

Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee

Oral evidence: Air Quality, HC 468

Monday 16 November 2020

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Members present: Neil Parish (Chair); Ian Byrne; Geraint Davies; Rosie Duffield; Barry Gardiner; Dr Neil Hudson; Mrs Sheryll Murray.

Questions 220 - 296

Witnesses

I: Rebecca Pow MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State, Defra; Rachel Maclean MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State, Department for Transport; Dr Bill Parish, Deputy Director for Air Quality and Industrial Emissions, Defra; and Andrew Jackson, Deputy Director, Joint Defra/DfT Air Quality Unit.

Written evidence from witnesses:

- [Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs](#)



Examination of Witnesses

Witnesses: Rebecca Pow, Rachel Maclean, Dr Bill Parish and Andrew Jackson.

Q220 **Chair:** Welcome to the EFRA Select Committee. We are carrying on our inquiry into air quality. We are fortunate this afternoon to have both Rebecca Pow MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State at Defra, and Rachel Maclean MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State at the Department for Transport. Welcome, Ministers. We also have your two advisers, Bill Parish and Andrew Jackson. They will be able to come in by Zoom. The idea will be that, if you require them, you can either send them a message or ask me and then I will ask them. As I said as you were coming into the room, we largely want you both to answer the questions, but if you need their assistance by all means have it, because they are there for that purpose.

Thank you very much for coming in today. It is good to get you here. It has taken a little while, but, considering all that has been going on, it is a privilege to have you both here. Why was so little progress made on reducing traffic pollution before the pandemic, given that only 10 of 43 areas across the UK met the annual limit for nitrogen dioxide in 2019?

Rebecca Pow: I am delighted to be here, in front of this Select Committee, which I was on for a number of years, with you as the Chair. It is always a pleasure to come back and engage with the EFRA Select Committee.

Chair: It is lovely to see you here.

Rebecca Pow: This is a really important inquiry and it is right to be looking into everything that is going on. In a minute we will go over to Minister Maclean for more detail about the roads and transport side. To set it all in context, your question is why you felt so little was done. I would say that we have set out a very good framework for air quality in this country. It is extremely important to the Government. Tackling air quality and the pollution associated with it is a huge priority for Government.

We know that air pollution is the greatest environmental risk to human health, which is why we have this framework for tackling it. We have rolled over the EU directives, the national emission ceilings and the EU ambient air quality directive, but we also have our clean air strategy, which takes this whole issue extremely seriously. That is an overarching, comprehensive and ground-breaking document that tackles all aspects of air pollution, not just NO_x, which is related to transport, as you say.

Q221 **Chair:** Thank you for that answer, but I am interested in the methodology. I am going to bring in the Transport Minister in a minute. The issue that we found before, as you well know, Minister, when you were on the Select Committee, is that Defra has responsibility for air quality but much of the reduction—increasing the quality of air and reducing pollution—comes from many other Departments. How do you



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directly, at Defra, influence exactly what is going on in Transport? Then I will definitely let the Transport Minister in.

Rebecca Pow: It is a good point, and that is the whole purpose of the clean air strategy. It sets out how we are going to tackle the five key pollutants, which are SO₂, NO_x, the non-methane volatile organic compounds, ammonia and PM_{2.5}, which I am sure we will be talking about in a minute. We are doing well with three of those, but, in terms of the ceilings directive, it is going to be a challenge to meet the PM_{2.5} and the ammonia emissions. When it came to looking at the concentrations of how much pollutant you get in a certain area, it is the NO_x that needs all the work doing to it. It has improved a great deal. We have set up the UK plan for tackling roadside nitrogen dioxide concentrations. That sets out how local authorities must produce their own plans.

Q222 **Chair:** How do you, as Defra, influence what is happening in Transport, and how does Transport then feed that back to Defra?

Rebecca Pow: We work incredibly closely.

Q223 **Chair:** Is there a formal process?

Rebecca Pow: Yes.

Q224 **Chair:** What sort of process is it?

Rebecca Pow: We have our joint air quality unit, which we share between Defra and the Department for Transport. That is the big link, from that unit. We have Andrew on that.

Q225 **Chair:** You both sit on that?

Rebecca Pow: Yes, and all our officials work together on that. We liaise over all the detail, in terms of input with the local authorities. The clean air zones come under that. That is where we have a lot of joint meetings and joint input. We look at all the applications together. We have done a lot of work this summer, during Covid, on some of those plans and proposals. It is a very strong relationship, as indeed it is with the Department of Health, because air quality goes across all Departments. It is not just one Department.

Q226 **Chair:** It certainly does. Can we park it there, Rebecca? Rachel, as far as Transport is concerned, working with Defra, how does it interlock? Only 10 of the 43 areas across the UK met the annual limit on nitrogen dioxide in 2019. Are we speeding it up? What are you doing about it?

Rachel Maclean: We have this joint air quality unit, which is responsible for sitting across Defra and the Department for Transport. Andrew Jackson, who is here, is one of the lead deputy directors from JAQU if we need to bring him in, just so you are aware. Those structures are well embedded inside Government and there is a lot of cross-departmental co-operation.



Back to your specific question about coronavirus, the impact and why we have not got where we need to get to with every single authority, this work has been ongoing for a number of years. When the coronavirus outbreak took place, local authorities had a number of pressures on their budgets, so there was a lot of working at that time to go through where they were up to with their work. In some cases, we had to take decisions, with the agreement of the local authority, to allow them to delay or slightly adjust their plans to take account of those local pressures.

Nevertheless, we were keeping up the momentum, as Rebecca said, all through the summer, working through those plans in detail. We will be introducing a CAZ, a clean air zone, in Bath on 15 March 2021 and in Birmingham on 1 June 2021. Despite all the pressures, it is positive that local authorities recognise that they need to meet their targets and put the work in place on the ground.

Q227 Chair: We had the Mayor of Bristol in last week. He was talking about the fact that the M32 comes right into the centre of Bristol. He was concerned that, as Bristol was trying to reduce its emissions, it had no real way of not exactly controlling, but feeding into the effect the M32 had on that air quality. In this specific case, how would you work with Bristol, or any city that has a motorway or many large roads coming in, which naturally are with Highways England and the Department for Transport? It is going right into the centre of the city. If you look at Birmingham, you have motorways running right through the middle of the city. How do you link in to make sure that the city councils are aware of how much pollution is coming from those particular motorways? How can you work together, both in developing a policy and in having some funding to help that?

Rachel Maclean: You have highlighted a really important point. There has to be a lot of joint working, because you have a number of different interested parties. You have Government in Whitehall, local authorities plus Highways England and the roads authorities. When it is identified that there is an exceedance and action needs to be taken, they have to come forward with a plan of how they will tackle these exceedances, and then a huge amount of analysis is done on that. The plans do not necessarily need to be charging clean air zones. They can include a number of other measures if that is appropriate and is going to tackle the pollution.

Q228 Chair: We have wider questions on this, so I do not want a complete answer. On this situation of the M32 creating a lot of pollution from the traffic, how do the Government, Highways England and the Department for Transport directly negotiate with the city council of Bristol?

Rachel Maclean: They would produce a very detailed business case, which would set out exactly what the problem is with the M32. That would have to be exposed in their business case, and they would have to come to the officials in JAQU, Andrew and the team, and set out where the issues are, what they propose to do and where they think a clean air zone is relevant. There are a number of different ways that you can



implement a clean air zone. You have the option of charging. You also have the option of simply excluding certain vehicles from certain roads. There are a number of different ways of doing it. We in the Department very much want to make sure that the local authorities consider the impacts on their businesses, the people who live there and the local traffic patterns.

That is how the process works and that is why it is quite a lengthy process, to be honest with you. That is why it needs funding. We provide funding in these initial phases for Bristol and others, to enable them to do that work and do it well.

Q229 Chair: I will bring Rebecca back in, but certain local authorities will always say that it is not enough funding, and you will say that it is more than enough. How do you come to some sort of agreement on where the figure is?

Rachel Maclean: We already pay Bristol, for example, £51 million. That is before it even has the clean air zone started. It is based on business case. The local authority will have to come up with a business case, our officials will scrutinise it and there will be some discussions, of course. Some of the things they have asked for are things that we might think are not necessary. We will have those discussions. Actually, it has all been very collaborative and constructive with all the local authorities so far. While there have been some small disagreements about funding, on the whole they have agreed with the funding, they have the business cases and they are going ahead with it.

Rebecca Pow: We had a Zoom with Bristol over the summer, to talk through its issues, because it is very much give and take. We need it to be able to do the right thing in order to tackle the pollution. Of course, the local authorities have a duty to tackle air pollution in their areas. As Minister Maclean said, they have to come up with their plan. Something that was highlighted, and it is going to come forward in the Environment Bill, is that, through the local air quality management framework, we are trying to make it easier for local authorities to liaise with other partners and bodies, for example Highways England. This would probably be quite relevant to the example in Bristol.

Chair: I think we are going to deal with this in another question.

Rebecca Pow: It is quite relevant. A call for evidence is already out, in terms of who would be considered suitable partners to input or to work with. Authorities could work more closely with other partners and, indeed, with other neighbouring authorities, because the air does not stay in one place. It travels. That is a measure that we believe will be helpful, and lots of local authorities have expressed interest. That will help exactly what you are talking about.

Q230 Mrs Murray: Had the Minister stopped when you guided her to, Chair, she would not have strayed into this question. Could I ask both of you,



but particularly you, Rebecca, how you respond to evidence that the Government's clean air strategy and the Environment Bill put too much responsibility on local authorities, but without the funding and resources necessary for them to comply?

Rebecca Pow: We have said that all burdens that are brought forward through the Environment Bill will be fully funded. We have made that quite clear. Local authorities are a very important part of tackling air quality, but, equally, there are many other levers in place. As I am sure you know, Sheryll, the Environment Bill is going to help us move on and sort out air quality. We will be able to set this long-term target on PM_{2.5}, which will be a legal requirement. There will be all the steps and levers that the Environment Bill brings in to keep us up to the mark, to make sure we keep to those targets.

In addition to that, we are going to set another air quality target, which is going to be more about exposure and air concentrations. What is really telling is how many people in one area are exposed to the air pollution. There will be two targets, and we are going to work with academics and all those with the knowledge to input into informing us about what those targets should be, so we set them at the right level through the Bill, with a date to announce those, which will be October 2022. There is a lot of work ongoing on that.

