

Report of: Environmental Health Business Manager

To: EXECUTIVE BOARD

Date: 7<sup>th</sup> January 2008

Item No:

Title of Report : Local Air Quality Management – Low Emission  
Zone Feasibility Study

### Summary and Recommendations

**Purpose of report:** To update on progress and to agree future working with Oxfordshire County Council and the bus companies.

**Key decision:** Yes

**Portfolio Holder:** Councillor Jean Fooks (Cleaner City)

**Scrutiny Responsibility:** Environment Scrutiny

**Ward(s) affected:** All

#### Report Approved by

**Portfolio Holder:** Councillor Jean Fooks

**Legal:** Jeremy Thomas

**Finance:** Andy Collett

**Interim Strategic Director:** Michael Crofton-Briggs

**Policy Framework:** This work reflects the Council's Vision of improving performance and working with others to deliver shared goals. It specifically contributes to the strategic priority to improve the local environment, economy quality of life, tackle climate change and promote environmental resource management, and the Community Strategy theme of working to create a better living environment.

#### Recommendations:

The Executive Board is recommended to: -

- i) Note the progress with the Low Emission Zone (LEZ) feasibility study.
- ii) Ask the Head of Environmental Health to write to Oxfordshire County Council requesting that future discussions with the bus companies in relation to the Bus Quality Partnership should be carried out as a joint

- undertaking, as part of the LEZ process.
- iii) Request Oxfordshire County Council to work with the City Council towards the adoption of a joint Low Emission strategy in Oxford.
  - iv) Comment on whether further public consultation, other than with the bus companies, is required for the implementation of a LEZ and a Low Emission Strategy (LES).

## **Background**

1. Council adopted the Air Quality Action Plan (AQAP) for the Central Oxford Air Quality Management Area (AQMA) in April 2006. The AQMA was declared because the national annual mean air quality objective for nitrogen dioxide was not being achieved.
2. The AQAP, a requirement under The Environment Act 1995, put forward a range of actions to improve air quality in the AQMA. The most significant action proposed was that a feasibility study should be carried out for the introduction of a Low Emission Zone (LEZ) in central Oxford.
3. Initial study work has shown that the main source of the pollution in the central area is emissions from buses and coaches. At present the LEZ options being considered look at the feasibility of setting emission standards for buses only, however this strategy may be re-visited in the longer term.
4. Oxford City Council and Oxfordshire County Council are jointly funding the cost of the LEZ feasibility study, and AEA Technology has been engaged to undertake the work.
5. The main focus of the LEZ feasibility study is the improvement of air quality, however the assessment being undertaken will also provide indicators that will be useful in the long term assessment of sustainable transport in the City.
6. A Steering Group, made up of Portfolio Holders (Councillor Fooks for the City, and Councillor Robertson for the County now taken over by Councillor Hudspeth), Officers from Oxford City Council and Oxfordshire County Council, has been set up to progress the feasibility study. To date there have been four meetings of the Steering Group.

## **LEZ Feasibility Study**

7. The study has been split into two stages:
  - **Stage 1 Scoping phase** - information gathering, defining the problem and agreeing a number of scenarios for further assessment.
  - **Stage 2 Detailed assessment phase** - detailed modelling, using traffic data, to predict the impact that the various scenarios will have on traffic emissions and air quality. The scenarios will be assessed in terms of traffic emissions, air quality, greenhouse gases and carbon emissions (indicators of sustainability).

## Progress of the Study

8. Stage 1 of the LEZ feasibility study has been completed and reported to the Steering Group, which then agreed a number of scenarios for further detailed assessment in Stage 2.
9. Traffic data from a new City Centre traffic model, along with the development of a new traffic emissions model will provide the basis for the further assessment. The new traffic model is being undertaken by Oxfordshire County Council and will be completed shortly enabling the air quality assessments to be carried out.
10. Stage 2 elements:

Traffic Model	Data on traffic flows and impact of congestion taking account of changes to existing bus priority routes and developments such as West End and Westgate.
Traffic Emissions Model	Assessment of traffic emissions and impact on air quality for progress towards, on a phased basis, Euro 4 and Euro 5 by 2011 for the different scenarios.
Cost Benefit Analysis	Analysis of the outcomes for each of the scenarios in terms of benefit to air quality and cost of implementation and compliance.
Health and Environmental Impact Assessments	Further assessments based on health and sustainability criteria.

11. In recognition of the contribution that city centre congestion makes to poor air quality, the impact (on air quality) of introducing measures designed to reduce delays and improve bus journey times through the city centre will also be investigated within the emissions model.
12. Productive meetings have been held, both collectively and individually, with the three main bus operators, Oxford Bus Company, Stagecoach and Thames Travel to discuss the LEZ feasibility study and also obtain details of their planned future investment programmes. A meeting has also been held with the Traffic Commissioner with regard to taking advice on preferred implementation methods. The Traffic Commissioner has made it clear that if enforcement options are to be considered at any stage, voluntary or partnership mechanisms will have to be applied from the outset.
13. Following completion of the study the Steering Group will make recommendations in relation to options for implementing a Low Emission Zone.
14. In the light of guidance, it will be necessary to consider a flexible approach to implementing a LEZ that will require continued joint working arrangements between the City and County Councils. This would include

future discussions with the bus companies through the Bus Quality Partnership.

15. The preferred options for an LEZ are expected to focus on controlling emissions from buses and coaches. The Air Quality Action Plan included other measures that could also be applied to reduce traffic emissions. For this reason, it is suggested that both Councils work together to adopt a shared Low Emission Strategy (LES), whereby policy measures applied by each Council may be considered within an integrated approach to reducing the impact of transport emissions. This approach will also enable a process of continued assessment to take place so that the impact of initial measures can be reviewed, in light of future developments and where appropriate strengthened.
16. It has yet to be decided whether further public consultation, other than with the bus companies, is required for the implementation of a LEZ or LES.

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**Background papers:**

None

**Glossary**

**AOAP:** Air Quality Action Plan.



**AQMA:** Air Quality Management Area.

**DEFRA:** Department for the Environment Food and Rural Affairs.



**LEZ:** Low Emission Zone

**LES:** Low Emission Strategy