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Blocked-off roads: New Rachel Aldred report on LTNs admits research shortcomings, many limitations, that traffic counters don't count all traffic – and why they're 'not relevant'

November 21, 2023 Active Travel Academy based at the University of Westminster, Blocked-off roads, Rachel Aldred

Sadiq Khan's cycling czar Will Norman says: "New academic analysis of 46 London Low Traffic Neighbourhoods (587 locations) shows: Substantial falls in motor traffic within LTN schemes; Little change in motor traffic on LTN boundary roads; and that LTNs can play an important part in reducing traffic. News From Crystal Palace takes a different view..."

A new report on LTNs in London co-authored by Rachel Aldred admits that automatic traffic counters ARE imperfect.

And they have not accessed raw data from them for the report – because they MIGHT be inaccurate.

As News From Crystal Palace reported in November last year: *The mystery of 'traffic evaporation' in Low Traffic Neighbourhood figures may have been solved – by a campaigner in Enfield. It turns out that the traffic surveys done by Enfield council for their post LTN data applied a filter so that it did not count any vehicles moving at less than 10km per hour.*

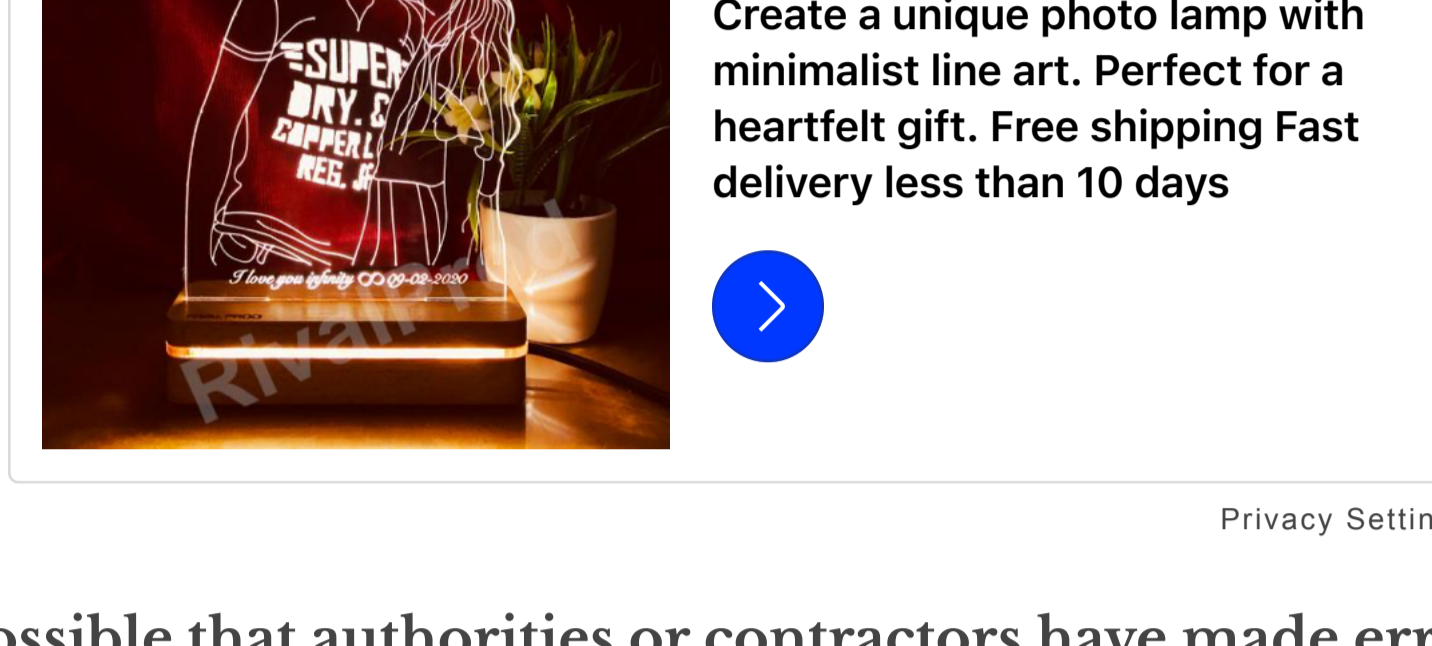
*This means that the figure quoted for the percentage increase in traffic on the boundary roads should be close to double that reported in the Fox Lane, Palmers Green Final Report. Blocked-off roads: Traffic 'evaporation' – a mystery solved? November 3rd 2022**

Rachel Aldred's latest report says:

"There are known issues with data quality. "Usually, reports used Automatic Traffic Counters (ATCs) to monitor traffic, in most cases 'tubes' across the road" says 'Changes in motor traffic in London's Low Traffic Neighbourhoods and boundary roads' by Rachel Aldred and a fellow University of Westminster 'Active Travel Academy' colleague.

