

Birmingham Friends of the Earth press release

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**Birmingham Friends of the Earth launch Let's Get Moving campaign to tackle the city's poor air quality through active transport**

Campaigners from Birmingham Friends of the Earth launched their new campaign Let's Get Moving today with a stunt outside Birmingham Town Hall.

Campaigners dressed in gas masks holding a banner, stood outside the Town Hall by the roadside at Paradise Circus, to make the point that Birmingham needs to get moving on the issue of air pollution.

Birmingham Friends of the Earth are launching their Let's Get Moving campaign in order to highlight the problem of air pollution in the city, and push for greater investment in cycling and walking infrastructure in order to combat the problem.

They argue that the city's traffic is by far the biggest cause of air pollution, and so having a much greater proportion of journeys being made on foot or by bike would go a long way towards cutting traffic and air pollution.

The group are calling on the council to invest in active transport and make it easier for people to choose to walk or cycle. This would help cut the number of car journeys and air pollution levels on some of Birmingham's busiest roads.

Robert Pass, Campaigns Co-ordinator at Birmingham Friends of the Earth, said:

“Air pollution is often overlooked, but it is a huge problem, with massive health impacts that we can no longer ignore. Brummies are breathing in a toxic mix of chemicals on a daily basis, largely through traffic related tailpipe emissions.

“It's estimated that poor air quality is responsible for between 19,000 and 50,000 premature deaths a year in the UK, compared to around 2000 deaths due to road accidents. It's a great scandal that air pollution is not taken more seriously.

“Last month the Supreme Court ruled that the UK is failing to protect its citizens from illegal limits of air pollution in 16 cities including Birmingham, and we know that a lot more can be done locally to help tackle the problem.

As traffic is by far the biggest cause of air pollution, especially in Birmingham, the best way to start to tackling this is by cutting the number of journeys being made by car.

Robert continued:

“20% of car journeys are under 2 miles, so there is a real potential for those journeys to be made by bike. However in Birmingham it isn't easy to make that positive choice, as the city lacks enough cycling infrastructure to make cycling safe and enjoyable.

“We're calling on the council to be ambitious in its walking and cycling journey targets and find the investment to make this happen.”

The group are planning several events as part of the campaign, to raise awareness of air pollution and promote cycling and walking. This includes Bike Trains into the city centre on 26<sup>th</sup> July. Contact Julien Pritchard for more information.

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Notes

### **The Problem: Air Pollution**

1. Birmingham, the UK's “motor city”, is widely regarded as the nation's second most polluted city, with the majority of air pollution resulting from transport.
2. Air pollution is estimated to cause between 19,000 and 50,000 early deaths each year across the UK<sup>1,2,3</sup>.
3. In comparison, approximately 2,000 deaths are caused each year by road accidents. The most dangerous thing about our roads is not the vehicles themselves, but the emissions they produce<sup>4</sup>.
4. The Supreme Court ruled in May that air pollution in Birmingham, amongst 15 other UK cities, is at illegal levels and will likely remain so into the next decade.
5. Not only is Birmingham destined to fail to comply with the EU's 2015 air pollution limits, but the UK government didn't apply for an extension because on current predictions it would still fail to comply with extra time<sup>5</sup>.
6. DEFRA estimates that approximately 122,400 people in Birmingham are exposed to annual average air pollution levels above the legal limit<sup>6</sup>.
7. The cost to Birmingham of the health impacts of air pollution is estimated to be £182 million a year.
8. Birmingham City Council itself says that particulate matter (PM10) can cause respiratory and cardiovascular health problems and increased mortality<sup>7</sup>.
9. Birmingham City Council monitors air pollution at only six sites around the entire city (having recently shut down two monitoring stations), with some of these consistently finding levels of pollution in breach of national regulations. Furthermore, the stations that remain have been frequently moved, making analysis of trends difficult, and few are placed in strategic locations<sup>8</sup>.

10. From the data we *do* have, we know that the Tyburn and Tyburn Roadside monitoring stations have reported breaches of maximum legal hourly limits, as well as Tyburn Roadside breaching the maximum legal annual average limit in 2012<sup>3</sup>.
11. The World Health Organisation has said that even these legal limits are too high for people's health<sup>10</sup>.
12. Whilst many are rightly concerned with the Carbon Dioxide emitted by fossil-fuel transport, it also emits particulates and many other other chemicals that are immediately harmful to people's health.

### **The Solution: Active Transport**

13. Birmingham has historically made some poor transport decisions, for example removing our extensive tram network and building a motorway directly into the city centre.
14. To reduce air pollution in Birmingham, we need a modal shift away from cars toward active transport (walking, cycling etc).
15. 20% of car journeys are under two miles, showing there is enormous potential for more journeys to be made by walking or cycling<sup>11</sup>.
16. The Campaign for Better Transport ranked Birmingham as the second-least pedestrian & cycling friendly city in the UK<sup>12</sup>.
17. Whilst London invests around £18 per person in cycling each year, Birmingham only invests about £2.
18. Birmingham City Council recently drew up a plan for almost £23 million worth of investment in the city's cycling infrastructure, which is currently unlikely to be implemented without central government funding<sup>13</sup>.
19. Birmingham's Cycling Strategy document lacks targets for the number of journeys made by bicycle<sup>14</sup>.

[1](#) UK Government Environmental Audit Committee (2010), *Fifth Report*

[2](#) Committee on the Medical Effects of Air Pollutants (2010), *The Mortality Effects of Long-Term Exposure to Particulate Air Pollution in the United Kingdom*

[3](#) Massachusetts Institute of Technology (2012), *Public Health Impact of Combustion Emissions in the United Kingdom*

[4](#) The Guardian (2012), *Air pollution prematurely killing 13,000 people a year in Britain, says MIT*

[5](#) European Commission (2012), *Commission Decision on the notification by the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland of a postponement of the deadline for attaining the limit values for NO<sub>2</sub> in 24 air quality zones*

6 DEFRA (2011), *Air Pollution in the UK 2010: UK's Annual Report to the Commission*

7 Birmingham City Council (2011), *Air Quality Action Plan 2011*

8 <http://airviro.smhi.se/birmingham2//Birmingham/info/main.htm>

9 <http://www.wmair.org>

10 World Health Organisation (2013), *Review of evidence on health aspects of air pollution - REVIHAAP*

11 Department for Transport (2010), *National Travel Survey 2010*

12 Campaign for Better Transport (2012), *Car Dependency Scorecard 2012*

13 Birmingham City Council (2013), *Cycle City Ambition Grant*

14 Birmingham City Council (2011), *Bike Birmingham: A Sustainable City's Cycling Strategy 2011*