



LowCVP's Andy Eastlake

The tools for transport in responding to the Climate Emergency

It feels like the tectonic plates may be shifting on climate change policy. The 'school strike' protests led by the extraordinary Swedish schoolgirl Greta Thunberg, gave way to the Extinction Rebellion direct actions in London and elsewhere; the Attenborough TV documentary confronted a mainstream audience with the imperative for action on climate change. The Committee on Climate Change, with impeccable timing, launched the 'Net Zero' report which further 'ups the ante' on climate action, prescribing a more stretching target for emissions reduction than had already been agreed under the UK's 2008 Climate Change Act.

This 'perfect storm' culminated in the Government declaring a 'climate and environment emergency', as MPs from all parties agreed that more must be done, and cities are clamouring to declare local ambitious targets for zero climate impact.

But what does the declaration of a 'climate emergency' mean for the fleet sector and what more will be done to drive change in fleets?

It's likely that there will be policy changes and there's certainly an opening now for that change to happen more rapidly than would otherwise have been the case. (The withdrawal of the Scottish Government's plans to abolish Air Passenger Duty in Scotland was an early indication that policy makers will be wary of making decisions that appear incongruous – at best - in the face of their support for the emergency declaration; and there are plenty of people who will call them out if they don't!)

Road transport was again highlighted (rightly) by the Committee on Climate Change as a 'problem' sector, along with the decarbonisation of heat. The Committee sees bringing forward the electrification of as much of road transport as possible to be a major part of the answer. (Rather than a 2040 end date for sale of conventional ICEs, they're proposing 2035, or even 2030)

Producers are responding and this year will see a doubling in the number of models of plug-in cars on the market (with, hopefully, at least a halving of delivery times). This will provide options for some operators, but not all. (Policy changes will be aimed at moving to more 'electric miles' where practical.) But, however much we all want to use zero emission solutions, it's very clear that road transport will still be burning liquid fuels in internal combustion engines for a significant time to come.

There are practical, technical decarbonisation options for operators apart from electrification; more and more fleets are using sustainable biofuel alternatives as a step change reduction from fossil fuels (to complement electrification), particularly for heavy duty fleets. Hydrogen, too, seems to be making serious impact now with Transport for London investing £12m to introduce the first 20 double-deck hydrogen fuel cell-powered buses to the capital and Liverpool working to match this. It's heartening that the buses to be adopted are made by British companies (Wrights and ADL).

But not all the options involve adopting new technology. Operators should also be considering advanced logistical solutions which could include closer collaboration with other parties, even competitors. New, 'smart' technologies are rapidly transforming the opportunities for innovative solutions to come forward. Driver training must also be part of the mix; significant fuel and cost savings can come from not just training – but engaging and inspiring – drivers to do the right thing and drive more efficiently.

As an engineer, I know there are times you need a sledgehammer...or at other times a jeweller's screwdriver can fix the problem. The real art is picking the right one! So yes, let's accelerate the drive for electrification but, until we get there, let's use all the 'tools in the box' for operational efficiency, low carbon energy and vehicle technology to ensure that road transport does everything possible, as soon as possible, in response to the climate emergency we all face.

The LowCVP Conference in London on July 8 will address many of these issues. It's entitled: 'More than electric dreams? Future fuels on the Road to Zero'. More details and bookings:

www.lowcvp.org.uk/events/conference/2019

FURTHER INFORMATION

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