

Cairngorms National Park Partnership Plan
2017-2022

**Final Strategic Environmental Assessment
Environmental Report**

Appendix 2: Environmental Baseline
Topic 2: Air

April 2017

THE
BIG 9

Topic 2: Air

“In order to protect human health and the environment as a whole, it is particularly important to combat emissions of pollutants at source...”

Ambient air quality and cleaner air for Europe Directive (2008/50/EC).

Air pollution results from the introduction of a range of substances into the atmosphere from a wide variety of sources, including industry, transport and power generation. Even domestic activities such as driving, heating and cooking contribute, as do natural sources like sea salt, wildfires, volcanic activity, soil erosion and farming (Scottish Government, 2015).

Poor air quality can have both short term and long term effects on health. In general, healthy people may not suffer from any serious ill effects; however people with pre-existing health conditions (e.g. heart disease, lung conditions and asthma) may be affected by day to day changes in air pollution levels. It is estimated that in 2010,

particulate matter in the air (PM₁₀ and PM_{2.5}) could have caused the deaths of 2,094 people in Scotland.

Air pollution can also damage the wider environment, causing the acidification of soils and water, damaging plant and animal life in forests, lakes and rivers. It can also add nutrients to soil, which can affect biodiversity. Air pollution can also damage the fabric of buildings and historic monuments (Scottish Government, 2014).

The air quality objectives for Scotland are set out in the Air Quality (Scotland) Regulations 2000 and its 2002 Amendment. The main pollutants of concern are:

- Nitrogen oxides (NO_x);
- Particulate matter (PM₁₀ and PM_{2.5});
- Sulphur dioxide (SO₂);
- Non-methane volatile organic compounds (NMVOCs);
- Ground-level ozone (O₃) and
- Ammonia (NH₃)

Scotland’s air quality is generally better now than it has been at any time since before

the Industrial Revolution, with increasingly strict controls over industrial emissions, tighter fuel and emission standards for road vehicles and the control of smoke from domestic premises yielding positive results. Between 1990 and 2012 significant reductions were seen in the emissions of particulates (-59%), nitrogen oxides (-65%) and sulphur dioxide (-79%) (Sailsbury *et al.* 2014).

Human exposure to air pollution is now largely associated with transport emissions. The effects of this pollution are not confined to Scotland’s cities but occur in many of the country’s built areas. Where air quality objectives are not being met, Local Authorities have a duty under section 83(10) of the Environment Act 1995 to designate Air Quality Management Areas (AQMAs), where plans must be implemented to improve air quality. All air quality objectives are currently being met within the Cairngorms National Park and therefore no AQMAs exist within its boundary (the

nearest AQMAs are located in Aberdeen and Inverness). It is therefore unlikely that the NPPP will cause air quality objectives to be exceeded.

Nevertheless, the influence spatial planning has over traffic levels means that air quality could be a policy concern. In particular, the potential for increasing pollutants associated with traffic emissions such as PM₁₀ (Figure 20) and Nitrogen dioxide (NO₂) (Figure 21) needs to be given consideration. Spatial data on the emission of both is available from the UK National Atmospheric Emissions Inventory for 2012. As might be expected, the highest emissions for both are located along the A9 and within National Park’s main settlements of Aviemore, Granttown-on-Spey and Ballater, where traffic volumes are greatest.