Equally, we have touched already on local air quality management and the framework that local authorities have to work to. As I touched on just now, again through the Environment Bill, it is something we believe local authorities would be keen on. There will be more effective and co-operative co-ordination with other partners to work towards air quality objectives and health objectives, such as working better with neighbouring authorities.

Q231 **Mrs Murray:** Will you be placing a duty on other public bodies to contribute to delivering the outcomes in the clean air strategy?

Rebecca Pow: We have already been doing some work with a call for evidence on which authorities should be designated. That is underway. It will all make it so much more transparent and easy for each local authority to co-operate.

There is something I wanted to mention as well that I think will really help local authorities. We are also going to make it easier for those with smoke control areas to enforce those smoke control areas, which is something they have asked us for. They are able to take people to court, for example, for emitting too much smoke from their chimney, but it is quite hard to do. It is lengthy to go to court, and it is costly. We are making that a civil enforcement, so it will be much easier for them to tackle it themselves. It is something they have particularly asked for, and I think it will really help on this agenda.



Rachel Maclean: I thought it might be helpful if I briefly set out how the funding works, because there are two pots of funding for local authorities. One is the implementation fund, which is provided to support them. It is expert advice. It is help with resources as they are working up their plans to help them set up those clean air zones and traffic management improvements.

Secondly, there is the clean air fund. That is for them to implement measures that will help mitigate any impact on local businesses. For example, that is investment in things like retrofitting buses, providing support for clean bus technology, other retrofit schemes and that sort of thing, to help local authorities and residents adapt to bringing in something that is quite a big change for how they travel around.

We have seen some really good examples of that in Leeds. In Leeds there was a legal obligation for them to deliver compliance with the levels. We supported them with £6.2 million-worth of funding to upgrade taxis and heavy vehicles and for behaviour-change programmes. That brought forward the compliance with the legal limit. That means they do not have to bring in a specific charging zone. That is a good example of where we provide funding early. That can actually solve the problem.

Q232 **Rosie Duffield:** You talk about the clean air fund and the ways in which local authorities are responsible. My Conservative-run local authority, Canterbury City Council, has had broken, ill-equipped and completely inadequate roadside monitoring equipment for several years now. You have mentioned academics getting involved. Along with Professor Stephen Peckham from the University of Kent, who is a public health professional, academic and expert in air quality, I helped to found the Canterbury clean air group in 2015. We have had to provide that equipment ourselves. Can you make it really clear to me and my Conservative-run local authority what it can do to update its equipment so that we can at least monitor the particulates we need to monitor?

Chair: It is not only in Canterbury. Across the country, the different systems of monitoring air quality do not always fit. They do not always come together to get the correct figures. What are we doing as a Government to try to make sure that we are giving local authorities help, but also to make sure that we can monitor air quality and have the same process across the country, so we know we are dealing with apples and not pears?

Rachel Maclean: I am more than happy to look at Canterbury. It is not a case that has been brought to my attention so far, but it is important that we get the monitoring right. I absolutely agree with you, Rosie. It is quite a complex area and there are a lot of technicalities involved in it. I wonder if Andrew Jackson can comment any further on the Canterbury issue that has been raised.

Andrew Jackson: Unfortunately, I am likewise not aware of the specifics of Canterbury. However, we have a process within the NO₂ programme



that enables us to work with any local authorities that believe they have evidence of a problem and to look at that data. There is an element around specific requirements as to the monitoring of NO₂. We are doing quite a bit of work at the moment, with the local authorities we are working with, to see what we can do to bring their monitored data into our programme. Bill may want to comment on the wider issues of particulates, et cetera, but there is a process on which we can engage with the local authority, if it is raised with us.

Q233 Chair: Why is it that you do not know what the situation is in Canterbury? We are trying to have joined-up Government here, especially with local government. Rosie asked what you are doing about it. Whose problem is it? It is somebody's problem, because obviously you do not know the situation in Canterbury. If you do not know the situation in Canterbury, I imagine there are lots of parts of the country you do not know either.

Andrew Jackson: The point I was making is that we were not aware of the particular problem in Canterbury. For the NO₂ plan and for the purposes of the NO₂ work we are doing, we model and monitor NO₂ levels across the country. This is not an area that has been flagged as a concern. If there are specific concerns we are not aware of, we want to work with individual local authorities.

Rebecca Pow: I am sorry to hear about Canterbury, and we will pick that up. Local authorities are required to come up with their plan. Where they have instances that they feel need tackling, they have to come up with them. We need to hear about it, so please come and liaise with us, Rosie. That is where the air quality grant programme comes into play. If there is a project and a proposal, clearly that is the kind of thing a local authority could apply for. There is something like just over £7 million given to monitoring, I think, 271 sites across the country. Monitoring is crucial for tackling this, and every single area is different in the results it gives, what the impacts are and all that.

Q234 Chair: When we inquired into it before, we found that the different types of equipment across the country do not monitor in exactly the same way, so sometimes it is very difficult to collate the figures. To what degree are you bearing down on this? I am delighted about how many millions of pounds you might or might not have spent, but we still need to get both sides together, and I am not sure yet that that is happening.

Rebecca Pow: We have a lot of databases that people can access, particularly people who have underlying health issues, so they know when the pollution is bad or when the incidents are likely to increase. We are well aware that that is so important. That is why the monitoring is important and why it should work.

Dr Parish: The big picture is that we have 271 monitoring sites dotted around the country, forming nine separate sorts of monitoring networks. That costs about £7.5 million a year to maintain. That network consists of



state-of-the-art equipment that has to meet stringent tests and levels of accuracy. That feeds into a live feed, where the data is collected on an hourly basis and presented on the UK-AIR website. That forms the basis for our understanding about what is happening around the country.

In addition to that, we use modelling to fill in all the gaps. The UK and one or two other member states have taken a slightly different approach to other countries. The modelling to fill the gaps is really important, because a monitoring site only measures what is happening at that particular point in time and in that geographical location. Since pollutants disperse and spread, the modelling enables us, with quite a high degree of accuracy, to understand what is happening in all the bits in between.

The local monitoring networks were always intended to be funded by the local authorities. That is to meet their duty to understand what is happening in their areas and to implement their local air quality plans. Some local authorities are understandably under financial pressure and have made their own decisions where kit is no longer maintained. To be quite honest, we do not have a clear understanding about which local authorities are really struggling to maintain an understanding of what is happening in their particular area.

You mentioned the bit about data, databases and joining things up. We have been trying to do that through funding, exploring how we can mark or understand what levels of accuracy different equipment can give. To fund state-of-the-art equipment everywhere is extremely costly, and lower-resolution equipment can still give local authorities a reasonable understanding of what is going on. We have been funding work on low-cost sensor networks. Using our local air quality grant, local authorities have been trialling those and working with academics to road test their usability.

Chair: To answer Rosie's question, how does Canterbury get in contact with you, at the Department for Transport, Defra or whoever, to get some help from Government? I ought to let Rosie back in, because I have rather taken over her question.

Rosie Duffield: I am extremely grateful for your intervention, Chair. Thanks so much. You have pushed for brilliant answers from everyone, so I am very grateful for the depth in which we have been able to explore this. I think it is a question of me going back to my local authority and asking what it wants to do, what it can do and whether it is aware of how to contact you all to take advantage of these schemes and feed into the data if possible. I am really grateful for that. Thank you.

Chair: We are a Select Committee of Parliament, but we also take evidence from local authorities, so we are quite interested, if at all possible, to be able to feed this information back to local authorities. Anything you can do directly, Bill, would be very useful.

Q235 **Geraint Davies:** Can I thank both Ministers for attending the All-Party



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Parliamentary Group on Air Pollution to be quizzed by experts? It was very helpful.

Cutting to the chase, we all know that air pollution prematurely kills something like 40,000 people a year, some say 64,000 people, at a cost of £20 billion a year. Something like 10% of Covid deaths, maybe 6,000, are of people who have a predisposition due to air pollution and, therefore, die unnecessarily. Moving out of the transition period, we will no longer have legally enforceable air quality limits.

I would like to ask Minister Pow whether she would consider continuing legally enforceable limits into 2021 and setting longer-term legally enforceable World Health Organisation limits of 10 micrograms per cubic metre per year by 2030, with an interim target of 12.5. Each microgram, as I mentioned, accounts for something like 10% of Covid deaths. The problem is that, as she said already, the Government currently only aim to set these targets, which can be changed and are not enforceable, in 2022. Will you look again at stringent targets that are immediately enforceable to save lives?

Rebecca Pow: I want to be clear. Are you talking specifically about PM_{2.5}? You did not mention it, but that is what you mean.

Geraint Davies: That is correct. If it was on the face of the Bill and if the other WHO guidelines were carried forward, that would be a guiding light. I do not expect to have all the targets.

Rebecca Pow: We have rolled over all the ceilings and the targets that we had previously. They still exist. They are not going away. I am going to address PM_{2.5}. I know it is something you have pressed on, Geraint. I wanted to thank you for all your work with the all-party group. I have been very pleased to engage with that a few times now.

We have made good progress on PM_{2.5}. PM_{2.5} is fine particulate matter, Chair. You know all this. It is the most polluting and dangerous aspect of air pollution to human health, which is why it is so serious and so important to tackle it. For the record, we have that down from 25 to 20 micrograms per cubic metre, so we have made good progress. Through the Environment Bill, we are aiming to be even more ambitious. Let us not beat about the bush. We are setting our heads above the parapet. We mean business on this. We have been commended, as Geraint knows, by the World Health Organisation for our ambition and for our clean air strategy.

The study about the feasibility of getting down further, to the amounts Geraint was referring to, was done, and it reported back this July. While it might be feasible, it is incredibly difficult, complicated, diverse and involves so many different sections. It is not just one area, Department or section of society that has to tackle it. We have to do it through a raft of measures, alongside setting our long-term target for PM_{2.5} through the Bill. Having been to many of these meetings with the health experts, you might have heard Dr Ally Lewis speaking. I know the Chair did. He is an



leading expert on this. He says that, while it might be feasible to get there, we have to have the right tools for doing it and take the right data, evidence and advice, which is what we intend to do. A lot of work is already ongoing on this, so that we get it right when we finally set our target.

