# London exceeds legal NO₂ limits nine years early thanks to ULEZ expansion



London has reached a historic milestone in air quality, meeting the legal limits for nitrogen dioxide (NO₂) pollution for the first time, a feat achieved nearly 200 years earlier than initially projected. This success is credited largely to the implementation and expansion of the Ultra Low Emission Zone (ULEZ), a policy initiative championed by Mayor Sadiq Khan. Government data released in 2024 revealed the capital has finally complied with the UK’s NO₂ regulatory standards, a major step in reducing toxic air pollutants harmful to public health.

Experts at King’s College London had estimated in 2019 that if no further action was taken, it would take 193 years for London to meet these legal pollution limits. The mayor’s bold approach, which included extending the ULEZ in August 2023 to cover all London boroughs, instead saw London achieve this milestone in just nine years. Sir Sadiq Khan described this as “incredible news,” emphasising the positive impact on nearly 10 million Londoners who now breathe cleaner air, likely resulting in fewer cases of asthma, dementia, and heart disease, as well as easing pressure on the NHS.

The ULEZ operates by charging owners of older, more polluting vehicles a daily levy to reduce traffic emissions. Since its inception in 2019 and subsequent expansion, the scheme has led to a 27% reduction in toxic gas emissions, including significant decreases in particulate matter (PM2.5) and nitrogen oxides from cars and vans, according to reports from the Mayor’s office and environmental assessments. Outer London experienced a 20% reduction in particulate pollution, while nitrogen oxide emissions dropped by 13% from cars and 7% from vans compared to scenarios without the ULEZ expansion.

Despite these advances, London still faces challenges in air quality management. Analysis from monitoring sites across the city indicates that all London boroughs continue to exceed the World Health Organization (WHO) recommended NO₂ guideline of 10 micrograms per cubic metre. Moreover, multiple sites within 14 boroughs breach the UK legal limit of 40 micrograms per cubic metre, especially in areas like Merton, Brent, and Croydon. These findings suggest that although legal compliance has been reached on an annual average basis, some localised pollution hotspots persist, underscoring the need for ongoing efforts and vigilance.

Local data from places such as Waltham Forest highlight the positive impact of ULEZ on a borough level, with monitoring showing compliance with legal NO₂ limits for the first time. The expansion is estimated to have reduced pollution equivalent to removing 200,000 cars from London’s roads for a year. City Hall continues to push forward with further environmental initiatives, including electrifying the entire London bus fleet and increasing the number of electric vehicle charging points, reinforcing a commitment to long-term air quality improvements.

However, the ULEZ has faced opposition and controversy among some residents, with protests against the scheme’s enforcement and concerns about its impact on living costs. Despite this, the mayor insists that the benefits – from cleaner air to public health savings – validate the policy’s implementation and expansion. Environmental experts, including Professor Frank Kelly from Imperial College London, have praised the turnaround in London’s air quality, calling the achievement “truly remarkable” given the city’s historic pollution struggles.

As London takes this significant step forward, it remains a leading example of how urban policy interventions can accelerate public health and environmental goals, even in the face of resistance. The challenge now lies in maintaining and building upon this progress to tackle remaining pollution hotspots and ensure that every Londoner can breathe clean air.

