

April 2016

UNISON North West Submission to the 'Greater Manchester Low Emission Strategy and Air Quality Action Plan' Public Consultation

About UNISON

UNISON has 200,000 members in the North West and we represent members who work in a wide variety of roles. We have members working for employers including local authorities, the NHS, the energy sector, the Environment Agency, Manchester Airport and the fire service. Our perspective is shaped by concerns about the need for high quality employment and public services.

The Format of our Consultation Response

We welcome the opportunity to be involved in this consultation process. As a large, democratic organisation it is difficult for us to respond collectively to the questions posed in an online survey so instead, in this concise document, we offer some comments on issues around emissions and air quality.

The Importance of Air Quality

There is significant and urgent problem with air pollution in GM. Public Health England's 2014 published estimates indicate that there were 1346 deaths of Greater Manchester residents aged 25+ attributable to particulate air pollution

We welcome the emphasis in the document on encouraging less polluting forms of transportation but are concerned that the strategy is not ambitious enough in reducing harmful air pollution quickly. If the strategy is successful, there will still be dangerous levels of air pollution in Greater Manchester until 2020.

The impact of air pollution is likely to be unequal across the city-region and we propose a co-mapping of air quality and deprivation indices to explore this.

Public services and travel

The distance people have to travel to access public services needs to be a consideration in service organisation. In current efforts to re-organise service delivery on a Greater Manchester scale, there can be a tendency to reorganise services such that there is greater functional specialisation. This might improve the quality of a service that is available to people in Greater Manchester, but its consequence is that people may have to travel further to access that service. The tendency to pursue a logic of specialisation is apparent in initiatives including the *Healthier Together* reorganisation of general surgery. Where this logic is pursued, its advantages need to be weighed against the greater distance people need to travel and efforts should be taken to ensure that people can access services in a way that is cheap, quick and environmentally-friendly.

Employment and travel

High travel-to-work times cause working people stress and cost, as well as impacting on carbon emissions and air pollution. We need workplaces to be easily accessible by affordable public transport, cycling and on foot. We are supportive of investment in our public transport infrastructure generally and the use of greener methods of powering transport (e.g. electric trams, electric cars). We also believe it is important to minimise the need for people to spend time and money travelling to work. The travel times of workers and service users should be considered when changes to public service provision are under consideration.

Union Environmental Reps in workplaces are well-placed to help to provide information and advice to colleagues about more environmentally-friendly means of travel to work.

Energy generation

The proportion of NO_x emissions attributable to energy generation is not insignificant, but processes for addressing it are not considered in the consultation document. Emissions from new power stations, or those about to come on-stream, in Greater Manchester should be recognised. There also need to be clear proposals relating to truly sustainable power: solar, wind and hydro, and how this will create skilled and long-term green jobs. A public sector-led municipal green energy company would have an important role to play in this in Greater Manchester.

Urban trees and other 'green infrastructure' contribute strongly towards the improvement of air quality: in the UK, specialist software has been trialled only in Torbay, indicating that local trees removed air pollution equivalent to taking 52 000 cars off the road. The national austerity-driven picture, however, is that local authorities are becoming increasingly less able to manage their population of mature trees; unsurprisingly, small trees are less effective in improving air quality, or in cooling urban centres.