Q236 Geraint Davies: That is very helpful. Thank you. You mentioned that we have made progress from 25 to 20 micrograms of PM_{2.5} per cubic metre, but the World Health Organisation target by 2030 is 10. The idea would be to get from 20 to 12.5 by 2025, which, as you point out, is very ambitious. If each microgram is accountable for up to 10% of Covid deaths, it is worth having these targets to focus minds across all Departments, not just your own but the Department for Transport, councils, Treasury and everyone else. Will you look again at putting a target that focuses on a holistic approach from Government but also gives industry a framework in which to innovate?

Rebecca Pow: You touch on all good points, but I am still going to hold my line that we cannot set that target until we have all the evidence and advice for doing so. We are being incredibly ambitious. Even now, we have just introduced secondary legislation to tackle smoke from domestic burning of wet wood and to move people on to manufactured solid fuels. That will make a significant difference to the amount of fine particulate matter going into the air. We are already demonstrating that we are moving in the right direction, but we have lots of other sectors to tackle. A lot of strides have been made in industry.

Q237 Chair: You cannot set the target now, but when can you set the target?

Rebecca Pow: We have said October 2022. All the work is ongoing and will be ramped up even further once the Bill is through. As you know, the Bill is back in Committee now.

Q238 Geraint Davies: I know there are a lot of scientists, a lot of data and a lot to think about. All the same, leading professionals and scientists like Professor Sir Stephen Holgate, have suggested that we can at this point set a target for 2030, not for next year, of 10 micrograms as a guiding light. We can do that and set other targets round it, so we know where we are going and the shape of our trajectory. We are trying to be ambitious, as you have said. That will focus the ambition and get everyone on board to deliver a cleaner, healthier world. Can you look at that again?

Rebecca Pow: We are all singing from the same hymn sheet about wanting a cleaner, healthier world. I reiterate what I have said. We are taking all the advice and speaking to all the health experts. We have really close links with COMEAP, the expert air quality group in the Department of Health. We work with Public Health England. I have done roundtables this summer with many health specialists on this subject. We have to get it right.



You touched on another interesting point. I mentioned that we are taking steps on domestic burning. Also, industry has made major steps through the medium combustion plant directive, because we have to tackle emissions from all these areas. We have done what one might call a lot of the easier areas, and now it is going to be complicated. It will even be things like street markets, where they have lots of cookers and heating of things. All these things will have to be looked at. I might very quickly let Bill touch on anything I have left out. We have talked about this target so much.

Q239 Geraint Davies: Can I take you to my next question? That is to build on your point about joined-up Government. You are doing your bit in Defra, and I will come on to Rachel to talk about the Transport contribution, which is very significant. Obviously, the NHS is of central importance to this, because we are talking about tens of thousands of deaths. Councils are important in terms of planning, and we have interviewed those. Treasury is important in terms of fuel duty scrappage systems, motorway building and financing, and the whole shooting match.

Do you think the Environment Bill should put a duty on Government overall to make an annual report on air pollution delivery and action, both outdoors and indoors? As you know, there is now a raft of evidence that we are exposed to unhealthy chemicals, material and other problems indoors. Do you not think it would be a good idea for Government themselves, as opposed to just Defra, to give an annual report on what they are doing and what the progress is to get to these public health targets?

Chair: We also want to know what you are doing about national leadership and building consensus on the need for action on air quality.

Geraint Davies: That is what I was asking, with respect.

Chair: I was trying to get it more succinct, if I could be so bold.

Geraint Davies: How do you build consensus around all these Departments and get them involved in doing something?

Rebecca Pow: I must stress that the whole point of the Environment Bill in setting these long-term targets is that we—

Q240 Chair: It is not just about targets. It is about actually doing something about it. I get fed up with targets and ticking boxes. We want to know exactly how you are working with local government to deliver it. Targets are all very wonderful, but we want to know, when you go outside your school, when you go down the road, that the air you breathe is cleaner. It is lovely to have targets and it is wonderful, but all we have done is talk about target, target, target. How are you working together to make it work?

Geraint Davies: That is what I was asking.



Rebecca Pow: I said he got fiery, Minister Maclean. I hear what you say, Chair and Geraint. We are constantly under pressure, as Government, to set ambitious targets. Another report came out this week saying Government needed to be very ambitious in their targets, and they are. The whole purpose of the framework of the Environment Bill is that it not only sets legally binding targets; it sets out an entire framework for how we report on those targets and are held to account. This is very important. Not only are there 15-year targets but there are five-year interim targets.

Q241 **Chair:** You set your target, and then how are you working with local government, schools and everybody else to make sure that, outside individual schools, the air quality is better? That is what we want to know.

Rebecca Pow: That is why, as you are suggesting, it all has to join up. It has to come from the top, through this process of constant reporting. Every year, we have to report how we are doing on the targets and every five years it has to be assessed. If it does not look like we are making enough progress, having been scrutinised, the Office for Environmental Protection can say, "You need to do more."

No other country is going to have such an ambitious framework of targets, monitoring and reporting. That is where we come right back to Canterbury and all those other places. Their monitoring and their local air quality plans are really important, because they will all feed into that overall data of how we are doing on the five individual pollutants that contribute to air pollution and are so seriously affecting people's health.

Q242 **Geraint Davies:** Should all Departments have a duty, certainly the relevant ones I have mentioned—the Department for Transport, NHS, Treasury, Defra and all the rest of it—to feed in on an annual basis to the holistic approach of how Government are going to achieve these targets, rather than just leaving it with Defra? With respect, it is a bigger issue than Defra, because there are so many people being affected.

Chair: From a Department for Transport position, it is again about working with everybody, local government and all Departments of Government. How is the Department for Transport working with other Departments of Government? How are you working with local authorities to deliver the improvement?

Rachel Maclean: Specifically, in the Department for Transport, we monitor. When the exceedances are identified, that is when we start the process of having that business plan. As I touched on earlier, the discussions will then take place in JAQU about how we help them to tackle the air quality issues they have in their particular local areas. I mentioned Bath, Bristol and Birmingham. We have already mentioned those, but there is a long list of other areas that we are working with and that, in discussion with Andrew and the team, are at various stages of implementing this, producing data, looking at the data and going round



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that cycle. When the clean air zone itself is introduced, we will have all the data and will be able to see exactly how much progress they have made in tackling those exceedances and meeting their legal limits.

Q243 Chair: What is the timescale of all this? Do you have any idea of when you are going to bring all this information together?

Rachel Maclean: It is happening now. That is a process that already exists. That is why we already have clean air zones ready to go in Bath and Birmingham. They will be coming on stream in May and June next year. Then there are a number of other ones also coming through the pipeline. I am more than happy to provide a list to the Committee.

Chair: That would be really useful.

Q244 Geraint Davies: To the Transport Minister specifically, in terms of joined-up Government, I led a campaign to get the electrification of the railway to Swansea and then it was stopped at Cardiff. Now it looks like, at a time when more people are wanting to work from home, so there may be a reduction in overall congestion from people in cars, there might be an opportunity to have electrification to Swansea, but instead the talk is of having a new M4 relief road in Newport. How much does the environment factor in your thinking on electrified rail versus more and more roads?

Rachel Maclean: Very much so, Geraint. Can I thank you for the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Air Pollution plan? It is a brilliant document and definitely stimulates a lot of thinking in the Department for Transport. You and I have had conversations about this before. I am the Minister for transport decarbonisation, as well as clean air. We are producing the transport decarbonisation plan, which is the most ambitious document the Department for Transport has ever produced, because it looks across every single mode of transport. In the past, they used to look at roads and see how much pollution and how many greenhouse gases were coming from there. Then they would look at maritime, then at rail. They would look at it all separately.

We have now legislated for net zero by 2050. We are the only major country to have done that. We are now looking at how we get the policies in place on a very grand scale across every bit of the transport sector, whether it is electrification of the railway, hydrogen, the transition to electric vehicles or shipping. We will be publishing that plan very soon, which will go into a lot of detail on all the policies. The work we have been doing so far is about looking at what funding is needed for all this, what investment is needed to make it happen and where we need to stimulate R&D in these different technologies. That is a really exciting piece of work and will answer a lot of the questions you have come up with.

Geraint Davies: That is very helpful. Thank you very much for that.



Rebecca Pow: You are touching on such a good point, as has the Chair. It has to be cross-Government. We are aware of that. You keep saying it comes under Defra's hat. It does, but the clean air strategy, which I am sure we have all read and digested, is a really good document. That sits under Defra's 25-year environment plan. The 25-year environment plan is cross-Government, and that is why the Environment Bill is so important. The first environmental improvement plan, which will have all these targets, is the 25-year environment plan. Air quality and the clean air strategy is absolutely part and parcel of it.

We have to work with other Departments, just as Rachel Maclean is saying. We work very closely with the Department for Transport. We work just as closely with BEIS, because that has to deal with all the industry and business. They are all decarbonising. They are all having to look at reducing their emissions and pollutants. Then we work at the other end with the Department of Health. This is cross-Government. Perhaps we need to highlight that a bit more. Perhaps people are not aware enough of quite how closely we are working. Indeed, we probably need to work even more closely.

Geraint Davies: We could perhaps have an annual report from each Department on what they are doing for air quality. I am sure the Chair would agree with that. I am sure he likes reports.

Chair: I am sure the Minister would be delighted to do that. I am putting words into her mouth probably. Geraint, thank you for those questions. I know you do a lot of work on air quality, so thank you.

Geraint Davies: I realise the Department for Transport is doing a great deal, and it was very helpful to hear from Rachel. Does Rebecca agree that it would be helpful to have an annual report on what everybody is doing across Government towards improving air quality? Is that something Defra could press?

Chair: Why do we not look to see what we might or might not be able to put in our report?

Geraint Davies: I hope that comes true.

Q245 **Dr Hudson:** Thank you, Ministers, for being before us. Andrew and Bill, thank you very much. I want to get on to clean air zones. You have covered some of this in your previous answers, but it would be good to get this formally on the record. Rachel, you mentioned Bath and Birmingham, et cetera, but the Government agreed that some of the clean air zones can be deferred because of the pandemic. Will you reiterate the Government's commitment to implementing these clean air zones? When will a formal timetable be set out for these individual zones and the overarching strategy?

