

ENVIRONMENT BILL 2nd READING

Briefing No 1 from Cycling UK:

REVIVING THE ROAD TRAFFIC REDUCTION (NATIONAL TARGETS) ACT 1998

This briefing is additionally supported by:

Asthma UK and British Lung Foundation Partnership, British Cycling, the Chartered Institution of Water and Environmental Management (CIWEM), Environmental Defense Fund Europe, Living Streets, London Cycling Campaign, Ramblers, Sustrans and Transport & Environment Europe. [more to follow].

Cycling UK was founded in 1878 and has 68,000 members and supporters. Our central mission is to make cycling a safe, accessible, enjoyable and 'normal' activity for people of all ages and abilities. Our interests cover cycling both as a form of day-to-day transport and as a leisure activity, which can deliver health, economic, environmental, safety and quality of life benefits, both for individuals and society.

Cycling UK is a member of the Healthy Air Campaign (HAC) and is supporting HAC's amendments to the Environment Bill which would:

- Commit to meeting WHO air quality standards by 2030 and generally strengthen the target-setting framework;
- Establish a more robust framework for making plans to ensure the targets are achieved;
- Introduce a new 'clean air duty' for all public bodies.

A [briefing from the Healthy Air Campaign](#) covers these issues more fully.

Cycling UK is additionally proposing two further amendments to the Environment Bill, both of which relate to target setting:

- One, outlined in this briefing, seeks to revive and regularise an existing duty for the Secretary of State to write road traffic reduction reports, which can either set targets to reduce road traffic or set out alternative measures, in order to tackle its adverse environmental, economic, health and societal impacts.
- The other seeks to introduce at least one target to increase public access to and enjoyment of the natural environment. That is the subject of a [separate briefing](#).

The environmental impacts of road traffic

The UK's over-reliance on road transport has serious adverse impacts, which in turn imposes substantial costs on society. These include:

- *Climate:* transport is now the UK's economic sector which emits the greatest proportion of greenhouse gas emissions (33%), most of which comes from road transport. These are still rising: this is a key reason why the UK is not on course to meet its 4th and 5th carbon budgets. Electrification of our vehicle fleet is not the whole answer - depending on the speed of conversion to electric, a 20%-60% reduction in car mileage would still be needed by 2030 to meet net zero targets.
- *Air pollution:* air pollution contributes to around 40,000 early deaths annually, with nitrogen dioxide and particulate emissions from road transport being major causal factors.
- *Landscapes, biodiversity and water quality:* road transport adversely affects biodiversity and habitats (due to a combination pollutant emissions, water run-off, road danger, noise and the resulting severance of habitats for animals insects etc). The Government's proposed £28.8bn National Roads Fund risks exacerbating these impacts still further.

Road traffic also imposes other costs on society: including congestion (this is estimated to cost the UK £8bn annually), physical inactivity (which costs the UK £7.4bn annually; road danger (n.b. this disproportionately affects children, older people, people with disabilities, and those on incomes); and the detrimental effect of traffic on the quality of the built environment.

This briefing proposes a small amendment to the Environment Bill which could make a big difference in reducing all of these impacts.

The Road Traffic Reduction (National Targets) Act 1998

In essence, the [Road Traffic Reduction \(National Targets\) Act 1998](#) (hereafter the RTRA 1998) requires the Secretary of State either to write a report which:

- EITHER sets targets for road traffic reduction in England, Wales and Scotland;
- OR, if he considers that alternative targets or measures are more appropriate, explains his reasons for proposing those alternative targets or measures, along with an impact assessment of his proposals.

When doing so, the Secretary of State must take account of greenhouse gas emissions, air quality, health, traffic congestion, land and biodiversity, road danger and societal impacts, as well as “the mobility needs of persons with disabilities” and “the need for an adequate provision of taxi services in rural and non-rural areas.”

Alongside the RTRA 1998, there is also an earlier [Road Traffic Reduction Act 1997](#), which empowers the Secretary of State to issue guidance to local authorities on road traffic reduction, and mandates local authorities to issue reports setting out their own local targets for reducing road traffic, or the rate of growth of road traffic, in their areas – or to state (with reasons) why they consider it inappropriate to do so.

The major weakness of the RTRA is that it only requires the Secretary of State to fulfil his duties under RTRA 1998 “At such times as he deems appropriate”. During the passing of the Bill, its promotor (Cynog Dafis MP) secured a commitment that a first report should be issued within 18 months after the legislation came into force. However the Bill fails to stipulate a minimum frequency for the Secretary of State to fulfil these duties thereafter.

Hence the Secretary of State complied with the RTRA 1998 by issuing a report in 2000 entitled ‘Tackling congestion and pollution’. In essence, it argued that there was no need to reduce road traffic, and that attention would instead be focussed on its two main side-effects. Congestion would be tackled with some targeted ‘pinch-point’ road improvements, while pollution could be addressed by working with the motor industry to promote cleaner vehicle technology.

That was the first Road Traffic Reduction Act report – there has never been a second one. Twenty years later, the limitations of this approach have become all too apparent.

Hence this briefing proposes an amendment to the RTRA 1998, to be made by way of the Environment Bill, which would require the Secretary of State, and the Welsh and Scottish Ministers, to set out new Road Traffic Reduction Act reports within 6 months of the relevant provisions of the Environment Bill coming into effect, and thereafter at intervals of no longer than two years following the publication of the previous one.

This would in practice require the Secretary of State, and the Welsh and Scottish Ministers, to consider the full range of use policy measures that might reduce road traffic and its adverse impacts. Specifically it would involve considering the proportions of overall transport spending allocated towards walking, cycling, public transport, the electrification of vehicles and measures to reduce the need to travel e.g. ‘shared mobility’ solutions, as well as the role of land-use planning policies.

The 1997 Act would then empower those national authorities to issue guidance to local traffic authorities on the preparation of, and consultation on, reports on local road traffic in their areas. Those local authorities would then be under a duty to issue reports in compliance with their duties under the 1997 Act, and thus to take action in support of the aims of the relevant national traffic reduction guidance, bringing coherence to national and local policy efforts to tackle the full range of impacts listed on page 1.

Amendment to the Environment Bill

New Clause [*N.B. this would be inserted in Part 1 Chapter 1, after clauses 1 and 2*]

Environmental targets: road traffic reduction

6A The [Road Traffic Reduction \(National Targets\) Act 1998](#) is amended as follows:

For the title of section 1 (“Meaning of ‘road traffic’”) substitute “Interpretation”

In section 2 subsection (5)–

Delete “at such times as he deems appropriate,” with “at intervals of not more than two years,”

6B The Secretary of State shall comply with the requirements of subsections 2(1) and 2(2) of the Road Traffic Reduction (National Targets) Act as amended by section 6A within 6 months of this Chapter coming into effect.