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Speech

Formula E: Racing to a low carbon vehicle future

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Sales of low carbon vehicles are surging, and our air quality will benefit.



Introduction

Thank you for that introduction.

And good morning everyone.

It's a real pleasure to join you today (24 June 2015).

And to have this opportunity to address such an expert and distinguished audience.

As both a local councillor in Harrogate, and as an MP, I've been a keen advocate for renewable energy and green growth.

So I was delighted to take on the environmental brief at the Department for Transport following the recent general election.

And it's fitting that my first keynote speech on the subject should be here, today.

Because the Low Carbon Vehicle Partnership (<http://www.lowcvp.org.uk/>) has done so much to further the cause of green motoring.

And I know this conference has always provided an excellent forum for debate and discussion.

Thriving UK Industry

I'm fortunate to take on this job at a time of optimism and growth within the industry.

Just as Britain is thriving again, so is the British motor industry.

And never have customers enjoyed such energy-efficient products.

It is thanks to the billions invested by car-makers in greener technologies that last year, average UK new car CO2 emissions fell to a record low: down by nearly a quarter since 2007.

But although mainstream models have been selling well, the fastest growth is in the ultra low carbon sector.

So far this year sales of cars eligible for the Plug-in Car Grant (<https://www.gov.uk/plug-in-car-van-grants/overview>) have grown more than threefold, while pure-electric car sales have almost doubled.

That's a fantastic achievement.

It's testament to the work of organisations like the Low Carbon Vehicle Partnership, and Go Ultra Low.

And also to the relationship between government and industry that's been nurtured over many years.

Showrooms are also doing brisk business with hybrid vehicles.

So far this year, diesel-electric hybrid sales are up nearly 37%.

When people see how far the industry has come in recent years, I think they are starting to appreciate that our ultimate objective, which is to effectively make every car on the road ultra low emission by 2050, is entirely achievable.

There are now 26 models eligible for the plug-in car grant – from luxury cars to city vehicles.

And that choice is only going to increase as demand for clean vehicles grows.

We are continuing the plug-in car grant with over £200 million during the current parliament.

Thousands of people - and many fleets - are discovering that owning an ultra-low emission vehicle no longer requires fundamental compromise.

Whether it's on convenience, driving experience, or affordability.

And the government is not just talking about this.

We're part of this motoring revolution.

We're investing £5 million to add 140 ULEV vehicles to departmental fleets.

And lots more ultra low vehicles are being used by other public sector fleets.

Speaking as someone who drove my first electric car just last weekend - a Nissan Leaf built in Sunderland - I must say I was amazed at its performance and refinement.

Nissan has been among the pioneers of low emission motoring in this country.

But it's the sheer diversity and capability of our low carbon vehicle sector that really impresses.

With companies like BMW, Detroit Electric, Geely and Mahindra investing in UK facilities.

From taxis to supercars, the range of vehicles benefiting from ultra-low technologies is growing all the time.

Formula E

So it came as no surprise that Formula E, the global electric racing series, has also found a natural home in this country - at Donnington Park.

For decades our motorsport industry has been a global leader.

7 out of 10 Formula 1 teams are based in this country.

And around 4,000 businesses supply the UK motorsports industry.

Employing nearly 40,000 people.

Many of them high skilled engineers.

The true value of these businesses to the UK economy is huge.

Because they also develop cutting edge technologies that can then be transferred to the mass market, making everyday motoring safer, more affordable and greener.

Now Formula E can do the same for production electric vehicles.

And help us build expertise in areas like aerodynamics, energy storage, and precision machining of components, that will one day make electric cars the clear choice for the majority of drivers.

On Saturday, the competition comes to Battersea Park in London.

The climax to the inaugural season.

Where the first ever Formula E champion will be crowned.

And we'll be using the event through the Go Ultra Low campaign to drive home the core messages on the benefits of electric cars.

And hopefully persuade some of the spectators to try ultra low motoring themselves.

What we're doing

We have a great opportunity here - not just to make the UK one of the world's leading market for green vehicles - but also one of the world's leading producers too.

