# London hits legal NO2 limits for the first time since 2010 thanks to ULEZ expansion



For the first time since the establishment of UK air quality regulations in 2010, London has achieved nitrogen dioxide (NO2) pollution levels within the legal limit, according to recent government data published by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra). This milestone marks a significant turnaround in the capital's air quality amid longstanding concerns about harmful nitrogen dioxide emissions.

The successful reduction in toxic NO2 levels is widely attributed to the implementation and expansion of the Ultra Low Emission Zone (ULEZ) policies championed by London’s Mayor, Sir Sadiq Khan. Since its introduction, the ULEZ has steadily curbed roadside pollution, with data from multiple reports confirming its transformative impact. Following the 2023 expansion of the ULEZ to cover all London boroughs, a report revealed a 27% decrease in roadside NO2 levels citywide. This was accompanied by a notable 31% drop in particulate matter (PM2.5) emissions from vehicle exhausts in outer London compared to scenarios without the ULEZ expansion. Industry analysis equates these reductions to removing the equivalent of around 200,000 cars from the roads for a year.

The ULEZ initially covered central London in 2019 and was extended to inner London in 2021, resulting in a 46% reduction in NO2 levels in central areas and a 21% decrease across inner London by 2023. By 2024, estimates showed a 27% reduction in nitrogen dioxide levels across London and a dramatic 54% decrease in central London due to the ULEZ’s measures. Beyond NO2, the zone contributed to a 23% reduction in nitrogen oxides (NOx) emissions from cars and vans citywide since 2019. These improvements reflect the enforced charges on older, more polluting vehicles that incentivise cleaner alternatives, alongside increased adoption of electric vehicles and electrification of London’s bus fleet.

Despite this progress, not all UK cities have met the legal limits. Government data indicates that while London complied with the NO2 regulations in 2024, Manchester, Birmingham, and Liverpool exceeded those limits, underscoring the persistent air quality challenges in other urban areas.

Sir Sadiq Khan expressed his enthusiasm for the milestone, highlighting the significance of the ULEZ in improving public health and Londoners’ quality of life. Conservative representatives at City Hall have yet to comment on the achievement.

The improvements in London’s air quality come amid wider concerns over health impacts caused by nitrogen dioxide, a key pollutant linked to respiratory issues. The continued success of the ULEZ, together with complementary measures like expanding electric vehicle infrastructure, is viewed as a crucial blueprint for other cities striving to tackle pollution.

In summary, London’s attainment of legal NO2 levels is a landmark moment that reflects years of policy commitment and technological progress. The comprehensive data and reports reveal a clear causative link between emissions charges on polluting vehicles, expanded low emission zones, and tangible improvements in urban air quality, which bode well for the city’s environmental and public health future.

