

Air pollution requires bold action says Lothians MSP



Alison Johnstone, Health and Wellbeing spokesperson for the Scottish Greens and MSP for Lothian, today challenged the Scottish Government and local authorities over their inaction on air pollution highlighted by TV documentary “Car Sick”.

The investigation, due to air on BBC1 at 7.30 tonight, reveals that only 13 of the country’s 32 local authorities carry out roadside emissions testing, more than a decade after the powers were introduced.

In the programme, Transport Minister Derek Mackay claims spending on walking and cycling is “at a record level”, yet analysis published by the Scottish Greens has shown it remains less than 2 per cent of the total transport budget, with funding for safe routes to schools due to be cut by £2.1million while spending on motorways is to rise by £125.5million.

Alison Johnstone, Health and Wellbeing spokesperson for the Scottish Greens and MSP for Lothian, said: “This investigation shows yet again that public health is being paid lip service by both national and local government who remain unwilling to use their powers and budgets to make our streets safe and healthy. Successive Labour, Lib Dem and SNP Governments have failed to take this issue seriously despite the clear evidence that investing in walking and cycling infrastructure and efficient, affordable public transport delivers much greater public benefit than building new roads.

“In parliament I highlighted comments by Professor David Newby of the British Heart Foundation centre of research excellence in Edinburgh who says there is a clear link between air

pollution levels and heart attacks. I will continue to challenge ministers and local authorities so we see bold action to save lives.”

Sarah Boyack Lothians MSP introduced the motion about air pollution in the Scottish Parliament on [18 November 2015](#). Beginning the short parliamentary debate Ms Boyack said: “More than 2,000 people die early deaths every year in Scotland as a result of traffic-related air pollution. There is also an impact on people’s health, on children, on older people and on those who have chronic conditions. The cocktail of emissions can lead to cancer, increased risk of heart attacks, angina and impacts on respiratory health. We lose days at work and we cost our national health service more than £1 billion every year.”

Gordon MacDonald MSP for Edinburgh Pentlands also spoke during the debate, saying: “I thank Sarah Boyack for securing the debate. The west of Edinburgh has four main commuter routes into the city: Queensferry Road, St John’s Road, Calder Road and Lanark Road. Two of those arterial routes—the A70 and the A71—are in my constituency.

“At the evening peak, between 4.30 and 6.30, Calder Road is the biggest car park in the west of the city. Communities along that route—from Stenhouse, past Saughton Mains, Parkhead, Broomhouse, Sighthill and the Calders—have mile after mile of traffic crawling along in second gear as commuters try to leave the city. The residents have to put up with the road noise and the difficulty of travelling the Calder Road to get to their homes. Furthermore, anyone who lives along that route has to contend with the exhaust fumes that are pumped out by thousands of cars over a relatively short period.

“The situation will only get worse as more than 6,000 homes are to be built in the east of the West Lothian Council area at Calderwood, Broxburn and Winchburgh. Those areas are all

easily commutable into Edinburgh by car along roads that are heavily congested.”

Malcolm Chisholm MSP for Edinburgh Northern and Leith said: “If we want to find out what is happening in my city, we can turn to a report to City of Edinburgh Council’s transport and environment committee, dated 25 August 2015. Such reviews of air quality are required under the Environment Act 1995—I remember participating in the process for what is a good piece of legislation from a previous Conservative Government; I do not often say that, but there, I have just said it.

“There are five air quality management areas in this city—by “this city”, I mean Edinburgh and Leith. It is important to include Leith, because, unfortunately, one of the zones is in Leith; it is centred on Great Junction Street but extends to Commercial Street and Bernard Street. There is nitrogen dioxide monitoring in Duke Street, almost as if the problem is expected to increase because of changes to traffic arrangements in Leith Walk. There is also an air quality management area covering Inverleith, which is not so well known.”

The motion read as follows:

“That the Parliament notes with concern statistics published by Friends of the Earth Scotland that suggest that more than 3,500 people in Scotland die early because of exposure to toxic emissions and that highlight the cost of these emissions, their environmental justice impact and the fact that they are believed to cost up to £2 billion to Scotland’s economy; is further concerned at the admission by Volkswagen Automobile Group that its diesel vehicles were fitted with “defeat devices” to produce favourable emission test results; notes the view that the results of other manufacturers’ models might require investigation; understands that European air quality legal limits continue to be breached in Scotland and that 32 air-quality management areas declared by local

authorities, including sites in Edinburgh, are in breach of regulatory standards; believes that the Supreme Court's determination that new air-quality plans should be devised before the end of 2015 to ensure that Scotland can comply with EU law is significant; welcomes the Scottish Government's commitment to achieving binding European air-quality legal limits by 2020 through the delivery of its low emission strategy, and notes the view that a new policy focus and funding will be required for the Scottish Government to achieve its stated ambition for the strategy and to deliver low emission zones where air-quality management areas are currently in place."

Emilia Hanna, air pollution campaigner for Friends of the Earth Scotland said today:

"Traffic related air pollution continues to be a public health crisis in Scotland, increasing the risk of asthma attacks, strokes, heart attacks, and cancers. Tonight's BBC documentary shows just how damaging cars are to our health and confirm air pollution as one of the biggest silent killers in Scotland.

"Last year the Scottish Government was ordered by the UK Supreme Court to increase its efforts to tackle air pollution but instead we see even more money poured into building motorways and trunk roads. The draft budget includes a massive £820 million for road building with only £40m left for walking and cycling paths. The current budget allocations are irresponsible and reckless if this Government wants to address traffic, the root cause of our air pollution problem.

"The Scottish Government says that it wants more people to walk and cycle, but if it is serious about this then it has to put its money where its mouth is. It cannot simply expect more people to walk and cycle when our pavements are broken and cycle paths still non-existent in many areas.

"The Netherlands and Denmark provide clear proof that

investing in active travel reaps huge health, social and economic benefits. In the long term the Government must spend 10% of its transport budget on walking and cycling. This year, we are calling for it to reallocate a further 1% of the roads and motorway budget to active transport in addition to its existing commitments.

The BBC's investigation also found that Aberdeen, Dundee and Edinburgh were not using powers to stop and fine polluting vehicles. Hanna commented:

"Getting the most polluting vehicles off the road can make a big difference, so it is disappointing that large councils are not using these powers. The Government should work with councils to make sure the skills and resources are available to allow these powers to be used effectively."