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News – RAC statement on the Government's clean air plan

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The future may well be electric, but it's wishful thinking to believe that British infrastructure is ready...

Britain is not yet ready for a major shift to fully electric vehicles...

RAC roads policy spokesman Nick Lyes said:



“The Government signalling the end of the sale of conventional petrol and diesel vehicles by 2040 is a bold move – but the reality is that the UK is nowhere near ready for such a sweeping shift to fully electric vehicles and a huge amount of work will need to be done to meet this deadline.

While drivers are keen to reduce their emissions footprint and help clean up our air, they are concerned about the cost and battery range of electric vehicles. This is borne out by RAC research that shows only 2% of motorists believe their next car purchase will be pure electric. With more models coming on to the market and the inevitable increase in competition driven by the 2040 target, these fears should reduce in time.

There is little evidence to suggest that the UK’s energy infrastructure will be ready for the largescale shift to electric vehicles, and it’s vital the energy used to power these vehicles comes from the greenest possible sources. Right now public charging facilities are patchy, there is very little on-street charging in residential areas and unlike filling up a petrol or diesel car, drivers cannot recharge a vehicle in a matter of minutes.

While reducing harmful emissions should be tackled locally, where the problem exists, we question whether councils have the skills or resources to take on the task of objectively finding the best means of cutting air pollution. Given the urgency of the situation, there is a real risk that authorities will rush to implement ill-thought through solutions to meet the Government’s deadline for final plans at the end of next year. It is good to see that the Government will ‘assess local plans to ensure they are effective, fair, good value, and deliver the necessary air quality compliance’, but it is vital this is done thoroughly so drivers and businesses are not unfairly penalised.

Charging vehicle owners to drive on certain roads and in certain areas must be the last resort. The Government has not yet made it clear what process needs to be followed before a charging regime comes in to force. Where charging regimes are proposed the Government must ensure that all other solutions for reducing emissions have been exhausted.



Plans for a diesel scrappage scheme appear to be at best tentative – of course it must be targeted and shown to provide tangible reductions in emissions and value for money for taxpayers.

The proposal to tax new diesel vehicles more heavily comes with pros and cons. It suggests existing diesel drivers will not be adversely affected, but this could severely harm both private owners and businesses that rely on the economy of diesel for high mileage driving, especially if new model diesels prove to be cleaner when real-world testing is introduced.

Plans to retrofit buses and taxis are welcome, but this must be done more urgently and we would encourage the Government to set a target for this in the same way they have done with the 2040 target for stopping the sale of new private petrol and diesel vehicles.

Critically, buses and taxis are the vehicles which are likely to cover the most miles in urban areas so it is imperative that these are looked at first.

The Government has rightly focused on a number of other things that can be done at a local level to improve air quality. Tackling bottlenecks, resequencing traffic lights, replacing speed humps with other safety measures to improve flow, and looking at road design are measures that can be addressed right away. However, local authorities will need significant assistance from the Government to make sure some of these sensible proposals are viable.”