

Uber adds to pollution and traffic in European cities too

A cross-continental coalition of green NGOs launch a campaign to clean up new taxi companies such as Uber

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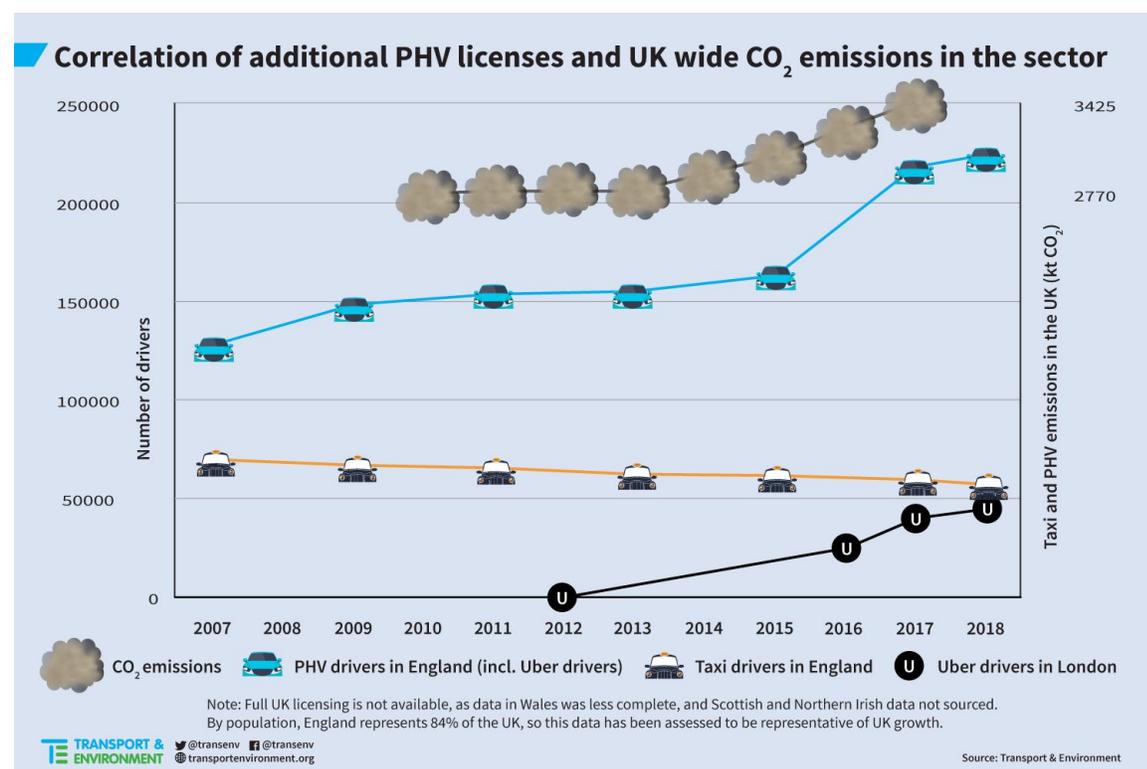
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<https://www.transportenvironment.org/press/uber-adds-pollution-and-traffic-european-cities-too>

Uber is adding more polluting car trips to already-clogged European cities such as London and Paris, new analysis suggests - contributing to air pollution and climate change and exploding the company's sustainability claims.

[Data compiled](#) by Euromonitor for European research and campaign group Transport & Environment (T&E) shows a surge in the number of Uber drivers (officially registered as private hire vehicles - PHV) in the past few years. In France, which liberalised the taxi market in 2015, the number of reported PHV drivers doubled in three years (from more than 15,000 in 2016 to 30,000 in 2019) [1]. The number of Uber drivers in London almost doubled in three years (from 25,000 in 2016 to 45,000 in 2018), accounting for roughly half the total PHV licence number.

This has made Uber one of the biggest taxi services in Europe, with 3.6 million users in London in 2019 and with 2.7 million users in France in 2017. According to company documents issued for its stock market launch, Uber is looking to massively increase its operations worldwide and is eyeing Europe in particular, identifying [Germany, Spain and Italy](#) as priority markets for expansion.



But whilst the number of taxi licenses was historically capped through licenses [2], Uber has seen rapid growth [3]. Since Uber's arrival in London, its biggest European market, taxi and PHV trips have increased by roughly 25% in the capital. This data strongly correlates with a 23% increase in overall CO2 emissions for the taxi and PHV sector in the UK in the same period.

The analysis estimates that in London and Paris alone, the emissions of Uber taxi services could be as high as half a megatonne of CO2 - 515 kilotonnes of CO2. This is equivalent to adding the CO2 emissions of an extra 250,000 privately owned cars to the road.

These kilometers have predominantly been driven by petrol and diesel cars, exacerbating the [air pollution crisis](#) in European cities. Worryingly, French government data from 2017 show that 90% of the registered private hire vehicles, which includes Uber, were diesel cars. The high share of diesels in the PHV fleet can be also found in the traditional taxi market. It's thought that other European cities where Uber operates have similar levels of diesels in their fleet.

