



REDUCING CO₂ EMISSIONS IN TRANSPORT

CONSUMER CHOICE WILL BE A VITAL FACTOR IN DETERMINING WHETHER OR NOT THE UK ECONOMY SUCCEEDS IN MEETING ITS EMISSIONS TARGETS



The UK government is currently committed to an economy-wide target of 80% reductions in greenhouse gas emissions by 2050. This is thought to be the minimum reduction necessary if global temperatures are to be held below the generally accepted danger threshold of 2°C, and more stringent measures could well be agreed in the wake of the 2009 UN climate conference in Copenhagen.

As the UK's transport sector currently accounts for about one quarter of total current emissions, it is reasonable to expect that transport emissions will need to fall by a similar percentage. Yet, in spite of recent improvements in technical efficiency and fuel economy, the total CO₂ emissions from UK private vehicles are not decreasing as quickly as policy makers had hoped.

Researchers at the Institute for Carbon and Energy Reduction in Transport believe that if we are to

achieve these targets, policy makers need to target consumers directly, in order to encourage them to make more rational decisions when purchasing a car.

EMISSIONS TARGETS

The UK's main policy commitment with regards to transport emissions is currently its participation in a voluntary agreement between the European Union and car manufacturers. The aim is to stimulate technical improvements in vehicle efficiency with the ultimate goal of reducing CO₂ emissions to an average level of 140 g/km for all new passenger cars by 2009 and an average level of 120g/km by 2012. The 2012 target represents a cut of only 45% on 1995 levels, yet it is becoming increasingly clear that the UK is not going to meet these targets.

The UK's new-car fleet currently has one of the highest levels of greenhouse gas emission per km in the EU. In fact, according to a paper co-authored

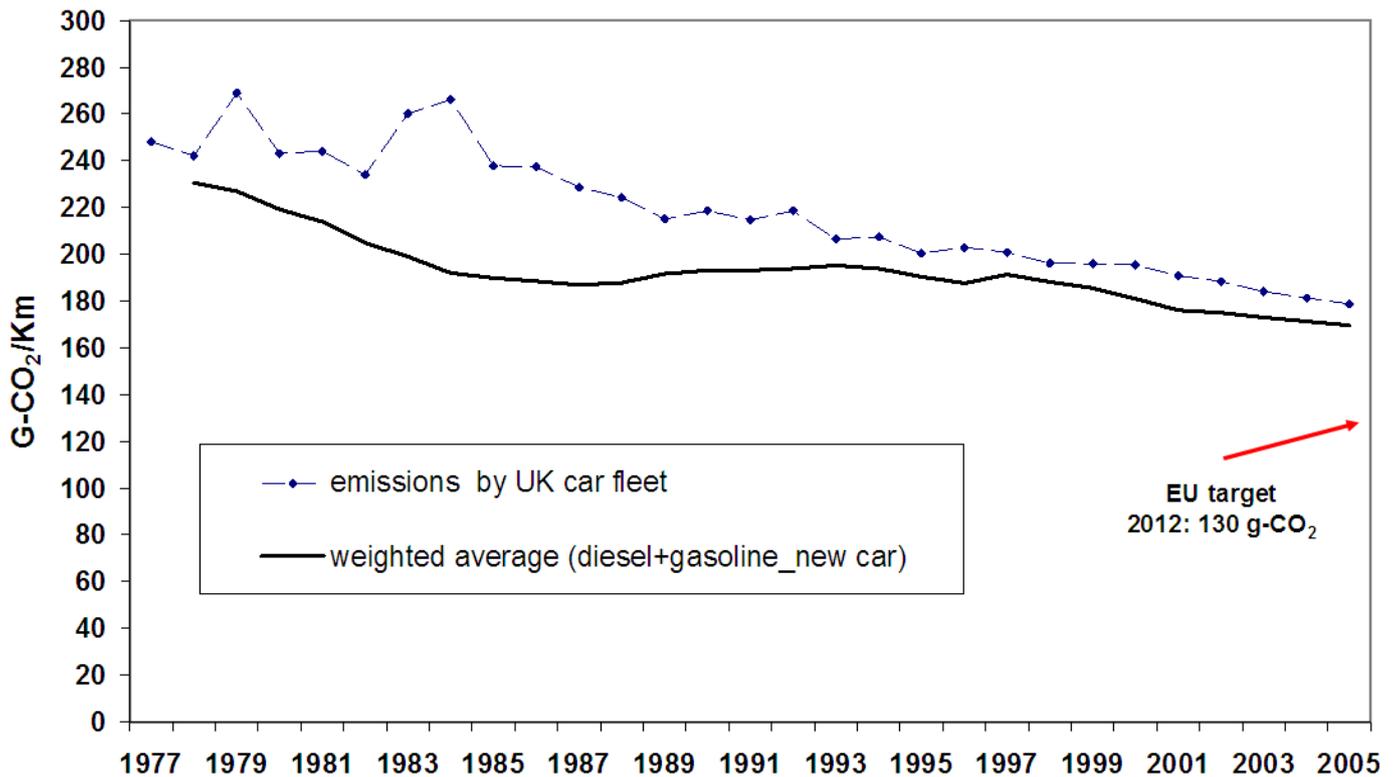


Figure 1. Comparative greenhouse gas performance for the current UK fleet and for new cars

by ICERT Research Fellow Dr David Bonilla, CO₂ emissions per kilometre from new cars are currently not much lower than those from the national vehicle fleet as a whole.

CONSUMER CHOICE

This poor performance (see figure above) is due, in part, to the impact of the recent financial crisis on car sales and the current absence of any mandatory emissions standards. However, one of the key factors contributing to the UK's poor performance in this area is a lack of consumer interest in smaller, more environmentally friendly cars. According to "Demand for New Fuel Economy in the UK, 1970-1995", consumer choice is one of the key factors which will determine whether or not the UK is successful in meeting any future targets for the transport sector as a whole.

Researchers at ICERT therefore recommend that policy makers target consumers directly, in order to shape consumer choice in the new car market. They

argue that such choices are currently skewed by a lack of information and poor levels of education with regards to the process of financial decision making and that without such policies, the UK has little chance of achieving its targets within the transport sector.

INSTITUTE FOR CARBON AND ENERGY REDUCTION IN TRANSPORT

Currently, there is no sector-wide 'road-map' setting out a route to a lower carbon future for transport. The Institute for Carbon and Energy Reduction in Transport (ICERT) believes that it is only by considering engineering, science, economics and policy instruments in a single model that we will be able to understand (and enhance) the impact of promising technologies, fuels, or policy instruments. The Institute looks at the whole infrastructure that will be needed for the successful implementation of practical, low-carbon transport and advises the government on future carbon reduction policies.

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For further information on the work of the Institute for Carbon and Energy Reduction, please visit:

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