# London’s ULEZ faces scrutiny over missing detailed annual air quality report despite proven pollution reductions



City Hall under Mayor Sadiq Khan has faced criticism for not producing a comprehensive air quality report for the second year following the expansion of London’s Ultra Low Emission Zone (ULEZ) in July 2023, despite generating substantial revenue from the scheme. The Daily Express revealed that, while an extensive analysis was published for the initial year of ULEZ expansion, no similar detailed report has since been made available to the public, prompting accusations that the scheme's primary motive is financial gain rather than environmental improvement. Outer London MP David Simmonds expressed frustration on behalf of his constituents, suggesting that many see the policy as a “money raising measure” lacking transparent evidence of ongoing benefits for motorists affected by the £12.50 daily charge. Since the London-wide expansion, Transport for London (TfL) has reportedly raised over £226 million from fees and fines related to ULEZ, contributing to a nationwide total exceeding £1 billion from various clean air zones across the UK.

Nonetheless, multiple independent studies and data from City Hall emphasize substantial improvements in air quality linked to ULEZ. According to a recent report released by the Mayor's office covering data up to September 2024, nitrogen dioxide—a harmful pollutant linked to respiratory illnesses—has fallen by 27% since the expansion. This marks a continuation of a broader trend, with 99% of air quality monitoring sites across London showing improvement in toxic emissions since ULEZ was first introduced in 2019. Supporting these findings, a Guardian study corroborates the reduction in nitrogen dioxide levels, highlighting significant public health benefits despite the controversial nature of the charges for some residents.

Further analysis has underscored the environmental impact of the ULEZ expansion, revealing that nitrogen oxides emissions from cars and vans are 13% and 7% lower, respectively, than would have been expected if the zone had remained confined to central London. Particulate matter pollution, particularly PM2.5 exhaust emissions in outer London, is estimated to have dropped by 22%, equating to the removal of around 200,000 cars from the roads for a year. These improvements contribute to London’s air quality advancing more rapidly than other parts of England. The substantial decline in roadside pollutants since the scheme’s inception has moved many areas closer to meeting legal air quality limits. City Hall data show that sites exceeding the UK’s annual nitrogen dioxide limit plummeted from 56 in 2016 to just five by 2023.

The health benefits of the ULEZ scheme are also emphasised by organisations such as Asthma and Lung UK, whose interim director Jonathan Blades stated that improved air quality helps reduce sick days and has generated an estimated £37 million in related health cost savings. He advocates for enhanced public awareness and transparent data sharing to ensure communities understand the benefits of pollution control policies, thereby fostering greater public trust and support for further air quality measures nationwide.

Mayor Khan has defended the strategy as the “world’s largest clean air zone,” asserting that it has successfully taken thousands of polluting vehicles off London’s roads and contributed to significant drops in toxic air pollution. He remains committed to expanding environmental reforms aimed at ensuring cleaner air for all Londoners and visitors, framing these initiatives as crucial steps towards a greener and healthier capital.

Despite these positive indicators, the lack of a recent, comprehensive air quality report has provided critics with ammunition to question the transparency and motivations behind ULEZ, underscoring that while measurable improvements exist, ongoing detailed monitoring and public reporting remain essential to maintaining trust and demonstrating accountability.

### 📌 Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.express.co.uk/news/politics/2108316/sir-sadiq-khans-1bn-ulez)
* Paragraph 2 – [[2]](https://www.london.gov.uk/media-centre/mayors-press-releases/new-data-shows-mayors-ulez-expansion-working-better-expected-bringing-cleaner-air-five-million-more), [[3]](https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2025/mar/07/london-air-pollution-down-since-ulez-expansion-study), [[1]](https://www.express.co.uk/news/politics/2108316/sir-sadiq-khans-1bn-ulez)
* Paragraph 3 – [[4]](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+Review&page=&referral=), [[5]](https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2024/mar/08/sadiq-khan-hails-remarkable-progress-in-improving-london-air-quality), [[6]](https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2023/dec/28/london-ulez-averts-more-air-pollution-than-that-caused-by-capitals-airports-report-shows)
* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://www.express.co.uk/news/politics/2108316/sir-sadiq-khans-1bn-ulez), [[2]](https://www.london.gov.uk/media-centre/mayors-press-releases/new-data-shows-mayors-ulez-expansion-working-better-expected-bringing-cleaner-air-five-million-more), [[6]](https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2023/dec/28/london-ulez-averts-more-air-pollution-than-that-caused-by-capitals-airports-report-shows)
* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://www.express.co.uk/news/politics/2108316/sir-sadiq-khans-1bn-ulez), [[2]](https://www.london.gov.uk/media-centre/mayors-press-releases/new-data-shows-mayors-ulez-expansion-working-better-expected-bringing-cleaner-air-five-million-more)

