Election Briefing 4

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The bias of the LTN researchers

Virtually all the studies were led by just two people – both known enthusiasts for LTNs – Rachel Aldred and Anna Goodman.

Rachel Aldred is Professor of Transport at Westminster University and the Director of the University's Active Travel Academy. Between 2012 and 2018 she was an elected trustee of the London Cycling Campaign and chaired its Policy Forum.

Professor Anna Goodman is an Infectious Diseases specialist and Clinical Trials physician. She operates out of London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine at University College London doing work on sustainable transport. She gained her 15 minutes of notoriety when the Sunday Telegraph got hold of film of her tearing down, and pocketing, an anti-LTN leaflet from inside a newsagents in Dulwich, the upmarket suburb of London close to where she lives.

Although the studies were peer-reviewed, questions have been raised about virtually every study they have produced. Their starting point is the basic problem. They aim to show that LTNs work. What they don't do is to provide an all-round, critical assessment of LTNs. The clearest example of this is their 2024 report stating that the health/economic benefits of LTNs were 100 times their costs. But the study only looked at the benefits! It didn't attempt to assess the disbenefits (such as the health impacts of the stress of relying of buses caught up in extra congestion caused by the traffic displaced from LTNs).

Aldred and Goodman failed to show any convincing links between LTNs and a fall in car use.

Study 1

A longitudinal study looking at the impact of LTNs in three Outer London boroughs on walking, cycling and car use found an increase in cycling and walking but no change in car use.
https://westminsterresearch.westminster.ac.uk/item/q5890/impacts-of-an-active-travel-intervention-with-a-cycling-focus-in-a-suburban-context-one-year-findings-from-an-evaluation-of-london-s-in-progress-mini-hollands-programme

Study 2

This was a follow-up study to the 2018 one. It included more LTNs. It admits the sample was small. It found "the low-cost, rapidly-implemented emergency LTNs [the Covid ones] are associated with increased walking, possibly reduced car driving, and improved perceptions of the local cycling environment".
https://findingspress.org/article/21390-the-impact-of-low-traffic-neighbourhoods-on-active-travel-car-use-and-perceptions-of-local-environment-during-the-covid-19-pandemic

Study 3

It looked at the impacts of active travel interventions in Outer London 2016-19. It found evidence of decreased car ownership and use and increased 'active' travel in the LTNs but they admit the 'sample size for LTN areas is small and hence uncertainty about effect magnitude is large.'
https://findingspress.org/article/17128-low-traffic-neighbourhoods-car-use-and-active-travel-evidence-from-the-people-and-places-survey-of-outer-london-active-travel-interventions.

The study that finally nailed them

The traffic relocation schemes helped to increase cycling but failed to encourage people to drive less or walk more.

The scandal was unearthed by Andrew Ellson of the Times. What follows is an abridged version of his article (Times, 17/09/25).

"Sir Sadiq Khan's officials suppressed taxpayer-funded research that showed low traffic neighbourhoods (LTNs) do not reduce car use. Transport for London, which is under the mayor's control, chose not to publish the Travel and Places study after it found the traffic relocation schemes helped to increase cycling but failed to encourage people to drive less or walk more. Over the past five years, Khan has repeatedly claimed that LTNs help to reduce traffic and are therefore good for the planet. The University of Westminster's research, obtained by The Times, found otherwise. Emails between Transport for London (TfL) and the university show that officials were concerned about the report's results coming out.

They discussed how they might present the findings in the most positive light before a decision was made not to publish. In one email, an official reminded others that "all of this stuff is FoI-able" (available under freedom of information laws) before reassuring them that no one outside TfL yet knew about the study. Funding for the completion of the project was withdrawn in June last year. TfL's internal "completion statement" explained that the data had failed to offer sufficient new insights. This is despite the groundbreaking finding that LTNs do not reduce car use.

The statement explained that the interim results had not been published because the report was "highly technical", "full of jargon" and therefore "not accessible to the general public". Yet in the emails seen by The Times, officials stated that the report was "easy to follow" and "very well structured and written". TfL documents show it initially agreed to pay £82,095 for the three-year study although it is unclear how much was eventually paid because it was curtailed after two years."

The study was led byRachel Aldred.