

Chancellor of the Exchequer
HM Treasury
Horse Guards Road
London
SW1A 2HQ

28 February 2017

Dear Mr Hammond, Chancellor of the Exchequer

Re: Vehicle Excise Duty (VED)

Supported by European legislation and domestic financial incentives, the UK has undergone a significant shift towards diesel vehicles over the past 15 years, which now account for 45% of new car sales.¹ While it is a positive step that changes to VED rates from April this year will mean that the only cars to be exempted will be those that produce no tail-pipe emissions, the new rates continue to ignore the health impacts of diesel emissions. The VED banding system needs to reflect all pollutants, including carbon dioxide.

The impacts of increased diesel car sales have been unprecedented on air quality and health. Diesel emits nitrogen oxides and particulates, both major contributors to air pollution and which have contributed to the UK regularly breaching legal limits on air pollution. As you will know a large part of this is explained by the fact that real-world emissions of nitrogen dioxide exceed those measured in test conditions by up to 20 times, and this is the case even for the current highest Euro-6 standards.²

Nitrogen dioxide is estimated to lead to 5,600 premature deaths per year in London³ and air pollution is linked to a range of health impacts throughout the life-course, beginning before birth and including asthma, stroke, heart disease, obesity, diabetes and dementia.⁴ Children are significantly at risk, with evidence from studies of children in London linking air pollution to impaired lung growth.⁵

The government must now take all possible steps to encourage a shift from diesel to cleaner forms of transport.

We propose a change to the first year rate of VED on diesel vehicles to disincentivise the purchase of them. Revenues generated may contribute to diesel car scrappage, which is essential in towns and cities, though for the greatest health gains investment must also be made in improved public transport and walking and cycling infrastructure.⁶

UK towns and cities are facing an air quality crisis about which health professionals are increasingly aware and concerned. Urgent action is required to avoid preventable diseases, and the forthcoming budget provides the opportunity to remove one of the incentives to purchase a diesel vehicle.

Yours sincerely,

Prof. Jonathan Grigg, Professor of Paediatric Respiratory and Environmental Medicine, Queen Mary University of London.

Prof. John Middleton, President, Faculty of Public Health

¹ <http://www.autoexpress.co.uk/car-news/consumer-news/94714/diesel-registrations-fall-in-first-month-of-2017>

² http://www.theicct.org/sites/default/files/ICCT_PEMS-study_diesel-cars_2014_factsheet_EN.pdf

³ https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/hiaionlondon_kingsreport_14072015_final.pdf

⁴ <https://www.rcplondon.ac.uk/projects/outputs/every-breath-we-take-lifelong-impact-air-pollution>

⁵ Griffiths C, Mudway I, Wood H, *et al* P180 Impact of the london low emission zone on children's respiratory health: a sequential yearly cross sectional study 2008–2014 *Thorax* 2016;71:A182.

⁶ [http://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(12\)60766-1/fulltext](http://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(12)60766-1/fulltext)

Prof. Derek Bell, President, Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh

Prof. Stephen T Holgate CBE, Chair of the RCP/RCPCCH Working Party on Air Pollution and MRC Clinical Professor Immunopharmacology and Honorary Consultant Physician, University of Southampton (*signing in personal capacity*)

Prof. Edwin R Chilvers, President British Thoracic Society and Professor of Respiratory Medicine, University of Cambridge.

Prof. Sir Andy Haines, Professor of Public Health and Primary Care, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine (*signing in personal capacity*)

Prof. Chris Griffiths, Centre for Primary Care and Public Health, Queen Mary University of London, and Co-Director, Asthma UK Centre for Applied Research

Prof David McCoy, Director, Medact, and Professor of Global Health, Queen Mary University of London

Prof. Patrick Saunders, Fellow, Faculty of Public Health and Chair of UK Public Health Register