Rachel Maclean: I have in front of me a list of local authorities that are developing plans. As I said at the beginning, all this work kicked off



before the pandemic. When the pandemic started to emerge, that was when the discussions with local authorities and the Department for Transport started to take place. The local authorities have responded in different ways: some have carried on with not much deviation from the original plan; and some have had to make longer decisions. It is very much driven by the local authorities and their individual needs. While we have an overarching national strategy, these are legal limits that they have to meet and we provide the funding, it is very much down to them.

Having said that, we have a duty and a natural responsibility to make sure they are hitting their targets. As Rebecca said earlier, we have been keeping them on track. We have regular meetings. We expect regular progress updates. Andrew keeps us up to date with what they are doing. If there is anything where they are slipping, we want to know. They have to satisfy us that they have taken responsible steps and all the action they need to take. There is no sense that we are letting any of it slip.

The broader point is that, even though in the lockdown period we saw some reduction in road usage, we know that road usage has ticked up again. It is not really the case that, because we have had a lockdown and people are now working from home, we do not need to implement them any more. We do still need to implement them. There might be some local changes for some of them but, broadly speaking, we know that we need to see those behaviour changes coming on stream.

Q246 Dr Hudson: Will there be a new timetable for the rolling out of individual zones? When will that come out, if that is on your radar?

Rachel Maclean: Some of them have new timetables. For example, Birmingham was originally supposed to be introducing the clean air zone this year, I think, and now it is going live next year. Yes, there is a timetable for all of them, but they are all different, so it is not a national timetable where they will all go live on the same day. There are different timetables, driven by those different local needs.

Q247 Dr Hudson: If I could take you back, before the onset of the pandemic there were some delays in the roll-out of these zones. Thinking pre-Covid for a minute, if that is possible, what lessons do you think Government can learn from those delays prior to the pandemic, in terms of the implementation of these clean air zones? What lessons can be learned?

Rachel Maclean: That is a really fair question. It is the sort of discussion I have all the time with Andrew and the team. When there is a delay I do not like to get into the blame but, if it is an issue at our end or an issue at their end, I always want to know why that is. You might be referring to the vehicle checker system, which is the data part of the whole system that has been made available to local authorities. There were some delays with that, and we had to do a lot of work to try to understand what happened there. We are now on track with that, and we provided that vehicle checker for the local authorities. Like any system and any project, inevitably there will be hiccups. As a responsible Government,



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spending taxpayers' money, we want to make sure we are doing a better job of that.

Q248 Dr Hudson: In terms of preventing future delays, that is really helpful. On central Government working with local government, what specific funding are you giving to local authorities to ensure they have the right skills and knowledge in place to develop these zones?

Rebecca Pow: There is upfront funding for local authorities, but it is really up to them when they want to put that funding into operation. Some hang on to it and wait until the CAZ is fully arranged, and some have spent money upfront. I was going to give the example of Leeds City Council. It spent quite a lot of its upfront funding on its taxis and heavy vehicles to swap them over to be less emitting and cleaner services. It sparked a whole change in behaviour and communication. That has brought forward what we call the compliance time to get within the legal limits sooner than was expected, so now it is not going to go full steam ahead with the CAZ. It is using all these other measures.

That is quite a good example of flexibility and of how each local authority is interpreting, monitoring, assessing and reporting what they need, what the needs of the local area are, individually, to try to make the scheme work. It is influencing the dates and times when these schemes come forward and in what form.

Q249 Dr Hudson: That is really helpful. That leads me on to my final question. It is really helpful to hear that local authorities and central Government are making evidence-based decisions as to how these programmes are being implemented and then evaluated as they go forward, so they can decide how they progress them. What specific support is central Government giving from either of your Departments, or both, to local areas to evaluate whether the schemes they are bringing in are actually working, so that we can amend them and have evidence based decision-making?

Rachel Maclean: It is helpful to know that we have made £880 million available to date for our NO₂ plan, which is the large-scale funding pot that is available to local authorities. I will give you one example. You have asked me specifically what we do. When the business case is presented, we return our decision to them within eight weeks. In that time, we go to the lengths of having them all reviewed by an independent panel of experts to make sure they are robust and we are making the right decisions based, as you said, on evidence.

Andrew Jackson: We have a full evaluation plan for all the measures implemented by local authorities. That will take the form of a local evaluation, using traffic analysis, in terms of ANPR camera monitoring data, but also central evaluation. It is work that we in JAQU are going to do to co-ordinate across local authorities with deep dives, long-term studies, into the impact of the air quality measures we have implemented, and some more rapid case assessments, so shorter case



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studies lasting a few months, to get a quick feel for how the interventions are landing and what impact they are having. The plans are backed up with that plan for evaluation.

Q250 **Chair:** There were reports in the press this weekend that the Government are going to have no more diesel or petrol cars after 2030. Is that correct? Are we going to be in a position to say that?

Rachel Maclean: We have all seen the reports in the press. It is not a secret that we have looked at how we can bring forward the phase-out date where we end the sale of new petrol and diesel cars. That is something that was in our manifesto at the election. We launched the consultation: should we bring this date forward to 2035 or even earlier? That has been the bulk of my work as a Minister, even throughout the pandemic, with everyone.

Q251 **Chair:** Is the new figure 2030? Is it 2035? Is it 2040? Are we going to have enough electric and hybrid cars by 2030? Where are we, Minister? Perhaps I am being a little unkind to you. Are these just press reports, or are they Government policy? What are they?

Rachel Maclean: They are definitely not just press reports. We will be bringing the date forward, but I would not like to steal the Prime Minister's thunder. He is due to make a speech this week on exactly this point, even though he is self-isolating. I had better leave him to do that.

Chair: Perhaps I had better not press you further on that. The point I would make is that you have to have the availability of alternative vehicles.

Rachel Maclean: Of course.

Chair: It puts a pressure on delivering more electric and hybrid vehicles in the meantime. I can see both sides of the argument. We will park that one there, because I do not want to make life even more uncomfortable for your good selves.

Q252 **Dr Hudson:** Can I ask for a departmental overview? Some of our witnesses in previous sessions from local areas have said that one of the effects of the pandemic is that road usage has gone down, and sometimes it is now recovering to pre-pandemic levels. Some witnesses have said it has got up to 85% to 90% of pre-pandemic levels. Interestingly, the air quality measurement in some of those areas has not come back up to that pre-pandemic level. We talk about evidence base and monitoring. In both of your Departments, are you are picking up across the country that, although road usage is back up, air quality is perhaps still better than it was, despite the fact that the roads are busy again?

Chair: And how does that fit into the clean air strategy?



Rachel Maclean: Throughout the whole pandemic period, we were asking exactly those questions of Andrew and the team. “Are you sure we still need to implement these clean air zones, charging or not?” There is no road traffic, people are working from home and there are long-term behaviour shifts. The evidence has shown us—and I will ask Andrew, who has the technical details—that, despite the pandemic, road traffic is still a bit lower, but it is ticking up again. Even though you might not see the peaks and troughs, you see more spread-out patterns of road traffic.

The general consensus and conclusion is that, despite all that—the fact there has been this reduction, especially at the beginning of the pandemic—we are still seeing air quality problems and exceedances. It is not a solution for us not to roll out clean air zones in those areas. The monitoring has continued. Does Bill want to add something on the technical details of that?

Rebecca Pow: I will do an overview, and then Bill has the nitty-gritty detail. It is really important, and lots of MPs pushed us on this, Chair, including you, I think. We did a call for evidence very early in the lockdown, between March and June, with the air quality expert group. Their findings were very much as Minister Maclean has said. NO_x went down initially, because there were not so many cars, but it is creeping back up. Interestingly, the PM_{2.5} did not change very much. Part of that is because we get the knock-on effect from other countries. There was a strange wind from Europe and a lot of pollutants came across, so that affected us here. It tells us that it is a very complicated picture, so we have been gathering more evidence and working in conjunction with COMEAP, the medical group.

Q253 **Chair:** Can these particulates travel a great distance?

Rebecca Pow: They can travel a great distance. I am not sure I should say this, as we are all pushing for electric cars, but they still have tyres and brakes, which give off fine particulate matter. This is a large picture, and it is not just one source. There is some finer detail on that. We did the call for evidence and there was another ONS study done in August. The details were then presented to all Departments, Health, Transport and Defra, to have a look at what the situation was. Nothing is clear-cut. There is no clear-cut “lockdown caused air pollution to go away.” That is not the case. Bill has a little more fine, granular detail on what we have found so far, but it is all ongoing.

Dr Parish: We keep the levels of pollution under constant review with our live monitoring network. The air quality expert group has been helping us interpret that information as we measure the changes once lockdown started in March and then through later in the year. We will keep that under review and watch how the pollution profile is changing as traffic levels are building up. While traffic levels build up, it is congestion, stopping and starting, that generates most of the NO₂ exceedances. Even if you have traffic, you will get less build up if it is flowing. The minute



you start to get serious tailbacks, et cetera, that is when your hotspots start to become significant.

We are learning in real time how the traffic responds and how more people are probably using private transport, because they are understandably worried about public transport. We will keep that under review and the expert group will help us interpret that, in the same way as we tried to work out what was happening with the particulate matter. Over April, we had a huge quantity of easterly winds, and that was directly correlated with the spikes of particulate matter we were getting. Once the wind swung back to the south-west, the particulate matter levels in June dropped quite significantly.

Chair: It is always good to get a wind from the south-west. You can be absolutely certain that will bring much good to the country. That is an aside. I do not think I have a lot of scientific knowledge on whether that is effective. Thank you, Bill. I am only joking.

Dr Hudson: Those answers are really helpful. As the traffic levels have come back up, there still is a need for these clean air zones. It is interesting, and it is great that it is still being monitored. If the traffic levels are still there but they are perhaps moving in different ways and people's behaviour has changed, the lessons learned as to how these plans are put in place can be taken forward. Despite heavy usage, we can get some good lessons that can be developed into these new plans. We still need to address the air quality issue. That is really helpful, and this evidence base is taking it forward.

Chair: It also shows that action needs to be taken internationally to improve quality across Europe and the world. That one is interesting.

