



## ACS Submission: The Clean Air Plan for Wales

ACS (the Association of Convenience Stores) welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Welsh Government's consultation on their draft Clean Air Plan for Wales. ACS is a trade association, which represents over 33,500 convenience stores across the UK, including Spar UK, Nisa Retail, Costcutter and thousands of independent retailers. There are 2,931 convenience stores in Wales, employing around 27,000 people<sup>1</sup>. For more information about ACS and the convenience sector, see Annex A.

ACS welcomed the Welsh Government's draft Clean Air Plan for Wales and is committed to working with the Welsh Government to improve air quality. We are also committed to working with the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs in their efforts to improve air quality and previously responded to consultations on their draft Clean Air Strategy<sup>2</sup> and the domestic burning of house coal, smokeless coal, manufactured solid fuel and wet wood<sup>3</sup>.

ACS also represents fuel retailers including Motor Fuel Group, MRH, HKS Retail, Rontec and thousands of independent fuel retailers. There are over 8,000 forecourts across the UK, employing 92,000 people. While the Wales Transport Strategy to be published later this year will set out the policy framework to achieve decarbonisation targets, we wanted to comment on the Welsh Government's proposals in the draft Clean Air Plan which aim to support the development of ultra-low emission vehicles. We believe the government must work with industry to offer incentives to help them adapt and change to achieve this ambition.

While the draft Clean Air Plan addresses a wide range of areas, our submission relates specifically to the sections of the Plan on domestic combustion and ultra-low emission vehicles. Please see below for our response to the relevant consultation questions.

### **Question 6 – Do you agree with the proposals for tackling air pollution from domestic combustion?**

The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs recently confirmed a range of measures that they will introduce in February 2021<sup>4</sup> to tackle air pollution from domestic combustion including requirements for wood sold in volumes under 2m<sup>3</sup> to have a moisture content of 20% or less, which means that all sales of wet wood in these volumes would be banned. There will also be a ban on the sale of all pre-packaged traditional bituminous house coal. Suppliers of wood would also be required to apply for mandatory certification to

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<sup>1</sup> ACS Welsh Local Shop Report 2020

<sup>2</sup> [ACS Submission – Clean Air Strategy](#)

<sup>3</sup> [ACS Submission - Domestic Burning of House Coal, Smokeless Coal, Manufactured Solid Fuel and Wet Wood](#)

<sup>4</sup> [Defra: Government takes action to cut pollution from household burning](#)

demonstrate that their stock has less than 20% moisture and retailers would be required to check that their supplier has received certification.

These plans to restrict the sale of wood and solid fuels has widespread implications for retailers in our sector, particularly for local shops operating on forecourts and in more rural and isolated areas. ACS' Local Shop Report 2019 found that 44% of convenience stores and 72% of forecourts sell wood or domestic burning fuel. We believe that the Welsh Government should be as consistent with measures announced by the Department for Environment and Food and Rural Affairs as possible. However, we do have some concerns about what the measures mean for our members, which we have raised below.

We have raised concerns about the timeframe for implementation. Currently, the requirement for wood sold in volumes under 2m<sup>3</sup> to have a moisture content of 20% or less will come into effect in February 2021. This will be introduced as a ban on the sale to the public which means that there is no sell through period for retailers because suppliers could continue to sell wood to retailers which would not be compliant up to February 2021. We believe that the measure should be introduced in two stages: first with the ban to the sale of wood by suppliers followed by a separate sell through period for retailers. This will ensure that retailers have enough time to sell through non-compliant stock.

The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs also confirmed that retailers will be required to store seasoned wood in such a way to keep it dry. We have asked for clarity on how retailers will be able to comply with these measures. Our members have suggested that wood is stored in bunkers or wheeled trollies, the majority of which is sheltered by a canopy to protect the stock from rain. However, it is unclear as to whether retailers storing wood in such a way would be compliant. The government has committed to developing guidance to support retailers. We will be calling for the guidance to be developed in consultation with retailers and that given that enforcement will be taken by local authorities that it should be covered by Primary Authority.

**Question 9 - Are there aspects of indoor air pollution, which you would like Welsh Government to address? You may wish to consider what the Welsh Government's top priorities should be for regulating chemicals in articles and products, which may contribute to poor indoor air quality.**

We understand and support the need for developing the electric vehicle charging network and would welcome further engagement with the Welsh Government ahead of the upcoming Wales Transport Strategy. We believe that the growth of electric vehicle charging infrastructure should reflect the supply and demand in the market and as such should be led commercially rather than government mandating businesses to host charging points which would place considerable costs on businesses with no reassurances that they will receive a return from their investment.

The overall trend of electric vehicle charging points is positive, with the number of public charging connectors and locations increasing dramatically over the past 12 months. ZapMap suggest that as of February 2020, there are 1,002 charging points in Wales<sup>5</sup>. Latest data from the Department for Transport suggests that Wales has 17 public charging devices per 100,000 of population.

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<sup>5</sup> ZapMap 2019

In the forecourt sector, there has also been an increase in the number of locations providing charging points. ACS' Forecourt Report 2019 found that there had been a 74% increase in the number of charging devices available at fuel retailer sites in the UK compared to the previous year, increasing from 254 to 441<sup>6</sup>. The number of fuel retailer sites in the UK providing electric vehicle charging points has also increased by 70% compared to the previous year from 197 to 334 sites. Forecourts are outperforming the overall trend in the electric vehicle charging infrastructure market, making considerable investments to offer this service to their customers.

