



Department for

Infrastructure

An Roinn

Bonneagair

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**From the DALO
Amy Law**

Ms Michelle McIlveen MLA,
Chairperson, Committee for Infrastructure

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Dear Ms McIlveen

Decarbonising Road Transport in Northern Ireland

Thank you for your letter of 25 March 2021 advising that the Committee for Infrastructure is conducting an inquiry looking at the ambition to decarbonise road transport, and is seeking views of key stakeholders.

The Department welcomes the inquiry and is working to identify actions to support the decarbonisation of transport and infrastructure services that will help to reduce carbon emissions and address the climate emergency. Minister Mallon remains committed to working in partnership with her Executive colleagues to help deliver a change in the way we travel that also helps us to tackle the climate crisis.

To assist the Committee with the inquiry, I would wish to outline some of the key policy development areas, which are being taken forward by the Department and to provide some insight as to how Minister Mallon has been working to provide solutions and opportunities for the decarbonisation of transport.

Policy Development

Recently, the British Government announced that it is bringing forward its plans to ban sales of new diesel and petrol vehicles in the UK to 2030. Minister Mallon has written to the Secretary of State for Transport seeking clarity on the allocation of funding to support Northern Ireland in delivering greener, cleaner transport.

Officials are also working closely with the Office for Zero Emission Vehicles (OZEV) and a broad range of stakeholders from across the transport and environmental sectors on decarbonising transport, including specialists, innovators, businesses and NGOs, to inform the development of UK-wide transport decarbonisation plans. This work is intended to address strategic energy issues, including the requirement to respond to climate change and the British Government's net-zero carbon target by 2050.

The Department for Transport is now starting to develop those policies and draft the wider UK Transport Development Plans, and will be engaging further with other government departments and Devolved Administrations over the coming months with a view to publishing the plans by the end of this year. Officials from the Department will continue to provide the Northern Ireland context in these discussions.

DfI is carrying out work in parallel with the ongoing development of a draft Energy Strategy for NI, led by the Department for the Economy. The Strategy is intended to address strategic energy issues, including the requirement to respond to climate change and the UK Government's net-zero carbon target by 2050. As Transport theme lead, the Department formed a Working Group comprised of a range of government, non-government and industry representatives. The Group completed an analysis of the relevant evidence raised by the Energy Strategy Call for Evidence, collected other relevant evidence relating to Transport and four themes were identified as key areas where actions will be required: Active Travel and Modal Shift, the Electrification of Transport, Alternative Fuels and the Future of Mobility.

Working collaboratively with the other thematic teams and wider project team, draft measures and/or steps to decarbonising transport to inform an Energy Strategy Options Paper were developed. The options consultation document issued on 31 March 2021 and the consultation closes on 30 June 2021.

[Consultation on policy options for the new Energy Strategy for Northern Ireland | Department for the Economy \(economy-ni.gov.uk\)](#)

In the interim the Department has commissioned 4 research pieces to provide further expertise on:

- Active Travel and Modal Shift
- The Electrification of Transport
- Greening the Public Sector Fleet and;
- Alternative Fuels in the Transport Sector

These reports when complete will be considered alongside the outcomes from the Options Consultation and the wider GB-led Transport Decarbonisation Plans to assist Minister Mallon in finalising policy options.

In addition to this input to the Energy Strategy, DfI officials are also supporting colleagues across the NICS in the development of key work to address climate change, including through the development of a multi decade Green Growth Strategy. These collaborative strategies will ensure that the future of our transport, energy sector and civic planning enables businesses to make positive contributions to our environment and bring about the change needed to build a future that delivers more for our citizens, socially and economically.

Alternative Fuels

Alongside this wider policy development work, the Department is currently examining potential options to support the decarbonisation of transport, through the introduction of a range of fuels which have the potential to replace petrol and diesel. This includes support for alternative fuels such as hydrogen. Development and deployment of hydrogen fuel cell technologies in the transport sector is at an earlier stage than for plug-in hybrid or battery electric vehicles.

In 2020, Minister Mallon announced the procurement of 3 Hydrogen Buses by Translink from Wrightbus, as part of the NI Hydrogen (NIH2) Project which allowed the introduction of the first Hydrogen buses and, in conjunction with Energia, the first Hydrogen refuelling station in Ireland (NI and RoI). These buses entered service on 17 December 2020 and are currently being trialled on Metro routes in Belfast.

This was followed up by the Minister's announcement of a £66m capital investment which will allow for the purchase of 145 low and zero emission vehicles by Translink over the next 2 years. These vehicles will include both Hydrogen Fuel Cell and Battery Electric Buses.

