

LowCVP's Andy Eastlake

Air quality agenda driving electric transition

You'd need to have been hiding somewhere (or on a long holiday in a remote spot) not to have noticed the stream of media coverage heralding the demise of the 'conventional' petrol and diesel car since the Government's announcement on how it plans to tackle Britain's air quality challenge.

The mainstream media picked up in a big way on the 'announcement' that the UK plans to end the sale of conventional new petrol or diesel cars in 2040. Coming shortly after the French Government made a similar statement of intent and Volvo – also much-publicised – issued a pledge that all new models after 2019 will have some form of electric propulsion, the 'electrification revolution' has certainly entered into public consciousness following the sustained media barrage.

It's a little churlish, perhaps, to point out that not all of this was really 'news'. In fact, Defra's recent report (on tackling roadside nitrogen dioxide) says that the UK was the first country in the world to announce (in 2011) the intention that conventional car and van sales would end by 2040, and for almost every car and van on the road to be a zero-emission vehicle by 2050. While Volvo has picked up many glowing headlines, Toyota has been steadily hybridising its model range with much less fanfare.

Nevertheless, the fact that the 'man on the Clapham omnibus' now knows that the future of road transport will prominently feature increased electrification, surely marks an important moment in the UK's automotive history.

Criticism of the Government's plan for air quality has focused on how pollution will be cleaned up in the short term and, in particular, around the fact that the plan will not require local authorities to charge – or ban – more polluting vehicles to enter Clean Air Zones (CAZs). This, however, depends on whether councils are able to reduce air pollution by other means including increasing ULEV uptake, improving public transport, retrofitting diesel vehicles and other measures.

While the timing of the decision has been driven by the immediate air quality agenda, the plans will – crucially – also help us to deliver the key long-term objective of tackling climate change. I'm glad that Mr Gove, the minister responsible, made a point of this.

There's clearly still a considerable challenge in terms of tackling air pollution in the shorter-term. I was pleased that our calls to hasten the introduction of low emission buses and trucks and to certify effective retrofit systems have been heeded. Measures to do the same for taxis will also make a helpful contribution.

The LowCVP looks forward to playing a significant part in tackling the immediate challenge. The Government has commissioned the LowCVP and EST to run the (just announced) Clean Vehicle Retrofit Accreditation Scheme (CVRAS) which will produce a robust, evidence-based scheme to accredit the effectiveness of proposed retrofit options, some of which can cut polluting emissions by over 95 per cent.

Plans to give consumers more transparent and reliable information on both the emissions and fuel consumption of vehicles are also welcome and will feature strongly in future LowCVP activity. Why not join us and play your part in shaping the future?

FURTHER INFORMATION

www.lowcvp.org.uk