To extend the network of electric vehicle charging points in Wales, we believe that the Welsh Government should secure industry cooperation by making a business case for the extension of ULEV infrastructure. The Welsh Government must be able to show how they will incentivise investment, that there is sufficient consumer demand for electric vehicle charging points and that business investments will work to future proof businesses and support current trading models.

As part of the Welsh Government's aims to grow electric vehicle charging infrastructure in Wales, we believe that the Welsh Government should consider the following recommendations ahead of the publication of the Wales Transport Strategy:

- Deliver meaningful incentives to fuel retailers to extend the reach of EV public charging points on the road network.
- Avoid mandating businesses to host electric vehicle charging points - only to be used as a last resort if the market does not deliver an effective network.
- Exempt electric vehicle charging points and the associated car parking space from business rates.
- Place ULEV infrastructure in strategic locations that match consumer demands, for example, retail and leisure facility car parks and workplaces

### *Deliver Meaningful Incentives*

Currently, there is uncertainty about electric charging point infrastructure, including the longevity of equipment, length of contracts with suppliers, if there is sufficient consumer demand, and how the infrastructure will support current trading models. The charging speed is also an important factor when fuel retailers are considering whether or not to invest due to the short dwell times at their sites which make it commercially viable. Rapid electric vehicle charging points can charge between 30-60 minutes however this speed is entirely dependent on the electric vehicle's battery capacity. Even if the charge point has a high KWH output, if the electric vehicle cannot charge on a high capacity it will take the same amount of time as if it were being charged on a slower charger. ACS has also heard anecdotally from fuel retailers that a barrier to investment is the lengthy contracts proposed by charge point suppliers, that can range from 10 years to 15 years. Given the fast-paced nature of technological changes in the market, fuel retailers are reluctant to sign up to a contract which may not be an attractive offer and commercially sustainable if faster chargers become available.

As such, the Welsh Government must provide concrete commitments to fuel retailers, so they have the confidence to make a long-term investment in this technology. For the investment to be effective it needs to be across the supply chain for consumers purchasing

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<sup>6</sup> We do not hold specific data for forecourts in Wales

ULEVs, fuel retailers providing the infrastructure and car manufacturers to produce these vehicles. Uncertainty can lead to businesses being reluctant to invest, and therefore we believe that to incentivise investment from businesses, the Welsh Government should consider incentives such as dedicated funding and business rate exemptions for public charging points.

### *Business Rates*

Installing an electric vehicle charging point could increase the rateable value of the site and the business rates they are required to pay. Currently there is no provision in the rating manual for the assessment of electric vehicle charging for business rates or the parking spaces that the vehicle occupies to charge, however, this is likely to change at the next business rates revaluation. The Welsh Government should ensure that electric vehicle charge points and the car park space associated are exempt from the rating list to ensure that businesses do not incur increased rating bills for investing in electric vehicle charging.

### *Strategic Locations*

For many fuel retailers, their business model does not lend itself to supporting EV charge points. Consumers will be spending between 30 minutes to an hour charging their battery and at present most fuel retailing sites are not designed to support consumers waiting for long periods of time. Research by Baringa<sup>7</sup> found that the average amount of time consumer drives would be willing to wait in order to charge in-transit is just 13 minutes. While the increasing use of rapid charging points may be more appropriate for the business model of a fuel retailer, the Welsh Government should make a business case to show how there is sufficient consumer demand for charging in that location.

To understand if there is sufficient consumer demand for charging in that location, the Welsh Government should understand how and where consumers want to charge. By determining suitable locations where there is demand for public charging, this will promote the charging network more effectively. This could incorporate strategic locations on the road network and in local communities that could sustain electric vehicle charging rather than charging points being located on sites where they are not used.

## **EU Energy Performance of Buildings Directive**

We would welcome more information to how the Welsh Government's policy in Planning Policy Wales: Edition 10, which encourages planning authorities to seek a minimum of 10% of car parking spaces to have charging points in new non-residential developments will interact with legislation to be transposed from the EU Energy Performance of Buildings Directive (EPBD) which will set minimum requirements for electric vehicle charging infrastructure in new and existing non-residential buildings.

The Department for Transport's consultation Electric Vehicle Charging in Residential and Non-Residential Buildings looks to transpose EPBD by requiring existing non-residential buildings with more than 20 car parking spaces to have one charge point and new non-residential buildings and buildings undergoing a major renovation with more than 10 car parking space must have one electric vehicle charging point and cable routes for one in five spaces.

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<sup>7</sup> [Baringa: Is the UK ready for electric cars?](#)

ACS responded to the Department for Transport's consultation setting out that we do not agree that the most appropriate way to increase the uptake of electric vehicle infrastructure is through mandating non-residential buildings with more than 10 car parking spaces to offer electric vehicle charging points and cable routes. We understand and support the need for developing the electric vehicle charging network, but we believe that the Department for Transport should instead offer incentives to promote EV infrastructure without burdening retailers. The Department for Transport could also identify how and where consumers want to charge to identify strategic locations where it is more appropriate to host electric vehicle charging points rather than mandating based on the number of car parking spaces offered.

We would welcome engagement with the Welsh Government on how the policy to require new non-residential developments to have charging points in at least 10% of the spaces available has gone so far and how the Welsh Government plan to transpose EPBD. We believe that there must be protections for small businesses from being disproportionately impacted by the regulations, and we would support proposals to exempt small businesses from the regulations. However, if the Welsh Government decides to require small businesses to comply, they must commit to providing financial support to smaller businesses to install electric vehicle charging points.

**For more information about this submission, please contact Julie Byers, ACS Public Affairs Manager by emailing [Julie.Byers@acs.org.uk](mailto:Julie.Byers@acs.org.uk) or calling 01252 515001.**