Transport Committee
House of Commons
London
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GMB Trade Union Response for written evidence: Zero emission vehicles and road pricing inquiry

Accelerating the shift to zero emission vehicles

The feasibility, opportunities, and challenges presented by the acceleration of the ban of the sale of new petrol and diesel vehicles to 2030;

The actions required by Government and private operators to encourage greater uptake of electric vehicles and the infrastructure required to support them.

GMB Trade Union Response

GMB is a general trade union that represents workers across all sectors of the economy. Our Union has over 600,000 members with thousands working in a variety of roles in the Transport Sector from Aviation, Passenger transport, Food and Freight Logistics & Public Services transport roles as well as private hire, courier, and package distribution.

Our Union acknowledges the need to reduce our carbon emissions, improve air quality and move to a more greener transport system. However, as we have workers in the energy sector we would be looking to ensure that the industry retains these skilled jobs as we move to green transport initiatives.

We need to see an improved local transport links if our members are going to reduce their reliability on using cars. This includes rural areas. We welcome moves to introduce light rail and tram networks which have produced increases in skilled jobs and have added to the regeneration of towns and city transport links.

There are multiple challenges in relation changing attitudes due to price point, charging infrastructure availability as well as finding solutions for those who live more remotely and have range anxiety.

There issues are compounded by the need of many key workers who just fundamentally cannot afford to make the change forcing them in to paying weekly charges in the longer term for low emission zones as exist in London but will expand as more authorities create these zones.

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Whilst GMB London broadly welcome Low emission zones there needs to be proportionality in the terms of use as often commerce such as Taxi, Private Hire, Food Delivery and Courier are often disproportionality affected by this as are those with disability who are often taking longer routes at greater expense to complete trips or are unable to reach their ultimate destination.

The need for improved grants for those embracing the technology is encouraged as well as tax advantages for those who have already been keen to embrace this Zero Emissions to be sure future grant that may have greater advantage do not put early investors at a disadvantage well selling back in to a second hand market.

A low emission grant scheme for Key workers would also be a welcome addition to any consideration of increasing vehicle adoption.

There must be a mandatory scheme to increase charging in any regeneration schemes, new build properties & refurbishments especially in town centre developments and redevelopments.

Furthermore, local authorities must be given minimum levels of charging infrastructure to implement at public offices and car parks at a high enough charging speed to be able to give an adequate charge.

There must be an improved high speed infostructure especially on the Motorway network where Ecotricity have failed to provide adequate service and provision.

Maximum pricing rates must be set to avoid price gouging.

The particular challenges around decarbonising buses and how these should be addressed.

A scheme to invite inventions of new technology to retrofit ecological systems that either eliminate or substantially reduce would be welcome and create extra employment for those installing the chosen systems.

It should not be the governments jobs to subsidise bus operators who are private profit driven entities in implementing these changes as in the medium term there will be reduced maintenance and fuel costs for these providers.

The Government's ambition to phase out the sale of new diesel heavy goods vehicles, including the scope to use hydrogen as an alternative fuel.
Road pricing

Lack of Hydrogen infrastructure. With Less than 20 Hydrogen stations available or planned for Bus and Standard vehicles the practicalities for HGV Hydrogen provision will be down to fleet operators to consider (At great cost.) Unless consideration is given to this there will be substantial difficulties in acting on speed and turnaround required by fleets.

Using electricity until ranges increase will be difficult Volvo as an example are offering vehicles that have a range between 120 to 180 Miles range, but this will be dependant on payload and road conditions paired with time and weather conditions.

Add to this the time required to charge a vehicle for long range journeys and the lack of high-speed infrastructure and the need for multiple charging points in fleets and this is the perfect storm for many operators.

With driver's hours being restricted the costs of maintaining a fleet also may mean longer turnarounds and delays as well as issues with tacho hours for drivers who may be reliant on returning or reaching their next destination in time to not exceed their permissible hours.

Novel solutions will be required to appropriate levels of infrastructure especially for Motorway and Hubbed services for HGV.

Unless range anxiety can be overcome and solutions that look at how distance journeys can be undertaken there will be inertia from the haulage and HGV fleet managers as well as Local authorities and specialist users.

There will also need to be consideration to grid infrastructure to take in to account the levels of use for these vehicles.

The case for introducing some form of road pricing and the economic, fiscal, environmental and social impacts of doing so;

We recognise where excise duty revenue is reducing as there will need to be some mechanism to find other avenues to replace this loss. However, any scheme that is introduced should not be a cash cow and an opportunity to exceed levels already received from existing revenues beyond a RPI or similar increase.

There is a distinct possibility that revenue levels will increase if a road pricing is instituted as there is a possibility that the true level of travel will be perhaps greater than prophesised.

GMB have a major concern in relation to the effects and implementation for workers who are reliant on their own personal transportation to reach their places of work especially those who work unsocial hours and cannot use public transport.

