# Local councils spend thousands on taxis despite backing Low Traffic Neighbourhoods



Recent investigations have revealed that several local councils, under the guise of promoting environmental responsibility through initiatives like Low Traffic Neighbourhoods (LTNs), are paradoxically allocating significant resources to taxi services for their own employees. Reports indicate that councils praised for their environmental actions have spent substantial sums on taxi services, raising questions about their commitment to reducing carbon emissions while their staff continue to rely on vehicle transport.

Ealing Council, which declared a climate emergency in 2019 and aims for carbon neutrality by 2030, disclosed expenditures of at least £30,000 on taxi services over the past three years. However, the actual figure could be considerably higher, as the council did not account for expenses classified under “other business expenses”. Ealing's strategy outlines that most local journeys should be undertaken by bicycle, on foot, or via public transport, stating that short vehicle trips could significantly impact emission levels.

In a similar vein, Hackney Council, which has implemented LTNs on 70% of its roads, reported spending nearly £20,000 on taxis since 2020. Its "Change One Thing" initiative encourages residents to opt for walking, cycling, or public transport instead of driving. Yet, like Ealing, it revealed that taxi expenditures for council staff remained relatively consistent over the past few years, undermining the sustainability narrative it seeks to promote.

Lambeth Council's foray into LTNs has drawn widespread criticism due to severe congestion issues, where bus travel times have been reported at two hours for a mere three-mile journey. The council has spent over £10,000 on a luxury chauffeur-driven limousine for its mayor in the past year, prompting raised eyebrows about the disconnect between their actions and their stated sustainability goals. The ongoing frustrations with LTNs in Lambeth have been reflected in public protests against restrictions designed to limit vehicle access in certain areas.

According to a survey by The Times, which sought taxi expenditure data from ten local councils recognised for their healthy street initiatives, the total spend across these authorities reached approximately £156,000 since 2020. This figure suggests a concerning trend where councils promote public and environmental welfare while simultaneously investing taxpayers’ money into taxi services for their staff.

Joanna Marchong, Investigations Campaign Manager at the TaxPayers' Alliance, highlighted the incongruity of these practices, stating, “This ‘do as I say, not as I do’ attitude undermines public trust.” Indeed, this scepticism has been echoed in public sentiment, as communities continue to grapple with the impacts of traffic measures intended to foster greener living.

While some councils, like Islington, have attempted to clarify their taxi spending by stating that all vehicles available for staff use are electric or low-emission, the overall trend raises crucial questions about transparency and accountability. Hackney Council claimed its taxi spending amounted to only £16 a day last year and emphasised that over 90% of their staff use sustainable transport. However, the consistency of taxi expenses undermines these assertions, leading to a broader discussion around the efficacy of LTNs and other green policies they promote.

As councils grapple with rising costs and public opposition to measures like LTNs, their ongoing investments in taxi services reveal a critical discrepancy between environmental policy intentions and practical outcomes. The challenge remains: how can authorities effectively implement eco-friendly travel initiatives for their constituents while maintaining credibility and trust within their communities?

In light of recent budget allocations, such as Hackney’s proposal, which includes over £55 million for net-zero initiatives, the balancing act between promoting sustainable practices and addressing immediate logistical needs for staff continues to be a contentious issue for local governments across the UK.

**Reference Map**

1. Paragraphs 1-2, 4-5
2. Paragraphs 3, 7
3. Paragraphs 6, 8
4. Paragraphs 9, 10

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14722001/councils-cracking-car-drivers-spending-thousands-taxis.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/taxi-and-private-hire-vehicle-statistics-england-2023/taxi-and-private-hire-vehicle-statistics-england-2023> - This UK government report provides comprehensive statistics on taxis and private hire vehicles in England for 2023. It includes data on the number of vehicles, their fuel types, and age compositions, highlighting trends such as the increase in battery electric and hybrid vehicles. The report also offers regional breakdowns, illustrating variations in vehicle types and emissions standards across different areas, which can be useful for understanding local transportation dynamics and planning.
3. <https://news.hackney.gov.uk/hackney-council/a-better-hackney-in-tough-times-ambitious-new-council-budget-agreed/> - Hackney Council's 2024-25 budget outlines plans to balance finances amid rising costs and increased demand. The budget allocates funds to frontline services, housing, and climate initiatives, including over £55 million for net-zero projects. It also addresses a 4.99% Council Tax increase to support vital services, reflecting the council's commitment to maintaining essential services despite financial challenges.
4. <https://www.reading.gov.uk/business/licences/taxi-and-private-hire-licensing/draft-hackney-carriage-and-private-hire-vehicle-strategy-2023-2028/> - Reading Borough Council's draft strategy for 2023-2028 focuses on enhancing taxi and private hire vehicle services. It includes an action plan with objectives like customer focus, safety, and environmental sustainability. Proposed actions involve reviewing consultation methods, assessing policies against statutory standards, and promoting low-emission vehicles, aiming to improve service quality and align with environmental goals.
5. <https://www.westberks.gov.uk/article/41297/Proposed-Fees-for-Hackney-Carriage-and-Private-Hire-Vehicles-and-Private-Hire-Operator-s-Licences-2023-24> - West Berkshire Council proposes an 8.47% increase in hourly rates for taxi licensing fees for 2023/24, marking the first fee rise in three years. The proposal includes new and renewal fees for hackney carriage and private hire vehicles, as well as private hire operator licenses. The council emphasizes that the fee adjustments reflect the rising costs of providing licensing services.
6. <https://www.west-norfolk.gov.uk/info/20119/taxis_and_private_hire/1146/proposed_changes_to_hackney_carriage_and_private_hire_licensing_fees_procedures_and_conditions> - King's Lynn & West Norfolk Borough Council outlines proposed changes to taxi licensing fees, procedures, and conditions. The council clarifies that it does not profit from taxi licensing; fee increases are intended to cover the costs of providing services. The document references a 2019 Court of Appeal case affirming the council's right to recover enforcement costs through licensing fees.
7. <https://democratic.trafford.gov.uk/ieDecisionDetails.aspx?ID=1274> - Trafford Council approved the Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Licensing Policy 2023-28, including amendments to vehicle age and emission standards. The policy aims to support the Clean Air agenda, with potential implementation of new standards as early as April 2026. The decision reflects the council's commitment to environmental sustainability and public health.