"These are imperfect. "Parked or very slow-moving motor traffic may affect results although in most cases count sites were placed away from junctions where queueing is likely, which should reduce this problem. (3 Strengths and limitations)

"We have not accessed raw data directly from counters, as this would not be feasible for so many count points, schemes, and boroughs (and data may be held by contractors). (3 Strengths and limitations)



"It is possible that authorities or contractors have made errors (in one report a clearly wrong count was given for one site, for instance). "We believe that a small number of undetected errors should not bias the overall results; and sensitivity analyses assess if any borough's exclusion substantially changes the results. (3 Strengths and limitations)

Among its *conclusions* the report says: "It may still be the case that despite relatively little changes in boundary road traffic, those car journeys which continue to be made as before take longer simply because it is through them are no longer available.

"Finally, it is important that boundary roads are not forgotten. "They do experience often substantial traffic burdens, and just over half the boundary roads in this study saw increases over the monitoring periods (with just under half seeing a reduction).

The report makes some astonishing admissions:

- Our background trend analysis has **limitations** (3. Strengths and limitations);
 - It is **still broad brush** and individual district trends may vary and it is derived from the TfL network of counters which tend to be on larger roads (3. Strengths and limitations);
 - There are **limitations** to what one can conclude from average daily motor traffic counts. For instance, changes in motor traffic volumes do not correlate linearly with congestion, which is time-specific, nor do they directly map onto air pollution where speed and other variables play an important role (3. Strengths and limitations);
 - Schemes are controversial with **still limited academic evidence** on impacts (Opening 'abstract');
 - There are **inevitable data limitations** associated with the use of routine monitoring data (Opening 'abstract');
 - This research provides **SOME SUPPORT** for the position that LTNs can form an effective part of wider strategies to reduce motor traffic and its associated disbenefits (opening abstract);
 - It avoids looking at impacts at an individual LTN level "where there are hundreds of count points at most and where results may be atypical but which are likely to have very little or no impact on overall means or medians"; (3. Strengths and limitations); and
 - ".....there are **inevitable limitations**. Firstly, data gaps are not random. While we found data issues across districts, some either did not provide any reports at all or provided them without spatially located tabular count data." Hence, we cannot include schemes from Tower Hamlets or Ealing, for instance. (3. Strengths and limitations).
- The report – much of which cites references to reports where Rachel Aldred was the author or a co-author (14 out of a total of 20 of them):
- Says that **unlike low emission zones or road pricing schemes, LTNs do not involve direct financial disincentives to driving.** (Background 1.1)
 - Cites previous research which states that a)Both critics and promoters of LTNs typically agree that LTNs, if successful, can produce substantial reductions in motor traffic inside their borders, while disagreeing about impacts on what both call 'boundary roads'; (2. Materials and Methods)
 - and that b) wider evidence suggests there tend to be a combination of the effects of traffic displacement versus traffic evaporation (Cairns et al., 2002), although the balance may vary substantially. (Background 1.1);
 - Says some minor data issues were identified (such as average five-day counts rather than the more typical seven-day average). These were included in the main analysis but marked for exclusion during a sensitivity analysis. (Count sites 2.3);
 - Admits the use of an *albeit imperfect* comparator/control already is an additional contribution that an academic study (on London's functional zones) can make, compared to typical local authority reporting; (2.4. Calculating background trends)
 - Says having more comparator zones would be better, in allowing a more accurate normalisation based on borough-specific trends for example; but the analysis was constrained by the available data. (2.4. Calculating background trends)
 - States the focus of the paper is an additional analysis across multiple sites, as we believe that is where the power of the dataset lies (its ability to examine the typical or total impact of many schemes across London). (3. Strengths and limitations)

Waltham Forest:

- The report also says that in London, evidence covers schemes introduced in Waltham Forest borough (Outer London) and from London's 2020 'emergency' LTNs. This suggests that Waltham Forest and/or emergency LTNs in London have (i) increased levels of walking and cycling among LTN residents (Aldred et al. 2021a, Aldred et al 2021b. Aldred and Goodman, 2020) (Background 1.1)

But please see: **Blocked-off roads: Professor Aldred gets a lesson on figures from Cllr Briggs** November 25th 2021, this website:

The report of Lambeth's Low Traffic Neighbourhoods Commission cannot be taken seriously because it is based on data no proper academic or any proper university would consider valid, councillors have been told.

