

5.1 Getting about

The borough of Walsall has a population of approximately 269,500 and an area of some 41 square miles through which major sources of transport-related air pollution are the M6 motorway, dissecting the borough, and major arterial roads including Wolverhampton Road (A454), Lichfield Road (A461).

Air quality has a direct influence on the health of the general public, as well as the environment. By virtue of EU directives and in-turn UK legislation, councils are tasked with duties to review and assess air quality as an on-going annual basis. Stemming from this, Walsall has declared the whole of its borough an Air Quality Management Area (AQMA) and along with five other West Midlands authorities faces the key challenge of tackling vehicle emissions.

Poor air quality is attributed to nitrogen dioxide, with exceeding the national annual air quality objective for nitrogen dioxide (NO₂) occurring notably along the M6 motorway corridor and major arterial routes (A-roads) serving the town centre. Nitrous Dioxide can have the following implications in terms of adverse health effects:

- *Toxic in high concentrations*
- *Triggers and exacerbates asthma*
- *Acts as a pre-cursor for ground level Ozone formation which can trigger sudden cardio-vascular episodes*

Such health impacts of air pollution are well documented. The Committee on the Medical Effects of Air Pollution (COMEAP) estimated that air pollution in the UK in 2009 caused 29,000 premature deaths; the Environmental Audit Commission (EAC) estimated that the cost to health from poor air quality in the UK ranges from £8.5 to £20 billion per annum; and research shows that road transport emissions account for more deaths in the UK than road traffic accidents.

The UK's air quality strategy is designed to improve and safeguard the health of exposed persons, which in the main constitutes citizens. By declaration of AQMAs, local authorities must demonstrate how they are working towards achieving national air quality objectives through the implementation of local air quality action plans and associated mitigation measures.

In light of this, the West Midlands Low Emissions Town and Cities Programme (LETCP) has been set up to improve air quality and reduce emissions from road transport regionally. The objectives of the programme are to investigate and produce regional strategies designed to improve air quality with a view to meeting national air quality objectives. By direct association this promotes compliance with EU emission limits, reduction of carbon emissions and supports the objectives of the Local Transport Plan 3 (LTP3) to improve air quality and reduce emissions from road transport. The intention is to do this by promoting the uptake of low emission fuels and technologies, establishing and sharing best practice policies, and developing various tools and resources for this purpose.

Over the past three consecutive years the LETCP has secured three elements of funding from Defra's Air Quality Grant scheme to undertake work in relation to the programme. Part of this involves work with Public Health Authorities, Health Protection Agencies, schools, and the NHS to develop an awareness campaign regarding the impacts of air pollution. This work will build on findings of a Low Emission Zone Study which incorporates a Health Impact Assessment. Work is also currently underway to develop an Air Quality/Health Awareness Project with Walsall Schools as part of the Walsall A*STARS Schools Programme.

The A*STARS programme is a series of walking, cycling, road safety initiatives, training and support given to schools to help them to develop and promote safer, healthier lifestyle choices for all. The programme promotes health and wellbeing by combining and providing road safety, health and sustainable travel education, training and awareness. It targets all educational establishments and school communities; supporting children's development at every stage from birth to adulthood.

The overall goal set out in a Low Emissions Strategy will be to improve emissions and concentrations of NO₂ (together with fine particulates, which have a direct association with health impacts) through the transformation of the West Midlands vehicle fleet. The Low Emissions Strategy has the potential to influence emissions of the proportion of the national fleet whose journey originates in, transits or terminates in the region, though it is acknowledged that transformation of the vehicle fleet will require the provision of low emission vehicle infrastructure and incentives for low emission vehicle take-up. Additionally, policies and measures that discourage the use of high emission vehicles are likely to be required to meet pollution reduction goals.

In taking this forward, the Low Emissions Strategy will look at the economic impacts and benefits of intervention policies. The LETCP will work in co-ordination with Local Enterprise Partnerships and Universities, reflecting the status of the region as a national centre for low emission vehicle research and manufacturing. In short, the Low Emissions Strategy will act as a platform for inward investment for low emission vehicle demonstration and deployment.

Indicator:

- *Proportion of children who walk or cycle to school*

Priorities for action:

- *Partners should promote walking and cycling as routine ways of travelling that will help improve residents' health and wellbeing. 'Make Every Contact Count' provides a means for front-line staff to do this*
- *Improve signage, increase the number of designated or separate cycle paths and increase provision of secure cycle racks in Walsall so that cycling becomes an easy, safe and regular method of transport throughout the borough*
- *Consider a cycle hire scheme such as that used in London and Paris*

- *Use transport planning as a mechanism for improving residents' access to green spaces, health facilities, leisure opportunities and healthy food*
- *Review current 20 mph zones in residential areas and consider expanding these*
- *Encourage the use of public transport; there may be opportunities to use smart card technology such as the Oyster card in London to enable residents to collect reward points for each journey*
- *Consider what part the canal network could play in contributing to improving health and wellbeing*
- *Ensure there is a safe and good-quality fleet of private hire and hackney carriages as part of the public transport strategy, particularly to meet the needs of the elderly and those residents with disabilities*
- *Use accessibility planning software to map access to employment and services as well as health and fresh food to inform planning decisions regarding transport issues*
- *Roll out the A*STARS programme across all primary schools by March 2016;*
- *Pilot the A*STARS programme in secondary schools during 2013/14 with roll out across 50% of secondary schools by March 2015;*
- *Develop and pilot A*STARS programme in early year centres during 2013/14.*