

# Air Pollution in London

## FACTSHEET



Healthy air. Healthy climate.

## The Problem

London's dense road network and high buildings mean that central London is one of the most polluted places in the UK and currently one of the main areas failing to comply with legally binding limits. Oxford Street, one of London's most notorious streets, is regularly referred to as the most polluted street in Europe. In London, air pollution is estimated to shorten lives by 140,743 years – the equivalent of up to 9,400 premature deaths and over 3,400 hospital admissions a year.<sup>1</sup> These figures come from a study carried out by King's College London looking at two key pollutants: nitrogen dioxide (NO<sub>2</sub>) and fine particulates known as PM<sub>2.5</sub>s.

In London, the principal driver of air pollution is road transport and it is estimated that nearly 40% of all NO<sub>x</sub> emissions come from diesel vehicles. In the whole of the UK, over 50% of new vehicles entering the fleet run on diesel, often with marginal climate change benefit, because policies have in recent years incentivised diesel over petrol.

As a result, nearly all vans, lorries, taxis, and busses run on diesel. Nitrogen dioxide and particulates from these engines are poorly controlled, resulting in worsening air pollution across the UK's major city-centres including London.

Addressing poor air quality in London by promoting zero-emission transport such as walking and cycling, and investing in electric public transport will improve health directly, by reducing traffic-related air pollution, and indirectly, by tackling climate change and its deleterious effects on health and health services. By encouraging a cleaner and smaller vehicle fleet, London can set an example for other UK cities to reduce the burden of disease from air pollution, improve physical activity, and meet the climate change commitments under the Paris Agreement.



Healthy air. Healthy climate.

## Air Quality Monitoring

---

The London Air Quality Network, operated and managed by the Environment Research group at King's College London, co-ordinates and improves air pollution monitoring in London. The data is collected by air quality monitoring stations to allow long history measurements with the same equipment at the same location.

King's College recently conducted a pilot study to measure personal exposure to pollution from different vehicles that spent the day travelling around busy London areas. This new pioneering work is associated with an increased interest in monitoring air quality around buildings where vulnerable populations gather, such as schools, care homes and hospitals.



## The Solution

Tackling air pollution in London and across the UK requires a whole of Government approach based on a robust Air Quality Strategy that will support local authorities in implementing a set of measures including promoting electric vehicles, restricting the most polluting vehicles from entering city centres and increasing cycling and walking accessibility. Clean Air Zones are one of the key elements of the UK's air quality strategy and have the potential transform urban environments and improve health and air quality, whilst also meeting climate change targets. However to achieve the best possible outcomes, it is critical that local authorities receive adequate financial support from central Government.

### • Action

We call on the UK Government to support the implementation of strengthened (both in scope and coverage) Clean Air Zones across the UK's major cities, to bring air quality levels in-line with EU standards. This should be enabled by a package of new policy mechanisms and budgetary measures included in the new UK Government Air Quality Strategy to be finalized by the end of July 2017.

[www.unmaskmycity.org/london](http://www.unmaskmycity.org/london)





**UNMASK  
MY CITY**

Healthy air. Healthy climate.



UK HEALTH  
ALLIANCE ON  
CLIMATE CHANGE

[www.unmaskmycity.org](http://www.unmaskmycity.org)

[#UnmaskMyCity](https://twitter.com/UnmaskMyCity)

**Unmask My City** is a global initiative by doctors, nurses, public health practitioners, and allied healthcare professionals dedicated to improving air quality and reducing emissions in our cities.

This will save millions of lives, improve health outcomes for billions of people, and make a huge contribution to greenhouse gas reductions needed to keep the world safe from climate change crises.

---

**References:**

1. Walton, H. et al (2015) Understanding the Health Impacts of Air Pollution in London. King's College London for GLA and TFL. Figures relate to the health impacts of NO<sub>2</sub> and PM<sub>2.5</sub> pollution in 2010

\* Images ® Global Call for Climate Action / Greg McNevin