## Electric vehicles (vulnerable road users) - Westminster Hall debate

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**The danger faced by blind and partially sighted people from silent electric cars was debated in Westminster Hall on Wednesday.**

The shadow transport secretary's PPS, Mary Glindon (Lab, North Tyneside), introducing the debate, referred to a parliamentary reception she attended for the 'Safe and Sound' campaign run by Guide Dogs.

The success of hybrid and electric vehicles was particularly important to the economy in the North-East and her constituency, where Nissan in Sunderland had invested more than £400m in the development of the Leaf electric vehicle, Glindon said.

But, she argued that the vehicles were so quiet that they posed a danger to the public, and particularly the elderly, the blind and the partially sighted.

Glindon referred to research by the TAS Partnership published last month that showed that electric and hybrid vehicles were involved in 25 per cent more collisions, causing injury to pedestrians, between 2010 and 2012, than conventional vehicles.

Calling on the government to act, she also referred to research by the eVADER (electric vehicle alert for detection and emergency response) project which found that 91 per cent of blind and partially sighted people wanted to see quiet vehicles recognised as a problem.

It also showed that 81 per cent of the general public, according to a survey by Orange, wanted electric vehicles to emit a noise at a level equivalent to conventional vehicles.

Glindon noted that in February this year, MEPs voted for an amendment to the EU regulation on the sound level of motor vehicles to make acoustic vehicle alerting systems (AVAS) mandatory for all quiet vehicles.

The amendment was being negotiated by the European Commission, European Council and European Parliament and scheduled to be finalised next year.

She noted that the UK government was pushing for only the voluntary introduction of AVAS.

Glindon argued that it was concerning that the government did not accept national and international evidence, including that of Guide Dogs, the Automobile Association and the Royal Automobile Club.

Shadow road safety minister, Richard Burden (Birmingham, Northfield) noted that the debate was timely ahead of further EU negotiations on the regulation on the sound level of motor vehicles next week before an agreement on audio-alerting systems was reached at the next EU Transport Council on December 5.

"We need action and agreement on audio systems for electric and hybrid cars and other quiet vehicles before they become mainstream and not afterwards, when there has been an increase in collisions," Burden argued.

He referred to recent EU research which showed that 93 per cent of blind and partially sighted people were already experiencing difficulties with electric vehicles.

Burden called on the government to confirm its position on AVAS and stressed the need for certainty for motor manufacturers.

Road safety minister, Robert Goodwill told MPs that the government was committed to "establishing the UK as a leading market for ultra-low emission vehicles".

Responding to comments on mandatory sound alerts for ultra-low emission vehicles, Goodwill said the government's position was based on an assessment of the risk that the vehicles pose to pedestrians.

He highlighted that research carried out in the United States had raised concerns about the safety implications of quiet road vehicles.

Goodwill said the government was aware of recent research carried out by Guide Dogs, but he added that most of the recent differences between the figures for conventional vehicles and those with electric drives were due to a drop in the rate of pedestrian accidents involving conventional vehicles.

"The lack of robust data is problematic," Goodwill argued.

The minister went on to outline the government's commitment to ultra-low emission vehicles.

Mark Spencer (Con, Sherwood) argued that the government was making progress, highlighting that the Home Office was listening on the issue of attacks on assistance dogs.

Spencer called on the minister to give consideration to retrospective action for silent vehicles already on the road.

Iain McKenzie (Lab, Inverclyde) argued that not everyone supported additional sounds.

"Opponents claim that artificial sounds will do more to cause noise pollution in the environment than aid pedestrians or other road users" he said.

He also called for clear definitions of a recognisable sound, to ensure that the sound conveyed distance, speed, acceleration or deceleration and the size of the vehicle to the pedestrian or other road user.

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