Q254 **Barry Gardiner:** Dr Parish, Defra commissioned technical analysis by King's College London and Imperial College last year. Can you remind the Committee what they concluded about the possibility of achieving the WHO guidelines for PM_{2.5}?

Dr Parish: We commissioned this work in response to a commitment we made in the clean air strategy to assess the potential achievability of WHO air quality guidelines. The key conclusion was that, while it is technically feasible to achieve the World Health Organisation guidelines of 10 micrograms, we do not know how we are going to do it, in terms of the myriad interventions we would need to make, to make incremental reductions across all sectors of the economy.

As a reminder about London, being such a huge city, where you have a lot of people living in the south east, all going about their everyday lives, it generates an awful lot of particulate matter from everything we do. Where you have friction, you have particulate matter. The background level of particulate in London, before you even add the key anthropogenic sources, such as domestic combustion, transport, et cetera, is modelled to be about 6 micrograms. That baseline is quite high.



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Our conclusions were that, across much of the country, we could probably achieve WHO guideline levels. In London, being such a big city, it would be challenging. We need to do the groundwork to look at what interventions we need to make in order to make it possible to reach 10 micrograms.

Q255 **Barry Gardiner:** That is extremely helpful. It sets out very clearly that, while it is technically possible, the Government do not yet know how they would go about implementing it. Were you in your current post when Michael Gove was the Environment Secretary?

Dr Parish: I was.

Q256 **Barry Gardiner:** That is also helpful. Do you recall that he said that the new Environment Bill should introduce "a legally binding commitment on particulate matter so that no part of the country exceeds the levels recommended by the WHO"? When he said that, what advice did you give him about the level that should be set?

Chair: Dr Parish, I will let you answer that one, but then I am going to bring in the Minister because I am a little concerned about the questioning here. Would you give an answer to Mr Gardiner, please?

Barry Gardiner: We are getting answers.

Chair: You have to be careful about how much you politicise those giving advice, dare I say it.

Barry Gardiner: I do not intend to do that at all. The clarity came from the Secretary of State at that time.

Chair: These questions are better answered by Ministers rather than by Dr Parish, if you see what I mean. If Dr Parish is happy to answer the question, it is up to him.

Dr Parish: My advice was based on the evidence we built up at the time we were drafting the clean air strategy, recalling that the strategy is a Government strategy that Defra took the lead on drafting, but we needed collective agreement across Whitehall as to the level of challenge and commitment. At the time, I was the head of the evidence team and my advice would have been that I did not know how I would be able to achieve, or find a pathway to achieving, a level as low as 10 micrograms in a city like London at this time.

Q257 **Barry Gardiner:** In other words, your advice at that time was very similar to the report from King's College and Imperial. When you were talking about a whole-of-Government approach, did you also give advice? We have heard from some of our witnesses in other sessions, particularly from local authorities, about the importance of having a national framework of low-emission zones to encourage all the cities and areas to participate. Was that also something you mentioned to the Secretary of State at that stage about a national framework and the importance of it?



Dr Parish: In the clean air strategy, we had a specific chapter about leadership. The framework we set out in the strategy is now being put in place through the Environment Bill in terms of a duty to redo the UK national strategy for air quality. That framework for air quality has been renewed several times since the first one in 2007. That is our opportunity now, working with local authorities, about how we reframe the working relationship with local authorities but also ensure that the focus is clear on how we equip local authorities with the tools to drive down emissions where they are really needed, for example focusing on areas where there are disproportionate levels of pollution affecting more people. It is a more health-based outcome as opposed to just focusing on limit values.

Q258 **Barry Gardiner:** That is extremely helpful. Turning to Minister Pow, you spoke earlier in the session, and on previous occasions, about how the WHO was happy with the Government's clean air strategy, and that is absolutely true. That was published two years ago. Subsequent to that, Dr Neira, the director of public health and the environment at the WHO, has said that, with the Environment Bill, they need to "raise the level of ambition". Can you tell us how you propose to raise the level of ambition in the Environment Bill and the clean air strategy from two years ago?

Rebecca Pow: There are a few points I would like to make. It was Michael Gove in particular who drove the clean air strategy, and it was published last year, in 2019, so it was not two years ago. I would also like to put on record that, whatever rate of PM_{2.5} we are talking about, there is no recognised safe limit, so it is going to be a constant piece of work to get this right and to get all the evidence feeding into it, to work with everybody across Government and with all health officials. I have met Dr Neira, and she praised our ambition, our clean air strategy and our ambitions through the Environment Bill to say that we are setting a legally binding target for PM_{2.5}, that we are endeavouring to go further than has been suggested, I believe, by any other nation and that we are looking at where we are going to set the target.

I still completely stick to what Dr Bill Parish has said. We have to do this on an evidence basis. We have to talk to all the experts. I will refer you back to Dr Ally Lewis. I do not know if you have had him before the Committee, but I think he would agree with what we are saying. We want, obviously, to make this safe for human health. We want to have a really positive impact on health, and we engage hugely with the health organisations and charities and work with them towards this endeavour.

Barry Gardiner: Could we just cut to the chase?

Rebecca Pow: You asked me about Dr Neira and the level of ambition. From my meeting with her, she thought we were being very ambitious. She agreed that it was very tricky to get the rate lower, but she applauded the fact that we have this ambition to set a target and that we are setting this concentration target on average population exposure, which is really important.



Q259 **Barry Gardiner:** I absolutely agree with you about there being no safe limit. Therefore, in setting the target and trying to achieve the technically feasible target that the WHO has set, it would be to set a minimum standard across the board that people could feel was giving them a minimum level of equity and fairness across the country where they are relatively secure. You are right that there is no minimum level. No level of PM_{2.5} is going to be safe, so we want to drive it down as much as possible but, obviously, we must try to get the target at the WHO level.

You talked about how you are looking to talk about exposure as well as targets. I welcome that. Can you tell us, in looking at the exposure rates, what you are doing to ensure that the exposure rates, as they are lowered, are not simply allowing high levels in the sorts of areas that you were discussing earlier with the Chair and that Marvin Rees spoke to the Committee about, such as those close to motorways? In my constituency, it would be near the North Circular. How are you making sure that there is equality at that level, with the exposure rates as well as with the target levels?

Rebecca Pow: You touch on some good points, but that reiterates the point. You are highlighting how complicated this is. If we are going to get the two targets to work together, it is imperative that we have this evidence-based approach. We believe this new concentration target will act as a minimum standard across the country. What we are going to do is ground breaking. It is aimed at reducing average population exposure across England. The aim of it is to drive continuous improvement across the country.

If we get this dual approach to tackling PM_{2.5}, it will be the most effective way that we can go about tackling this really harmful pollutant. We just announced that we are going to do this extra target. You make a good point that, in some areas, it is very concentrated and in other areas it is not so serious. We have to get that right. That is why an average overall statistic is not necessarily as helpful.

Q260 **Barry Gardiner:** It is not the right approach, is it? That is precisely my point.

Rebecca Pow: That is why we are having two. I thought you might welcome that, Barry.

Q261 **Barry Gardiner:** Minister, we agree on a great deal here. This Committee is only about trying to make sure that we get the very best possible result. It is not trying to stop you doing the right things. It is trying to help you.

I am asking about not just reducing the average exposure across the country. I am pointing out that, in hotspots like the M32 in Bristol or the North Circular in London, people's exposure is infinitely higher than in other areas and the concentration levels are infinitely higher. I am asking how we can tackle that health inequality and how your approach, the strategy and the Environment Bill are going to do that. I know that is



what you want, and it is what this Committee wants, too.

Rebecca Pow: We agree, Barry, in that we are setting a target for it. I explained earlier how we are going to hold people's feet to the fire, to use a term the Chair loves, or did when I was on the Committee. How are we going to be held to account for that? That is why all the monitoring, reporting and data is so important. You are right that it is important to tackle these hotspots. That is why the concentration target will really help.

Bill might give us a little more detail. I think Barry wants to know exactly how we are going to determine that. I would still say it is early days, because we have to take evidence, ask experts and involve all those who are pleased that we are doing this but realise that it is very challenging. Bill, is there any more detail we could share with Barry here?

Dr Parish: At this stage, because we are working closely with experts to do all the groundwork, all will be revealed, in terms of our options for doing exposure-based target setting. How do you apply that in a way that focuses action on where people are most vulnerable? Within a population, there are areas where you have more vulnerable people in the community: hospitals, schools, care homes, et cetera. We need to do something that is meaningful and sets a process of ongoing improvement of air quality. Whether or not you have already achieved the WHO guideline, you continue to drive it down where you can, but you are driving it down where you are going to get the most health benefit, focusing interventions on where people are more vulnerable as well as where more people are likely to be affected by elevated levels.

Q262 **Barry Gardiner:** Will the Government consider including any additional outcome measures in the Environment Bill to reduce those health inequalities that are associated with air pollution?

Rebecca Pow: Dealing with what we term the more vulnerable, or those sections where we have higher pollution, more people and, potentially, more deprived areas in some city centres, all of those things will have to be taken into account. One of the clear messages in this air quality landscape is that it is all about health and how we can improve people's health. You touch on important areas and, indeed, we have done studies during coronavirus to see whether, for example, there were more coronavirus deaths where there was higher air pollution. All the data and evidence, at the moment, says to us that, yes, there might have been, but the reasons for that are very complicated.

Q263 **Barry Gardiner:** That is not the question I asked, with respect. It is a good question. I am very happy to go on and ask it. The question I asked was about whether you will include additional outcome measures in the Environment Bill to reduce those health inequalities that we have talked about.

Rebecca Pow: I think the targets we are setting, and particularly this concentration target, will address many of the areas you are getting at.



Q264 **Barry Gardiner:** How are the Government taking into account the link between air pollution and Covid-19 in the strategy and in the policies that you are putting in place?

Rebecca Pow: I touched on it earlier. We have been monitoring the situation incredibly closely. Our joint air quality expert group has already done a review and reported back about what any potential links and impact might be. Similarly, COMEAP has. To reiterate what I have just said, there is no decisive link, but we are still monitoring it because it is a very complicated picture. Those people whose deaths are associated with coronavirus, potentially in air pollution areas, have, in many cases, had lots of underlying health issues as well. We are still monitoring it really closely so that we have answers and evidence to inform us as we go along.