Yoann Le Petit, new mobility expert with T&E, said: *"Uber's CEO tells us they 'do the right thing, period.' But the reality is that Uber is part of the traffic and pollution problem, adding car trips in our cities and adding to the climate and pollution crisis. If it wants to become part of the solution Uber needs to stop using petrol and diesel cars and rapidly shift to 100% electric rides. That's the right thing to do, full stop."*

The findings confirm that cities in Europe face the same challenges as American ones, such as [New York](#), [Boston](#), [Chicago](#), and [San Francisco](#), where Uber and Lyft have been shown to exacerbate pollution and congestion.

Global NGO campaign urges Uber to go clean and stop running dirty cars in our cities

A broad coalition of green NGOs in the US, Germany, France, the UK, The Netherlands and Belgium today launched the #TrueCostOfUber campaign. This collective action aims to tell concerned citizens and city authorities that Uber needs to clean up its act in order to operate in cities across Europe and the US. The company therefore needs to help their drivers switch to zero-emission cars as it is already [doing in London](#) thanks to the ultra-low emission zone in the capital.

The campaign in Europe calls on Uber to go 100% clean in large cities by 2025 [5].

The coalition includes organisations such as the Sierra Club, Nabu, Respire, MilieuDefensie, Bond Beter Leefmilieu, Les Chercheurs d'Air and Transport & Environment. These organisations will take the campaign to the cities of Paris, Brussels, Berlin, Amsterdam, Antwerp, Manchester, amongst others, urging local authorities to clean up Uber.

Rebekah Whilden, campaign representative with the Sierra Club (USA), said: *"Uber and Lyft aren't fooling anyone anymore with their greenwashing. Cities and countries around the world are beginning to see the companies for what they are: Corporate players putting profit over planet. You can't claim sustainability if the data proves you're doing the opposite-- reducing transit ridership, worsening our air quality, and mistreating the people at the heart of your business model."*

Pierre Dornier, president of the citizens movement Les chercheurs d'air (Brussels), said: *"Brussels, the capital of Europe, seriously suffers from air pollution and congestion. It cannot afford companies like Uber adding to the diesel and gasoline cars on its streets. Uber must be part of the solution, not the problem."*

Justyna Wladarz, transport policy expert at NABU (Germany), said: *"Uber is a wolf in sheep's clothing - it says it wants sustainable mobility, but what it really does is adding as many cars as possible to our already highly congested and polluted cities."*

Olivier Blond, president of Respire (France), said: *"Diesel kills. Uber should not be a part of the air pollution problem. The company should stop using these dirty cars, and especially in densely populated urban areas like Paris, they are very inefficient. Solutions exist for citizens and for drivers"*.

Greg Archer, director of Transport & Environment UK, said: *"Forced by London's clean air rules, Uber has already committed to 100% clean rides in London by 2025. This proves that it is a financially viable option for the company. If it wasn't, they would have pulled out of the market already. So our question to Uber is: why not Bristol, Birmingham, Manchester and Leeds? Are those second-class citizens? Are their lungs any different?"*

Laurien Spruyt, climate & mobility policy officer at Bond Beter Leefmilieu (Belgium), said: *"Many Flemish cities have been working towards electrifying taxis for years now. They are also introducing measures to reduce car traffic in order to improve air quality. The upcoming liberalisation of the taxi market in January threatens to wipe out these efforts. We urge Uber, if they choose to come to Flanders, to make the right decision right from the start and to only use electric cars."*

Diesel engines are the main source of nitrogen dioxide emissions (NO₂). According to the European Environment Agency, exposure to NO₂ caused the premature deaths of an estimated 79,000 people across 41 European countries in 2015.

Transport is [Europe's biggest climate problem](#), representing more than a quarter (27%) of the bloc's total greenhouse gas emissions. Cars emit 44% of transport emissions and are still rising. If the EU is to achieve the Paris Agreement goals of limiting global temperature rise to 1.5°C, car emissions must be zero by 2050 at the latest, meaning the last diesel or petrol car should be sold ideally by 2030, and by 2035 at the latest.

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Notes to Editors:

[1] Uber doesn't disclose the exact number of drivers working for them - actually, the company doesn't disclose much data on its operations. Based on media reports and official databases, in 2019 the total number of private hire vehicles was 30,000, of which 28,000 were working with the Uber app.

[2] Taxi licences are regulated in Paris and London and have remained stable at about 17,000 and 21,000 respectively.

[3] Taxi-style services account for 10-20% of traffic in European cities. In the EU, average motorists drive circa 12,000km per year; whereas an average taxi and PHV driver completes about 48,000 km a year in London and 31,000 km in Brussels. This figure is higher in other countries like France (58,000 km for PHVs and 69,000 km for taxis) and the Netherlands (61,000 km).

[4] Additionally, Uber should commit to:

- Working with public transport agencies - beyond just small pilots - to meaningfully reduce vehicle miles traveled in all major cities where Uber operates and to not target public transport riders in advertising and marketing;
- At least 50% shared rides by 2030 by creating policies that incentivise pooled rides on the platform;
- All autonomous vehicles on the platform being electric and predominantly shared vehicles only;
- Ensuring that Uber's policies toward these ends do not harm drivers or riders or get in the way of the drivers on the platform earning a living wage;
- Sharing essential, up-to-date operation data with public transport authorities. This includes e.g. number of trips, trip origin and destination, time and duration of trips, trip distance, number of vehicles available in the service, number of drivers available in the service, and number of users.

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