerns but economic. With council budgets under such pressure of late, it might clearly be advantageous to raise the income from permit parking charges. But Councillors are reminded that on-street parking charges cannot be used as a "revenue raising" measure because the Act of Parliament that enables such charges to be imposed does not support that. Only administration costs can be recovered. This has been upheld in legal cases such as Camden v Cran and in more recent cases such as the attempt by Barnet Council to raise charges.

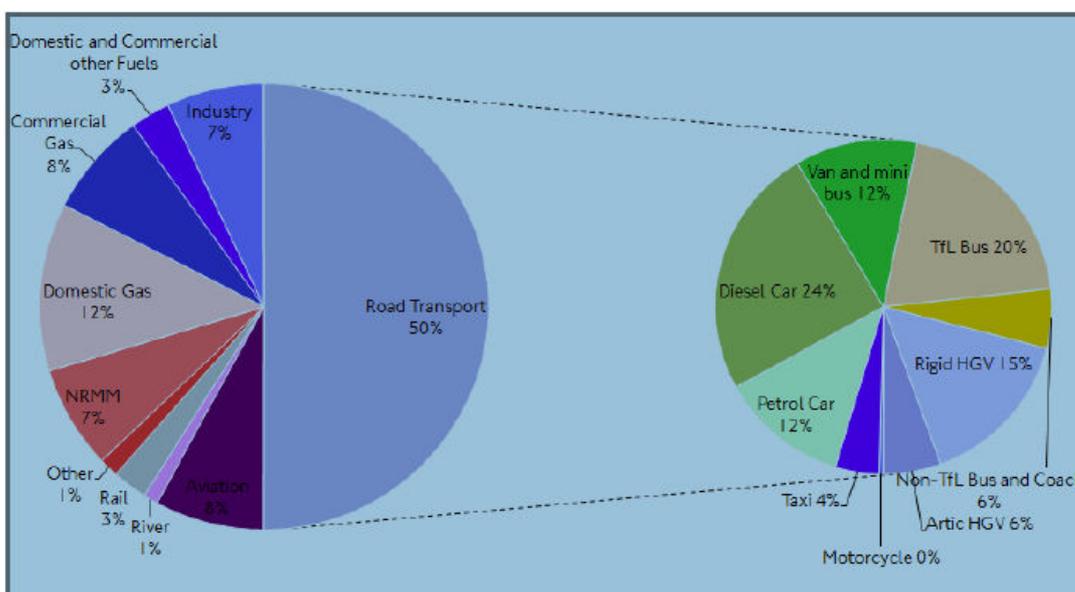
The Council's proposals for Merton will increase overall revenue from permit parking charges by as much as £861,150 dependent on the actual "surcharge" for diesel vehicles (see page 37 of the report). That might be offset to some extent by the discount for electric vehicles, but there are very few of those at present, and of course by possible reductions in future if people switch from diesel to electric or other vehicles. However that is not likely to take place rapidly as few people can afford to immediately replace their vehicles. In the meantime the council would be obtaining a large additional surplus from permit parking charges that would be illegal. This could only be rectified by introducing a discount for petrol fueled vehicles to offset the increased charges on diesel vehicles. The extended phase-in of the diesel charges may assist of course, but there is no estimation of the likely changes in overall revenue in the TTR report which is a major omission which should be rectified.

The Overall Impact of a Diesel Vehicle Surcharge on NOX in Merton

The TTR report also has another major omission in that there is no estimation of the likely impact of a diesel permit parking surcharge on NOX emissions across the borough. These factors need to be taken into account when considering the impact:

a - What proportion of vehicle emissions in the borough arise from private cars as opposed to the bigger polluters which tend to be HGVs, buses, taxis, LGVs etc, and other air pollution generators such as industry, offices, homes and other buildings? Indeed one factor to look at is what proportion of the air pollution actually blows in from surrounding boroughs or further afield. The TTR report says nothing on these matters. But there is data on the sources of air pollution in London in the recent Consultation Report on the ULEZ from TfL - see page 21 : https://consultations.tfl.gov.uk/environment/air-quality-consultation-phase-2/user_uploads/consultation-information-document.pdf-1 . Below is a chart from that document that shows that road transport only represents 50% of NOX emissions and diesel cars only 24% of that 50%, i.e. 12%.

Figure 3: NO_x sources in Greater London in 2013 (LAEI 2013)²⁰



As those figures cover the whole of Greater London, it is likely that they are representative of the data for Merton.

b - Another factor to consider is what proportion of cars on the roads of Merton which may be causing NOX pollution are actually owners of a parking permit from the Council. Clearly a number of the vehicles will have driven in from outside the borough, and in addition any vehicle owner who has off-street parking will not be affected by the proposed surcharge. What proportion of vehicles owned and parked in the borough actually have a parking permit? This should be a simple question for the Council to answer but is not in the TTR report so far as I can see.