"Fundamentally this report cannot be trustworthy, cannot be taken seriously" Cllr Tim Briggs told Lambeth council's overview and scrutiny committee.

His comments came as the committee considered the draft report of Lambeth's Low Traffic Neighbourhoods Commission, held behind closed doors.

"There's no research in any of these background documents that challenges the principle of LTNs, that challenges the basis on which LTNs are supposed to reduce traffic.

"Specifically when I look at monitoring and evaluation in the report at 5.2 the basis of the report is Aldred and Goodman 2020. "Data from Waltham Forest shows car ownership fell by seven per cent within three years.

"In the London Cycling Campaign document you get to LTNs and they say the figure is around 15 pc of traffic disappeared from the area entirely.

"If you look at Scoot figures from Transport for London it says congestion increased by 25.7 pc between 2015 and 2020."

The data for these academic studies collected by Professor Aldred is "clearly problematic" added Cllr Briggs.

"How Professor Aldred did this was that she cited London-wide traffic patterns.

"Instead of those for the borough of Waltham Forest themselves the reality is there was an increase of four per cent across London, far less than the boundary roads in Waltham Forest so this whole report is founded on a method of collecting data which is painfully incorrect, partial and not objective.

"Fundamentally this report cannot be trustworthy, cannot be taken seriously because it is based on data no proper academic or any proper university would consider valid....."

Editor's note: Please see: **Appendix 1: LTN Commission report , item 4 as PDF 703 KB** Part of paragraph 5.2 states: *this includes the research conducted by Aldred and Goodman in 2020: which reports on analysis of impacts of active travel interventions in Outer London between 2016 and 2019, which concludes that LTNs lead to decreased car ownership and use, and increased active travel. Data from Waltham Forest, where LTN-style measures were first announced in 2014, shows that car ownership fell by around seven per cent within three years of the schemes being implemented, while a study by King's College London focusing on the same borough – the first of its kind to attempt to quantify the effect of increased active travel on health outcomes – reports that increased walking and cycling arising from active travel interventions would amount to an additional seven to six months of life expectancy for a child born in 2006.*

- **Rachel Aldred's latest report says:** This study explores changes in motor traffic on primarily residential streets within London LTN schemes and on generally busier 'boundary roads', on which concerns about traffic redistribution have focused / meta-analyses traffic data extracted from monitoring reports for 46 Low Traffic Neighbourhood schemes in 11 London boroughs introduced between May 2020 and May 2021.

***Blocked-off roads: Traffic 'evaporation' – a mystery solved?** November 3rd 2022, this website:

The mystery of 'traffic evaporation' in Low Traffic Neighbourhood figures may have been solved – by a campaigner in Enfield.

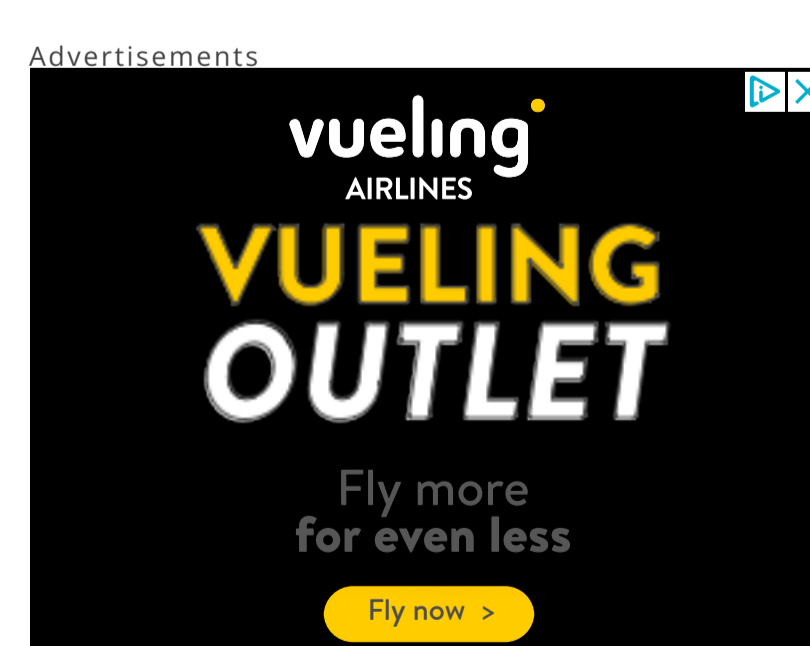
Peter Payne says: "It turns out that the traffic surveys done by Enfield for their post LTN data applied a filter so that it did not count any vehicles moving at less than 10km per hour.