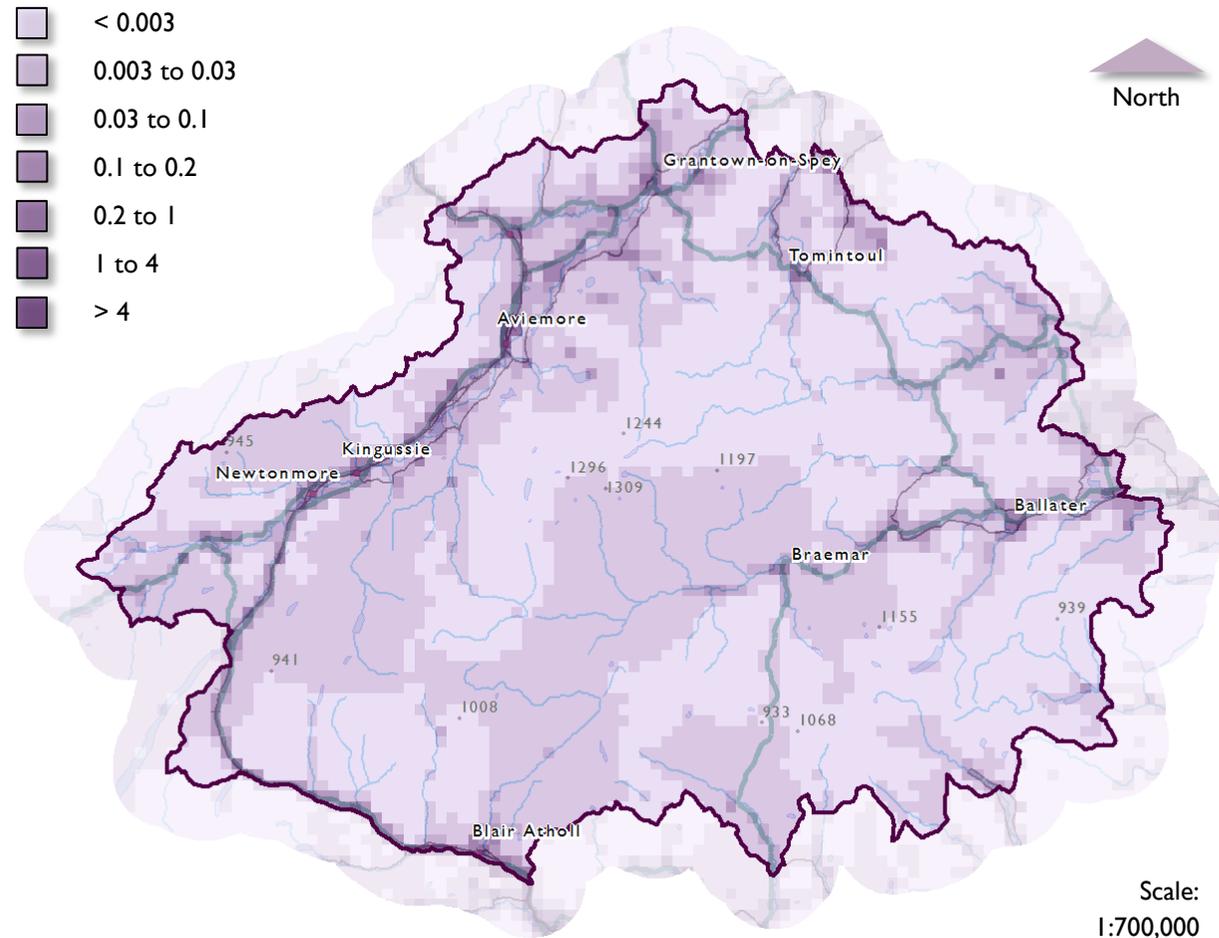


Figure 20 Emissions of PM₁₀ in tonnes in the Cairngorms National Park in 2012.

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Scottish Household Survey data for 2012 / 2013 (Scottish Government, 2014) indicates that private motorised vehicle use is the main mode of transport for the LAs that cover the National Park's area, ranging from around 77% in Aberdeenshire to around 65% in Highland. While specific data for the National Park is unavailable, it is assumed that due to the area's rurality, a similar level of use exists within its boundary. Indeed, Census information collected on household access to cars or vans supports this assumption (see **Topic 5: Material Asset**, p. 129) Road traffic is on the increase across Scotland (Transport Scotland, 2014) and owing to population growth and increasing visitor numbers, is also likely to rise within the National Park over the Plan period. It is estimated that the A9 alone will see a growth in traffic in the region of 10 to 15%, even without the effects of the planned dualling (Transport Scotland, 2013).

