# Confidential TfL report questions the impact of low traffic neighbourhoods on car use, sparking transparency debate



Sir Sadiq Khan’s team at Transport for London (TfL) has come under scrutiny for shelving a report that revealed Low Traffic Neighbourhoods (LTNs) do not significantly reduce car usage, contradicting the Mayor of London’s previous assertions about their environmental benefits. Commissioned from the University of Westminster, the study found that while LTNs increased cycling rates among residents, they failed to encourage a notable reduction in car use or an increase in walking.

The confidential report, which cost £82,095 and surveyed over 4,500 residents about their travel habits, was quietly withdrawn in June last year after officials expressed concerns about its "underwhelming" conclusions. Correspondence obtained by media sources showed TfL officials contemplating how to present the findings positively, worried that the data—accessible through Freedom of Information requests—might undermine Sir Sadiq’s narrative that LTNs are effective in reducing traffic and pollution.

Critics, including John Stewart of the campaign group Social and Environmental Justice, accused the mayor’s office of suppressing important evidence that could have informed better policy decisions. Stewart argued that the failure to publish the research hampers transparency, noting that local councils often support LTNs believing they reduce car use and improve air quality, a claim this study calls into question.

However, the debate around LTNs and their impact on traffic and car use is far from settled. Other research, including a comprehensive study by the University of Westminster and the climate charity Possible, highlighted substantial reductions in motor traffic within LTN zones, though it noted traffic on boundary roads remained largely unchanged. This suggests LTNs successfully limit vehicle movement in residential streets but may divert traffic rather than eliminate it altogether.

Supporting this, Possible's report emphasized not only significant drops in traffic volumes but also considerable improvements in road safety, citing a 70% reduction in road traffic injuries in certain LTN areas like Waltham Forest. Their findings indicated no evidence of increased collision risks or traffic displacement to surrounding roads, highlighting the contained benefits of these schemes within their designated areas.

Further evidence from Imperial College London indicated that in boroughs such as Lambeth, LTNs correlated with a modest reduction in daily driving distances—around 1.3 km per resident—and a 6% decrease in annual driving compared to control zones. These findings suggest that in some inner-city contexts, LTNs can contribute to reducing car use, with potential public health benefits including lower air pollution and noise.

Nevertheless, the broader challenge of encouraging Londoners to shift from car use to greener modes of transport persists. Analyses by the Evening Standard have pointed out that despite initiatives like LTNs, the overall proportion of journeys undertaken by walking, cycling, or public transport has not significantly increased, with car use remaining stubbornly high. This underscores the need for more comprehensive strategies to achieve meaningful modal shifts.

Practical issues with some LTNs have also been reported, with the Streatham Wells LTN cited as causing severe bus delays and traffic chaos shortly after its introduction. Data revealing bus journey times of over two hours for under three miles sparked public frustration, illustrating the operational challenges in implementing such traffic management schemes effectively.

In summary, while the suppressed TfL report raises questions about the effectiveness of LTNs in reducing car use specifically, other studies present a more nuanced picture. LTNs appear to reduce residential motor traffic and enhance safety, though their effects on overall car use and traffic displacement vary. The controversy over the unpublished study highlights ongoing tensions in urban transport policy between transparency, evidence, and political narratives.

### 📌 Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-15109357/Sadiq-Khans-Low-Traffic-areas-FAIL-car-secret.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[2]](https://www.standard.co.uk/news/london/tfl-suppressed-report-ltns-car-use-b1248287.html)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-15109357/Sadiq-Khans-Low-Traffic-areas-FAIL-car-secret.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[2]](https://www.standard.co.uk/news/london/tfl-suppressed-report-ltns-car-use-b1248287.html)
* Paragraph 3 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-15109357/Sadiq-Khans-Low-Traffic-areas-FAIL-car-secret.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490)
* Paragraph 4 – [[3]](https://www.standard.co.uk/news/london/low-traffic-neighbourhoods-impact-on-traffic-london-westminster-university-study-b1054147.html), [[6]](https://www.wearepossible.org/press-releases/largest-ever-study-of-low-traffic-neighbourhoods-in-london-demonstrates-overwhelming-success-in-reducing-motor-traffic)
* Paragraph 5 – [[4]](https://www.wearepossible.org/our-reports/londons-ltns/), [[6]](https://www.wearepossible.org/press-releases/largest-ever-study-of-low-traffic-neighbourhoods-in-london-demonstrates-overwhelming-success-in-reducing-motor-traffic)
* Paragraph 6 – [[5]](https://www.imperial.ac.uk/news/245315/low-traffic-neighbourhoods-london-daily-driving/)
* Paragraph 7 – [[7]](https://www.standard.co.uk/news/london/sadiq-khan-london-mayor-green-travel-plan-cars-walking-cycling-b1124166.html)
* Paragraph 8 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-15109357/Sadiq-Khans-Low-Traffic-areas-FAIL-car-secret.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490)

