



Pollution drop: Shoppers and buses on Oxford Street *Peter Macdiarmid/Getty Images*

One of London's notoriously polluted streets has seen its toxic air levels drop by a third in just twelve months.

The switch from diesel to electric buses and reducing deliveries to the street's hundreds of shops is said to be behind the fall in nitrogen dioxide levels.

The Mayor of London, Sadiq Khan, has welcomed the clean-up but said there is still a long way to go until the street meets legal air quality levels.

He said: "The improvement in Oxford Street's air quality is welcome news and testament to the changes that we have been making not only in this area, but to the entire bus and taxi fleet in London.

"This is only the beginning and there's still a lot more work to be done in the battle against London's toxic air."



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Around 262 buses travel down the busy route every hour and Transport for London have ensured 70 per cent of vehicles either have electric or greener engines.

Readings taken by King's College London and London Air monitors show nitrogen dioxide released by vehicles was 135 micrograms per cubic metre of air in 2015, compared to 86 micrograms per cubic metre in 2016 - a drop of around 30 percent.

The street is still in breach of EU regulations on the number of hours each year it can surpass pollution levels, but it is making significant progress.

In 2015 safe pollution levels were breached for 1391 hours, and in 2016 this dropped to 163 hours - a decrease of 88 per cent.

In 2013 it was 1502 hours and in 2014 it was 1532 hours.

Leon Daniels, TfL's managing director for surface transport, said: "There is clearly a lot more to do.

"Our ambition is to transform Oxford Street for pedestrians, and as a first step we are consulting on plans that could see the number of

buses on Oxford Street reduced by 40 per cent. We're also helping to make London's taxis much cleaner.

"From January next year all brand new taxis will have to be zero emission capable."

Councillor Heather Acton, Cabinet Member for Sustainability and Parking for Westminster City Council, said they have been trying to improve air quality on Oxford Street for 15 years.

But their projects to curtail building emissions, reduce freight deliveries and waste collections and stop engine idling, has made a big difference to traffic volumes.

She said: "Levels of particulates in the air remain a problem, posing a major public health issue, so we need to continue to improve practices to reduce emissions from both buildings and road vehicles, as well as encourage people to change behaviour if we are to become a truly healthier, greener more liveable city."

Tim Baker from the Environmental Research Group at King's College London said: "The data for Oxford Street for 2016 is still provisional and needs to be analysed very carefully to determine exactly which changes had an impact and when.

'A fall in pollution levels on Oxford Street would provide a great opportunity to study which changes to the traffic fleet have had an impact, an answer that will have value not just in London but across the UK and Europe."

Mr Khan is also consulting on a T-charge, which is an emissions surcharge for older polluting vehicles entering the congestion charge zone, and has aims to pedestrianise Oxford Street by 2020.

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