

Employers can lead reduction in commuter transport emissions – CBI

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Decarbonising the journeys of commuters in England will be vital if the country is to hit net-zero targets – and businesses should take more responsibility for cutting their employees' emissions, says the CBI.

Prior to the coronavirus pandemic, commuter journeys accounted for 15% of all trips and 20% of total travel distance in the UK – totalling 18 billion kg of CO2 emissions per year. Even with travel patterns evolving in the wake of the pandemic, commuting emissions will need to be radically reduced for the UK to achieve its environmental ambitions.

A new report from the CBI and KPMG – *Greener Miles: Delivering on a net-zero vision for commuting* – has proposed a series of recommendations designed to cut travel emissions ahead of the government's upcoming Transport Decarbonisation Plan.

Key among them is a call for businesses to shoulder greater responsibility for ensuring their workers adopt greener travel habits.

At a time when many firms are reconsidering their future working models, the CBI is encouraging

businesses to incorporate staff commuting into their net-zero strategies. The report suggests this can be achieved in a number of ways, from incentivising public transport use and promoting active travel options, to supporting the delivery of electric vehicle charging infrastructure.

However, it is also incumbent upon government to lay the foundations for business to act. That will mean revamping public transport networks to reflect shifting working patterns and demand for different ticketing models, while accelerating rollout of low-emission vehicles.

CBI recommendations include details for a bold plan for government support for operators to enable the UK to meet its ambition of 4,000 new zero emission buses by the end of the parliament. The recommendations also push for government to commit to publishing a national EV infrastructure delivery plan by the end of the year.

Both government and business will then have a role to play in influencing behaviours by rebuilding public confidence in shared transport and driving long-term shifts towards more active transport.

In tandem, these measures can help build momentum around the shift to a decarbonised economy ahead of COP26 in November, where clean transport will be a core theme.

Matthew Fell, CBI Chief UK Policy Director at the CBI, said: "If the UK is to meet its obligations to reach net-zero emissions by 2050, decarbonisation of commuting will be vital. However, this will require not only significant public and private investment in infrastructure and technology, but also a shift in business and employee behaviours to match.

"A key change will be for businesses to now take greater responsibility for their employees' commutes. They should factor these emissions into their net-zero strategies and set out tangible steps to help their teams make greener journeys.

"Collaboration between business and government can be a catalyst for achieving this. This summer, as more and more businesses nationwide begin to look beyond the challenges of COVID and plan a return to on-site work, firms have an unprecedented opportunity to work with government at all levels to provide their staff with a menu of low emissions travel options.

"This will be critical, not only for meeting the UK's net-zero commitment, but for society's health, wellbeing and productivity both in the short-term as the economy reopens, and in the decades to come."

Richard Threlfall, Global Head of Infrastructure at KPMG, said: "As COVID-19 restrictions start to ease, employees are reconsidering where they work and how they commute – giving employers a unique window of opportunity to reduce the impact of these journeys on the environment.

"But to bring about real, lasting change in employee behaviour, businesses and government need to work together and invest in a range of affordable, accessible travel options and new technology to reduce emissions. This type of investment will also help the economy's recovery, better connect communities and provide more opportunities for levelling up across the country.

“And with the clock ticking on the UK’s commitment to achieve net-zero emissions by 2050, now is the time to put words into action and deliver green commuting.”

Photo credit: CBI