When the similar borough of Richmond proposed to introduce a similar "emission-based permit charge", one Councillor suggested only one sixth of vehicles in the borough would be affected by it.

So if one assumes a similar figure for Merton, then the overall impact on emissions might be one sixth of 12%, i.e. 2%.

But that assumes that all NOX emissions from diesel vehicles will be removed which would only happen if all such owners converted to electric vehicles or stopped owning cars altogether. It is surely more likely that half might pay the increased permit charge, while another half move to petrol vehicles (which are not NOX free, but only reduce emissions by 63% over diesels according to the TTR report - page 19).

So taking those additional factors into account means that the overall reduction in NOX emissions might be 0.4% (40% of the 50% who respond, from the 2% above).

So this policy if implemented might result in a reduction of 0.4% in overall NOX emissions in the borough of Merton.

This is a ridiculously small figure which not only will be difficult to even measure (given the variation in NOX figures, the accuracy of equipment to use it, and the fact that more general trends might make it indiscernible), but can surely not be justified in terms of the cost and inconvenience imposed on local residents who have the misfortune to own diesel vehicles.

The Experience of Richmond

It is worth reminding Councillors of what happened in the London Borough of Richmond when they proposed to introduce an Emissions Based permit parking charge scheme. At the time they were a Liberal Democrat controlled council and had been for some years. They undertook widespread public consultation on the proposals and held public meetings on it, but despite widespread objections decided to proceed and implemented it. Subsequently this was surely one factor in the Liberal Democrats losing control of the council to the Conservatives with leader Serge Lourie also losing his seat in 2010. Their irrational anti-car policies were the source of many complaints. Subsequently the Conservative led council in Richmond scrapped the emission based permit scheme, although they have retained discounts for zero and very low emission vehicles. That would surely be a wiser policy for Merton to adopt.

Answers to Councillors Questions

Below are our specific answers to the questions posed by Councillors:

a - What experience does ABD have from elsewhere of schemes of this nature?

Answer: I have covered the experience in Richmond above - more information is present here: <http://www.freedomfordrivers.org/Richmond.htm> which was aimed to control CO2 emissions but would not have succeeded. We do not have experience of the few London boroughs who have attacked diesel cars and are certainly not aware of any evidence that they have reduced NOX emissions.

b - What the impact has been for the residents in question elsewhere in the country?

Answer: None so far as we are aware.

c - What does ABD believe would be a fair level of levy for diesel vehicle owners living in CPZs?

Answer: We do not believe that any "surcharge" for diesel vehicles would be fair, bearing in mind that the ULEZ scheme is likely to be implemented and will provide incentives to change vehicles.

d - What does ABD believe should be the timeframe of implementation for a levy of this kind?

Answer: Never.

e - What does ABD think would be a fairer approach for diesel vehicle owners living in CPZs?

Answer: There should be no prejudice against diesel vehicle owners who require on-street parking. These are matters for the national Government to cover and we should not encourage such local schemes that are the result of "gesture politics" which will have negligible impact on emissions.

f - What alternative suggestions ABD would make to improve air quality in the borough and reduce diesel emissions?

Answer: Encourage the national Government to discourage diesel vehicles by taxation adjustments, and tackle the many other sources of air pollution other than private car owners who happen to have a parking permit.

g - How should any revenue from this surcharge be spent to improve air quality?

Answer: Apart from the fact that raising extra revenue from such a policy would be illegal, we have no particular suggestions to make in this regard.

h - Does ABD believe this policy is a sufficient incentive to encourage greater take up of electric vehicles in the borough?

Answer: No at this present time. The lack of attractiveness of electric vehicles depends on their relative inflexibility and the fact that they currently cost significantly more than the equivalent petrol or diesel power vehicle. Even hybrids are somewhat more expensive. These costs may improve over time as more electric vehicles are owned. However, total environmental costs of electric vehicles are no better than petrol vehicles because of the high production costs (resources used) and the fact that electricity generation is not emissions free - however it does tend to move the environmental impact elsewhere (a kind of "beggar thy neighbour" approach) while reducing emissions in cities.

Conclusion

Our response on this matter has unfortunately had to be relatively brief due to pressure of time on a topic that is complex and difficult for those unfamiliar with this policy area to understand. But in essence we do not see any significant benefit in resulting NOX emissions by introducing a diesel surcharge on permit parking fees in Merton. Even introducing such a change will of course incur administration costs which will be a wasted and unproductive cost.

Councillors should at least request that more work be done on the TTR report to give more specific evidence on the likely benefit (if any) of such a scheme, as explained above, before any such proposal is taken forward.

Yours sincerely

Roger Lawson
London Co-Ordinator