In addition, Minister Mallon has recently announced an All Island Strategic Rail Review in conjunction with the Republic of Ireland's Transport Minister, Eamon Ryan TD. This review will look at a wide range of issues for the rail network within the island of Ireland and will include an assessment of the decarbonisation of the rail network.. It is envisaged that this work will take 12 months to complete once a service provider has been procured.

In order to develop an understanding of the technologies and to help support activity in the private sector, the Department continues to assist on the steering group of a Belfast Met led Interreg Hydrogen Project (GenComm). This project provided the platform for the introduction of Hydrogen Buses to the Translink fleet.

The Department is considering proposals to build on the NIH2 project by extending production and refuelling capacity for hydrogen and to support the introduction of other heavy vehicles to provide refuse collection services. Work is also being carried out to consider how Compressed Natural Gas and Liquefied Natural Gas can provide interim solutions for decarbonising the Heavy Goods Vehicle sector.

Electric Vehicle (EV) Infrastructure

Whilst the use of alternative fuels in the transport sector is still in the development stage, support for the introduction of EVs has been ongoing since 2010. The EV public charge point network consisting of 337 publicly available charge points, has been owned by the Electricity Supply Board (ESB) since 2015 and is operated on a commercial basis.

The latest Department for Transport (DfT) data shows that in the first nine months of 2020, 1052 Ultra Low Emission Vehicles (ULEVs) were registered in NI, an 82%

increase for the whole of the previous year. There are now 4,186 ULEVs registered in NI at 30 Sept 2020, demonstrating a significant increase in uptake and is an encouraging sign as we make the transition to 2030 when the ban on the sale of new petrol and diesel vehicles comes into effect.

The Department is currently considering the future requirements in terms of public charge point infrastructure and will continue to liaise with ESB to consider any specific requests to ensure the public network can meet the needs of EV owners now and in future. ESB currently does not charge e-car drivers for the use of its public charge points in Northern Ireland. Furthermore, whilst the market is open to other commercial operators who would wish to provide charging infrastructure, to date, ESB is the only public network provider in Northern Ireland. Minister Mallon is shortly to meet with ESB to discuss options on how EV charging infrastructure can be funded in future. She is also engaging with Ministers Poots and Dodds on how all three departments can work together to encourage the use of electric vehicles.

Departmental officials have also recently been engaging with ESB on its plans to replace approximately 70 charge points i.e. 35 charge posts to upgrade and improve the reliability of the existing public network. ESB has advised that it hopes this work programme will commence over the summer 2021. In addition, we are making changes to the planning system, through permitted development rights, to make it easier to expand the charging infrastructure for electric vehicles.

The Utility Regulator's decision in March 2020 to remove the Maximum Resale Price on the electricity cost of charge points now allows commercial charge point operators to charge above cost price for electricity supply. This decision has provided clarity for operators wishing to enter the market and in doing so strengthen network provision in NI.

This Department has also been able to support the EU INTERREG VA Funded FASTER electric vehicle network project contributing €513,945 (£455,371) of Match Funding. The project is to install a total of 73 EV Rapid charging points across the island of Ireland and the West of Scotland by 31 March 2023. The responsibility for the implementation of the project rests with the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB) and it has agreed a delivery schedule with the project partners, led by the East Border Region Group Limited, which will include the approval of the final location of charge points once identified.

Whilst the availability of public charging infrastructure is crucial, it is anticipated that the majority of EV charging should be carried out at home, with the majority of EV drivers having availed of the Office for Zero Emission Vehicles (OZEV) home charge point grant. The public charge point network is designed to provide opportunity charging where EV drivers can charge for a short period of time when necessary.

To help provide solutions for those who cannot avail of home charging the Department has been engaging with OZEV and with the Energy Saving Trust (EST), who administer the On-street Residential Charge Point scheme (ORCS), funded by OZEV which provides funding for Councils to provide such charging solutions.

A pilot scheme is also being taken forward to introduce electric vehicles into the Department's operational fleet. The scheme will assess the suitability of electric vehicles to meet operational needs and will initially see the purchase of two electric vans, with a view to replacing other vehicles in our fleet with low emission vehicles in the future. The Department is also working to reduce diesel emissions from the Strangford Ferry Service entering the environment.

Conclusion

These initiatives alongside the active travel solutions which are being pursued by the Department will help shape how we travel in future and I look forward to the outcome of the Committee's inquiry and hearing the views of key stakeholders across Northern Ireland.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Amy Law".

AMY LAW
Departmental Assembly Liaison Officer