

Transport Strategy Must Think Beyond EVs for Greener Travel, Says Think Tank

by Jonathan Goldsmith

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The Green Alliance has called for new policies to encourage an increase in public transport use to reduce emissions.

The UK think tank has conducted research regarding the policies as efforts to cut transport emissions by switching to electric vehicles (EVs) in the UK are not expected to hit mid-term climate targets.

The study, published on Wednesday 8th December, also revealed that swapping 1.7 per cent of car journeys to walking or cycling could provide up to £2.5bn in health benefits.

While the UK Government has put some positive policies in place to help decarbonise the transport sector, the new report noted the importance of including different modes of transport such as public transport, cycling or walking.

Transport became the UK's highest-emitting sector in 2016 and emissions have been steadily on the rise. While Government data shows territorial carbon emissions from transport in 2020 sat at 97.2 megatonnes, 22.5 per cent lower than 1990 levels, the sector still accounts for 29.8 per cent of the UK's total emissions.

The Green Alliance's study analysed fast, medium, and slow EV sales trajectories leading up to the UK's 2030 ban on the sale of new petrol and diesel cars. The faster trajectory is based on recommendations from the Climate Change Committee, while the medium is based on the Government's prediction of average sales rates.

The slow trajectory is the Department for Transport's 'worst-case' scenario, of only 50 per cent of vehicles sold in 2030 being purely electric.

Even under the medium sales trajectory, the study discovered the average annual mileage per car would have to drop by approximately 1,700 miles to meet targets. Under the slow sales trajectory, the annual average mileage per car would have to be reduced by almost 30 per cent (2,300 miles a year fewer) to keep emissions on track.

Helena Bennett, the Green Alliance's senior policy adviser, said: "Switching to electric vehicles is the top priority for cutting emissions from cars, but it can't be the only tool used to make transport greener.

"Better and more affordable public transport, safe cycle routes and walkable places must be a centrepiece of the government's transport strategy."

Jonathan Goldsmith, Head of Construction and Infrastructure at Acre

commented *"Over the last twenty years, the cost of motoring has fallen by 15%. In contrast, over the same period, rail fare costs have increased by over 20% and coach fares by over 40%. If it wishes to meet its decarbonisation objectives, the UK Government needs to find a way to ensure that green public transportation is more accessible to its citizens."*

The research noted that reducing congestion would boost the economy as the cost of congestion was estimated to be almost £8bn in 2018.

While the government has introduced a zero-emission vehicle mandate for company car sales, it has not yet unveiled levels for these targets, according to the report.

The Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR) had already highlighted that the Government's efforts to decarbonise transport are focusing too much on EVs and could fail to provide affordable and greener alternatives for reduce overall car use.

It noted efforts to decarbonise road transport through the uptake of EVs could deliver an 11 per cent increase in car traffic by 2050 and a 28 per cent increase in car ownership, so is instead calling for transport to be decarbonised in line with the net-zero target by encouraging greater uptake of public transport, cycling and walking.

Johnny leads Acre's work within the construction and infrastructure sectors, with a particular focus on placing senior-level Sustainability and EHS professionals into exciting businesses. Johnny joined Acre in 2015 as a Research Consultant and, after continued success identifying and placing challenging roles, has since progressed to the Head of Acre's construction team. During his time at Acre, Johnny has partnered with both major corporates and SMEs to help shape their sustainability and EHS functions. He has an honest and transparent approach to the industry and enjoys challenging clients to continually drive change.

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