The individual road reports show not a single vehicle on any road doing less than this speed. Given the congestion introduced by the LTNs this is highly unlikely.

- Where cars only shuffle forwards a couple of car lengths at a time you will not count 25 per cent of the cars (that's one in every four).
- Even in milder congestion where cars move forwards 10 car lengths at a time you will miss five per cent of vehicles (one in every 20).

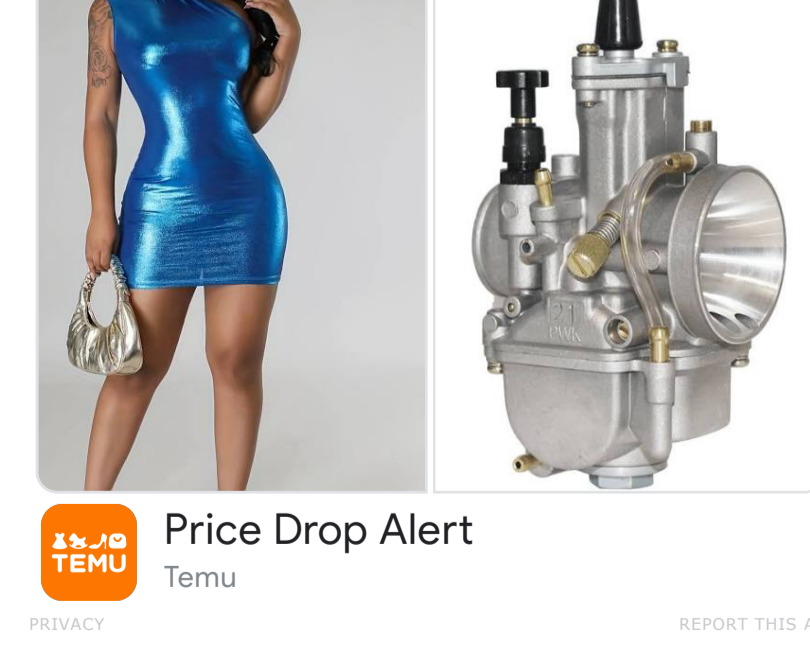
In an article on the Palmers Green Community website he adds: This means that the figure quoted for the percentage increase in traffic on the boundary roads should be close to double that reported in the Fox Lane, Palmers Green Final Report. These falsely low figures were also the ones used to generate the pollution models.

MEANWHILE, ON SOCIAL MEDIA:

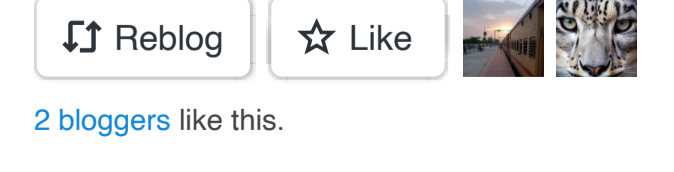


@VincentStops - (Former LB Hackney Labour councillor – Ed.)

I support closing minor streets. But a quick read shows this Prof. Aldred work is entirely inconclusive.

