

Overview and Scrutiny Management Board

12 July 2021



Report of: Mike Jackson, Chief Executive

Title: Clean Air Zone update

Recommendation

- This report provides a written update for Overview and Scrutiny Management Board during the intervening period that the full business case (FBC) is undergoing review by the Joint Air Quality Unit. It also sets out background information regarding the development of Bristol's clean air zone (CAZ).
- A short presentation will also be given at the scrutiny meeting.



1. Background

A Clean Air Zone (CAZ) will help improve air quality by reducing harmful levels of air pollution caused by traffic. It will also ensure that residents benefit from a healthy and natural environment. We have sought to deliver clean air in a way that protects the most deprived households in the city.

The council's Full Business Case (FBC) has recommended a small CAZ D Option. A small CAZ D Option involves a charging element; the scheme would charge non-compliant buses, coaches, taxis, HGVs, LGVs and private cars across the small zone. The small CAZ D Option includes the following measures:

- Small Area Class D (charging non-compliant private cars, buses, coaches, taxis, HGVs and LGVs) – map attached at Appendix A.
- Fast Track Measures: Closure of Cumberland Road inbound to general traffic; implementing a detailed VMS strategy (Variable Message Signs) which includes the use of existing transport infrastructure such as traffic signals and modelling.

Since submitting the Full Business Case (FBC) on 26 February 2021 officers have worked closely with government to:

- gain valuable insight from the introduction of Bath and Birmingham's clean air zones
- adjust the FBC to include more support for businesses and residents
- finalise a launch date that gives people enough time to prepare and ensures we comply with legal limits for NO₂ pollution in the shortest possible time

Officers are working with the Joint Air Quality Unit (JAQU) to finalise plans to introduce the zone in summer 2022, with a date to be confirmed following final review. The review will incorporate plans to integrate Government systems with new and existing BCC systems. The programme as a whole is complex, as is the IT processes that integrate with the governments back office systems and as such (and as experienced with other authorities implementing CAZ zones) has the potential to influence and affect the delivery programme. This does not affect the availability of support for those most impacted by the introduction of a CAZ in Bristol. Plans to offer support will continue as they were before, ensuring they are made available well in advance of the go live date.

Since the submission of the FBC, work has continued with JAQU which has resulted in a greater package of support for residents and business being proposed, for consideration by the government. Financial support for low income households has been increased so that more people will be eligible. After talks with the NHS, who were concerned that inflationary salary increases of trainee nurses might place them slightly above the low-income threshold, the threshold has been raised from £24,000 to £26,000. Our threshold is 20% higher than the Office of National Statistics (ONS) calculation which defines the low income threshold in Bristol. We felt the ONS threshold was too low, especially given current economic uncertainties, and set an 80% threshold of the median annual income per individual in Bristol, capped at £26k. To ensure we help as many people as possible, a second round of funding is proposed to be held in early 2022 for people earning up to £27k, again this will be prior to the scheme going live.

All residents living inside the CAZ area with a non-compliant vehicle will be offered a one-year exemption. This is to give people enough time to apply for loans and grants to upgrade to a cleaner vehicle. Commercial vehicle owners in the zone with existing finance agreements will also be able to apply for a one-year exemption. Patients and long term visitors to the BRI complex of hospital sites will

also be exempt from the CAZ charge. Officers have had discussions with local bus and coach operators and £2.1m will be made available to help them to buy cleaner vehicles or convert existing vehicles to meet the Clean Air Zone's emission standards. There will be an announcement on this shortly.

2. Timeline:

- Officers are continuing to work with the Joint Air Quality Unit (JAQU) and will formally announce the go live date after this review has completed.
- Officers expect to receive final approval in the autumn
- The full loan and grant schemes are expected to launch in autumn 2021.

3. Further information

The scheme is still on track to reach legal compliance in 2023.

It is estimated that the zone will reduce traffic travelling into the city centre by approximately 2,000 vehicles per day and reduce traffic on roads in the zone. The zone is also expected to improve air quality on most roads surrounding it due to the knock-on benefits of people switching to cleaner vehicles across the whole network. Approximately 71% of vehicles travelling in the zone are already compliant and will not be charged; this number is expected to increase as more people take advantage of financial support to switch to a cleaner vehicle.

The impact traffic has on pollution levels on roads surrounding the zone has been assessed. No roads had pollution levels higher than the safe legal limit and most surrounding roads were some way below safe limits, due to the number of motorists switching to cleaner vehicles across the whole network. This will continue to be reviewed post implementation to ensure that no unforeseen impacts occur.

Charges will be collected by central government. The costs of running the central system are deducted and the excess is returned to council to cover the cost of running the zone. Surplus revenue will be reinvested back into the local community ring fenced to traffic projects, supporting individuals and businesses to switch to cleaner vehicles, ongoing work to encourage walking and cycling, and the introduction of more sustainable public transport options. Our modelling indicates that the charging zone, plus support measures such as loans and grants, will be enough to ensure we comply with our legal requirements for clean air by 2023.

