



May 14, 2019 15:33 BST

## **Bus managers speak out on Air Quality as final days of consultation approach**

The region's bus operators are keen to make it clear that buses are part of the solution, not the problem, in improving air quality and, that under the right option in the current Air Quality consultation, they could do even more in supporting the region.

Speaking on behalf of the North East Bus Operators Association, representing Tyne and Wear's bus operators including Arriva, Go North East, Stagecoach and a number of independents, the group's Chair Martijn Gilbert said "More people use buses than any other form of public transport and year on year bus operators have continued to invest in the latest generation low emission

buses. They are the most efficient use of road space, helping to ease congestion with each bus having the potential to take seventy or more cars off the road, have step free access and wheelchair accessibility for all and deliver considerable environmental benefits per passenger journey with a carbon footprint far less than private car use.”

Gilbert added that “there are also many other health benefits to bus use, including getting people more active by boosting their step count!”

The bus operators see the Air Quality consultation as an opportunity to further support buses, and other modes of public transport, as the best way to get around and want to be clear that under the option of a Low Emission Zone (LEZ) focussed on Newcastle City Centre from 2023, combined with tolls on the bridges, buses can deliver a viable and sustainable way to keep the city connected and moving without additional costs on fares.

They also point out, however, that the Government’s default option of a Clean Air Zone (CAZ) with wider road user charging, including for buses, and covering a much larger area would risk having a detrimental impact on the regions bus passengers by increasing costs in an unsustainable way that would likely lead to fares increases and potentially the withdrawal of some marginal services that run into the fringes of the zone, especially south of the Tyne.

Gilbert was clear that “it would be a disaster if the CAZ option chosen to improve air quality actually led to making buses a less attractive way of getting around. We must avoid this at all costs, but we have to do more to improve the environment in our region and that’s why we’re keen to get behind the more practical and balanced option of the LEZ and bridge tolls from 2023 where we know the bus can be a force for good and our regional economy can continue to thrive”.

In the meantime bus operators continue to invest year on year in more latest generation low emission buses, including the region’s first truly zero emission electric buses which will enter service between Newcastle and Gateshead during 2020.

The ‘Breathe’ Clean Air consultation runs until the 17<sup>th</sup> May and the bus operators are encouraging everyone to have their say. You can take part online at [breathe-cleanair.com](https://breathe-cleanair.com) by clicking on the ‘What happens next, have

your say' link.

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