

Overview & Scrutiny Management Board

30th November 2020



Report of: Adam Crowther, Head of Strategic Transport

Title: Clean Air Zone updates

Ward: City Centre

Recommendation

- Officers have provided a written update on developments on the Clean Air Zone; this includes a project update on the delivery of our proposed Clean Air Zone scheme. The reason for not being able to provide more evidence at this stage is that discussions with Government, Department for Food and Rural Affairs, are still ongoing. The staged modelling process is still underway and the consultation is live. This report seeks to explain what the plans are and the timeline for the completion and submission of the Final Business Case (FBC). A further report will be brought back to OSMB in January once submissions are finalised with JAQU.



1. Summary

After substantial discussions between Bristol City Council and the government's Joint Air Quality Unit (JAQU), and calls between the Mayor and the Minister, progress has been made towards a clean air plan for Bristol. This includes a new timetable, recognising the progress made towards alternative options for clean air. Subsequently, on 20 August 2020, Government issued Bristol City Council with a new [Direction](#) regarding the implementation of a Local plan for a Clean Air Zone in Bristol. This superseded the previous Direction of the 13 March 2020, which required the Council to submit a Full Business Case (FBC) by the 18 September 2020 and to provide all required modelling by 10 April 2020 (later extended to June to allow for further analysis to take place as requested by JAQU).

The Direction and associated letter of 13 March 2020 preceded the passing of the Coronavirus Act 2020, meaning that the implications of pandemic management policies had not been considered in setting the submission dates. Since then, Bristol City Council has been working closely with JAQU to understand the wider impacts of the global coronavirus pandemic on this programme of work.

In continuing discussions with JAQU throughout this period, Bristol City Council has continued to assess the situation and monitor the impacts of COVID-19. In April 2020 JAQU issued a statement from the Joint Heads of Department confirming that no Clean Air Zones would be implemented before January 2021. This was in recognition of the challenges and unknown entities that the situation presented.

Despite the challenges that the first lockdown (which commenced on the 23 March 2020) presented, council officers made significant progress in continuing with the additional required modelling and technical assessments as set out in the letter from Minister Pow on the 13th March 2020. These were all submitted in line with the requirements placed upon us.

Following the submission of the required information and subsequent discussions with JAQU officers, the Council was issued with a new [Direction](#) on 20 August 2020 which required the Council to:

'Implement the local plan for nitrogen dioxide (NO₂) compliance, specifying a Medium Charging Clean Air Zone Class C with small Charging Clean Air Zone Class D and additional measures, subject to provision of further evidence to be submitted to the Secretary of State in accordance with Article 5'.

'To be implemented as soon as possible and at least in time to bring forward compliance to 2023.'

This new Direction is as a direct result of intense engagement with JAQU which will continue in order to satisfy both parties that the Bristol Clean Air Zone is the right strategic fit for Bristol that will meet the legal requirements.

COVID-19 - emerging situation:

An Outline Business Case (OBC) that was submitted to JAQU in November 2019 included a set of proposals that offered the most appropriate measures for Bristol at that time and that were aligned with the Mayor's strategic vision for the future development and direction of the city.

However, the situation changed dramatically, without warning, due to the global pandemic caused by COVID-19.

The council has reviewed the impact of the pandemic and the inevitable change to the project baseline that this presents, the baseline which included previously modelled results and data analysis having been set in 2018 has now dramatically changed. The methodologies, modelling and assumptions that had been used up until the outbreak of COVID-19 became outdated. As such, consideration needed to be given to how we move forward in a way that delivers clean air and improved health benefits to Bristol, recognising the unprecedented times we are in while also seeking support economic recovery.

Officers have been in continual dialogue with JAQU to consider the most suitable manner in which Bristol can respond to the pandemic and take into account the new environment. In a short space of time and with the help of enabling legislation from Government, we were able to make some radical changes to some of the most polluting areas in Bristol. We closed Baldwin Street to help insulate and promote local bus services and ensure that residents are encouraged to adopt public transport and active modes of travel. Other recent measures include the closure of Bristol Bridge to through traffic other than buses, motorbikes, taxis and cyclists, new segregated cycle routes on Park Row, Upper Maudlin St and Lewin's Mead. Access to the central hospital and Bristol University has also been improved with new segregated cycle routes and our plans for the autumn and winter will expand the area of focus to our local neighbourhoods, improving livability and air quality in several neighbourhoods while protecting local businesses.

New proposals sought to build on these measures and develop further schemes to ensure we are successful in improving air quality on our most polluted corridors, making schemes permanent or extended as required.

The need to take account of the changes that have occurred inevitably means that the baseline data has changed as a result of changed patterns, and altered travel behaviours; these changes must now be factored into the evidence base for future decision making. In order to do this a new three-staged modelling approach was agreed with JAQU to update the baseline and provide the most current evidence to make decisions.

A methodology has been adopted that carries out modelling and sensitivity testing (reports that test the modelling results against different scenarios) as well as capturing real time information from existing air quality monitoring units and the automatic number plate recognition (ANPR) data.

This new methodology is largely due to an emerging change in air quality readings. During the first lockdown period, air quality and traffic levels were continuously monitored at our five continuous sites and 100 diffusion tubes sites. As compliance is based on an annual mean, it is not possible to fully predict if we are currently compliant with legally defined NO₂ levels (as we are only able to do this annually), but it is possible to see an improvement in air quality measures recorded during this time, suggesting we could have been close to compliance at that time. For example, in June it was reported that daily traffic had declined by at least 50% compared to pre-lockdown recordings; and although we saw numbers rise, they remained lower than the same levels as pre-lockdown for a sustained period of time showing what is possible. Roadside NO₂ declined by around half (53%) when compared to the same period in 2019. Following the first lockdown, numbers took a long

time to begin climbing to the same levels as pre-lockdown, but they did rise leading to uncertainty as to whether a charging CAZ would be needed or not.

