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Air Pollution from Traffic: *Knesset* Passes Amendment to Traffic Order

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On February 18 2007 the *Knesset* (the Israeli Parliament) passed an amendment to the Traffic Order that will allow local authorities to take independent measures to tackle air pollution from traffic in their area. The amendment significantly expands the authority of municipalities and allows them to manage traffic in their jurisdiction in order to reduce pollution, as part of a multi-year plan for air pollution control.

According to the amendment, districts with more than 100,000 inhabitants are obliged to draw up a plan for the reduction of air pollution, while districts with more than 30,000 inhabitants will be granted the authority, but will be under no obligation to do so. Each authority that draws up such a plan must present it for public comment before its implementation.

The increased level of control allows authorities to close areas within their jurisdiction to all traffic or polluting vehicles. In addition, they can restrict the number of vehicles entering their jurisdiction, particularly in heavily polluted areas. They can also set specific hours and days when restrictions apply. On the enforcement side, local government personnel will be trained and given increased authority, including the power temporarily to confiscate vehicles and prevent their entrance into designated areas. These officers will also enforce the order against drivers of private cars using the lanes designated for public transport only.

The amendment of the Traffic Order provides that fines collected from drivers violating the order will be transferred to a fund that is to be established by the local authorities. Fifty percent of the funds will be used to encourage the use of public transport by improving infrastructure and subsidizing tickets.

The amendment no longer refers to a proposal to introduce tolls for vehicles entering cities. This is because it makes no sense to impose tolls on citizens who want to use their cars when there is an insufficient public transport system. However, once the infrastructure for public transport has improved, stricter rules will be applied in order to encourage its use.