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

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.express.co.uk/news/politics/2108316/sir-sadiq-khans-1bn-ulez> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.london.gov.uk/media-centre/mayors-press-releases/new-data-shows-mayors-ulez-expansion-working-better-expected-bringing-cleaner-air-five-million-more> - 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))
3. <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2025/mar/07/london-air-pollution-down-since-ulez-expansion-study> - A study published in The Guardian reports that London's air pollution levels have decreased since the expansion of the Ultra Low Emission Zone (ULEZ). The ULEZ, introduced in 2019 and expanded in 2023, aims to reduce harmful emissions by charging older, more polluting vehicles. The study found that nitrogen dioxide levels, a toxic gas that exacerbates asthma and lung diseases, have decreased by 27% across London since the ULEZ was introduced. The report also highlights that air quality has improved at 99% of monitoring sites across the city since 2019. Despite these improvements, the ULEZ remains a focal point for residents' anger at what they perceive as the high cost of living and working in and around the city. ([theguardian.com](https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2025/mar/07/london-air-pollution-down-since-ulez-expansion-study?utm_source=openai))
4. <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+Review&page=&referral=> - An article from The Guardian discusses a report indicating that the expansion of London's Ultra Low Emission Zone (ULEZ) has led to a significant reduction in air pollutants. The report found that nitrogen oxides (NOx) emissions 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 are an estimated 22% lower than without the expansion. The total change was equivalent to removing 200,000 cars from the road for one year. The article also notes that London's air quality is improving at a faster rate than the rest of England, with the capital's pollution rapidly approaching levels seen across the country. ([theguardian.com](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+Review&page=&referral=&utm_source=openai))
5. <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2024/mar/08/sadiq-khan-hails-remarkable-progress-in-improving-london-air-quality> - An article from The Guardian reports on the significant improvements in London's air quality following the expansion of the Ultra Low Emission Zone (ULEZ). The report highlights that the fall in pollution levels came despite London's population having risen by more than a million people. The number of air quality monitoring sites in the capital showing nitrogen dioxide (NO₂) levels beyond the UK's annual legal limit fell from 56 in 2016 to five in 2023. Overall air pollution concentrations have fallen by 65% in central London since 2016, 53% in inner London, and 45% in outer London. The article attributes much of the benefit to the ULEZ, which was launched in central London in 2019 and then expanded in 2021 and last summer. ([theguardian.com](https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2024/mar/08/sadiq-khan-hails-remarkable-progress-in-improving-london-air-quality?utm_source=openai))
6. <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2023/dec/28/london-ulez-averts-more-air-pollution-than-that-caused-by-capitals-airports-report-shows> - An article from The Guardian discusses a report revealing that London's Ultra Low Emission Zone (ULEZ) has averted more air pollution than that caused by the capital's airports. The report found that the ULEZ and the pre-existing low-emission zone for heavy goods vehicles reduced road traffic particulate matter (PM₂.₅) emissions by 180 tonnes across London over three years, a cut exceeding the particulate pollution produced by rail and river transport and agriculture combined. Nitrogen oxides (NOₓ) emissions from road traffic fell by an estimated 13,500 tonnes in London in the same period, a figure roughly equivalent to the emissions produced by planes taking off and landing at London Heathrow and City airports. The article notes that the figures are estimates and do not cover the period since the ULEZ expanded throughout London. ([theguardian.com](https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2023/dec/28/london-ulez-averts-more-air-pollution-than-that-caused-by-capitals-airports-report-shows?utm_source=openai))