

## No compromise on air quality

Written by Cécile Nourigat on 13 June 2016 in Opinion Plus  
Opinion Plus

EU and national policymakers need to place more emphasis on the use of alternative fuels, argues Cécile Nourigat.



UK Secretary of State for Transport Patrick McLoughlin made the headlines earlier this week after saying that the current low tax on diesel has caused a dramatic rise in nitrogen oxide (NOx) emissions in major cities, and therefore should be "looked at".

The initial decision to create incentives for drivers to choose diesel vehicles was made by former UK chancellor and Prime Minister Gordon Brown back in 2001 in the aftermath of the Kyoto Protocol, as a solution to cut CO2 emissions from transport and thus mitigate global warming.

In the wake of the recent Dieselgate emissions scandal, air pollution caused by road transport is gaining more attention. Is this a paradigm shift from a climate focused policy to more attention being given to air quality? This is still unclear. However, it means that leaders now realise the unintended consequences of past policy decisions.

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Trade-offs are also taking place at the European level. Representatives from the European Parliament, Council and European Commission met on 8 June to negotiate future national ceilings for a number of pollutants. These will serve as a basis for the development of a wide range of measures at national and local level for the attainment of the agreed objectives.

Again, diverging views were expressed on the level of ambition needed regarding the EU's future air quality strategy. Similarly, a conservative approach was taken by EU member states when approving the new real driving emissions requirements, allowing diesel cars to significantly exceed NOx standards in real life until 2020.

Knowing the impact of air pollution on people's health, we believe that the debate should focus less on trade-offs and more on solutions to quickly roll-out sustainable solutions for transport.

A number of alternative fuels have the potential to bring important gains, in both the short and long terms, and therefore should be promoted.

LPG, also called Autogas when used as transport fuel, produces far fewer of the harmful emissions that contribute to environmental and health problems, than traditional road fuels.

Tests in laboratories have proven that Autogas vehicles, on average, emit 96 per cent less NOx than diesel vehicles. Contrary to diesel, whose fumes have been classified as carcinogenic by the World Health Organisation since 2013, Autogas cars generate almost no particulate matter or black carbon (soot).

More recently, research on real driving emissions measured through a portable system showed that Autogas cars in normal driving conditions emit up to 19 per cent less CO<sub>2</sub> up to 97 per cent less CO (Carbon Monoxide), and 96 per cent less small particles than their gasoline equivalent.

Autogas, with 7.5 million vehicles in the EU served by more than 30,000 filling stations, is already widely available. It is therefore a solution to effectively reduce NOx pollution in the short term.

Other alternatives will also come into play in the future, but LPG is a low-hanging fruit that can deliver significant, cost-efficient emission cuts today.

Cities across Europe are already taking initiatives to tackle the problem at its source, in response to public opinion pressure and regulatory initiatives aimed at promoting air quality.

These include the establishment of low emissions zones, congestion charges, or simply banning the most polluting vehicles from city centres. In Spain for example, a new label defines which categories of vehicles should be favoured, and similar initiatives are now seen in a number of European capitals.

It is critical that such schemes reward alternative fuels, including LPG, in line with their proven environmental benefits.

Our message to European leaders is clear: it is time to put more emphasis on alternative fuels, in a technology neutral way, to effectively tackle air pollution in cities. The future starts today.

### **About the author**

Cécile Nourigat is Autogas Manager at the European LPG Association (AEGPL)

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[Health and social care](#) [12]

[Transport](#) [13]



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