Q265 **Barry Gardiner:** Evidence-based data is exactly what we want. When will you be able to share that evidence? When will there be a report outlining the findings and data that you have gathered?

Rebecca Pow: The air quality expert group's information is already available. The ONS reported back in August so that is available. There is now more work going on, and Public Health England is involved with it. We are also doing an indoor air quality report with the expert group and COMEAP, which will be underway shortly. I am not sure exactly when we can give you the next lot of data. Bill, do we have a date for the conclusion of the next review? We can let you know that. It is constantly ongoing, that is what I am saying.

Q266 **Chair:** You are now talking about indoor air quality, which I know is of interest to Geraint in particular, as well as to Barry and all of us. We would be very interested in that data and information when you have it and can release it to us. I do not expect you are necessarily going to have it in time for our report but, if you were able to let us have any information in that time, it would be very useful.

Rebecca Pow: Of course.

Q267 **Ian Byrne:** I will direct this to Minister Maclean and give Minister Pow a rest. Dr Susan Kenyon's evidence noted that, "throughout the crisis, coverage of public transport has been negative, with a focus on the potential of travel by public transport to spread the virus. The government stated that we have a 'civic duty' not to use public transport. The damage that this has caused must not be underestimated." What work is the Government doing to ensure that public transport is seen as safe to use and to encourage people back from using cars once we are through the worst of the pandemic?

Rachel Maclean: I am more than happy to talk about transport and give Minister Pow a break. On your first point, yes, I would agree that, at the beginning of the pandemic, we definitely did have that focus on not using public transport. That did not sit well with me at all, being the Minister for transport decarbonisation but, on balance, it was felt it was necessary to



protect public health, which was the Government's first priority. You will know of the record amount of funding that has been put in by central Government to enable public transport to continue to run with social distancing in place. Services have been maintained. The frequency has been maintained so that people have confidence that, if they are travelling, they will be able to maintain social distancing. That is significant amounts of funding for all forms of public transport.

In this latest smaller lockdown period, we have changed our guidance and we have not had that same message about public transport. We have made it clear that only essential journeys are permitted. That is the Government guidance, but we have not encouraged people to stay off public transport in quite the same way. That is a deliberate policy that we brought on because we definitely do not want to encourage long-term shifts to car use. Earlier, I touched on the work that we are doing in the transport decarbonisation plan. With this, we want to see a natural shift to more active travel over the longer term and all the different policy levers that will go into making that happen.

I will point out one example of the fantastic work we are doing on cycling infrastructure. Funding was announced at the weekend on the back of an initial award of £225 million of funding. We have awarded another £175 million to local authorities to enable them to implement cycling infrastructure and more active travel schemes including, in some cases, e-scooter rental schemes. This is because we definitely want to ensure that people have other ways of travelling in this pandemic period that are not polluting.

Q268 Ian Byrne: That is a fair answer. In Liverpool West Derby, there has been a bit of disquiet about the cycle lanes and the impact they have had on traffic. Dr Bill Parish was talking about how static cars emit more pollution, and we have had difficulties with the cycle lanes being temporary. Hopefully, the Government can work with the local authorities and see how the plan and the remit around the plan can perhaps be altered to incorporate more local voices. That was certainly lacking.

Moving on to another point, you talked about public subsidy and funding to get us through the pandemic. In a previous session, Bristol's Mayor, Marvin Rees, raised the possibility of private bus company subsidies being used in the transition to local authority ownership of bus companies and also for the Government to come alongside Bristol and other cities to help them collectively buy large numbers of electric or biogas vehicles. In his words, this "could transform the public transport offering almost overnight", giving people "a clean alternative and...public transport". You talked about the Government being hugely ambitious. I think that is a hugely ambitious ask, but it is also achievable and one that would transform communities with the sort of offering that Marvin has outlined. Is this something the Government would consider?

Rachel Maclean: The Government are already introducing zero-emission, hydrogen and electric buses.



Q269 **Ian Byrne:** What about public ownership?

Rachel Maclean: Many of them are already in public ownership. Many of the bus companies that are operating buses on our network are in public ownership. We have committed to introducing an all-electric and zero-emission bus town. The Prime Minister is going to be announcing that very soon. We have a lot of support in place for buses because we recognise that these are services that people rely on. Not only have we kept them going throughout the pandemic and supported them, but we are looking at how we decarbonise the bus sector more generally. We are doing that in a number of ways through support for R&D, new technology and hydrogen buses. This is absolutely where we want to go with Government policy on buses.

Q270 **Ian Byrne:** I just wanted to make that point because, in Liverpool city region, I know this is somewhere Steve Rotheram and the team want to go with regards to local authority-owned bus transport, moving away from the private model. At the moment, they say they are constrained by that. Their idea was to use the subsidies that are used to prop up the privatised models on many occasions and maybe take some equity in those companies. Has that been spoken about or considered as we move forward post-Covid?

Chair: Minister, Ian is talking about nationalising the buses, I think you will find. You need to be quite clear where he is leading you.

Rachel Maclean: Quite right, Chair—I will not get on that bus. Bus strategy more broadly sits with my colleague, Baroness Vere, the Roads Minister. That is her detailed brief, so you are possibly asking me to stray a little bit into that. In terms of decarbonisation of those buses, that is something we absolutely want to support. You have already highlighted that local authorities have a lot of power over what models they want to bring in on their networks and what is right for them. If local authorities believe it is right for them to subsidise buses, they already have considerable freedom to do so.

Q271 **Chair:** Where Ian has a real point is that the cost of delivering these types of buses is enormous. Therefore, is it going to be delivered by the private sector or by the public sector? I am trying to get you off the hook here, Ian. Who is going to deliver this? We have quite a number of gas and electric buses here in London, but a lot of public money goes into Transport for London. Where does the future of transport lie? It is a fair question from Ian. Will the private bus sector survive coming out of this pandemic? I know it is slightly wider than our inquiry, Minister, but I do not know whether you would like to attempt to answer that.

Rachel Maclean: I can make some very general comments. I know Baroness Vere is working very closely on the reform of the bus strategy. She is committed to bringing that in. I am sure she would be happy to talk to your Committee about it. We do not have a prescriptive view. Government have to support new technologies, and we already are, to the tune of billions of pounds, in terms of the R&D and science that we



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are putting into new and innovative forms of technology that are being developed. The Government definitely have a role to play. When it comes to the future of the bus industry, whether it be private or public, I expect the private sector to have a massive role to play because it will be able to stimulate more investment into this.

Q272 Chair: Do Government have to help those companies with some of the costs of these buses? Otherwise, we are not going to end up with cleaner buses. I am probably not quite so tied up as Ian over who owns the buses, but I am quite interested in cleaner buses.

Rachel Maclean: Yes, absolutely. I have already said that we have a manifesto commitment to 4,000 zero-emission buses and an all-electric, zero-emission bus town. That will have to attract Government support to get it off the ground. When it comes to decarbonisation and low-emission buses, it is about not only the buses themselves but the infrastructure that goes along with them, such as the refuelling stations. How do we get the hydrogen or the power to the bus to enable it to run for the distance it needs to run? Again, that is where Government need to step in and support. They already have done in a number of cases, and they will probably need to do more in the future.

Q273 Ian Byrne: If we are going to be pumping large amounts of taxpayers' money into the research and infrastructure, surely it follows that taxpayers can own the companies. I am always going to push for that, and you know that, Chair. We are pushing for it at a local authority level. It will be an interesting debate, I am sure, in the coming months. Minister, thank you very much for your excellent answers.

Rebecca Pow: Can I just add a stat? Ian, thank you for your cheeky question. Minister Maclean touched on the importance of R&D and innovation. Our clean air strategy has highlighted the £10 million of investment into transforming the evidence underpinning the development of the clean air strategy and all of that. The funding has stimulated £42.5 million of UKRI strategic priorities investment on clean air. That covers a whole raft of things that involve research in order to deliver the things in this strategy. It involves practical industrial innovation and all of the things I think you are getting at. If Government reduce the date for electric cars, that is a massive signal for industry. It wants certainty, but also stimulation of innovation into exactly the things that Rachel Maclean is talking about. You will find that a lot of it is already underway, but it is not to say that we do not need more.

Q274 Chair: The BMA told us that the UK Government need to spend £1.2 billion a year to deliver their active travel plans. How do you respond? What progress have you made on implementing active travel plans across the country? You have given us some figures, but we also had evidence from the deputy leader of Derby last week. He was saying that the trouble is not only in providing these cycle ways. Where they are in competition with traffic, they are not always universally popular. How could we get more people to actively travel to work, but placate those



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who do not want to go into that method of transport? How much money do we need to spend on it? Do we need the £1.2 billion, and how far are we up that road?

Rachel Maclean: It might surprise the BMA to hear that we have committed to spend £2 billion on active travel, cycling and walking, which is the largest funding commitment to this area that any UK Government have ever made. It is very much on the back of the Prime Minister's cycling plan. We have an ambition to make active travel the natural first choice of transport, because we all know that most journeys undertaken are less than five miles. There is no reason why a vast number of those journeys, not all but a lot, could not be done on foot, on a cycle, on an e-scooter or on some other form of transport that we do not even have on our roads yet.

On the point about cycle lanes and your witness from Derby, we have seen what we call emergency active travel funding made available to local authorities, because we wanted to lock in those good habits. People were already saying, "The air is cleaner. The streets are quieter. It is brilliant. I like walking. I like cycling. Please can you help me to do that so I feel safe with my family?" That is why the Department brought forward this funding and said to local authorities, "It is up to you now. You can decide where you want to make this funding available," and lots of them did. Lots of them have been incredibly successful and very popular. Surprise, surprise, they do not run to the media and say how fantastic they are, but there are one or two schemes where there have been very vocal criticisms and we have heard about those.

The response to that is that, on the next tranche of funding that we have made available, the Secretary of State has been very clear that you have to consult all road users. You cannot let one group of road users dominate this. You have to have that consultation. The local authorities are responsible for doing that, so, if they have closed off roads and made mistakes in how they have been implemented, it is up to them to consult their local communities. They know the local roads. In the Department, we do not. We make the money available, and it is then up to them to make the best decisions for their local areas.

We are determined to crack on with this because we think it is better for public health. Rebecca was talking earlier about public health. Of course, we have to keep pollutants down. The other part of that equation is helping people be more active, because we know that is better for them in the long term, for physical and mental health.

