



Environment Bill summary

Just over twenty years ago, laws were introduced through the [Road Traffic Reduction Act 1997](#) and the [Road Traffic Reductions \(National Targets\) Act 1998](#) requiring the Secretary of State (SoS) to publish a report either setting targets to reduce motor traffic on roads in England, Wales and Scotland, or propose alternative targets and measures, explaining why they were more appropriate. The SoS was also able to issue guidance to local authorities (LAs) on road traffic reduction, and require LAs to issue reports setting out their own local targets for traffic reduction.

In 2000, the SoS published the first report, 'Tackling congestion and pollution'. This argued that there was no need to reduce road traffic because it was sufficient to address the main side-effects of road traffic, namely congestion and pollution. Congestion could be tackled through well-targeted 'pinch-point' road improvements, while pollution could be addressed by working with the motor industry to promote cleaner vehicle technology. But the legislation failed to specify how frequently the SoS had to report, so there's never been another report, despite it becoming painfully obvious that 'road improvements' haven't reduced congestion and that motor traffic has continued to be a major source of pollution.

Twenty years later, it's clear that the approach set out in that report has failed, with catastrophic consequences for air quality and the wider environment, particularly our climate.

However, the Government has now published the Environment Bill, which is supposed to enshrine and protect environmental standards and principles, particularly around air quality. Cycling UK and others are hoping to persuade MPs to put forward amendments to that Bill to, in turn, amend the old traffic reduction laws.

Since these laws were passed, we've had devolution, so rather than a Traffic Reduction Act report from the SoS for the UK, we need one from each nation, with the first being within six months of the Environment Bill coming into effect and reports thereafter at intervals of no longer than two years.

In practice, this would require each 'appropriate national authority' to consider the full range of policy measures that might reduce road traffic and its adverse impacts. That would include looking at the proportion of overall transport spending allocated to walking, cycling and public transport, something Cycling UK called for through our [funding campaign](#) and our recent [election campaign](#) when we asked prospective MPs to pledge to support increased investment in cycling and walking to at least 5% of overall transport spending this year, rising to at least 10% within five years.