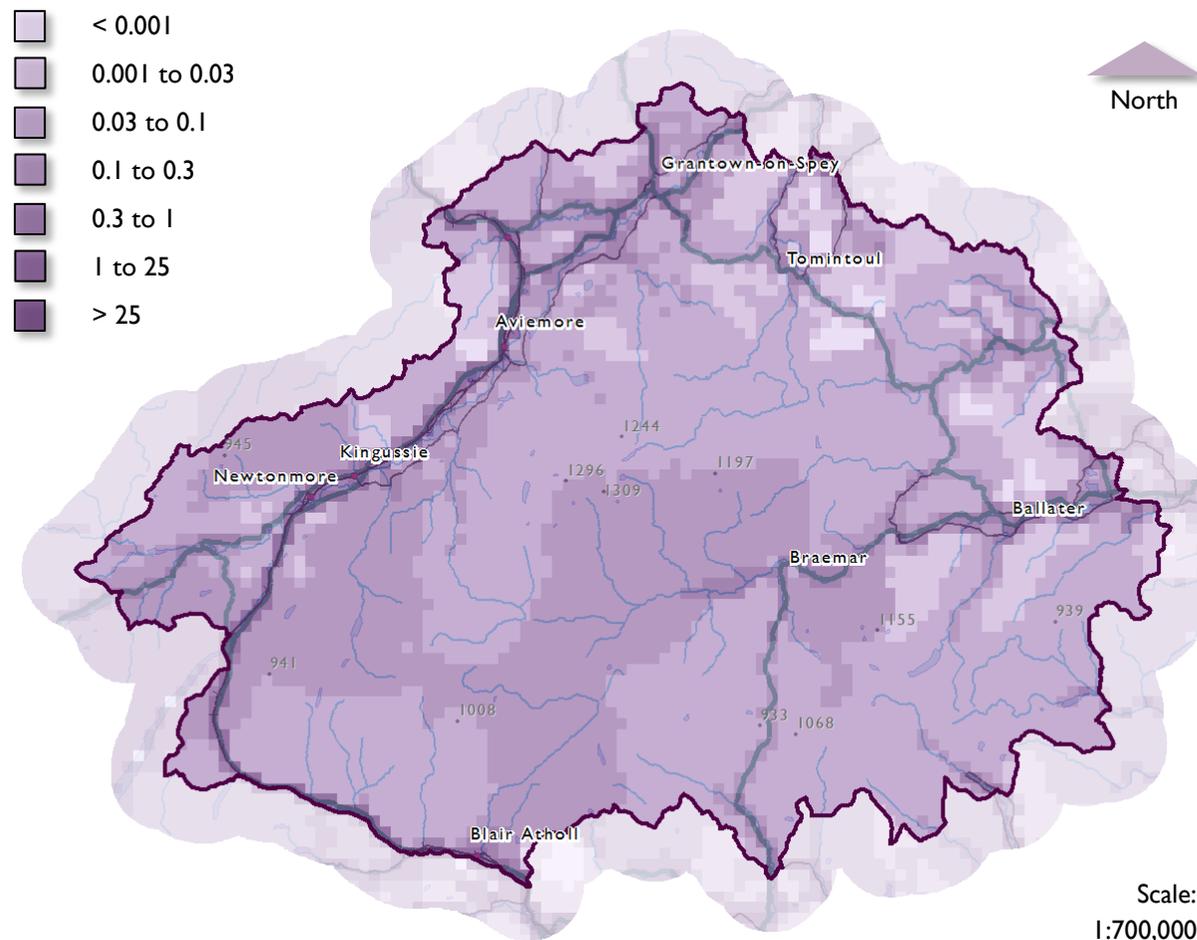


Figure 21 Emissions of Nitrogen Oxides (NO_x) as NO₂ in tonnes in the Cairngorms National Park in 2012.

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The Plan's spatial strategy will therefore need to carefully consider its impact on traffic levels and seek to avoid adverse effects on air quality. It will also need to consider its relationship with the A9 Dualling Strategy (Transport Scotland, 2015), which is predicted to result in a reduction in ambient roadside carbon, NO_x and particulate levels through resultant improved traffic flows (Transport Scotland, 2013).

Key Messages

Air pollution is relatively low within the Cairngorms National Park, with no AQMAs within its boundary. However, there are localised areas along the main transport corridors where pollutants related to vehicle use are high enough to generate concern should they not be managed appropriately.

The NPPP may have an influence over air quality both on its own and in combination with other PPS such as the A9 Dualling Strategy. The Plan's ability to influence the level and distribution of development as well as its aim to encourage greater visitor numbers to the National Park, means that spatial options should be carefully considered.

Inter-relationships with other topics

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