



LowCVP's Andy Eastlake What a Westminster month!

If a week is a long time in politics, then the last month might be described as an epoch. Brexit vote, leadership battles, a new Prime Minister and a wholesale shake up of the government departments and ministers might leave you reeling. And as I write this we have just had the confirmation that transport minister portfolios are changing too.

The merger of the Department of Energy (and Climate Change?) with the Department for Business and much political upheaval elsewhere, left us without a specific titular department for Climate Change, which superficially might seem a concern, however in all our discussions across a range of department officials, it is clear that climate change and air quality remain of critical concern.

So where does this leave us in terms of the prospects for the low carbon vehicle and fuels agenda? Well, it's clear that if and when we leave the European Union there will be significant differences but, I believe, the overriding direction of travel is very unlikely to change.

UK policy in this area is anchored by the 2008 Climate Act, which provides an example for many other countries in the world about where we are headed. The Climate Act provides a legal framework for reducing carbon emissions to very low levels by 2050 and the specific target for 2028-32 (CB5) has just been approved in the knowledge that further policies and more dramatic carbon reductions, especially in transport, are undoubtedly needed in order to reach it, irrespective of EU requirements.

While the decision to abolish DECC may send a concerning signal on one level, its amalgamation with BEIS (the acronym I hope, is going to sound like 'beers' when spoken quickly – that's one department in which I wouldn't mind a role!) provides an opportunity to embed the low carbon agenda squarely into our industrial strategy. It is a significant change too, that the new government has clearly signalled the need for an active industrial strategy by embedding the words into the name of the new department.

Speaking at the recent LowCVP Annual Conference, the IPPR's Michael Jacobs said that while there are many uncertainties, the agenda will continue to be driven by the 2008 Climate Act. In the current unstable political environment, he said, the Government is particularly eager to find areas where it can provide policy certainty and clear direction. So in view of the recent success of the UK automotive sector, the drive for low carbon vehicles and fuels provides a clear opportunity for the Government and business to do more of this.

So whatever your views on 'Brexit' and the upheavals that have followed, I urge you to keep the faith and your focus on the low carbon transport future because now more than ever, the undoubted benefits to the UK are needed.

FURTHER INFORMATION

For more details on the outputs from the LowCVP's 2016 Annual Conference see: <http://www.lowcvp.org.uk/events/conference16.htm>