Delivering improved air quality through the Local Transport Plan process in English local government

The second round of the Local Transport Plan (LTP) process in England included air quality as one of the shared priorities for action. While this presents opportunities for enabling political will and funding for improving local air quality, the integration of both policy areas is often challenged by the low priority given to air quality within transport policy. This study investigated the opportunities, barriers and enablers for managing traffic-related air pollution through the LTP process.

The research evaluated the integration of air quality as a shared priority within the LTP process in relation to four major themes:

- integration of air quality into the transport planning framework;
- prioritisation of air quality as a major agenda within local transport policy;
- the impact of air quality targets and use of air quality monitoring data to inform transport planning schemes; and
- the impact of existing and potential inter-professional engagement between the Environmental Health Officers (EHOs) and transport planners.

The study utilised the triangulation of three research methodologies involving two rounds of questionnaire surveys, content appraisal of selected LTP2 documents and in-depth case study interviews with EHOs and transport planners from a sample of English authorities, to investigate the feasibility of achieving the air quality objectives through the LTP process.

The results demonstrated wide-ranging capabilities and experience of integration within English local governments along with commitment to air quality management within the LTP process. However, while air quality is a shared priority in the LTP process, it is not given an equal priority in comparison to other traffic-related problems such as congestion and road safety. The results also show that integrating air quality within the transport planning framework is better facilitated through the existence of a collaborative platform across departments and authorities, in which the communication between the EHOs and transport planners is promoted to a level acceptable and accessible to both groups.

The research implied that continuous engagement by all the policy actors offers the best hope for improved local air quality in England.

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