Q275 **Chair:** Just for the accuracy of the record, Minister, you talked about £2 billion, but I think that is across five years. The BMA is talking about £1.2 billion a year, so there is a slight discrepancy in figures there. I think you were probably talking about over a five-year period.

Rachel Maclean: Yes, I was talking about the £2 billion that we have committed to.



Q276 **Chair:** It is a good step in the right direction. Do not get me wrong, but the ask of the BMA is greater. If you are a cyclist, you need to feel that you are safe. I cycle in from Battersea, and my wife does as well. Those cycle ways are really important, but they can, as you rightly say, block off traffic. It is how we balance in society. I do not have an electric bike, but they are very good. My neighbour has one, and I went shooting up our not-very-large hill on this bike. It shows how easy it is to operate electric bikes. You have to feel safe if you are going to go to work in a city on a bike.

You are not necessarily going to get the elderly going around on a two-two-wheel scooter, nor is it necessarily safe. Here in London, it can be a menace for those on a bicycle or on foot, as well as cars, when these scooters are weaving in and out. All of this is good stuff, but it is how we manage it. As a Department, are you looking at how you manage all these different types of transport, because there are many out there?

Rachel Maclean: You are absolutely right. There is no point implementing something if all that happens is a backlash and it becomes very unpopular. Local councillors then have to consider, "I cannot carry on with this scheme. Everyone is complaining about it, so I will have to scrap it." That is not what we want. That is why, as a national Government, first of all, we make the funding available. Then we make it very clear that, yes, they have to consult their local communities. They have to consider things like deliveries to local shops. They have to consider emergency vehicles. They have to consider all those really important issues. There were one or two examples where that did not happen. There were some fantastic schemes that had really great feedback and people have been very happy with them.

I cycle across London and around my constituency, so I understand all those points about feeling safe. Often, when we have introduced these schemes, there are criticisms and complaints at the outset, but then, if you go back a year later and ask people, "Are you happy with that?", they say yes. They are happy because they have changed how they behave and how they travel, and the benefit is felt locally. That is when the air starts to become cleaner and quieter.

Q277 **Chair:** In a way, this is slightly linked, although not so much to the spending on plans. How are the Government going to use their reforms to planning policy to help local areas redesign communities to improve air quality? I know neither of you is a Planning Minister, but it is about how we deal with it across the piece. It could be redesigning roads, pedestrianising some roads or totally altering our town centres in the future as we perhaps see some shops going and more residential coming into our centres.

Talking about joined-up Government, how are we, as a Government, linking into a planning policy? I know a lot of this is local government, but it is also a national review of planning policy. For instance, would the Department for Transport feed into this at all? Would Defra feed into it



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because of air quality and so on? Really, this gets to the nitty-gritty of how the Government work together on this. That is a really nice, simple question for you. Who would like that one first?

Rachel Maclean: I do not mind going first, because I have something relevant to say. We are not Planning Ministers. I am certainly not, but it is really important. What we are doing here is very ambitious and everything has to work, as you have rightly said. One specific example is where we are looking at the electric vehicle infrastructure and the charging points. One thing that people are concerned about is, when we have these electric cars, how we will charge them. "We live in a house that has no parking." "We live in a block of flats." "We go to a place of work where there is no charging point." Our Department is working really closely with MHCLG to address all these issues through legislation in some cases, changes in regulation and a number of other pieces of work to tackle all that, because it has to be joined up.

The other bit about legislation and planning is around things like cycle lanes. We have a lot of jurisdiction over the different sorts of vehicles that are allowed on roads. For example, we have made it possible for e-scooters to be used in cycle lanes in the trial areas, because we want to get the data about how they are working and whether they are suitable for some elderly people. I might class myself as an elderly person. We want people to be using these new forms of transport, so, yes, we do work across Government.

Q278 **Chair:** On that point, it is how they mix together. Cycling from Parliament back to Battersea, it is quite interesting with the scooters whipping in and out of the bicycles and everything else. I am probably not as young as I used to be, but there is an issue. It is good to trial these things to see how they will work. Thank you for that.

Minister Pow, what would you like to add on joined-up Government and how Defra links into planning and air quality?

Rebecca Pow: It is essential. I am at pains every week with my officials, saying we need to be talking to all the other Departments because the environment does not stop at our gate. It is everywhere. I would reiterate everything that Minister Maclean has said. In national planning policy, it is already clear that new development has to be appropriate for its location. It is also increasingly going to be about community engagement and local people feeding in what they want, but also taking account of all effects of all developments, whether it is transport, housing or what you put where, on people's health. A holistic approach is really important.

One of the aims of the new planning White Paper is to speed up development, but that still means, and increasingly so, getting it right for the environment. We have said, and the Prime Minister is at pains to say, that we will have a green recovery. We have all learned so many lessons from this lockdown. People want to engage with nature. That is another



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thing that Minister Maclean was talking about. If it is safe to do so, people want to cycle, walk and keep healthy. There is a big drive in that direction.

In Defra, protecting the environment is of utmost importance to us, but it is not at the expense of any development happening. It has to be part and parcel. As a Government, that is a very clear message that we are giving and need to give. The measures in the Environment Bill and the measures related to air quality, as we are talking about today, will all impact on that. If we want to get our PM_{2.5} down and we do not want big concentrations in certain places where people are living, around schools and hospitals, we have to design the places so that does not happen.

Q279 **Chair:** Rachel, if you were designing a garden village or big housing developments, to what level would the Department for Transport be involved in making sure there is rail and other infrastructure? If you want a greener development, you need greener transport. To what degree would you link into that? Is there a method of linking into it in Government? How does it work?

Rachel Maclean: Yes, there is. The specific way that is done is through the value for money and the planning analysis. There is a document called TAG. It is the guidance whereby schemes are analysed about what that particular road link or rail link will deliver. All the factors that you just mentioned are part of whether that piece of infrastructure will get funding from the Department for Transport. It considers things such as employment opportunities, access to leisure, to work and to training and skills, and those environmental impacts. Does it cut down on private car use? All of that is part of this very broad guidance that the Department for Transport has for national infrastructure.

Rebecca Pow: We also have guidance on air quality so that, if a local authority is planning its new development, it can look at that guidance as well.

Chair: I am conscious of time, so perhaps some of that could be given in written evidence.

Q280 **Geraint Davies:** What contribution or support have you given to businesses to enable them to reduce their emissions? At the same time, it seems to me that, if more people work from home, there will be fewer emissions. If there is an opportunity to improve indoor air quality in manufacturing, where we lose 6 million working days from poor air quality, there is an opportunity for higher productivity and profitability for the businesses concerned. To what extent are you engaged with businesses to enlighten them that clean air means higher profit and that they should invest or, indeed, support that investment?

Rebecca Pow: We constantly work with BEIS and with big industry, because we have our industrial emissions directive that I am sure you know about. Indeed, industry has made a lot of strides. It is divided into 60 sectors for the EA's permitting purposes. There is constant work going



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on with industry over its emissions. There is a piece of work on what are called best available techniques, so that they are always bringing in and introducing the least-polluting, least-emitting technologies. It is something that industry welcomes because it means that it can, as you say, balance out its environmental improvements and be flexible. At the end of the day, if it is working more efficiently, it is going to be more effective. Industry supports that. What was the beginning of your question, Geraint? Was it about home working?

Q281 Geraint Davies: Are you going to give any extra grants or incentives for business to become less polluting? At the same time, I have to say that Government should say to business, "If you have more people working from home, you will be less polluting and, if you invest in cleaner air, you will be more productive." I am not completely convinced we should give lots of money to businesses, but we should require them to raise their game and they will recover it from profit.

Rebecca Pow: It is interesting. I know that you are very interested in indoor air quality and, of course, more people working at home. We do not know that much yet about the impacts on indoor air quality of all those people working at home. We cannot just assume it is all good. You could say everybody is now going to be whacking on their central heating more, or maybe lighting up their wood-burning stoves and their fires.

Chair: As long as it is dry wood, that is fine.

Rebecca Pow: We hope they are using dry wood, because we have just brought in that regulation. That impacts on people's health within their own homes and not just what is going out of the chimney.

Chair, when we are talking about business, can I include farming, which I know you are really interested in? It does not seem to get mentioned enough. That is a big business, and we have to tackle the emissions from agriculture. It is one of the areas we still have to address to do with ammonia, which breaks down into a number of things that we have to tackle. It can give off fine particulates that can then land on our precious protected habitats, so that is important. It can affect them so we have to tackle that.

We are, through the Environment Bill and other measures, working on advice for farmers. There will be an arm of the new ELM scheme where farmers could be paid to deliver climate change adaptation and mitigation schemes, which could be related to tackling these emissions. That is an area that we are working on. Also, Geraint, through the Environment Bill pipeline of actions, we are tackling non-mobile machinery and industrial machinery on industrial sites that give off emissions.

Q282 Geraint Davies: You rightly raised the issue of indoor air pollution. You will know there was a major bit of work done by the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health in January. Therefore, given the importance of this, as you acknowledge, will you at least reference in the



Environment Bill that the Government should have a duty to report on an annual basis what they are doing about indoor pollution?

I am not asking for specific targets or actions, but just bring it within the orbit of the Environment Bill. At the moment, the Environment Bill is simply about the outdoor environment. We spend 90% of our time indoors and, as you have just pointed out, we are subjected to all sorts of chemicals and other things that we need to do more work about. Will you get that in and have a little hook in the Environment Bill, so there is some responsibility to report back on an annual basis?

Rebecca Pow: It will not surprise you to hear me say that air quality is included in the Environment Bill. The framework of the Environment Bill means we can bring forward any targets we like in future.

Q283 **Geraint Davies:** The Bill says “the natural environment,” which means outdoors. Are you acknowledging that you can bring “indoors” into the wording of the Bill? I will be very pleased if you can.

Rebecca Pow: I am sticking to my point here in that, just as you have alluded to, there is a lot of work going on in this space. Rightly so, there is a lot of evidence gathering and it is an area of great interest, but we need to wait for more of the advice.

