

Is it right that children should be poisoned so that people can get to work, the pub or the shops without any effort? Most people would say no, but then grab their car keys and do just that.

On Monday, the Mercury published a pollution map of Leicester. Several areas look likely to breach government air safety levels next year and the city council says a quarter of a million short car trips a day into the city are the main cause.

The AA says that vehicles are getting cleaner. That's true, but catalytic convertors that take pollutants from exhaust fumes don't start working until they are warm - usually after about ten miles.

Zoe Cantrell, a teenager living on Leicester's most polluted road, Glenhills Way, believes traffic fumes make her asthma worse while a Leicester university study - still underway - appears to show that the growth of children's lungs is harmed by pollution. Yet still people persist in driving to destinations that are just a mile away.

Motoring brings freedom, but why should this be at the expense of other people's health especially when there are adequate means of doing short trips i.e. by foot? It is time that driving short distances without good reasons i.e. ill health or heavy loads is seen as just as anti-social as smoking among a crowd of non-smokers.

Most people accept that it is wrong to drop litter, to pump toxins into rivers and discharge sewage into the seas. I believe that it is equally unacceptable to pollute the air that we breathe if it can be avoided

I add "if it can be avoided" because it isn't easy to do without a car completely. Public transport in this country is suffering death by a thousand cuts. Every week another little piece of the network goes - the last mile of the number 81 bus route serving Braunstone Town being one of the latest casualties. This just leaves the most profitable routes, but the profitability of these routes are undermined by the loss of less used lines.

For example, once you have travelled from Leicester to Market Harborough by train, you still need to get from the station to your final destination - and then you find there's no bus, so next time you take the car.

Not enough is done to promote cycling. I doubt a month goes by that someone doesn't complain in the Mercury about cyclists on the pavement, particularly New Walk in Leicester. There is no excuse for cycling in a way that scares pedestrians, but the way some motorists drive is an excuse for cycling on the pavement.

You have to have a death wish to cycle along London Road and no money has been put into a safe alternative such as cycle-bridge over Waterloo Way as suggested by one Mercury reader last week.

I want to see non-car transport given the same priority by government as health and education because it is just as vital to healthy, economically-successful society, but ministers can't see beyond the bonnets of their cars.