

# Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee

5th Meeting, 2023 (Session 6), Wednesday 22  
March 2023

## PE1944: Enforce engine idling ban

<b>Lodged on</b>	8 August 2022
<b>Petitioner</b>	Alan Ross
<b>Petition summary</b>	<p>Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to enforce the engine idling ban and take action to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Introduce instant £80 fines for offences</li><li>- Reclassify idling as a high traffic offence</li><li>- Legally oblige local authorities to enforce the engine idling ban</li><li>- Create contact points for public reporting</li><li>- Increase anti-idling signage in public spaces</li></ul>
<b>Webpage</b>	<a href="https://petitions.parliament.scot/petitions/PE1944">https://petitions.parliament.scot/petitions/PE1944</a>

### Introduction

1. The Committee last considered this petition at its meeting on [28 September 2022](#). At that meeting, the Committee agreed to write to COSLA, the RAC Foundation, and Professor Adrian Davis (Napier University).
2. The petition summary is included in **Annexe A** and the Official Report of the Committee's last consideration of this petition is at **Annexe B**.
3. The Committee has received new responses from COSLA and Professor Adrian Davis which are set out in **Annexe C**.
4. Written submissions received prior to the Committee's last consideration can be found on the petition's [webpage](#).
5. Further background information about this petition can be found in the [SPICe briefing](#) for this petition.
6. The Scottish Government's initial position on this petition can be found on the petition's [webpage](#).

## Action

The Committee is invited to consider what action it wishes to take.

**Clerk to the Committee**

# Annexe A

## PE1944: Enforce engine idling ban

### Petitioner

Alan Ross

### Date lodged

8 August 2022

### Petition summary

Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to enforce the engine idling ban and take action to:

- Introduce instant £80 fines for offences
- Reclassify idling as a high traffic offence
- Legally oblige local authorities to enforce the engine idling ban
- Create contact points for public reporting
- Increase anti-idling signage in public spaces

### Previous action

I contacted John Swinney. His office responded to say that engine idling is already illegal and that councils already have the authority to issue fixed penalties. Local councils have stated that the legal powers to stop vehicles and check emissions are discretionary and local authorities have to apply to the government if they wish to use them.

### Background information

Engine idling has become a national epidemic which poisons the air we breathe and reduces our children's chances of surviving the escalating Climate Crisis.

The current law prohibiting idling is not fit for purpose, is futile and ignored by most councils and the police. Indeed the police routinely refuse to address it. Those councils that do take action are only scratching the surface of the issue.

We are in a Climate and Ecological Emergency that demands Emergency Action!

The 2021 IPCC report - "Code Red for Humanity" spells it out in simple terms. Our governments have failed to take the actions necessary to reduce emissions to limit global warming to a 1.5 degree rise. Engine idling is a perfect example of incompetent leadership in an emergency.

The true scale of idling in Scotland revealed that 1 in 5 drivers at some supermarkets left engines idling whilst they or partners went shopping.

## Annexe B

### Extract from Official Report of last consideration of PE1944 on 28<sup>th</sup> September 2022

**The Convener:** PE1944, which has been lodged by Alan Ross, calls on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to enforce the engine idling ban and take action to introduce instant £80 fines for offences; reclassify idling as a high traffic offence; legally oblige local authorities to enforce the engine idling ban; create contact points for public reporting; and increase anti-idling signage in public spaces.

The SPICe briefing explains that statistics on engine idling enforcement action are not routinely published but that FOI requests indicate that fixed-penalty notices are rarely, if ever, issued.

In response to the petition, the Scottish Government states that the current approach to enforcement is fit for purpose and proportionate, with penalties being viewed primarily as a deterrent. The response states that local authorities undertake educational and awareness-raising campaigns to prevent idling and target enforcement in areas of known concern.

The petitioner believes that the response is inadequate and does not address the petition's proposals or reflect the gravity of the issue. He points to the rise in the number of vehicles on the roads since the legislation was updated, in 2003, and to the health risks associated with inhaling car fumes. He also raises enforcement issues and stresses the climate impacts.

In my experience, since 2003, a lot of cars now cut out automatically to prevent engine idling. The manufacturers have incorporated into the mechanics of more recently produced vehicles an engine idling cut-out facility.

Do members have any views on the petition or on what we might do next?

**David Torrance:** Could the committee keep the petition open for now, to give us a chance to write to COSLA, the RAC Foundation and Professor Adrian Davis of Edinburgh Napier University, seeking their views on the action called for in the petition?

**The Convener:** Are members content to do so?

**Members** *indicated agreement.*

**The Convener:** We will write as Mr Torrance has suggested, keep the petition open and consider it afresh when we hear from those bodies.

## Annexe C

### Professor Adrian Davis submission of 10

October 2022

#### PE1944/C: Enforce engine idling ban

**Headline:** Localised education and promotion programmes to discourage idling by parent/carers close to schools have had limited impact in terms of improvements in air quality. City-wide or national-wide banning of idling combined with fear of fines, and environmental awareness appear to be most effective. The petition is supported on the basis of scientific evidence.