### 📌 Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c75q9d2pqyeo)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c75q9d2pqyeo), [[2]](https://www.london.gov.uk/london-meets-legal-limits-toxic-no2-pollution-first-time-almost-200-years-earlier-predicted), [[3]](https://www.london.gov.uk/media-centre/mayors-press-releases/new-evidence-reveals-all-londoners-are-now-breathing-cleaner-air-following-first-year-expanded-ultra), [[5]](https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/london-air-quality-improves-after-expansion-levy-polluting-cars-says-report-2025-03-07/), [[6]](https://www.theguardian.com/environment/article/2024/jul/25/ulez-expansion-led-to-significant-drop-in-air-pollutants-in-london-report-finds?No.4=&category=Salary+Sacrifice+Advice%2CCar+Comparison%2CCar+Comparison%2CCar+Comparison&page=&referral=), [[7]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ultra_Low_Emission_Zone)
* Paragraph 3 – [[4]](https://www.london.gov.uk/new-report-reveals-transformational-impact-expanded-ultra-low-emission-zone-so-far), [[7]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ultra_Low_Emission_Zone)
* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c75q9d2pqyeo)
* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c75q9d2pqyeo), [[2]](https://www.london.gov.uk/london-meets-legal-limits-toxic-no2-pollution-first-time-almost-200-years-earlier-predicted)
* Paragraph 6 – [[2]](https://www.london.gov.uk/london-meets-legal-limits-toxic-no2-pollution-first-time-almost-200-years-earlier-predicted), [[3]](https://www.london.gov.uk/media-centre/mayors-press-releases/new-evidence-reveals-all-londoners-are-now-breathing-cleaner-air-following-first-year-expanded-ultra), [[6]](https://www.theguardian.com/environment/article/2024/jul/25/ulez-expansion-led-to-significant-drop-in-air-pollutants-in-london-report-finds?No.4=&category=Salary+Sacrifice+Advice%2CCar+Comparison%2CCar+Comparison%2CCar+Comparison&page=&referral=), [[7]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ultra_Low_Emission_Zone)
* Paragraph 7 – [[1]](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c75q9d2pqyeo), [[2]](https://www.london.gov.uk/london-meets-legal-limits-toxic-no2-pollution-first-time-almost-200-years-earlier-predicted), [[3]](https://www.london.gov.uk/media-centre/mayors-press-releases/new-evidence-reveals-all-londoners-are-now-breathing-cleaner-air-following-first-year-expanded-ultra), [[4]](https://www.london.gov.uk/new-report-reveals-transformational-impact-expanded-ultra-low-emission-zone-so-far), [[5]](https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/london-air-quality-improves-after-expansion-levy-polluting-cars-says-report-2025-03-07/), [[7]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ultra_Low_Emission_Zone)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c75q9d2pqyeo> - 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> - In September 2025, the Mayor of London, Sadiq Khan, announced that London had achieved legal limits for nitrogen dioxide (NO₂) pollution for the first time, nearly 200 years ahead of predictions. This milestone was reached due to the implementation of policies such as the Ultra Low Emission Zone (ULEZ), which led to a significant reduction in roadside NO₂ levels since 2016. The achievement is attributed to the Mayor's bold air quality policies, including electrifying London's bus fleet and expanding the electric vehicle charging network. The success is seen as a transformative impact on London's air quality and public health.
3. <https://www.london.gov.uk/media-centre/mayors-press-releases/new-evidence-reveals-all-londoners-are-now-breathing-cleaner-air-following-first-year-expanded-ultra> - A report from March 2025 revealed that the expansion of London's Ultra Low Emission Zone (ULEZ) led to a 27% decrease in roadside nitrogen dioxide (NO₂) levels across the entire capital. The ULEZ, which was expanded to cover all London boroughs in August 2023, resulted in cleaner air for all Londoners. The report also highlighted a 31% reduction in particulate matter (PM₂.₅) emissions from vehicle exhausts in outer London compared to a scenario without the ULEZ expansion. The findings underscore the effectiveness of the ULEZ in improving air quality and public health.
4. <https://www.london.gov.uk/new-report-reveals-transformational-impact-expanded-ultra-low-emission-zone-so-far> - A report from February 2023 highlighted the significant impact of the expanded Ultra Low Emission Zone (ULEZ) on reducing harmful pollution emissions in London. The ULEZ, which was expanded to cover inner London in October 2021, led to a 46% reduction in nitrogen dioxide (NO₂) levels in central London and a 21% reduction in inner London compared to a scenario without the ULEZ. The report also noted a 23% reduction in nitrogen oxides (NOx) emissions from cars and vans across London since 2019. These findings demonstrate the effectiveness of the ULEZ in improving air quality and public health.
5. <https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/london-air-quality-improves-after-expansion-levy-polluting-cars-says-report-2025-03-07/> - A Reuters article from March 2025 reported that toxic gas emissions in London fell by 27% following the 2023 expansion of the Ultra Low Emission Zone (ULEZ). The ULEZ, which imposes a daily charge on older, more polluting vehicles, was expanded to cover all of Greater London in August 2023. The report also noted that since 2019, air quality had improved in 99% of monitored locations in London. Despite concerns about the cost of living, the expansion of the ULEZ has led to significant improvements in air quality and public health.
6. <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/article/2024/jul/25/ulez-expansion-led-to-significant-drop-in-air-pollutants-in-london-report-finds?No.4=&category=Salary+Sacrifice+Advice%2CCar+Comparison%2CCar+Comparison%2CCar+Comparison&page=&referral=> - An article from The Guardian in July 2024 reported that the expansion of London's Ultra Low Emission Zone (ULEZ) led to a significant drop in air pollutants. Analysis covering the first six months since the ULEZ expansion found that total emissions of nitrogen oxides (NOx) from cars across London were 13% lower than projected had the scheme remained confined to inner London, while NOx from vans was 7% lower. Levels of particulate pollution in the form of PM₂.₅ exhaust emissions from cars in outer London were an estimated 22% lower than without the expansion. The total change was equivalent to removing 200,000 cars from the road for one year.
7. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ultra_Low_Emission_Zone> - The Wikipedia page on London's Ultra Low Emission Zone (ULEZ) provides comprehensive information about the ULEZ, including its implementation, expansion, and impact on air quality. The page notes that between 2019 and 2022, nitrogen oxide emissions in London dropped by 13,500 tonnes, equivalent to all emissions from landings and takeoffs at Heathrow Airport and London City Airport during the same period. A 2025 report from Transport for London and the Greater London Authority found that in 2024, nitrogen dioxide levels were 27% lower across the city than they would have been without ULEZ and its expansion, with a drop of 54% in central London. Particulate matter exhaust emissions from cars and vans were estimated to be 31% lower in outer London as a result of the zone's expansion.