That's why, in partnership with industry, we created the Advanced Propulsion Centre (<http://www.apcuk.co.uk/>).

And it is why we're investing £500 million to support ultra-low emission vehicles.

And help UK businesses develop products for market.

We're delivering £125 million for low emission vehicle research and development, match funded by industry.

We're working with you on the Go Ultra Low Campaign.

And we're developing the infrastructure to support the market further.

With fast charging at home, on the street, at rail stations, in town centres, car parks.

And many more locations.

Take Bristol, for example.

Already one of this country's greenest cities.

By the end of 2015, Bristol will have gained a new network of 100 electric vehicle charging points.

For the first time it will be possible to hire electric vehicles as part of the Bristol Car Club fleet.

And we're providing the city with a million pounds to trial a number of cutting-edge low carbon buses.

We're also supporting other schemes to develop low emission buses and trucks.

But not all modes of transport can be easily electrified in the near future.

Sustainable biofuels will have an important role to play in the decarbonisation of transport.

So to encourage innovation we've committed £25 million for a competition as part of plans to support up to three demonstration-scale advanced biofuel plants in the UK.

We expect to announce the winners later this summer.

I'm grateful to the Low Carbon Vehicle Partnership and members of the audience for engaging in the work of the Transport Energy Task Force (<http://www.lowcvc.org.uk/projects/transport-energy-task-force.htm>) which examined options for incentivising biofuels to 2020 and beyond.

The task force's report puts us in a good place to assess how to meet our greenhouse gas targets in transport.

Now there's agreement at EU level on Indirect Land Use Change regarding biofuels, I am keen that we provide policy clarity for the industry on our plans as soon as possible.

Air Quality

All these initiatives will help us achieve our fundamental goals of reducing carbon emissions, while keeping the population mobile, and building a flourishing low carbon economy in the UK.

But having come from local government into central government, I'm aware that big concepts like global warming and climate change can seem remote and distant to people's everyday lives.

We talk about saving billions of tons of carbon by making transport greener.

But frankly, that doesn't always resonate among communities.

People are more likely to listen to messages and issues which affect them directly, and have some impact on their daily lives.

Issues like air quality.

People listen to news reports about the health effects of pollution.

Yet all too often the local and global aspects of transport emissions are divorced, when in fact they are closely related.

Ultra low emission vehicles not only help tackle climate change.

They make our air cleaner too.

Cutting levels of particulates and other pollutants.

Reducing levels of particulate matter could help prevent up to 29,000 premature deaths annually.

While overall air quality has improved as emissions from heavy industry and transport have become cleaner, we are still failing to meet EU limits for nitrogen oxides.

Concern over the long term impact of diesel emissions has surfaced in regular media reports recently.

And it's unlikely to go away.

So I want to urge the industry to stress the local air quality benefits of ultra low emission motoring.

And in doing so spread the message to a wider audience.

Of course we have to take into consideration the emissions produced by generating the electricity for electric vehicles.

But still, ultra low emission vehicles have a very positive environmental story to tell.

Indeed, there are resources on the web which compare the full range of emissions for every car which qualifies for the plug-in car-grant.

The government is working with the EU to bring forward real world vehicle emission testing.

Something that will certainly help us communicate the wider environmental message.

But I would welcome your views on this.

And how we can identify opportunities for further reducing air pollutants from vehicles.

While of course continuing our work to drive down carbon emissions.

Conclusion

This spirit of partnership and co-operation is at the heart of the progress we've made in recent years.

Kick-starting and developing the ultra low market.

Launching an ever-growing range of desirable ULEV cars.

And constructing a charging infrastructure.

We're on this journey together.

So I'd like to thank everyone here who has contributed to that success.

As for the future, well, this is already a fast moving market.

And it's going to move faster.

Particularly here in the UK, where we have big ambitions to be a global leader.

And as it does so, the partnership we share will become more important.

We will have to work even more closely together.

Business and government, hand in hand.

To make our economy stronger, and our environment cleaner.

Yes, it will be a challenge.

But it's a challenge I'm looking forward to immensely.

And it's a challenge I know we will meet.

Thank you.

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