There is a further concern for individuals who provide commercial services such as couriers, Taxi and Private Hire, food delivery as well as freight and service providers in terms of increased costs and the propensity where gig economy providers are concerned that rates of payment for services rendered will not be considered when road pricing is introduced as there are or will be multiple variables that cannot be considered when carrying out real time journeys such as Low traffic neighbourhoods or zero emission zones.

Local authorities, Health Authorities or Care providers may see an increase in costs based on journeys for those who require care or essential services.

Those self-employed carers who are on limited contracts or zero hour contracts will also no doubt be also impacted by potential extra costs.

Unless a cap is put in place for such providers many will find the possibility of carrying out such roles damaging to their income.

Socially there is a distinct possibility that those who can least afford excessive costs will be disadvantaged.

The need to still band payment based on vehicle consumption may be still necessary however there will need to be a consideration on how milage rates will still affect those who have to travel considerable distances for work and if there will be implications to the economy where inflation rates increase due to enhanced charges to consumers.

There will be a long delay in availability of low cost second hand ZEC vehicles that will reach the market in reasonable numbers and the costs will still be restrictive for many plus the inherent risk of battery degradation issues making repair costs higher for many who can ill afford the extra expenditure.

Once consideration may be a people's electric car program which will not only boost home manufacturing but create a platform for manufacturing in what is still a depressed labour market.

The value of such a program would be creating an affordable low-cost solution to the requirement for affordable and plentiful Zero emission vehicles as well as creating employment.

Unless there are plentiful levels of BEV and Zero Emission capable vehicles, we will continue to see a lack of speed to such a program with those on the lowest rung economically being left behind with potentially higher costs of motoring in conventional combustion engine vehicles.

Clearly the longer time that the transition to Zero emission vehicles the longer it will take to reach improved emission levels and carbon reduction.

There will still be the particulate issues from tyre breakdown and braking systems that are a further issue in terms of contaminants and further research in to alternatives will be required in this realm too.

Limits must be instituted in terms of maximum pricing for charging prices per K/Wh to prevent price gouging.

Which particular road pricing or pay-as-you-drive schemes would be most appropriate for the UK context and the practicalities of implementing such schemes;

We have looked at multiple options that may be a mix of geofenced areas where you buy a carnet e.g. like Germany, Switzerland – our biggest concern is black boxes and tracking systems and people's rights to privacy. An alternative would be a self-declaration scheme of milage that could be verified or alternatively a dumb black box that records milage and transfers basic information on charging the vehicle to then pay outstanding tolls.

A further additional option would be to include a separate Vehicle registration plate-based system for use on motorways and arterial roads for toll payment that is deducted from a payment account.

The need for a pay as you go system would be imperative for those not only on low incomes but for those who may be having journeys subsidised or paid for by third parties.

A general charging system will need to be universal and payable from any financial institution.

Under no circumstances should a corporate entity be responsible for such a system bar the programming and implementation as this should not be profit led otherwise money is lost to the exchequer.

A pre charge pay as you drive scheme could also be incorporated in to charging infrastructure in the form of a credit-based system.

GMB are also concerned that the costs of instillation of any black box system be as low as possible.

Using a mobile device that is subject to damage or theft is not a strong solution and could lead to multiple individuals being charged for the same journey which in turn would lead to increased paperwork and time wasted in refunding accounts.

The level of public support for road pricing and how the views of the public need to be considered in the development of any road pricing scheme.

Black box and tracking or toll roads public view will be difficult to change perceptions as duty is normally included with fuel cost of device installation. Or new with manufactured vehicles – this will require motor manufacturers and concessionaires to add plus car dealers.

We suspect that public support will not only be low, but it will take time to re-educate many in relation to the need to look at alternative revenue streams to recover lost.

A lower rate of charging may need to be considered until the public perception is changed.

At present there is a perceived freedom that comes with motoring as the cost of fuel duty cannot be seen as a separate sequitur as the cost is combined at the pump.

Seeing a separate charging structure will take a change of attitude of the public and will be less damaging on corporate entities.

It may also be practical to consider a no charge period where rates are outlined for journeys, but no real charges or payments are requested to ease in such a system

The lessons to be learned from other countries who are seeking to decarbonise road transport and/or utilise forms of road pricing.

Many counties are looking at MaaS solutions. DFT have been looking at this and GMB have had some involvement.

There are clear values in the case of China and the need to improve emissions levels. However, each individual country has different requirements due to public perceptions.

Where China has found value is that in many cases, they have started with a blank canvass allowing for greater electric integration as the country has advanced in many areas in a short space of time.

Locations such as Germany, The Netherlands and the UK suffer from pre-existing infostructure or issues such as listed buildings that prevent simple implementations.

Even in Moscow there are specific restriction on certain days and times for HGV to be kept out of the city to reduce congestion and emissions.

An invitation to a round table discussion with planners and those involved with implementation to learn the triumphs and pitfalls of schemes and would be of value as well as showing the UK at the forefront of such planning.

Where we have seen an increase in light rail and tram networks, these have produced increases in skilled jobs and have added to the regeneration of towns and city transport links. As a trade union we need to ensure retention of jobs or retraining.

ENDS.

For questions on this response please contact:

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