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

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-15109357/Sadiq-Khans-Low-Traffic-areas-FAIL-car-secret.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/london/tfl-suppressed-report-ltns-car-use-b1248287.html> - Transport for London (TfL) reportedly suppressed a taxpayer-funded study that found Low Traffic Neighbourhoods (LTNs) did not reduce car usage. The research, conducted by the University of Westminster, indicated that while LTNs increased cycling, they failed to encourage people to drive less or walk more. TfL officials expressed concerns about the report's findings and chose not to publish it, stating that the data did not offer sufficient new insights to justify further investment in continuing the survey. This decision has sparked criticism regarding transparency and the effectiveness of LTNs in reducing car use.
3. <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/london/low-traffic-neighbourhoods-impact-on-traffic-london-westminster-university-study-b1054147.html> - A comprehensive study by the University of Westminster and the climate charity Possible found that Low Traffic Neighbourhoods (LTNs) in London significantly reduced motor traffic in residential areas. The research analysed data from 46 LTNs and concluded that these schemes were overwhelmingly successful in decreasing traffic volumes within their zones. However, the study also noted that there was little impact on traffic levels on boundary roads, suggesting that while LTNs are effective in residential areas, additional measures may be needed to address traffic on surrounding streets.
4. <https://www.wearepossible.org/our-reports/londons-ltns/> - The climate charity Possible released a report highlighting the effectiveness of Low Traffic Neighbourhoods (LTNs) in London. The report found that LTNs led to a substantial decrease in overall traffic volumes and significantly improved road safety. For instance, in Waltham Forest, there was a 70% reduction in road traffic injuries within LTN areas. The report also noted that LTNs did not cause increased risk of road collisions on boundary roads or increased traffic on surrounding streets not part of the LTN, indicating that the benefits of LTNs are largely contained within their designated zones.
5. <https://www.imperial.ac.uk/news/245315/low-traffic-neighbourhoods-london-daily-driving/> - A study conducted by Imperial College London found that residents in Lambeth, a borough in London, reduced their daily driving by approximately 1.3 km after the introduction of Low Traffic Neighbourhoods (LTNs). The research indicated a 6% decrease in annual driving among residents living in four new LTNs introduced in 2020, compared to control areas. This suggests that LTNs can be effective in reducing car usage in inner-city areas, potentially leading to public health benefits such as decreased road danger, air pollution, and noise.
6. <https://www.wearepossible.org/press-releases/largest-ever-study-of-low-traffic-neighbourhoods-in-london-demonstrates-overwhelming-success-in-reducing-motor-traffic> - A large-scale study by the climate charity Possible and the University of Westminster's Active Travel Academy demonstrated that Low Traffic Neighbourhoods (LTNs) in London led to substantial reductions in motor traffic within their zones. The research found an average decrease of 815 motor vehicles per day on roads within LTNs, indicating a significant overall reduction in traffic. The study also noted that there was little indication of systematic displacement of traffic to boundary roads, suggesting that LTNs effectively reduce traffic without causing significant increases elsewhere.
7. <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/london/sadiq-khan-london-mayor-green-travel-plan-cars-walking-cycling-b1124166.html> - An article from the Evening Standard discusses the challenges faced by Mayor Sadiq Khan in encouraging Londoners to shift from car use to walking, cycling, and public transport. The piece highlights that, despite efforts, the proportion of journeys made by 'green' modes of transport has not significantly increased, and car use remains high. The article suggests that while initiatives like Low Traffic Neighbourhoods aim to reduce car usage, achieving a substantial modal shift requires more comprehensive and effective strategies.