FUNDING TO HELP REDUCE CARBON DIOXIDE EMISSIONS FROM LONDON TAXIS

£1 million of funding has been announced by Mayor Boris Johnson to help to trial low carbon technology for London's taxi fleet. Provided jointly by Transport for London (TfL), through its Climate Change Fund, and Cenex, the UK's National Centre of Excellence for Low Carbon and Fuel Cell Technologies, the funding will be used to introduce a low carbon taxi demonstration project in London. The PCO has issued a Contract Notice to the Official Journal of the European Union OJEU) inviting motor manufacturers to register their interest in supplying low carbon taxis.

CARBON REDUCTION STRATEGY

As part of its carbon reduction strategy, the PCO wants to work with motor manufacturers to introduce taxis with lower fuel consumption and carbon dioxide emissions. The project is part of TfL's commitment to reducing the impact of public transport on the environment. It will make the taxi fleet more fuel efficient, which will significantly reduce emissions of carbon dioxide and help tackle climate change. At present, the taxi and private hire fleet together make up 4% of the capital's carbon dioxide emissions from transport in London.

The low carbon technologies which could be included might be stop-start or 'micro-hybrid' technology where the engine cuts out automatically when the vehicle stops, and starts up again when the accelerator is pressed. This technology is already being used by many of the major car manufacturers as a means of reducing carbon dioxide emissions. The PCO says that London's taxis spend about 40% per cent of their time either waiting on taxi ranks, at traffic signals, or waiting to pick up or drop off passengers. Under these conditions, a micro-hybrid taxi is expected to reduce fuel consumption and carbon dioxide and other emissions by 10 to 15 per cent, as well as producing less noise and fewer harmful air pollutants.

QUIETER, MORE EFFICIENT TAXIS NEEDED SAYS MAYOR

Boris Johnson, said: "As well as significantly cutting carbon dioxide emissions, we're looking for taxis that are quieter and produce fewer air pollutants, which will be good news for anyone who spends time in London. Taxi drivers should be particularly pleased - they're more exposed than most to traffic pollution, and they should also see the benefit of cheaper fuel costs as low carbon taxis would use less than a standard taxi."

David Brown, Managing Director of Surface Transport at TfL, said: "We are committed to reducing the impact of public transport on the environment, and have already taken significant steps to clean up emissions of particulates and nitrogen oxides from the taxi fleet. Now it's time to tackle carbon dioxide emissions. With over 21,000 taxis on London's roads, making our taxi fleet more fuel efficient will lead to substantial carbon dioxide savings and help tackle climate change."

Robert Evans, CEO of Cenex, said "Cenex is looking forward to working with TfL to procure and trial innovative low carbon vehicle technology in London taxis. We believe this project will attract a great deal of interest from both consumers and the motor industry."

FUEL EFFICIENT DRIVING CAMPAIGN

TfL's Climate Change Fund will also support the introduction of a fuel efficient driving campaign aimed at both taxi and private hire drivers. Small changes, such as keeping tyres at the correct pressure and not accelerating sharply, can make a big difference to fuel consumption and emissions from an individual vehicle.

TEST DRIVE CYCLE

Taxi drivers may well respond to the news in a positive way as suggested by the Mayor. When Ken Livingstone launched his Taxi Emissions Strategy research was carried out to ensure the equipment which taxi owners fitted to their cabs met high standards. Unfortunately there have been problems during the implementation period and in the case of one manufacturer, Van Aaken, who are now in administration, taxi owners who installed the equipment have had no answers from either the PCO or the company with regard to what happens should they encounter any problems. This time London has a new Mayor so perhaps things will be done differently.

One good point is that the PCO and Cenex intend to create a test drive cycle specific to London taxis. Currently taxi emissions are tested on drive cycles used for regular cars. However, the way in which taxis operate in London differs markedly from the passenger car test cycle. The new test cycle will therefore be much more representative of taxi emissions in London.

PROJECTS UNDERWAY AT LTI VEHICLES

New projects announced recently by LTI Vehicles are looking to address the requirements for cleaner taxis which at the same time have good fuel economy. The company has recently announced the signing of a development agreement for the TX4E with the Tanfield Group Plc, the world's leading manufacturer of commercial electric vehicles, to develop a battery powered, zero emission urban taxi, the TX4E. The company has also announced a hydrogen powered taxi is being developed, in a collaboration led by hydrogen fuel cell developer, Intelligent Energy, and including Lotus Engineering Ltd, LTI (London Taxis International) Ltd and TRW Conekt. This programme is part of the UK government's Technology Strategy Board recent allocation of funding of £23 million for 16 innovative low carbon vehicle development programmes. LTI Vehicles continues to be committed to producing taxis at their Coventry factory and investment is being made into new clean technologies.