

VIABILITY OF BIOFUELS

“We need to concentrate on the most cost-effective measures to reduce CO2 emissions in transport,” stressed Jack Short, Secretary General of the International Transport Forum, at the United Nations Climate Change Conference in Bali in December 2007. “Too often high cost and low impact measures are being chosen,” he criticised. Because the challenge for the sector to reduce its CO2 emissions is immense, neither industrial nor developing countries can afford to get priorities wrong. “By achieving the required emission reductions at the lowest overall cost, it is possible to protect the climate with minimal damage to welfare and economic growth.”

GROWTH IN VOLUMES OF TRAFFIC

Short’s alarming perspective is that the substantial growth in traffic anticipated over the next decades in all modes of transport under a business as usual scenario will likely double world transport emissions by 2030. Therefore “wide ranging and integrated policy packages are needed” to reduce transport emissions. According to Short these include significant advances in vehicle and vehicle component technology supported by a range of policy measures aimed at increasing fuel efficiency. It is also necessary to act on the demand side, “not to restrict mobility, but to manage it.”

According to the International Transport Forum “effective and affordable” actions include tax and regulatory incentives for improved vehicle components including tyres, lubricants, air conditioners and lights that are not covered by the standard tests that award fuel efficiency ratings to cars. Training, information and support for “ecodriving” is also highly cost effective with an immediate pay-off in reduced emissions. These are “the most cost-effective” practices, Short stressed, “but at present we are not taking advantage of them. We are putting too much hope in expensive options like biofuels that are neither cost effective nor necessarily good environmentally”.

ON GOING DEBATES

In September 2007 a meeting chaired by Juliette Jowit, Transport & Environment Editor, The Observer, was one of several fringe meetings at the Labour Party Conference. Also speaking at the meeting were Nia Griffiths MP, DEFRA spokesperson, PPS to Phil Woolas MP, Minister of State DEFRA, Greg Archer, LowCVP, Richard Safford, Home Grown Cereals Authority and Mark Avery, Conservation Director, RSPB.

The subject of biofuels has been covered in the media a lot recently as some back the products whilst others voice concerns about the viability of biofuels. A study by a Nobel-prize winning chemist says that growing and burning many biofuel crops may raise, rather than lower, greenhouse gas emissions because emissions of nitrous oxide have previously been understated. Paul Crutzen and his colleagues have calculated that the growth and combustion of some of the most commonly used biofuel crops such as rapeseed releases around twice the amount of the greenhouse gas nitrous oxide - far more potent than CO2 - than previously thought. The finding, if correct, could wipe out any benefits from not using fossil fuels and, worse, may contribute to climate change.

TARGETS SET TO INCREASE USE OF BIOFUELS

The EU and the UK Government have already got set targets to increase the amount of biofuels being used, but there are still many concerns being voiced about the suitability of biofuels. The DEFRA spokesperson set out the Government’s position to reduce CO2 from transport, which will necessitate a range of strategies and the full evidence base is yet unknown. The Government support biofuel which is why there is the 20p reduction on fuel duty incentive for biofuel and bioethanol and a target of 5% biofuel mix for all vehicles by 2010. More details can be found at of this can be found at <http://www.dft.gov.uk/pgr/roads/environment/rtfo/governmentssupport>

CARBON FOOTPRINT MONITORING

The impact of the carbon footprint and crop biodiversity is uncertain so continual monitoring is necessary. There is also an EU strategy to support developing countries sustainable growth – biomass action plan, as well as an enhanced capital allowance scheme in the UK. The Royal Society for Protection of Birds highlighted some of their concerns, including the potential dangers to biodiversity and wildlife, saying that biofuels do not produce savings on green house gasses and recent evidence from Edinburgh University suggests that biofuels may produce more CO2 and Commission for Integrated Transport report did not identify biofuels as a mechanism to reduce CO2. Mark Avery said that he is not an expert, but the issues of limited land space also needs consideration.

Richard Safford, Home Grown Cereals Authority, argued that there is sufficient land in the UK to meet the 5% mix of biofuels by 2010 for 1st generation biofuels. He said there needs to be consideration given to crop types – especially in relation to nitrogen fertilization. An independent study commissioned by Home Grown Cereals Authority, showed a 50% savings on CO2 emissions. The process needs to be sustainable however.

The LowCVP then told the meeting that Rainforests are not being destroyed by biofuels and that the LowCVP looks at supply train to really understand the CO2 emissions of the whole process. There are good and bad biofuels – this is dependent on process of production rather than type. The UK is leading in Europe in the development of biofuels and the Low CVP say biofuel is a better alternative to oil.

IMPACT OF BIOFUELS ON GLOBAL TRADE

Those attending the meeting were given the opportunity to ask questions. One of the main issues raised covered the impact on global trade. NGO representatives questioned the impact that the growth of biofuels will have on poor countries and highlighted the dangers of free trade / trade disparities. In reply to this the Home Grown Cereals Authority speaker supported an accreditation scheme to ensure best practice - the Government agreed. Deforestation and biodiversity issues were raised.

BIOFUELS AND THE TAXI TRADE

For the taxi trade, biofuels have been available for some time now, but only the 5% biodiesel can be used without invalidating the LTI Warranty on TXII’s and TX4 taxis. A spokesperson for LTI Vehicles commented: “It would appear that Biofuels could be part of the solution to reducing CO2 emissions from surface transport but it is unclear at present how biofuels (particularly if sourced in larger quantities) will impact on biodiversity, fair trade and CO2 emissions. It is possible that Biofuels will have a role to play in reducing CO2 vehicle emissions but there needs to be more research and an effective report and accreditation mechanism to ensure production is sustainable and the process truly reduces CO2.

“LTI will continue to monitor the developments in Biofuels and all other opportunities to reduce emissions.”

ST GEORGE’S DAY
APRIL 23rd 2008



The London Cab Drivers Club are inviting taxi drivers to take part in a St George’s Day Cavalcade of Cabs to celebrate England and being English. The idea is to demonstrate support for England, no matter what your race or religion. The event is being supported by the English Democrats who will be fielding their own candidate for Mayor of London, Gary Bushell.

For further details on how to join the Cavalcade and fly the flag of St George, contact:
The Secretary, LCDC Ltd, 1 Hampton Street London SE17 3AL
or email thelcdc@aol.com