

The highs and lows of LowCVP

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Now that the smoke has died down and the delegates have left the building - what's the lasting memory of this year's LowCVP annual conference?

[E019 Image 1](#)

For readers who were unable to attend the much-anticipated event, *MindsinMotion.net's* Gareth Chadwick gives us the inside story.

Talking figures

It got off to quite an intensive start with Ian Hodgson of the Clean Air and Transport group at the European Commission (DG ENV.C3, if you must know) stunning the audience into silence with his rather dry, fact-filled presentation on EU policy on the regulation of CO2 from cars, and the Car Labelling Directive.

Under the proposals he outlined, which were adopted by the Commission in December 2007, by 2012 the emissions for all new cars would be a maximum of 120 grams of CO2 per kilometre. However, if we understood it correctly (and please advise if we haven't), this would be the average emissions level for a single manufacturer (or consortium of manufacturers). Therefore, a car manufacturer could have some models with emissions above this level, as long as they were cancelled out by other models that were below the 120g level. There could also be a special exemption for small independent car producers. It is a long way from the adoption of a proposal to the implementation of new regulations, though, so let's see what happens in the next few months.

Government takes the stage

Next on the podium was Transport Minister Ruth Kelly, who [said much but promised little](#). She was followed by Kulveer Ranger, the transport advisor to Mayor of London Boris Johnson. Mr. Ranger said that the mayor's office was wholly supportive of the need to reduce transport carbon emissions, but that it did not see a low emissions zone as the way to do it. Instead, explained Ranger, the mayor was focusing on "encouraging modal shift," through investing in making other forms of transport more effective, managing traffic signals better and improving the organisation of roadworks. Does he understand the phrase "fiddling while Rome burns," we wonder?

Separating fact from myth

Professor Jim Skea gave one of the most informative presentations of the day, as he outlined the research he is undertaking at the UK Energy Research Centre. Professor Skea presented the initial findings of his research on the most effective kinds of policies in reducing car emissions. In doing so, he debunked a few myths that are trotted out all too often by authorities across Europe, such as "behaviour change can't make a big impact on carbon" (yes, it can, says Skea); "road user charges are effective at saving carbon" (only if supported by other policies, counters Skea); and "vehicle efficiency standards don't work" (Skea claims they do, if done properly).

IMPACT site a must-see

He ended by referring the audience to IMPACT (<http://impact-ukerc.org>), a still-under-construction website which should be stapled to the forehead of every transport policy-maker and authority in Europe. IMPACT stands for "Interactive Manual of Policies to Abate Carbon from Transport" and is basically the website for Skea's research findings about which policies are most successful – a virtual database of research and conclusions from sustainable transport initiatives all over the world. So the next time someone suggests giving a low carbon bus initiative a trial run to see if it is cost effective, direct them to IMPACT and tell them to spend their money on supporting second generation biofuels instead.

No tomatoes tossed at Gallagher

One of the big names at the conference was Professor Ed Gallagher, the author of the supposedly-controversial report on the sustainability of biofuels. However, it turns out that his report was not actually controversial at all. Gallagher essentially said that though first generation biofuels are not sustainable, second generation ones are. As a result, we need to be careful about setting strict biofuel targets in case we inadvertently encourage more production of first generation biofuels. Surprisingly, given the recent biofuels furore, there was not a single question at the end of his presentation. We have a question though: didn't we already know this?

Presenters eye public

The afternoon's debates were focused on public attitudes to low carbon cars, starting with Paul Everitt, chief executive of the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders. Everitt's presentation

was basically a defence of the industry's efforts to cut carbon emissions to date – well-meaning, but unconvincing.

[N143 Image 1](#)

He was followed by Dr. Jillian Anable, of Aberdeen University and UKERC, whose talk on "Why car buyers say they value fuel economy, but don't," ended with the somewhat-depressing conclusion that when we buy a car, we can't really be bothered working out its true fuel efficiency. Instead, our choice is guided by essentials like cup holders and silver speedometers.

Stop the spin

It was a theme which Jonathan Murray, deputy director of the LowCVP, picked up in his presentation on car advertising, which suggested that car manufacturers need to stop spinning the facts in their advertising, and start giving consumers robust, accurate, consistent data on car emissions. He did end, however, by pointing out that they are improving – slowly.

Finally, Helen Clark of the Department for Transport concluded the session by telling everyone what a great job her department was doing with informing consumers about cars and climate change. Well, she is deputy head of marketing after all.

The last session of the day was dominated by the "Big Debate: Can the road transport sector deliver enough carbon savings?" Unfortunately, we missed that one as we had to run and catch our train (now there's an under-researched idea for low carbon transport). At a guess, we'd say the answer was "no."