# High court ruling prompts fresh debate but does not halt progress on low traffic neighbourhoods



Hope springs eternal among those who have long opposed low-traffic neighbourhood (LTN) anti-pollution schemes, particularly in light of a recent high court ruling that found Lambeth Council in South London acted unlawfully by disregarding local objections to its LTN initiative. Headlines proclaiming a potential end to these schemes, such as “Low traffic neighbourhoods could be axed,” echo the sentiments of critics who perceive this ruling as a sign of victory for anti-LTN campaigners. However, this interpretation overlooks the broader context: far from signalling the demise of LTNs, the ruling underscores the need for councils to engage constructively with community concerns while also adhering to the compelling evidence in favour of these initiatives.

The reality is that the data supporting LTNs is robust and increasingly persuasive. Studies consistently demonstrate that LTNs can effectively reduce traffic volumes, improve air quality, and promote increased walking and cycling. According to a resource from Westminster Healthy Streets, LTNs have been linked to a significant reduction in road danger, making per-trip experiences 3 to 4 times safer for pedestrians and cyclists, and contributing to a notable 49% reduction in road casualties in certain London areas. Moreover, a survey by the Department for Transport found that a significant 45% of respondents support LTNs, as opposed to just 21% in opposition, indicating a growing acceptance among the public.

The premise that LTNs merely shift traffic chaos from one area to another is challenged by a nuanced body of evidence. While some areas may experience an increase in traffic, others see reductions. For example, Rishi Sunak's review of LTNs concluded that the impact on boundary roads is often minimal. Thus, blaming LTNs for congestion glosses over the underlying issue: London’s persistent congestion problem is more fundamentally a result of too many vehicles on the road, rather than any single initiative aiming to ameliorate the situation.

There is a pressing need to modernise our transport networks in response to the urgent health and environmental crises we face. Air pollution from vehicles, identified as the leading cause of poor air quality, is responsible for thousands of premature deaths in London each year. With only about 40% of residents walking or cycling for 20 minutes daily, the evidence points to LTNs as a viable means of encouraging a shift towards more active modes of transport. Recent studies show that areas implementing LTNs have experienced a 6% decrease in car ownership over two years, corresponding with an increase in active travel.

Furthermore, the economic implications of LTNs should not be underestimated. Communities benefit significantly from reduced vehicle traffic, as evidenced by data showing that pedestrians who stroll to local high streets tend to spend up to 40% more than those who arrive by car. This aligns with findings from numerous studies indicating that less traffic can lead to greater economic activity in local environments, making a strong case for councils to continue investing in LTNs.

Notably, the economic and social adverse impacts of road traffic are not negligible—they translate directly into increased strain on public health systems due to injuries and accidents, which alone cost London an estimated £1.2 billion annually. The stark reality is that approximately five people die on UK roads every day, a crisis that is often overlooked. It is clear that tackling these issues through initiatives like LTNs is not just about reducing traffic but about fostering safer, more liveable communities.

Critics often frame LTNs as barriers to mobility, yet for many, they represent an opportunity to redefine urban transport in favour of healthier, community-oriented alternatives. Such transformations, while challenging, are vital; public health and environmental sustainability hinge on our willingness to embrace change. It is essential for councils to maintain their commitment to enhancing local environments, ensuring that the discussions surrounding LTNs evolve into more meaningful dialogues with communities.

Ultimately, the evidence supporting low-traffic neighbourhoods continues to grow, and the societal benefits are clear. One court case should not derail the progress already achieved or diminish the momentum towards cleaner, safer, and more sustainable urban living. The pathway forward lies in perseverance, informed decision-making, and a collective commitment to creating healthier cities for future generations.