In relation to the Portway and the Cumberland Basin (A4-A370): these are main routes into the city. The size of the zone and its boundary has been designed so that air quality targets can be met in the central area – where air quality is worst – in the shortest possible time, in line with the Government's legal direction. Removing the Portway and the Cumberland Basin from the zone would mean the council would not be complying with the ministerial direction to reduce air pollution to legal limits in the shortest possible time. The traffic volumes and air quality levels will continue to be addressed once the scheme is live, with any issues being identified and addressed as appropriate. The modelling does not show any urgent issues we need to address as part of the implementation therefore we must wait and see how traffic behaviour responds to the zone.

Other recent improvements in the central area include the pedestrianisation of the Old City area, the closure of Bristol Bridge to general traffic, new bike lanes and widened pavements. Further planned improvements include encouraging walking and cycling for short journeys and the use of public transport for longer journeys. Officers are working with communities on further improvements across

the city and improving air quality outside schools, by piloting more Bristol School Streets and encouraging parents to leave their car at home during the school run. The council are fully committed to making the city more accessible for all as part of our liveable neighbourhoods aspirations. Liveable neighbourhoods aim to improve the local environment by addressing levels of through traffic in residential areas.

Engagement has continued to take place with organisations across the city and will continue to do so in order to prepare for the CAZ. We have worked closely with colleagues from the University Bristol NHS Trust to review and develop proposals, mitigations and exemptions for hospital visitors and staff, and this will continue.

Defra has awarded us £125,000 to run a project to investigate the problem of particulate matter pollution caused by solid fuel burning. High quality PM2.5 monitoring will be installed, and we will work with communities to monitor and raise awareness of the air quality implications of using wood burners.

4. A brief history (for the benefit of new Members)

Following submission of the council's Outline Business Case (OBC) in November 2019, the situation changed dramatically due to the global pandemic caused by Covid-19. The council reviewed the impact of the pandemic and the inevitable change to the project. Consideration needed to be given as to how we could move forward in a way that improved air quality and improved health benefits to Bristol, recognising the unprecedented times we were in while also seeking to support economic recovery.

In a short space of time and with the help of enabling legislation from Government, we made some radical changes to some of the most polluting areas in Bristol. These 'Street Space' schemes and Fast Track measures have been / are being implemented to open up road space usually reserved for parking and movement of general traffic to cyclists and pedestrians to:

- Enable better social distancing, especially in local shopping areas
- Encourage people to travel by bike or walk
- Reduce air pollution.

These measures are expected to be permanent, as the Mayor is committed to the Street Space schemes, some of which have been part of the council's Transport Strategy for a number of years and would likely have been implemented in the fullness of time without the pandemic having happened.

In August 2020, the council received a new ministerial Direction, setting out the following:

- That we continue work on a small CAZ D and outer medium CAZ C until evidence shows that there is no requirement for one or both
- That we provide evidence of our new proposed measures by 4 December 2020
- That we provide a Full Business Case by 26 February 2021
- That we prepare to implement the scheme as soon as possible and to deliver compliance by 2023 at the latest. We are required to start implementing a CAZ C with a small CAZ D by 29 October 2021, unless our further evidence demonstrates that this is not necessary in order to deliver compliance by 2023.

A further consultation took place from 8 October 2020 which consulted on two options:

- a dual zone consisting of a Medium CAZ C (charging all commercial non-compliant vehicles) with a small CAZ D (charging all non-compliant vehicles including private cars)
- a standalone option of a small CAZ D

We developed modelling to show the impact of the Street Space and Fast Track Measures on the CAZ plans. Evidence was provided to JAQU, showing that a Medium CAZ C was no longer needed to reach compliance in the shortest possible time and that, therefore; only a small CAZ D was needed.

The CAZ options that the council has explored to date are:

- A CAZ C, over a medium area, which charges polluting (non-compliant) commercial vehicles such as buses, coaches, taxis, private hires, heavy and light goods vehicles, but not private cars
- A 'hybrid' CAZ scheme featuring the medium area CAZ C, as above, and a smaller zone where private diesel vehicles are banned from entering between 7am and 3pm daily. The government no longer requires the council to proceed with the option of a diesel ban
- A CAZ over a small area (CAZ D) for all older, more polluting (non-compliant) vehicles

Updates about the Clean Air Zone have been presented and discussed at Scrutiny on the following occasions:

- Growth and Regeneration Scrutiny Commission – 26th July 2018
- Growth and Regeneration Scrutiny Commission - 21st February 2019
- OSMB – 17th July 2019
- OSMB - 30th October 2019
- OSMB – 30th January 2020
- OSMB – 24th April 2020
- OSMB – 26th August 2020
- OSMB – 5th October 2020
- OSMB – 30th November 2020
- OSMB – 2nd February 2021
- OSMB – 24th February 2021

Previous Cabinet reports can be found here:

Full Business Case – 25 February 2021: <https://democracy.bristol.gov.uk/mgChooseDocPack.aspx?ID=8404>

Clean Air Zone Project Update – 1 September 2020:

<https://democracy.bristol.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=135&MId=8399&Ver=4>

Clean Air Zone Project Update – 28 April 2020:

<https://democracy.bristol.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=135&MId=3694&Ver=4>

Outline Business Case – 5 November 2019: <https://democracy.bristol.gov.uk/mgAi.aspx?ID=17389>