#### **Detail**

Air pollution has a major negative impact on society, and idling engines are a contributor to air pollution. During idling, petrol vehicles emit a minimum amount of nitrogen oxides (NO<sub>x</sub>) and negligible particulate matter (PM). Petrol vehicles consume far more fuel at an hourly rate than their diesel counterparts during idling. Higher NO<sub>x</sub> and comparatively larger PM are produced by diesel vehicles than petrol vehicles on average during idling.<sup>i</sup> Health costs resulting from exposure to air pollution totalled more than £20 billion and contribute to approximately 40 000 deaths per year (at 2016 estimates).<sup>ii</sup>

Highway Code Rule 123 addresses 'The Driver and the Environment', stating that drivers must not leave a parked vehicle unattended with the engine running or leave a vehicle engine running unnecessarily while the vehicle is stationary on a public road. The RAC says most instances of idling engines come from 'avoidable' road situations such as waiting to pick someone up outside a workplace or school. However, fines are imposed only if a motorist refuses to switch off their engine when asked to do so by an authorised person. RAC research found that [26% of those caught idling are spotted doing so outside schools](#).<sup>iii</sup>

Previous attempts to address vehicle idling through public education have had some limited success. For example, a campaign targeting idling in school parking lots in one Canadian suburb resulted in a 34%

decline in the number of vehicles observed idling while waiting, and a decrease in the average amount of time spent idling from 3.7 to 2.5 minutes.<sup>iv</sup> The long term effectiveness is unknown. If rolled out nationally, however, the researchers note that there would be significant air quality and Greenhouse Gas emission (GHG) reductions. Other research has found that anti-idling campaigns are effective in reducing PM<sub>2.5</sub> and carbon and particle number concentrations at schools with significant amounts of passenger cars and buses – so long as campaign lasts.<sup>v, vi</sup> In the UK, a large-scale field experiment assessed the effectiveness of three interventions (outcome efficacy, self-regulation, and social norm messages) designed to decrease engine idling.<sup>vii</sup> The researchers observed whether the drivers turned off their idling engine while waiting, and also recorded air quality at the railway crossings. Three messages were trialled:

*Social norm message:* “Join other responsible drivers in Canterbury. Turn off your engine when the barriers are down”

*Outcome efficacy message:* “Turn off your engine when the barriers are down. You will improve air quality in the area”

*Self-regulation message:* “Think about your actions. When the barriers are down please turn off your engine”

The social norm and outcome efficacy messages reduced engine idling rates compared to baseline by up to 42%. The self-regulation message only led to small variations. These behavioral changes translated into a reduction in PM<sub>2.5</sub> concentrations while drivers were waiting for barriers to rise at railway crossings. Hence, this research demonstrated that using psychologically relevant messages on road signage can successfully reduce engine idling and improve air quality.

The Taiwanese government adopted an idling reduction policy in 2011 to curb GHG emissions from motorized vehicles.<sup>viii</sup> The policy states that parked vehicles, excluding those waiting at red lights, shall turn off their engines after 3 minutes. Evidence found that the most important factor influencing minimal acceptable time before switching off the engine, after fear of being fined, was environmental perceptions.

Note that a recurring issue is that short-term campaigns mean that effects of messages decay within weeks of campaigns ending. This is a risk where there is no enforcement or longer term programme.

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<sup>i</sup> Shancita, I., et al 2014. A review on idling reduction strategies to improve fuel economy and reduce exhaust emissions of transport vehicles, *Energy Conservation & Management*, 88: 794-807.

<sup>ii</sup> Royal College of Physicians, Every breath you take, London: RCP.

<sup>iii</sup> [Engine idling - why it's so harmful and what's being done | RAC Drive](#) accessed 07/10/2022

<sup>iv</sup> Carrico, A., et al, 2009. Costly myths: An analysis of idling beliefs and behaviour in personal motor vehicles, *Energy Policy*, 37(8): 2881-2888.

<sup>v</sup> Ryan, et al. 2013. The impact of an anti-idling campaign on outdoor air quality at four urban schools, *Environmental Science: Processes and Impacts*, 15: 2030-2037.

<sup>vi</sup> Ryan, P. et al 2013.

<sup>vii</sup> Abrams, D., Lalot, F., Hophthrow, T. et al 2021 Cleaning up our acts: Psychological interventions to reduce engine idling and improve air quality, *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, 74: 101587

<sup>viii</sup> Jou., R-C., Wu, Y-C., Liu, J-L., 2014. Minimum acceptable time for turning off idling engines: Evidence from Taiwan, *Transport Research Part D: Transport & Environment*, 30: 62-71.

## COSLA submission 28 October 2022

### PE1944/D: Enforce engine idling ban

- We are grateful for the opportunity to consider and share a Local Government perspective on this petition.
- COSLA does not have an official position on a ban on engine idling. However, our stated net zero and public health objectives are in line with reducing emissions from cars. We are also clear about our support for the sustainable travel hierarchy which seeks to minimise car use. COSLA has also developed, with Scottish Government, the joint route map to reducing car kilometres 20% by 2030. As a result, we understand the petitioners desire to see less engine idling in their communities. Looking specifically at the asks in the petition, this response will primarily address the call to “*legally oblige local authorities to enforce the engine idling ban*”.
- Currently Local Authorities have the discretionary power, but not the legal obligation, to enforce a ban on engine idling. It would not be a simple matter if it were to become a statutory duty. To do so would require a step change in resources and, without clarity on additional flexible resources, it will be difficult to support the call. To be a success, any ban would need to be supported by a high profile, national information campaign.

- Local Authority budgets across Scotland are increasingly stretched and challenging decisions are being taken on what to focus on. If enforcing the ban were to become a legal obligation, additional funding would need to be allocated. As it stands, many Local Authorities simply do not have the additional resources or staff capacity that would be required.
- The differences in enforcing the ban in rural and urban settings should also be considered, particularly considering the difference in costs or administrative time that ensuring full compliance with the ban would necessitate. This would clearly have significant consequences on the cost of enforcement for different Local Authorities.
- We understand that several councils have used the discretionary powers afforded to them to advise motorists to stop idling or issuing them with official guidance on the ban as opposed to issuing fines in the first instance. We note that the petition calls for the introduction of “*instant £80 fines for offences*” whilst the current legislation calls for fines as a last resort or for repeat offenders. As there may be road users unaware of the ban an alternative approach may be to have a new communication campaign to show the harmful effects of air pollution from motor vehicles.