# Sadiq Khan’s ULEZ crackdown exposes scheme as revenue-driven failure amid public outcry



Sadiq Khan’s latest crackdown on unpaid ULEZ charges reveals a clearly failed scheme that prioritizes ticking boxes over genuine air quality improvements. Since its expansion in 2023, the so-called Clean Air initiative has become a lucrative revenue stream for TfL, but one riddled with fraud, evasion, and widespread discontent. The fact that nearly £790 million remains unpaid—nearly three times what it was just a year earlier—exposes a system designed more to punish drivers than to clean up London’s polluted air. This scheme, which drives people off outer London streets to boost TfL’s coffers, has disastrous economic repercussions, with boroughs experiencing falling footfall and retail sales blamed on the Mayor’s relentless extortion.

TfL’s heavy-handed enforcement tactics, including aggressive vehicle seizures and court-backed warrants, are nothing more than bullying tactics aimed at forcing compliance—often at the expense of ordinary drivers caught in a punitive web of fines. Alarmingly, many of these drivers have seen their debts skyrocket, with some paying tens of thousands to settle warrants after relentless harassment. The scheme’s supposed environmental benefits are a smokescreen; instead, it functions as a cash cow for TfL, funneling millions from seized vehicles and fines into the transport authority’s coffers, rather than delivering tangible improvements to air quality.

TfL’s defenders claim that ULEZ is vital for health, yet the scheme’s efficacy is increasingly questioned. The assertion that 97 percent of vehicles now meet emissions standards is a dubious statistic, especially when the wider impact on air pollution remains unproven. Meanwhile, the expansion has disproportionately burdened working-class Londoners, who rely on older, non-compliant vehicles and are now footing enormous bills that push them into hardship. The claim that revenue from ULEZ is reinvested into transport improvements rings hollow, especially when the scheme’s real purpose appears to be raising funds through fines and asset seizures.

Khan’s confrontational stance on protesters—dismissing opposition as conspiracy theorists aligned with the far right—only deepens the divide. This is a mayor more concerned with imposing ideological schemes than listening to constituents’ concerns. Amidst this political theatre, the financial fallout is stark: TfL’s bad debts have spiraled by nearly £300 million in just three years, exposing the scheme’s financial mismanagement. Rather than tackling London’s air pollution, the ULEZ initiative has become a symbol of bureaucratic overreach, erosion of public trust, and a flagrant misuse of powers that serve political agendas rather than public health.

In this context, it’s clear that the scheme’s true aim is to fill TfL’s coffers, while honest drivers, struggling under the weight of astronomic fines and vehicle seizures, are left to pick up the tab. The question remains: at what cost does the Mayor continue to enforce this financially destructive and environmentally questionable scheme?

