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Abolishing Western Extension Zone would increase London's illegal air pollution levels

Campaign for Better Transport, Campaign for Clean Air in London, ClientEarth, Environmental Protection UK and Friends of the Earth condemn proposal to remove WEZ and argue consultation is invalid

The Mayor of London's proposal to remove the Western Extension of the Congestion Charging Zone (WEZ) is condemned by air quality, transport and environment groups ^{Note 1}, who say, among other things, it would increase air pollution and could result in European air quality laws being broken.

Transport for London (TfL) acknowledges that levels of two of the worst air pollutants, dangerous airborne particles (PM₁₀) and oxides of nitrogen (NO_x), would increase, on average across the whole WEZ area, by some 3.5% and 2.5% respectively.

TfL admits also that transport emissions of the climate change gas, carbon dioxide, would go up in the WEZ area by around 5%, on average, if the WEZ is abolished. Abolition would also mean the loss of £55 million of net income to TfL now used to support public transport, road safety, walking and cycling schemes. The introduction of the WEZ led to a reduction of about 30,000 in the number of motor vehicles entering the zone each day and this is likely to be reversed as are increases in the number of people travelling by bus, on foot and by bicycle.

In several parts of west London, air quality standards are either being breached or only just being met, so any measures which would lead to a deterioration in air quality must be accompanied by full mitigation measures to avoid further breaches of European air quality laws. The groups argue that the measures proposed by the Mayor are inadequate.

Further, the groups argue that the current consultation ^{Note 2} is invalid because, amongst other things, insufficient information has been provided in the consultation documents about increases in dangerous air pollution, and their likely health and legal impacts, which would result from the abolition of the WEZ ^{Note 3}.

Quotes:

Richard Bourn, London Campaigner at Campaign for Better Transport, said:

“The Mayor should scrap the proposal to abolish the WEZ. This will save lives and help protect London's hard-won, world-wide reputation for progressive transport policies.”

Simon Birkett, Founder of the Campaign for Clean Air in London, said:

“Removing the WEZ is the ‘daftest’ of the Mayor's ‘daft’ transport policies. With huge air quality problems, London needs to be moving forwards not backwards. On the basis of the information provided, the Mayor and TfL should reject the proposal to remove the WEZ.”

Alan Andrews, health and environment lawyer for ClientEarth said:

“London is consistently breaching legal limits on air pollution, which seriously affects Londoners’ health. If the mayor removes the WEZ, he will leave himself with a mountain to climb if he is to bring London’s air pollution under control.”

Ed Dearnley, Policy Officer at Environmental Protection UK, said:

“The WEZ is a key measure for improving air quality in central London. Removing it would send air quality in the wrong direction, meaning expensive remedial actions would be needed to bring air quality up to the legally binding, health based European targets that central London was already struggling to meet. In the meantime the health of Londoners would suffer as thousands more vehicles enter the former WEZ area every day.”

Jenny Bates, Friends of the Earth London Campaigner, said:

“The WEZ has been successful in cutting traffic in the area and TfL admits its abolition would mean worse air pollution and climate change emissions as traffic returned. It is unacceptable for the Mayor to abolish the WEZ when other measures currently proposed do not leave London on track to meet EU legal air pollution limits or its own climate change targets.”

Notes:

1. The groups are Campaign for Better Transport, Campaign for Clean Air in London, ClientEarth, Environmental Protection UK and Friends of the Earth.
2. The deadline for consultation responses on the proposed changes to the Congestion Charge is Monday 2 August. Views can be submitted by email to CChargeConsultation@tfl.gov.uk or online at:

<http://www.tfl.gov.uk/roadusers/congestioncharging/17094.aspx>

Key elements of the Mayor’s proposals, put forward by Transport for London (TfL), include:

- Removing the WEZ formally from 3 January 2011
- Increasing the daily charge in the Central Congestion Charging Zone (CCCZ) to £10 (£9 with ‘Auto Pay’)
- Residents in the WEZ area losing their 90% discount for travelling in the remaining CCCZ
- Replacing the Alternative Fuel Discount with a Greener Vehicle Discount which would provide a 100% discount to cars emitting 100g/km or less of CO₂ and meet the Euro 5 standard

3. For full consultation details see:

<http://www.tfl.gov.uk/roadusers/congestioncharging/17094.aspx>

4. For impacts see also impacts see table on page 34:

<http://www.tfl.gov.uk/assets/downloads/appendices-to-the-report-to-the-mayor.pdf>

5. The Mayor's draft Air Quality Strategy acknowledges that around 4,300 premature deaths a year in London are caused by air pollution which disproportionately affects those in deprived areas near main roads and vulnerable groups such as older people and people with certain medical conditions.