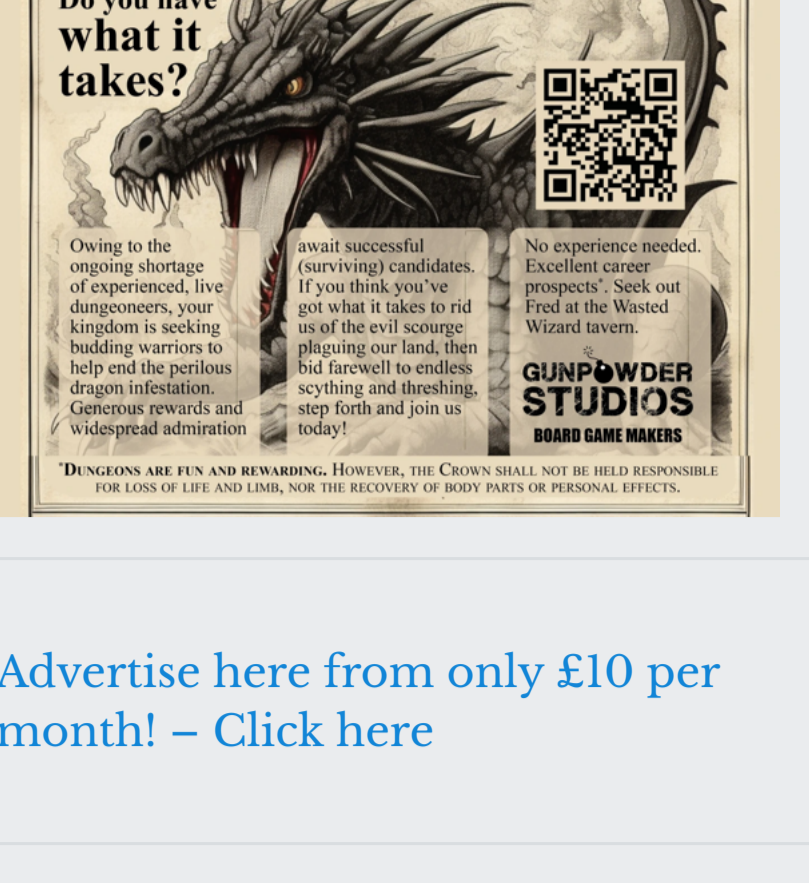


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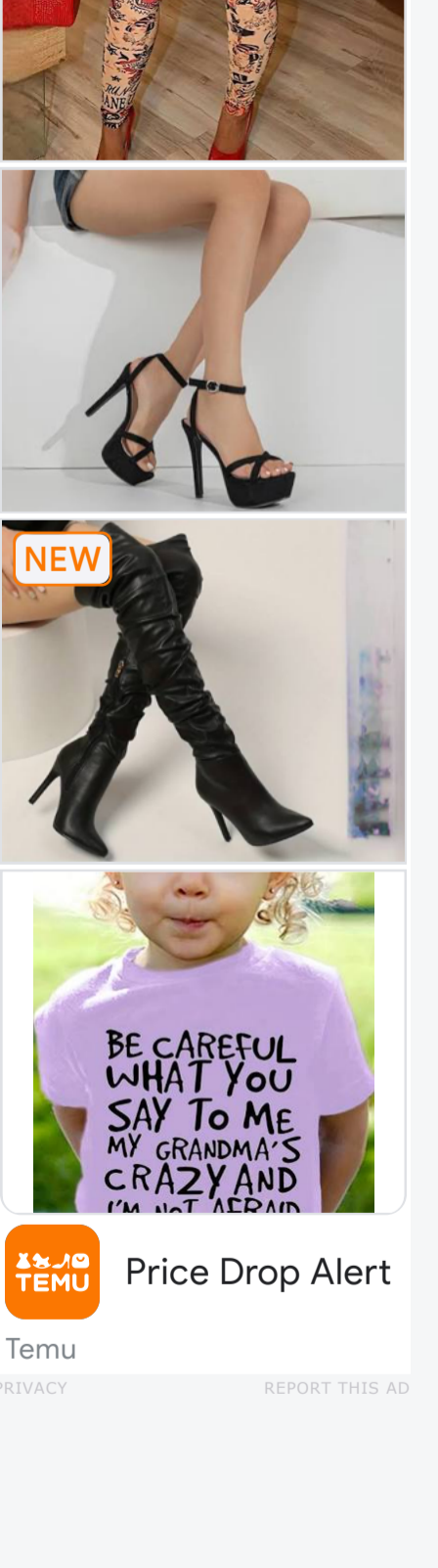
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