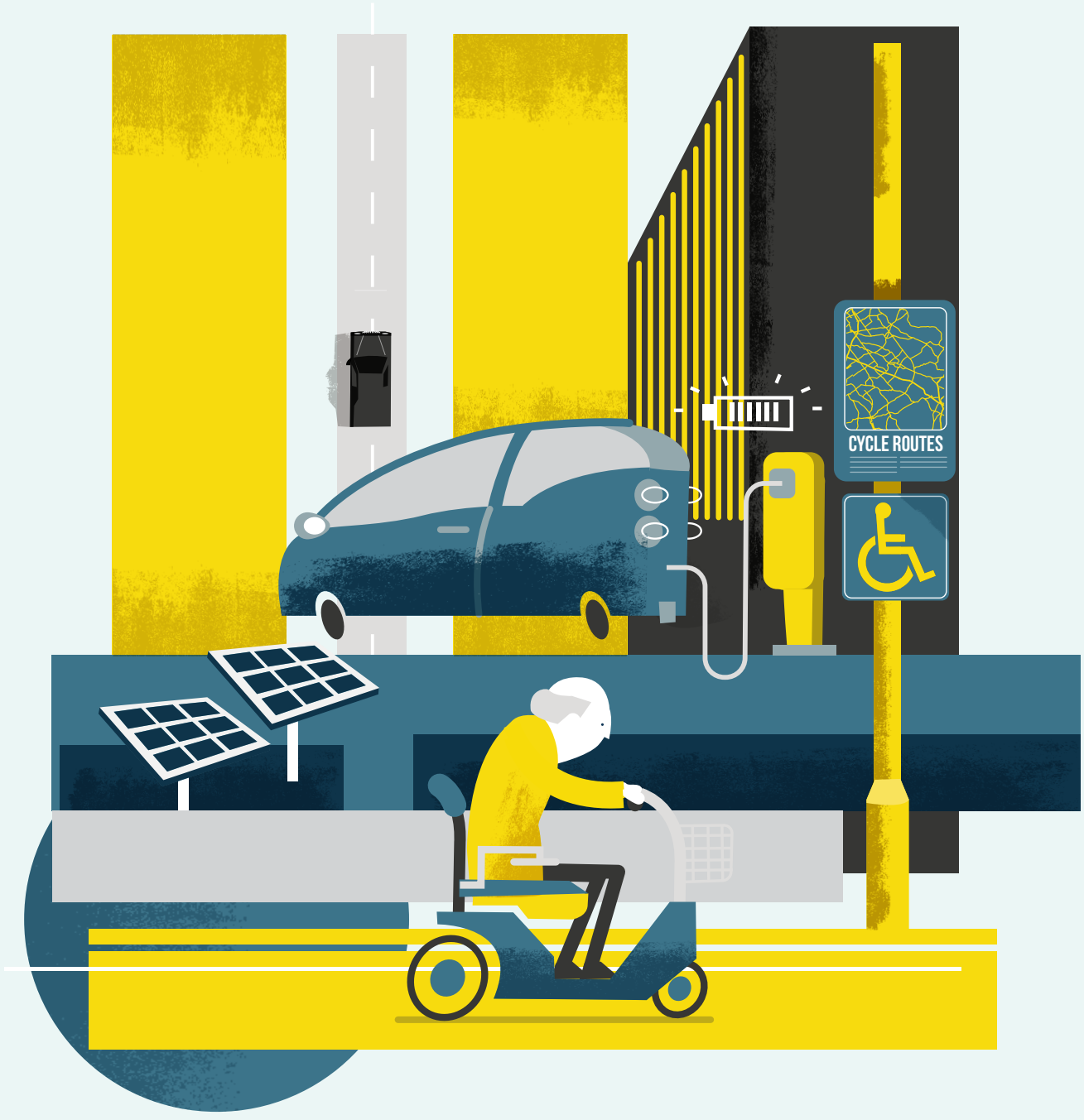
Technology and the environment



6.1 Energy

We should transition from vehicles powered by fossil fuels to a network powered by renewable electricity or other renewable fuels as the technology becomes available. Reducing the need to travel by energy-intensive means will minimise the city's contribution to climate change.

The city should support electric cars by planning and incentivising the provision of charging points across the city. However, a fair balance must be struck between subsidising electric cars (which remain comparatively expensive) and supporting people who use cheaper modes, such as walking, cycle and use public transport. After all, electric cars take up the same amount of room as cars powered by fossil fuels. Offering free parking to electric cars is unlikely to be sustainable in the medium term.

6.2 Air quality

Through introduction of a Clean Air Zone and charging for use of heavily polluting vehicles, the Council will discourage the use of vehicles that emit high quantities of harmful pollutants in those areas where these pollutants pose a significant risk to public health. Buses, taxis, light goods vehicles and private hire vehicles should be converted to low and ultra-low emission standards.

Electric vehicles are not a panacea for the city's air quality as a proportion of pollutants are produced by braking systems, rubber tyres and road materials. Promoting public transport, walking and cycling will remain critical to improving the city's air quality in the long term.

6.3 Autonomous and connected vehicles

Transport technologies are constantly evolving, and autonomous technology is already widely used in the rail industry. It could revolutionise the operation of rail, bus and any new light rail services in the Leeds City Region by lowering operating costs and enhancing safety, especially on routes where public transport is separated from general traffic.

In the near future, it is possible that autonomous vehicles will begin using our streets. This could help to make our roads safer, reduce the incentive for people to own cars and allow vehicles to be used more efficiently. The rise of autonomous cars could complement the growth of public transport and active modes in the city. We welcome the use of new technology where it supports our principles.

However, new technologies will also present Leeds with challenges. The case that autonomous vehicles will be safer for all road users, including pedestrians and cyclists, has not yet been proven. Calls to create segregated lanes for autonomous cars should be resisted as this would be harmful to other roads users and streetscapes, and reverse decades of recent progress.

Without effective regulation, the growth of autonomous technology could encourage people to use cars more often, exacerbating problems of congestion and pollution. The miles travelled by empty autonomous vehicles between passenger-carrying trips and the likelihood that these will cluster in areas of high demand awaiting passengers may compound existing traffic problems. There are already signs that the growth of Uber has aggravated traffic problems in large cities. If autonomous vehicles are owned and not shared, they will not necessarily reduce the number of vehicles on the road.

For these reasons, autonomous vehicles will need to be managed, just as standard cars are today. Public transport, walking and cycling are likely to remain the most efficient means of moving people in the city. We will still need to reserve space on the highway for pedestrians, buses and cycle users, and create pedestrian only areas.

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