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

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-15116191/Sadiq-Khan-drivers-repeat-London-ULEZ-fine-dodgers-BANKRUPT-mayor-clampdown.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://tfl.gov.uk/info-for/media/press-releases/2024/october/tfl-steps-up-enforcement-against-persistent-ulez-penalty-charge-evaders> - Transport for London (TfL) has intensified efforts against drivers who consistently evade Ultra Low Emission Zone (ULEZ) penalty charge notices (PCNs). Over the past year, TfL's enforcement agents have recouped £25.6 million from non-payment of ULEZ fines. Additionally, more than 1,400 vehicles have been seized, with over £700,000 recovered through the sale of vehicles belonging to persistent non-payers. TfL is also considering further debt recovery measures, including seeking County Court Judgments against those who refuse to pay. The majority of vehicles in the ULEZ are now compliant, with over 96% meeting the emissions standards, reducing the need for daily charges. TfL encourages drivers to engage with penalty notices and offers support for those facing financial difficulties. Income generated from the ULEZ scheme is reinvested into public transport improvements, such as enhancing bus routes in outer London. The scheme aims to tackle air pollution and improve public health by reducing emissions from older, polluting vehicles.
3. <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/transport/tfl-owed-ps800m-ulez-drivers-refuse-sadiq-khan-clean-air-levy-b1248605.html> - Transport for London (TfL) is facing a significant financial challenge, with approximately £800 million owed by motorists who have refused to pay the Ultra Low Emission Zone (ULEZ) charge. The ULEZ, introduced by Mayor Sadiq Khan, imposes a £12.50 daily levy on non-compliant vehicles to reduce air pollution. Despite this, many drivers have ignored the charges, leading to a substantial accumulation of unpaid fines. In response, TfL has intensified enforcement actions, including the seizure and sale of vehicles belonging to persistent offenders. Between January and June 2025, TfL seized over 530 vehicles, generating approximately £285,000 through auctions. The total value of unpaid ULEZ fines reached £789 million by April 2025, with 94% of this debt attributed to persistent evaders—drivers with at least four unpaid penalty charge notices. TfL continues to explore additional measures to recover the outstanding debts and reinvest the funds into London's public transport network.
4. <https://www.london.gov.uk/tfl-bad-debt-increases-almost-ps300m-three-years-0> - The London Assembly Budget and Performance Committee has highlighted a concerning increase in Transport for London's (TfL) bad debt, which has risen by nearly £300 million over the past three years. In 2020-21, TfL's bad debt expenses were approximately £160 million, but by 2024, this figure had escalated to around £450 million. This sharp rise coincides with the expansion of the Ultra Low Emission Zone (ULEZ) to the North and South Circular in October 2021 and its extension to cover all of Greater London in August 2023. The committee has urged the Mayor to implement measures to increase collection levels for road user charging schemes to address this financial issue.
5. <https://www.transportxtra.com/publications/local-transport-today/news/76890/tfl-recoups-25.6m-from-non-payment-of-ulez-fines> - Transport for London (TfL) has reported the recovery of £25.6 million from the non-payment of Ultra Low Emission Zone (ULEZ) fines over the past 12 months. In its crackdown on persistent evaders, TfL has tripled the size of its investigations team, enabling enforcement agents to make more visits to an evader's address, resulting in the removal of vehicles and their sale at auction. Over the past year, more than 1,400 vehicles have been seized, with over £700,000 recouped by the sale of vehicles belonging to persistent non-payers. Income generated from the ULEZ scheme is reinvested back into public transport, including improving bus routes in outer London. The scheme is not designed to generate revenue but to achieve high compliance. This is backed up by new data that shows more than 96% of vehicles seen driving in the zone comply with the emissions standards, meaning most drivers do not need to pay the daily charge.
6. <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2024/oct/16/tfl-seizes-vehicles-drivers-ignore-london-ulez-fines> - Transport for London (TfL) has intensified enforcement against drivers who persistently ignore fines related to London's Ultra Low Emission Zone (ULEZ). Over the past year, more than 1,400 vehicles have been seized from drivers who have repeatedly ignored penalty charge notices, with £710,000 being raised from the sale of nearly 800 of these cars. The figures, which cover the 12 months up to the end of July, come a year after the mayor of London, Sadiq Khan, extended the ULEZ to cover all 32 London boroughs from a previous zone that covered the area between the capital’s north and south circular roads. Vehicles that do not meet certain emissions standards and are caught using roads in the zone must pay a £12.50 daily charge, or a fine of up to £180 for non-payment. If drivers do not pay this penalty, it is registered as an unpaid debt and an order is made for recovery. If it remains unpaid, a warrant is issued which allows bailiffs to recover the outstanding debt. The latest figures from TfL, covering June, showed that the average number of vehicles charged is 42,555, with 6,004 penalty notice charges (PCNs) being issued. TfL said that in the past 12 months, bailiffs had recouped £25.6m from those who refused to pay penalty charge notices. This included one driver who was forced to settle a balance of £16,000 after 45 warrants were issued against them. In another case, a vehicle was seized to pay off an outstanding balance after the driver ignored 10 warrants. TfL said it is owed more than £370m in unpaid ULEZ penalty charge notices since the scheme expanded last year but added that it believed a significant amount of this debt would be recovered through law enforcement. TfL has hailed the Ulez expansion as a success, pointing to research showing that it has reduced levels of harmful air pollutants significantly since its introduction, as well as helping with the climate emergency by cutting London’s emissions. However, the scheme has also faced a strong backlash from some, including owners of non-compliant vehicles refusing to pay fines and others vandalising the cameras that police the zone. TfL said a significant amount of debt remained outstanding and it was now tripling the number of investigations staff to help enforcement agencies target repeat offenders.
7. <https://www.gbnews.com/lifestyle/cars/ulez-drivers-debt-tfl-fines-remove-vehicles> - Transport for London (TfL) has intensified its pursuit of drivers who repeatedly evade Ultra Low Emission Zone (ULEZ) penalties, with this minority group responsible for 94% of all unpaid ULEZ debt. The transport authority revealed that habitual offenders—defined as those with four or more outstanding penalty charge notices—account for the vast majority of money owed. TfL has adopted an intelligence-driven strategy to track down offenders, collaborating with national agencies including the Department for Transport and the DVLA to share data more effectively and locate drivers who attempt to avoid payment by changing addresses. Between January and June 2025, enforcement measures have generated approximately £16.5 million in recovered debt from road user charges and penalties, funds that have been channelled back into the transport system. Enforcement officers have confiscated more than 530 vehicles from motorists who failed to settle their road user charges and penalties during the first six months of this year. Of these seized vehicles, over 350 have gone under the hammer at auctions, generating roughly £285,000 in revenue. The enforcement procedure begins when drivers fail to respond to penalty notices over prolonged periods, prompting court-backed warrants. Enforcement officers then visit registered addresses to collect outstanding debts, with authority to confiscate assets including vehicles if payment cannot be secured. Transport for London said it was taking stronger action to target motorists evading Ulez rules. In one instance, enforcement officers tracked a persistent offender, who cleared 46 warrants in June by paying nearly £17,000 after enforcement agents made multiple contact attempts. One particularly egregious case involved a vehicle linked to 88 warrants, where the driver had received over 130 letters and endured 14 visits from enforcement officers before their car was eventually seized and auctioned for £7,000. Additional enforcement options under consideration include garnishing wages directly from employers and expanding civil court proceedings to enhance the authority of enforcement agents. TfL is actively engaging with government officials to explore legislative improvements that would strengthen debt collection capabilities across public bodies. Alex Williams, TfL's Chief Customer and Strategy Officer, emphasised the scheme's role in addressing London's air quality emergency: "We know that we need bold solutions to tackle the public health crisis and poor air quality in London and Ulez does just that. We want to make it clear that if you receive a penalty charge for driving in the zone, you should not ignore it. Your penalty will progress to enforcement agents to recover what you owe, and there is a risk that your vehicle and other items of property will be removed." The latest figures indicate that over 97% of vehicles travelling through London now meet Ulez emission requirements, with TfL encouraging motorists to register for Auto Pay to prevent penalty charges. TfL continues discussions with government officials about enhancing debt recovery mechanisms, including expanding vehicle seizure powers and addressing registration plate tampering.