There has been a great deal of behavioural, lifestyle and working changes, such as working from home and therefore not needing to travel into the city centre and organisations quickly adapting to new technology to allow people to work and operate in different ways. We are now in lockdown 2 which has meant a further change and we continue to monitor traffic levels, with early indications being that numbers are not as low as lockdown 1. We must continue to monitor the traffic volumes before we can make assumptions on what the emerging travel behavior patterns will be post lockdown 2 and indeed into the future. There may well be further periods of lockdown but the measures implemented must suit the average volumes i.e. out of a lockdown period. This must be considered alongside technical modelling data and consultation feedback to provide an overall picture of what is required to reach compliance in the shortest possible time.

As a result of this and the implementation of the new Bristol Street Space transport improvements that have been funded using the Department for Transport (DfT) emergency funding, a new approach was agreed with JAQU.

Bristol's new approach:

A 'test and learn' approach, based on monitoring air quality and traffic levels before and after the 'fast track' measures (see below) are implemented, so that full data can be gathered to evidence whether a charging CAZ is still required and if so what category of CAZ. The preferred approach would be for a non-charging zone, but only if the evidence supports it.

This is led by a three-staged modelling process offering further evidence in support of the monitoring data as it becomes available.

In summary, this involves:

- Significantly increased air quality monitors to assess air quality levels in comparison with models already created and allowing for live assessment of air quality
- Implementation of 'fast track' measures that will have an instant effect on air quality in a number of the most polluting areas (see schemes below)
- Implementation of sustainable transport projects, such as enhanced bus infrastructure and new cycle lanes in the zone or around the boundary to further encourage travel by sustainable modes. The specific routes will be dependent on which Street Space schemes get funding ahead of our implementation
- A three-staged modelling process to provide evidence required to inform decision making
- Immediate implementation of recent transport improvements, including the livable streets projects and those introduced using emergency government (Department for Transport) funding (see first fast track measures bullet point below).
- Development of a charging CAZ - to be implemented if evidence shows that it is required. (A CAZ C would see a charge applied to all commercial non-compliant vehicles, with the small CAZ D applying a charge to all non-compliant vehicles).

Fast track measures – originally planned to be implemented at a much more advanced stage of the programme:

- Recent transport improvements, such as those introduced using emergency government funding; the closure of Bristol Bridge and Baldwin Street to through traffic and lane closures in

specific pollution problem locations (Upper Maudlin Street / Marlborough Street and Lewin's Mead/Haymarket), enhanced bus infrastructure and associated cycle schemes in the proposed Clean Air Zone

- Closure of Cumberland Road to inbound traffic, for which plans are in development and is temporarily in place while Chocolate Path repair works are ongoing
- Controlling signals to improve the flow of all traffic, enhancing air quality in pollution hotspots
- Additional air quality monitoring units to keep track of progress
- Empowering residents and businesses to take a city-wide approach to air quality in the city and encourage different attitudes to travel and make use of the alternative options available, to support a non-charging clean air zone.

Timescale

The need for a charging CAZ and the type of CAZ or alternatively, other measures such as a non-charging CAZ will be determined following the completion of the stage three of the modelling process at the end of the year. Work to support the implementation of a charging CAZ could begin in spring 2021, going live by October 2021, but only if evidence supports the requirement.

Consultation:

We have been directed to implement a Medium Charging Clean Air Zone Class C with small Charging Clean Air Zone Class D and additional measures, subject to provision of further evidence to be submitted to the Secretary of State i.e. should this be necessary to reach legal compliance in the shortest possible time.

Consultation began on the 8th of October and due to the implications of lockdown 2, it's been extended to 13th December 2020. There are 2 charging options out to consultation; a standalone small CAZ D and medium CAZ C with a small CAZ D in case they are required. The consultation includes all aspects of the possible schemes such as charge levels, timings, mitigations and exemptions.

Meanwhile, engagement has continued to take place with our key stakeholders including Business West and colleagues from the University Bristol NHS Trust to review and develop appropriate concessions and mitigations in relation to hospital visits.

2. Timeline:

We are currently entering the end of the second stage of the modelling process. This will be followed by a period of discussion, assessment and refinement directly with JAQU before this information is used to inform the commencement of the third phase of modelling with final submission of evidence to JAQU in December 2020 (which will also likely be followed by further assessment and refinement with JAQU). The emerging situation regarding the pandemic is unclear and presents us with additional challenges to the CAZ programme which will be monitored. We hope to bring a further report back to OSMB in January once submissions are finalised with JAQU.

In summary:

- Evidence, through modelling, of the improved air quality and traffic levels to be submitted to JAQU in December 2020, potentially followed by further assessment and refinement with JAQU.

- Consultation began on the 8th November 2020 however due to the current situation regarding COVID-19 and the recently applied lockdown, it has been agreed to extend the current consultation period until the 13 December 2020.
- Full Business Case to be submitted to Cabinet prior to it being submitted to Government before 26 February 2021
- A CAZ C and/or a small CAZ D in place by 29 October 2021 at the latest, should the evidence demonstrate that this is required.
- A further report will be brought back to OSMB in January once submissions are finalised with JAQU.