

New government figures reveal declining car CO2 emissions

New carbon dioxide emissions figures, to be published by the Government this week, show that those emitted by passenger cars continue to decline while other forms of road transport have increased their CO2 output, says The AA Motoring Trust.

Statistics for 2004, the most recent available, show that passenger cars in the UK produced 19.4 million tonnes of carbon, down from a high of 19.9 million tonnes in 2002. In 1994, passenger cars produced 19.3 million tonnes of carbon when there were 5.8 million less of them on the road.

The updated profile of transport carbon emissions reveals the progress made through engine, fuel and exhaust technology advances in passenger cars and the contribution made by individual motorists, more than 20 per cent of whom now own diesel models that are up to a third more fuel efficient than petrol versions - despite the financial, tax and growing petrol-diesel price disincentives.

It also shows the disparity of emphasis on private cars, with 15 per cent of all-encompassing end user emissions coming from passenger cars, compared to a further 13 per cent from other transport, 27 per cent from residential emissions and 28 per cent from industry.

Emissions from light goods vehicles rose from 4.0 to 4.4 million tonnes from 2002-4, having produced 3.5 million tonnes in 1994. In the same period, HGV carbon emissions have gone up from 7.3 to 7.6 million tonnes, having emitted 6.3 million tonnes in 1994. Carbon dioxide emissions from buses have dropped steadily to 1.0 million tonnes, from a high of 1.3 million in 1994.

The figures, from Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs data, have been amalgamated for the Department for Transport's Transport Statistics Great Britain 2006, due out on Thursday. These show that passenger cars generate slightly more than half of all carbon dioxide emitted directly from domestic transport, the rest coming from light goods vehicles, buses, HGVs and shipping.

In terms of end user CO2 emissions, including those occurring during production (well-to-wheel), road transport accounted for 25 per cent. All domestic transport, covering road, railway, civil aviation and shipping, produced 28 per cent of all end user emissions, with residential emissions accounting for 27 per cent, industry 28 per cent and commercial/public administration sources adding a further 13 per cent, according to the National Atmospheric Emissions Inventory.

Nobody disputes that carbon dioxide emissions must be reduced dramatically, but punitive hit after hit on the motorist will not achieve it, says Ruth Bridger, head of environment, fuels and taxation for The AA Motoring Trust. The cost of petrol reached nearly a 1 per litre this summer, a dream level for those wanting to tax people out of their cars in the 1990s. Families continued to use their cars as before, cut back elsewhere in the family budgets, and hit high-street spending and tourism.

Political parties are grabbing on to green taxes but must consider the implications of what they are doing. Richmond borough councils proposed parking permit tax is an example of misguided policy: hitting large families disproportionately, picking on households with on-street parking but not those with off-road spaces, and encouraging house owners to pave or tarmac their front gardens.

With the Government, London's mayor and boroughs all thinking up ways to penalise the motorist, supposedly on environmental grounds, what will be the effect of layer after layer of tax and charges? How can the poorer large family afford the newer and cleaner large vehicle they need if their ability to buy is sapped by hundreds of pounds of extra tax every year?

The AA Motoring Trust wants to see the Government take responsibility for better coordination of environmental charges and incentives, ensuring a fair, sensible and uniform approach throughout local government. It also wants to see funds raised from environmental charges to be ring-fenced for specific projects that reduce carbon dioxide and not siphoned off into the Treasury and propping up local government finances.

Measures that would help to reduce car usage, fuel consumption and carbon dioxide emissions include:

Cracking down on the one-in-28 rogue drivers who drive without tax, MoT and insurance on UK roads. This would cut out emissions from between one and 1.5 million illegal vehicles, most of them ageing and badly-maintained gross polluters;

Raise Band G road tax thresholds from 226 to 250 grammes/kilometre. The level set at the Budget swept up the majority of large family vehicles, people carriers and 4x4 off-road vehicles, leaving no incentive for owners who need this size of vehicle to go for a less-polluting model;

Use the thousands of variable message boards on UK motorways to urge drivers to stick to the speed limit and reduce emissions. It could be done almost immediately, cost far less than the 4 billion needed to site SPECS speed cameras along

the motorway network, and not drive speeders on to dual carriageways;

Introduce bus routes that orbit town centres. This would counter the problem of hub systems that force passengers to go into the centre of big towns and cities before carrying them back out to a destination only a few of miles away from where they started;

High Occupancy Vehicle (HOV) lanes would encourage greater car-sharing, but with scope for them to become High Occupancy/Toll (HOT) lanes that other drivers, who want to get ahead, can pay to use.

Satellite car parks in motorway service areas that are secure and allow drivers to leave their cars longer than the normal two-hour limit. This would allow business people and parties to assemble on the outskirts of cities and major towns before transferring people into less vehicles for the trip into more congested areas.

NOTES TO EDITORS: In the Carbon dioxide emissions in the United Kingdom: 1994-2004 statistics, CO2 is expressed as Carbon.

Institute of Advanced Motorists

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