

# Capital gains?

The clock is ticking and there is little time for operators to get their fleets in order, ahead of January's new emissions standards for London's LEZ. John Challen explains what the changes mean and why it may be too late to take action

**E**stimates from Transport for London (TfL) suggest that some 150,000 vehicles will be affected by new emissions standards being implemented inside London's Low Emission Zone from 3 January 2012. From that date, HGVs, buses and coaches – already required to meet Euro 3 standards within that area of Greater London – will be required to be Euro 4 compliant. The penalty for non-compliance is a charge of £200 a day or a fine of up to £1,000.

For large vans, minibuses and some specialist vehicles – now required to meet Euro 3 guidelines – penalties are a charge of £100 or a fine of £500 a day.

The reasons for the long-awaited change in legislation are quite clear and, given the volume of vehicles affected, the new laws will have a major impact on air quality and vehicle condition. However, these improvements come at a cost, both in time and financial terms, to operators – something that the UK capital recognises.

"The vast majority of vehicles set to be affected by these new standards are already compliant. However, a small minority of drivers still need to take action to avoid fines," warned Kulveer Ranger, the Mayor of London's environment director, in September. "There is a range of options available to vehicle owners and, as part of this, the mayor has agreed deals with a number of vehicle manufacturers for discounts off new vehicles. However, some options to make vehicles



compliant, such as fitting an approved filter, can take up to three months to complete, so I urge those who are affected to take action as soon as possible."

Three months on, and just days away from the deadline, TfL says it is confident that the majority of vehicles that drive within the LEZ from 3 January 2012 will meet the required emissions standards. "The filter manufacturers tell us that demand is good and, while this may be the most cost-effective way forward for heavier vehicles, it is only one option," says a spokesperson.

## Equipment suppliers

It may only be one option, but there are many suppliers obviously keen to help out with fitment. Eminox is offering a choice of fuel-borne catalyst or emissions trap, and has increased production of both items and invested in a service centre just outside the zone to deal with growing demand. The company reveals that "of the 15–20,000 heavy-duty vehicles that TfL estimated will retrofit for the new 2012 rules, about half of these [conversion equipment] systems have already been ordered".

Meanwhile, competitor Dinex's retrofit solution is DiSiC, a closed catalysed filter claimed to cut particle emissions by up to 98%. Approved by TfL, the units are supplied with a DiNLog data logging device that monitors performance and are also approved for all European environmental zones.



Elsewhere, Keltruck boasts four designated fitment centres across the Midlands and Wales that customers can use to upgrade their vehicles with an approved particulate filter. However, the Scania dealer is using the introduction to push other options, such as financing a new truck, claiming it is cost effective, compared with the possibility of a daily fine of £200.

"Vehicle operators may choose to reorganise their fleet, rent a compliant vehicle or replace their vehicle," advises the TfL spokesperson. "Buying a compliant second-hand van may be the most cost-effective option for some van owners, but, for anyone considering buying a new vehicle, the mayor has negotiated discounts with various vehicle manufacturers."

### **Paying the price**

With economic and financial pressures, there may be some that oppose the LEZ to the point of long-term non-compliance. But to those that think they may be able to get around the new regulations, TfL has a strong message: Don't try it. "The LEZ is enforced by means of a camera network," explains the organisation's spokesperson.

"TfL has confirmed that operators of vehicles that do not meet the required standards will be sent a warning letter when they are first seen in the Low Emission Zone from 3 January 2012," he continues. "They will then have 28 days to take action and clean up their vehicles to meet the new LEZ standards. This policy has been in place

throughout the life of the scheme and will continue to be so. It is in keeping with TfL's aim that vehicle operators should comply with the LEZ, rather than pay a daily charge or risk a penalty."

TfL is operating a dedicated call centre (Tel 0845 607 0009) and website ([www.tfl.gov.uk/lezlondon](http://www.tfl.gov.uk/lezlondon)) to give operators the information they need to understand how the LEZ affects them and the options available. **TE**

## **Are you affected?**

Even if your vehicles theoretically need to be retrofitted with emissions traps or the alternative fuel-borne catalyst solutions, it could be worth checking if they actually need them. According to Transport for London (TfL), a small number of vehicles are entitled to an exemption from the LEZ.

One category is specialist, non-road going vehicles designed and built for mainly off-road use, but which may use the road for limited purposes. These include agricultural and forestry tractors, mowing machines, agricultural and farm machinery and equipment, mobile cranes, and road and building construction machinery. Other vehicles that avoid the new regulations include historic vehicles built before 1 January 1973 and vehicles operated by the Ministry of Defence.

If your vehicle meets any of the above criteria and is registered in Great Britain, TfL says it is automatically exempt and you don't need to register it. The organisation also says that, if your vehicle meets any of the above criteria, but is registered outside Great Britain (including Northern Ireland), again, it is exempt, but will need to register with Transport for London.