Q284 **Geraint Davies:** It would be good if we could have a change. The Chair may be interested in an amendment. Can I ask the Transport Minister about the relationship between the economy and air pollution? We know from the Royal College that the cost of air pollution is about £20 billion a year. If we had a Clean Air Act or a strengthened Environment Bill and could reduce that cost to £17 billion a year only, saving £3 billion, and borrowed money at less than 1%, we could afford an asset of something like £300 billion.

Are you keenly looking at the numbers, Transport Minister, on how, by reducing air pollution, we could borrow more money to invest in sustainable transport infrastructure? It seems to me that Germany and France, et cetera, are spending much more on green stimulus and we could justify this money to the Treasury by saying that we have a savings flow that could pay back massive loans to invest in green infrastructure, like electrified trains to Swansea or whatever it might be.

Rachel Maclean: Absolutely. Transport is a key driver of productivity across the economy. We are committed in the Department for Transport to building back better and putting a green recovery at the heart of everything we do. I already touched on the transport decarbonisation plan. We will be hearing some elements of that in what the Prime Minister is going to say. I am sure I am not breaking any confidences there. We have committed to investing £2.5 billion altogether just in the transition to electrical vehicle infrastructure. That is only the start of what we need to invest. We are putting the full weight of Government behind this agenda.



We are committed, as we said earlier, to bringing forward the phase-out of petrol and diesel cars and vans. That is something we will be saying a lot more about very soon. We are looking across all modes of transport including maritime. We are looking at how we include hydrogen in this and how we stimulate new industries and, for example, sustainable and recycled fuels. These are all areas where we know that, if we invest as a Government, we will see those returns coming in, jobs created and new industries springing up, which will help us level up the economy. That is at the heart of what we are doing.

Q285 Geraint Davies: Will you be looking at cleaner ports in Southampton and elsewhere where people are burning a lot of diesel? It is not very clean in the sea either, so are you looking at that?

Rachel Maclean: Yes.

Q286 Geraint Davies: What about aircraft? Are you working with Airbus to get carbon wings and all the rest of it?

Rachel Maclean: Yes, absolutely. The decarbonisation plan will look at maritime and air. We have already set up something we call the Jet Zero Council, which is led by the Prime Minister. The commitment there is to have net zero-emission commercial aviation. We are working not only with Airbus but with a whole range of manufacturers. We want a situation where we have zero-emission aviation, and we want to see manufacturing in this country. This is hugely ambitious, but we believe we have the best minds. We have the best engineers, entrepreneurs and manufacturers in this country. There is no reason why we cannot do it.

Q287 Geraint Davies: In terms of the vision, if more people work at home and, as Rebecca said, we might get cleaner internal air, et cetera, should we have more investment in digital technology, in a way that assumes we might not always have to travel further, faster and more often in the future? Surely the future of sustainability is about more sustainable transport, but less transport in the future, and planning around that. Would you agree with that?

Rachel Maclean: Yes. I have already said that we want to make the natural first mode of transport active travel. We want to see people travelling in an active fashion and, where they are travelling by road, we want to see that being electric or zero emission. Where they are travelling by air and by sea, we want to see that being low emission as well. We believe in choice. We accept that people will want to travel for all sorts of reasons and not just work. Sometimes it is life-enhancing to travel to different countries. We have all had the privilege of doing that, and we do not want to stop people doing it, but we do not want to do it at the cost of our planet. That is at the heart of our approach in the Department for Transport.

Q288 Geraint Davies: Spending three hours a day commuting is not enjoyable travel, is it? I respect what you are saying. Would you agree that less travel overall and better travel is good? That is what I am trying to say.



Rachel Maclean: I would need an awfully long time to do that question justice. It is quite a philosophical question with a lot of nuances in it, with the greatest of respect.

Chair: Geraint likes to lead you into questions like that. If you want to give us any more details in writing, that would be fine.

Q289 **Geraint Davies:** I want to check that there is not this compulsion in Government to assume that we need more and more roads, railways, flights and everything, and that we cannot make what we have better. I was wondering whether there is an assumption in Government that we have to keep building more and more, and that people have to travel more. Is there an answer to that?

Rachel Maclean: I think your assumption is wrong, but we believe in choice. As I said, we are focused on a green recovery and building back better, but we believe in infrastructure at the same time, so all these things can exist at once.

Rebecca Pow: Chair, coming from the west country, you know how important this is. Digital connectivity is part of this debate. I reiterate what Rachel Maclean says.

Chair: Every member of our Committee will be nodding their head at this stage, wherever you are with digital connectivity.

Rebecca Pow: We want everyone to work at home when they can, where it fits in with their business and all the rest of it. The Government are absolutely committed to providing this world-class digital infrastructure, including 5G, across the UK. We have this huge roll-out programme to do that. It is a £5 billion UK programme.

Q290 **Chair:** It could have a really great effect on improving air quality because we are working with good broadband.

Rebecca Pow: That is part and parcel. We want the right transport. You and I are jointly trying to get two new rail stations, in Wellington and Cullompton. That would help people get out of their cars and on to public transport. There are lots of ways of going at this argument.

Q291 **Chair:** A previous member of this Committee, Jim Fitzpatrick, the then Member for Poplar, was very keen on making sure that cruise ships have a proper electric supply when they come, rather than running their diesel engines. There is still a problem with that here in London, I think you will find. Naturally, there are still problems in Southampton and elsewhere with industrial shipping as well. It is a major issue, so I would like to ask you to take that away and keep looking at it. It is a very genuine point that Jim was making when he was here. I expect Rebecca can remember him making that, so please take it away.

Rachel Maclean: Of course.

Q292 **Chair:** Rebecca, I as the Chair of this Select Committee Chair, and Philip



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Dunne as Chair of the Environmental Audit Committee, wrote to you on 23 October about how the interim Office for Environmental Protection will work in practice from January. When will we have answers to those questions, and how is it going to work? Is it going to be able to hold the Government to account on air quality, like it or not, as the European Court and the European system did? I do not want to raise those huge issues again, but we need to be sure that the Government are held to account by the Office for Environmental Protection. How is the interim office going to work in practice? It is a very simple question.

Rebecca Pow: I can give you a very long answer.

Chair: Not too long, I hope.

Rebecca Pow: Thank you for your letter.

Chair: When are we going to get a reply, Minister?

Rebecca Pow: Have I not replied? You will get a reply.

Chair: When?

Rebecca Pow: As you know, the search has been on for the chair.

Chair: I do not know, because you have not yet replied to the letter.

Rebecca Pow: I have said this in a number of places. We will be replying to you very shortly. We are setting up an interim arrangement that will run immediately from 1 January. We will set up the structures in place for the OEP, which we anticipate will be fully up and functioning with its chair in July. We have the whole process, which we went through in fine detail in Committee the other day, which is why I thought you might have heard about it, with the set-up that will run in the interim. If people want to make complaints or go to the body, it will stack up those complaints. As soon as the body is fully functioning in July, it will swing into operation. All of the framework will be put in place for this fully independent Office for Environmental Protection. Again, there is nothing else like it. It is ground-breaking.

Q293 **Chair:** What happens between January and July?

Rebecca Pow: The body will be being set up. Effectively, a shadow body will be running. There will be a chief executive in place to start running it, and they will all start to come on board from January.

Q294 **Chair:** There are problems with air quality across this country, which we have had now for a long time, not just under this Government but under the previous one as well. I accept all that, but ClientEarth and others have been able to take cases against the Government in order to bring about real change to air quality. Are you confident that the Government can be and will be held to account after 1 January by some sort of interim arrangement?

I am sorry to be unkind to you, but the purpose of writing to you is to get us the detail of what you are putting in. I do not necessarily have to look



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at what might or might not be going on in any other Committee across this House. Therefore, it needs to be provided to both Philip and me in writing, please.

Rebecca Pow: We will respond. Indeed, this Committee has been referenced a number of times in the Bill Committee, in a good way, in terms of your demanding scrutiny and all sorts, so we will address that. I want to give absolute assurances because an awful lot of work has gone into this. I am as determined as you are to make sure that we have this body up and running. It is not an excuse, but the lockdown and, of course, the pandemic have had a knock-on effect on everything. That is why the Committee is late, had to be adjourned and has just come back. It has had an impact on the speed at which all these things have happened.

This shadow secretariat will be up and running. We will take them, initially, from a Defra team, but they will all be highly specialist. The Secretary of State will appoint the chair, and the chair will appoint the interim chief executive, so he or she will be there at Royal Assent. That will be happening as soon as possible, and it will go on from there.

You will also be able to do your pre-appointment scrutiny as requested. I am confident. The body is there to oversee environmental law to make sure that public authorities and Government are held to account for upholding our environmental laws and for reaching all these targets that we keep talking about. There is an entire long system of all that monitoring, reporting, reporting to Parliament, scrutiny from EFRA and the EAC.

I am convinced that we have the right structure in place and that it will happen. We must make it happen. If we want to set ourselves up as global leaders on the environment, we have to demonstrate that this will work, and I am determined that it will. There is a whole raft of measures that will mean the OEP is independent, and it will remain like that.

Q295 **Chair:** It will not be an independent chair necessarily, would it?

Rebecca Pow: The point is that you can have your say on that.

Q296 **Chair:** After you have appointed them, we can have our say. I think that is how it works.

Rebecca Pow: The chair will have a whole board of non-exec directors and directors all working to the one aim, but the point is that it has to be independent; otherwise it will not be functioning correctly. That is its purpose, and it has already undergone a great amount of assessment and scrutiny to get to this point.

Chair: Minister, I do not doubt your commitment to the environment and to getting this right. It is not you personally I am questioning so strongly. Like I said, Philip and I would like that in writing, and we would like it as soon as possible, please. We understand there have been commitments



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on time. Thank you very much for that.

Can I thank you both for being very generous with your time this afternoon? We have been quite robust with you at times, but I think you probably expected that before you came before the Select Committee. Rebecca has known my style for a while and, Rachel, I am sure you have become accustomed to it since you have been here. The members are also well equipped to ask very searching questions, so thank you for that. There were one or two things, as we went through, that we would like to follow up in writing, if we can have that.

Can I also thank Bill and Andrew very much for being with us today and giving the benefit of their official advice and what is going on in the Department? We appreciate that. I thank all members very much and, at 18.48, we will allow you to retire from this meeting. You must feel like it went on a very long time, but there were some very good questions and, hopefully, some good answers, and there is more information to come. Thank you both very much.