

Royal College of Nursing submission to TfL's consultation on Improving air quality and Londoner's health, tackling climate change and reducing congestion

With a membership of close to half a million registered nurses, midwives, health visitors, nursing students, health care assistants and nurse cadets, the Royal College of Nursing (RCN) is the voice of nursing across the UK and the largest professional union of nursing staff in the world. RCN members work in a variety of hospital and community settings in the NHS and the independent sector. The RCN promotes patient and nursing interests on a wide range of issues by working closely with the Government, the UK parliaments and other national and European political institutions, trade unions, professional bodies and voluntary organisations.

*Q1. How concerned are you about air quality where you live?
(To respond as an organisation you could say how concerned you are about air quality across London.)*

The RCN has identified air quality as one of its key objectives for action on climate change. As a core member of the UK Health Alliance on Climate Change and participant in the recent Lord Mayor's Clean Air Summit and London Clinical Sustainability Clinical Network we support the need for action to reduce air pollution and improve air quality. This is essential for the health of patients and communities and nursing staff that work within London. The RCN is extremely concerned at the effects of short- and long-term exposure to air pollution on health and the wide range of diseases it can cause.

Q5. How important do you consider it is to continue to have these existing discounts and exemptions and reimbursements for the ULEZ?

The RCN welcomes existing discounts however more needs to be done to support healthcare workers living and working in London. The costs to our members are prohibitive at a time when the nursing workforce is facing a crisis in recruitment and retentionⁱ

Whilst some RCN members can claim the ULEZ charge back from employers (Pay for work scheme) this is reported as burdensome with members requesting a simplified system for NHS related work. Whilst nurses are keen to explore and implement new ways of working to reduce unnecessary travel the complexity and unpredictability of care needs in community and hospital settings requires the use of work and personal vehicles for the purposes of work.

Many RCN members in London rely on their cars to enable them to get to work. Improvements in availability and frequency of public transport is welcome however many of our members are required to work across multiple locations or in community settings where the use of public transport is insufficient to meet care or service needs.

RCN members living and working within London will continue to be required to use cars to travel for the purposes of work and deliver patient care.

Q6. Do you think we should provide any further discounts, exemptions or reimbursements for the ULEZ?

Yes. The RCN proposes a pre-payment scheme is developed by the Mayor's Office which enables employers to pay in advance, removing the need for staff to claim back costs associated with their role. This will support recruitment and retention of healthcare workers within London and remove the need for expenses claims which are too slow and remove available money from staff at a time when the cost-of-living crisis is escalating.

In addition, the RCN recommends that the Mayor of London and NHS employers provide financial support to nursing staff whose vehicle does not comply with the ULEZ emissions standards. This would help expediate the transition to vehicles that comply with ULEZ emissions standards as well as lessen the financial burden on nursing staff who use cars for work purposes.

Q7. We are proposing to expand the ULEZ London-wide on 29 August 2023. What do you think of the implementation date?

The RCN agrees with action as soon as possible to protect the health of those living and working in London. We will support the proposed date providing measures are in place to protect our members from unmanageable costs (as per point 6). This should include a costed impact assessment including the proportion of nursing staff impacted.

Q8. How important is it that the proposed expansion of the ULEZ is supported by a scrappage scheme?

We support the availability of a scrappage scheme for those RCN members who can afford to buy a 'cleaner vehicle'. Many nurses are facing an acute cost of living crisis therefore it is uncertain how many will be able to benefit from such a scheme.

Shaping the future of road user charging in London

Q15. How important is it to you that we take further steps to tackle air pollution in London?

Air pollution is a major health risk and is responsible for driving excess morbidity and mortality within London. The RCN notes the estimated 9,400 premature deaths are attributed to poor air quality and a cost of between £1.4 and £3.7 billion a year to the health service because of air pollutionⁱⁱ. We believe positive action on reducing particulate matter and ensuring this is reduced as low as possible is urgently required.

Q16. How important to you is it that we take further steps to tackle the climate emergency by reducing emissions in London?

The climate emergency is a health emergency. Air pollution is only one aspect of action required to improve planetary health. Some of the actions such as more

investment to support active transport and more reliable public transport in and out of normal working hours will bring benefits.

Q17. How important to you is it that we take further steps to tackle traffic congestion in London?

Traffic congestion escalates the concentration of air pollution in busy areas increasing health risks to those living and working near busy, congested parts of London and delays healthcare workers, patient transport and emergency services. Action on traffic congestion is essential to reducing the effects of air pollution by idle vehicles. The RCN supports consideration of a wide range of options and incentives to travel and work differently resulting on improved standard of air quality, increased efficiencies and for all those in London. As part of this, the Mayor and Transport for London should implement free travel on public transport for all nursing staff, similar to the incentive offered to the London Metropolitan police. The RCN expects this would have a significant positive impact in encouraging nursing staff to use public transport and thus, contribute to improving air quality.

Q18. How important to you is it that we take further steps to improve the health of Londoners and address health inequality in London?

The RCN fully supports all actions to reduce the development of and action to reduce inequalities. Those most affected by climate change including air pollution are the least likely to be in a position to make decisive changes to act on climate change. RCN members and wider health and care worker colleagues are facing a real time pay cut despite proposed pay increases by the Government. Financial hardship is a core obstacle to action on air pollution and the introduction of ULEZ charges across London despite the benefits this can bring. This, combined with the necessity to travel often in unsocial hours does not enable change and action despite RCN members awareness of the need for action.

Q19. If we were to develop a future road user charging scheme to replace our existing schemes, how important is it for the new scheme to address the following challenges?

Questions	Very important	Important	No opinion	Unimportant	Very unimportant	Don't know
<i>Tackle air pollution</i>	x					
<i>Tackle the climate emergency by reducing emissions</i>	x					
<i>Tackle traffic congestion</i>	x					

Improve health and wellbeing	x					
Provide more space for walking and cycling	x					
Improve bus journey times and reliability	x					
Improve journey times and reliability for freight and servicing trips	x					
Make roads safer for everyone	x					

Q.20 If we develop a future road user charging scheme to replace existing schemes, what elements should be considered? (please select all that apply)

See below:

As included in question 6, the RCN would like to see a pre-payment scheme introduced by employers of health and care workers to support the recruitment and retention of staff within London. A joint employers and staff-side summit to explore challenges and seek solutions would be welcome.

Q21. Please use this space to give us any comments or suggestions you have about shaping the future of road user charging in London.

The RCN welcomes this consultation and the opportunity to represent the views and needs of our members. The RCN would like to see a pan London health employers summit established to actively seek solutions to the challenges faced by healthcare workers caused by air pollution.

ⁱ Staffing for Safe and Effective Care: State of the nation's labour nursing market 2022. RCN (2022). London <https://www.rcn.org.uk/Professional-Development/publications/staffing-for-safe-effective-care-labour-nursing-market-2022-uk-pub-010-108>

ⁱⁱ Demystifying Air Pollution in London. London Councils (2018)