### Reference Map

1. Paragraph 1: [[2]](https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2025/may/15/ignore-myths-low-traffic-neighbourhoods-ltn)
2. Paragraph 2: [[4]](https://westminsterstreets.org.uk/the-evidence-low-traffic-neighbourhoods/), [[5]](https://cohsat.org.uk/low-traffic-neighbourhoods-evidence/)
3. Paragraph 3: [[3]](https://www.ft.com/content/a1a59bab-25aa-45f1-82cb-3e01ae3e800f), [[6]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Low_Traffic_Neighbourhood)
4. Paragraph 4: [[4]](https://westminsterstreets.org.uk/the-evidence-low-traffic-neighbourhoods/), [[7]](https://rapidtransition.org/stories/making-streets-people-friendly-the-rise-of-car-free-communities/)
5. Paragraph 5: [[5]](https://cohsat.org.uk/low-traffic-neighbourhoods-evidence/), [[6]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Low_Traffic_Neighbourhood)
6. Paragraph 6: [[2]](https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2025/may/15/ignore-myths-low-traffic-neighbourhoods-ltn), [[3]](https://www.ft.com/content/a1a59bab-25aa-45f1-82cb-3e01ae3e800f)
7. Paragraph 7: [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2025/may/15/ignore-myths-low-traffic-neighbourhoods-ltn), [[3]](https://www.ft.com/content/a1a59bab-25aa-45f1-82cb-3e01ae3e800f)
8. Paragraph 8: [[2]](https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2025/may/15/ignore-myths-low-traffic-neighbourhoods-ltn), [[4]](https://westminsterstreets.org.uk/the-evidence-low-traffic-neighbourhoods/), [[5]](https://cohsat.org.uk/low-traffic-neighbourhoods-evidence/)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2025/may/15/ignore-myths-low-traffic-neighbourhoods-ltn> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2025/may/15/ignore-myths-low-traffic-neighbourhoods-ltn> - An opinion piece in The Guardian argues that despite a recent high court ruling against a specific low-traffic neighbourhood (LTN) scheme in Lambeth, such initiatives are beneficial for public health, the economy, and the environment. The author emphasizes that LTNs effectively reduce traffic, improve air quality, and promote walking and cycling. They also note that LTNs are popular and become more so over time, suggesting that councils should trust the data and continue implementing these schemes.
3. <https://www.ft.com/content/a1a59bab-25aa-45f1-82cb-3e01ae3e800f> - An article from the Financial Times discusses the controversies surrounding low-traffic neighbourhoods (LTNs) in the UK. It highlights significant opposition in areas like Bath, where a petition against LTNs garnered nearly 2,000 signatures. Despite this, a Department for Transport survey found 45% support for LTNs compared to 21% opposition. The article also notes that government reports acknowledge LTNs' effectiveness in reducing traffic volumes, though they remain a contentious topic, reflecting the clash between motorists' rights and desires for reduced noise and pollution.
4. <https://westminsterstreets.org.uk/the-evidence-low-traffic-neighbourhoods/> - This resource from Westminster Healthy Streets presents evidence supporting low-traffic neighbourhoods (LTNs). It cites studies showing that LTNs reduce road danger, with walking, cycling, and driving becoming 3-4 times safer per trip within LTNs. Additionally, LTNs have been associated with increased cycling, especially among children, and a reduction in car ownership, with a 6% decrease observed in areas introducing LTNs over two years.
5. <https://cohsat.org.uk/low-traffic-neighbourhoods-evidence/> - The Centre for Health and Social Care Studies (CoHSAT) reviews multiple studies on low-traffic neighbourhoods (LTNs). Findings include a 49% reduction in road casualties within LTNs in London, a 10% decrease in total street crime in Waltham Forest, and a 6% reduction in car ownership within LTNs over two years. The resource also highlights benefits for local businesses, noting that people who walk to high streets spend up to 40% more than those who drive.
6. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Low_Traffic_Neighbourhood> - The Wikipedia page on Low Traffic Neighbourhoods (LTNs) provides an overview of their implementation and outcomes. It cites studies showing that LTNs can reduce air pollution, with a 5.7% decrease in nitrogen dioxide levels within LTNs in Islington, London. Additionally, injury rates within LTNs have been significantly reduced, with a 70% decrease observed for walkers, cyclists, and car occupants in certain areas.
7. <https://rapidtransition.org/stories/making-streets-people-friendly-the-rise-of-car-free-communities/> - An article from the Rapid Transition Alliance discusses the rise of car-free communities and the benefits of low-traffic neighbourhoods (LTNs). It references a study from the University of Westminster, which found that after implementing LTNs, residents engaged in 40 to 45 minutes more walking or cycling per week compared to a control group. The study also observed a 6% reduction in car ownership within LTNs over two years.