

Greens release air pollution challenge as Government unveils plan



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***Green plan includes a fine on cheating companies, a new Clean Air Act, and increased air pollution monitoring**

The Green Party today unveiled an 'air pollution challenge' ahead of the Government releasing its own plans to tackle the high levels of toxins in the air. Party co-leader, Caroline Lucas, was in Bristol to highlight what she calls a 'catastrophic failure' by a Government 'trying its best to shirk its responsibilities on air pollution'.

Lucas said that any air quality plan which fails her party's 'checklist' isn't 'worthy of the name'. She said:

"Any air quality plan which fails this test isn't worthy of the name. We've seen catastrophic failure on air pollution from a Government trying it's best to shirk its responsibilities. It's astonishing that today's plan had to be dragged out of the Government – as ministers tried their best to use the election as cover for their continuing refusal to take action.

"The Green Party's air pollution plan would tackle this emergency – and force car companies to pay their way for the damage they have done to people's health. Half measures are not good enough when 40,000 premature deaths are linked to air pollution every year – we need bold action now.

"Through a clean air act we would enshrine the right to breathe in the law – and ensure that Britain becomes a world leader in new technologies which help us clean up our air. The Government must also plough resources into decent public transport – reversing years of underinvestment and skyrocketing fare prices."

Lucas' intervention comes after it was revealed that the cost of public transport has skyrocketed in recent years, while motoring has become cheaper. According to the Government the cost of motoring has dropped 20% in the last 26 years, while the cost of travel by train and bus is up over 60%.

Real terms changes in the cost of travel:

Real terms change in cost of transport	Motoring, including the purchase of a vehicle	Bus and coach fares	Rail fares
(1) Between 1980 and 2016	-20%	+64%	+63%
(2) Between 1997 and 2016	-16%	+33%	+23%
(3) Between 2010 and 2016	-10%	+7%	+5%
(4) Between 2015 and 2016	-0.3%	+2%	-1%

Lucas will be joined by children at Fairfield School in Bristol to unveil her party's air pollution plans.

THE GREEN PARTY'S AIR QUALITY PLAN CHECKLIST

Over the last two years, the Government has lost two UK court cases about its plans to tackle the key pollutant nitrogen dioxide – NO₂. As it stands, a total of 37 out of 43 regions of the UK are in breach of legal limits for NO₂, and, according to the Royal College of Physicians, air pollution is associated with 40,000 early deaths each year, and the annual costs to the health service and society are more than £20bn.

In November 2016, the High Court ordered the Government to publish a draft new clean air plan to tackle NO₂ by 24 April with a final plan by 31 July. The Government attempted to delay the publication of that plan (again) after calling the General Election, citing Purdah rules. That application was rejected by the High Court last week.

The Government will publish its plan today, but leaks suggest it will not go anywhere near as far as it needs to.

Here is what a comprehensive Air Quality Plan should include.

Clean Air Act: It should rapidly introduce a new Clean Air Act to tackle the sources of modern day air pollution that are harming people's health, enshrine the right to breathe into UK law, and ensure the UK becomes a world leader in the new technologies and industries that will help us clean up our air.

Expand 'Clean Air Zones': It should expand and strengthen the network of Clean Air Zones across the country – limiting the most polluting vehicles, including cars, from entering air pollution hot-spots – creating funding for local authorities to invest in walking, cycling and clean public transport. These should be strong enough to ensure legal compliance on NO₂ by the end of 2018.

Increase VED: It should increase the first year Vehicle Excise Duty on new diesel vehicles (except vans) by around £800, to reflect the additional cost to society of dirty diesel engines, [raising £500m](#) to help fund a targeted diesel scrappage scheme.

Diesel Scrappage: It should introduce a targeted diesel scrappage scheme to take diesel vehicles off the road as soon as possible, and ensure that all those who live within Clean Air Zones can affordably replace polluting diesel vehicles. As well as offering replacement clean vehicles, these schemes should also offer alternatives such as car club membership and rail season tickets.

Note: Despite a \$10bn vehicle replacement programme in the United States, VW has only embarked upon an opaque programme of 'technical fixes' on its 1.2 million vehicles in the UK. The Greens, working through UK regulators, would

ensure that VW and others offer free vehicle replacement or retrofitting – as has happened in the United States.

Fine the Cheats: It should set out a plan for how companies who cheated emissions testing would be fined. Despite a \$14.7bn settlement in the US, Volkswagen, for example, has yet to pay any damages in the EU – an equivalent fine in the UK could raise more than £8 billion from VW alone.

Independent Regulation: It should guarantee the independence of the Vehicle Certification Agency – changing the way it is funded ensuring that the car industry doesn't have [a disproportionate influence](#) on its activities.

Monitor Pollution Hotspots: It should ensure there is a comprehensive network of air monitoring stations in pollution hotspots – ensuring that air quality is monitored around hospitals, health clinics, and schools, so that those who are most vulnerable to the impacts of air pollution, notably children, the elderly and infirm, are protected.

Active Transport: It should undertake a national review of transport system with serious investment in buses, trams and trains along with safe routes for walking and cycling. People need an alternative to car use and we must protect our towns, cities and countryside from the pollution and congestion that comes with new roads.

Clean Energy: It should scale-up investment in renewable energy – which, as it stands, is set to drop by 95% over next two years. Harnessing the clean energy that we have in abundance would be a win-win, both for tackling climate change and air pollution.

Ditch Coal: It should should bring forward the coal phaseout date to 2023 at the least, and gradually end the [£6bn a year subsidies](#) in the UK to dirty energy. Pollution from the UK's coal-fired fleet causes roughly [2,900 premature deaths](#) a year.

HOW SHOULD THIS BE FUNDED?

There are no cheap fixes when it comes to cleaning up the air we breathe: the long term solution is to completely change the way we travel to reduce the traffic on our roads. Further, any action we take now will relieve pressure on our health services in the future, and reduce the £20bn cost of dirty air – as calculated by the Royal College of Physicians. As note above, the Air Quality Plan should ensure that car companies who cheated emissions are appropriately fined, and that such levies are used to fund action on air quality. UK regulators – namely, the Competition and Markets Authority, the Vehicle Certification Agency, and the Serious Fraud Office – should force car manufacturers in the UK to replace or retrofit polluting diesel vehicles.

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