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New air pollution limits push member states in right direction

The European Commission's Air Quality package is an important opportunity to improve the air we breathe in cities. It aims to tighten the national emissions ceilings for major air pollutants and sets long term targets for 2025 and 2030. It's essential that the European Parliament and the Council back these targets. They should also support the European Commission's proposal to use European structural and investment funds for measures that improve air quality, particularly in cities. We have to reduce pollution from sources that are beyond cities' control, yet considerably affect urban air quality.

James McKay, Birmingham City Council and chair of the EURO CITIES environment forum, said:

"Any attempt to resolve the problem of poor air quality in cities has to take a long hard look at the National Emissions Ceilings. Cities' best efforts at delivering cleaner air locally can't make up for the fact that national limits of major pollutants must be tightened."

Europe's city authorities are striving to improve air quality and meet the EU's hourly and daily limit values of pollutants as set out in the Ambient Air Quality Directive. They are providing better and cleaner public transport, more room for cycling and walking, or putting in place low emission zones and congestion charges. They are also making overall traffic management more efficient and supporting the renewal of heating installations. The Commission's proposal to use EU structural and investment funds and the LIFE programme for improving air quality measures can help cities exchange good practice and increase their capacity to clean up the air.

However, improving air quality is a shared challenge requiring action at all levels of government. City authorities want to work in partnership with the EU and its member states as they cannot solve this problem alone. The proposed European Clean Air Forum could support a dialogue between stakeholders and different levels of government; cities should be represented in it.

Air quality in cities depends in large part on national energy and transport policies. Through taxes, member states can incentivise cleaner fuels and technologies for road vehicles and heating installations. Imposing tougher limits for the yearly emissions of major pollutants at national level can put pressure on member states to adjust their national policies and help lower overall emission levels.

Future EU emission tests for cars, trucks and buses must reflect actual driving conditions in urban areas. The EU also has to provide more effective standards for sources of pollution like construction machinery, heating installations or industrial emissions.

EURO CITIES secretary general Paul Bevan said:

"EU and national standards must support more strongly and clearly our shared objective of improving urban air quality. In particular vehicle emission targets need to be ambitious, rigorous and effectively enforced through much more realistic testing."

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Notes to editors

- EUROCITIES response to European Commission's consultation on air quality: <http://bit.ly/VyyjOP>
- Contact: Michael Klinkenberg, EUROCITIES policy advisor, Michael.klinkenberg@eurocities.eu
- EUROCITIES: www.eurocities.eu
- EUROCITIES on Twitter: www.twitter.com/eurociestweet

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