### 📌 Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.irishnews.com/news/uk/khan-hails-ulez-success-as-london-under-limit-for-toxic-pollutant-for-first-time-WA6TQJZWJBLAHNOYYE5C6VKZDM/), [[2]](https://www.london.gov.uk/london-meets-legal-limits-toxic-no2-pollution-first-time-almost-200-years-earlier-predicted)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.irishnews.com/news/uk/khan-hails-ulez-success-as-london-under-limit-for-toxic-pollutant-for-first-time-WA6TQJZWJBLAHNOYYE5C6VKZDM/), [[2]](https://www.london.gov.uk/london-meets-legal-limits-toxic-no2-pollution-first-time-almost-200-years-earlier-predicted), [[5]](https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/london-air-quality-improves-after-expansion-levy-polluting-cars-says-report-2025-03-07/)
* Paragraph 3 – [[4]](https://www.britsafe.org/safety-management/2024/ulez-expansion-helped-improve-air-quality-in-london-last-year-says-city-hall-report), [[5]](https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/london-air-quality-improves-after-expansion-levy-polluting-cars-says-report-2025-03-07/)
* Paragraph 4 – [[3]](https://www.standard.co.uk/news/london/nitrogen-dioxide-london-borough-sadiq-khan-ulez-air-pollution-b1076770.html), [[1]](https://www.irishnews.com/news/uk/khan-hails-ulez-success-as-london-under-limit-for-toxic-pollutant-for-first-time-WA6TQJZWJBLAHNOYYE5C6VKZDM/)
* Paragraph 5 – [[6]](https://www.walthamforest.gov.uk/stories/ulez-success-waltham-forest), [[4]](https://www.britsafe.org/safety-management/2024/ulez-expansion-helped-improve-air-quality-in-london-last-year-says-city-hall-report), [[1]](https://www.irishnews.com/news/uk/khan-hails-ulez-success-as-london-under-limit-for-toxic-pollutant-for-first-time-WA6TQJZWJBLAHNOYYE5C6VKZDM/)
* Paragraph 6 – [[1]](https://www.irishnews.com/news/uk/khan-hails-ulez-success-as-london-under-limit-for-toxic-pollutant-for-first-time-WA6TQJZWJBLAHNOYYE5C6VKZDM/), [[5]](https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/london-air-quality-improves-after-expansion-levy-polluting-cars-says-report-2025-03-07/), [[1]](https://www.irishnews.com/news/uk/khan-hails-ulez-success-as-london-under-limit-for-toxic-pollutant-for-first-time-WA6TQJZWJBLAHNOYYE5C6VKZDM/)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.irishnews.com/news/uk/khan-hails-ulez-success-as-london-under-limit-for-toxic-pollutant-for-first-time-WA6TQJZWJBLAHNOYYE5C6VKZDM/> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.london.gov.uk/london-meets-legal-limits-toxic-no2-pollution-first-time-almost-200-years-earlier-predicted> - London has achieved a historic milestone by meeting legal limits for nitrogen dioxide (NO₂) pollution for the first time, nearly 200 years ahead of predictions. Experts at King's College London had estimated it would take 193 years to reach these limits without additional action, but under Mayor Sadiq Khan's leadership, this was accomplished in just nine years. The expansion of the Ultra Low Emission Zone (ULEZ) to cover all London boroughs has been instrumental in this achievement, leading to significant reductions in NO₂ levels and improving air quality across the capital. ([london.gov.uk](https://www.london.gov.uk/london-meets-legal-limits-toxic-no2-pollution-first-time-almost-200-years-earlier-predicted?utm_source=openai))
3. <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/london/nitrogen-dioxide-london-borough-sadiq-khan-ulez-air-pollution-b1076770.html> - A study revealed that every London borough exceeded World Health Organization (WHO) guidelines for nitrogen dioxide (NO₂) levels. Analysis of 1,823 monitoring sites across the capital showed that all locations had NO₂ concentrations above the recommended limit of 10 µg/m³. Fourteen boroughs had multiple sites breaching the legal limit of 40 µg/m³, with Merton, Brent, and Croydon having the highest percentages of exceedance. This underscores the need for continued efforts to improve air quality in London. ([standard.co.uk](https://www.standard.co.uk/news/london/nitrogen-dioxide-london-borough-sadiq-khan-ulez-air-pollution-b1076770.html?utm_source=openai))
4. <https://www.britsafe.org/safety-management/2024/ulez-expansion-helped-improve-air-quality-in-london-last-year-says-city-hall-report> - A report published on 25 July 2024 indicates that the expansion of the Ultra Low Emission Zone (ULEZ) to cover all of Greater London on 29 August 2023 led to significant improvements in air quality. The analysis estimated a 20% reduction in particulate matter (PM2.5) pollution from car and van exhaust fumes in outer London compared to a scenario without the expansion. Additionally, nitrogen oxide (NOx) emissions from cars and vans in outer London decreased by 13% and 7%, respectively. These findings highlight the effectiveness of ULEZ in reducing vehicular emissions and enhancing air quality. ([britsafe.org](https://www.britsafe.org/safety-management/2024/ulez-expansion-helped-improve-air-quality-in-london-last-year-says-city-hall-report?utm_source=openai))
5. <https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/london-air-quality-improves-after-expansion-levy-polluting-cars-says-report-2025-03-07/> - A report from London's mayor's office revealed that toxic gas emissions fell by 27% following the 2023 expansion of the Ultra Low Emission Zone (ULEZ). The ULEZ, first introduced in 2019 by Mayor Sadiq Khan, aims to reduce traffic emissions by charging £12.50 daily for older, more polluting vehicles. Despite concerns about its impact on the cost of living, the expansion included an additional five million people. The report, covering emissions up to September 2024, indicated that nitrogen dioxide levels, harmful to respiratory health, significantly decreased. Since 2019, air quality improved in 99% of monitored London locations. However, the levy remains controversial among residents, with protests targeting enforcement cameras. ([reuters.com](https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/london-air-quality-improves-after-expansion-levy-polluting-cars-says-report-2025-03-07/?utm_source=openai))
6. <https://www.walthamforest.gov.uk/stories/ulez-success-waltham-forest> - New data released on 26 July 2024 shows that the expansion of the Ultra Low Emission Zone (ULEZ) has led to significant improvements in air quality across London, including Waltham Forest. The data indicates that air pollution equivalent to 200,000 cars driving on London's roads for an entire year has been cut due to the ULEZ expansion since August 2023. Additionally, monitoring data for Waltham Forest showed no exceedance of the UK legal limits for nitrogen dioxide for the first time since measurements began, highlighting the positive impact of ULEZ on local air quality. ([walthamforest.gov.uk](https://www.walthamforest.gov.uk/stories/ulez-success-waltham-forest?utm_source=openai))