

Looking Over the Horizon: Transport and Reduced CO₂ Emissions in the UK by 2030

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Abstract

The issues relating to climate change have risen dramatically to the top of the political agenda, and the importance of transport in contributing to reducing levels of CO₂ is clearly evident: yet the difficulty remains that traffic levels continue to rise and all the projections suggest that significantly reducing emissions from current levels is likely to be very difficult. As urban and transport planners, policy makers and the public, we need to start to think very differently about tackling the global emissions problem.

This paper examines the potential for reducing transport emissions in the UK by 60 per cent by 2030 and reports on findings from the DfT-sponsored research study “Visioning and Backcasting for UK Transport Policy (VIBAT)”. The research was carried out by the Bartlett School of Planning, University College London and the Halcrow Group. The study uses a modified backcasting and scenario building approach, examines a range of policy measures (technological and behavioural), and assesses how they can be effectively combined to achieve the required level of emissions reduction.

The conclusion reached is that the 60% CO₂ reduction target (in 2030) can be achieved by a combination of strong behavioural change and strong technological innovation. There will be a major role for a wide range of policy packages – including more efficient vehicles, alternative fuels, more walking and cycling, better quality and more public transport, lower speed limits, integrated land use and transport planning, reduced car occupancy, new ICT developments, national road pricing, long distance travel substitution, reduced emissions from freight and ‘softer’ factors such as personalised travel planning and travel blending. Vehicle technologies and individual travel behaviour are likely to change very markedly in the future. However, the old debate of relying on technological improvements to help maintain our current CO₂-intensive lifestyles seems to be obsolete. We need a renewed emphasis over a very wide range of fields. Multi-disciplinary thinking and action is critical.

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