

Bus operators call for congestion

charges to be nationwide

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By Oliver Gill

CONGESTION charge zones urgently need to be widely implemented in towns and cities to meet climate change goals, ministers have been told.

A £7 daily fee for motorists across parts of the country is being proposed by bus operators.

It is part of a radical package of "carrot-and-stick" measures to make buses more attractive in a report shared by bus industry bosses with the

Government last week. Failure to implement the reforms would mean falling significantly short of zero-emission targets, the analysis claimed.

Britain's first congestion charge was introduced in Durham in 2002 to aid its 1,000-year-old crumbling roads. London's followed a year later.

Since then a handful of cities have introduced "clean air" or "low emission" zones such as Bath, Bristol and Portsmouth. These schemes target cars that fail to meet minimum emissions

standards rather than all vehicles. Cambridge, meanwhile, has broken the mould by proposing a £5 charge on drivers in a "sustainable travel zone" intended to free up space for pedestrians, cyclists and public transport.

Boris Johnson, the former prime minister and a long-time advocate of greater bus use, promised a "bus revolution" by pledging £3bn for zero-emission vehicles and the building of infrastructure such as bus lanes. But his flagship public transport policy,

announced more than 18 months ago, is yet to reach 31 of 79 local councils.

WPI Economics, which prepared the report, said: "Without a significant step-change to government policy, decarbonisation targets will not be met."

The Confederation of Passenger Transport, which commissioned the report, said: "UK decision-makers should not park bus policy packages but see them as fair and achievable measures to slash carbon, generate tax, create more jobs and make us all healthier."