

Labour abandons investigations into low-traffic neighbourhoods

Calls to vet impact of schemes ignored despite warnings of ‘evidence gaps’

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Labour has dropped future investigations into the impacts of low-traffic neighbourhoods on local areas.

Ministers have ignored calls for further examination of how LTNs affect residents and local businesses despite warnings of a lack of evidence for their economic and social impact.

The Conservatives have accused the Government of “doubling down on dogma” by neglecting to undertake necessary research into whether the controversial schemes work.

The only government-commissioned report into LTNs from March 2024 warned of “evidence gaps”, particularly on the impact on “local business turnover and footfall” on high streets.

The report by Ipsos found a “mixed picture” of the impacts of the schemes and underlined the “importance of collecting robust evidence over time”.

But Lord Hendy, a transport minister, confirmed: “The department has no plans to undertake further research on the impacts of LTNs.”

Sir Keir Starmer has been repeatedly accused of pursuing heavy-handed policies against drivers, most notably in London and Wales.

Several boroughs in the capital have pursued LTN policies, including Lewisham and Islington, where all roads under the local authority jurisdiction have a 20mph limit.

‘War on drivers hits full throttle’

The Government has quietly ditched reforms drafted by the Conservatives that would have curbed councils’ powers to restrict traffic and levy “unfair” fines.

The shelving of the guidance also means that local authorities do not have to regularly review LTNs to ensure they are “locally supported” and not “adversely affecting other areas”.

Richard Holden, the shadow transport secretary, told The Telegraph: “Labour’s war on drivers is hitting full throttle. Ministers have admitted they’ve no intention of ever finding out whether LTNs even work on their own terms.”

He added: “Local businesses are cut off, emergency services are blocked and families are sitting in traffic because Labour don’t have the backbone to admit they backed a bad idea out of ideological zealotry. Labour are doubling down on dogma.”

‘Mixed picture’ around impact, report finds

Decisions about whether to introduce LTNs, and where they are to be situated, are taken by local authorities.

They were originally introduced by Sir Sadiq Khan, the Mayor of London, in 2020 with government funding in a bid to reduce traffic and emissions.

A government-commissioned report by Ipsos, however, found “a mixed picture in terms of LTNs’ measurable impacts, at least in the short term, plus a degree of uncertainty in terms of perceived impact”.

It added: “These are related factors and underline the importance of collecting robust evidence over time as well as achieving better communications.”

The report emphasised “the importance of collecting robust evidence over time” and said there were particular evidence gaps when it came to the impact on small businesses in areas where LTNs were implemented, as well as whether they resulted in a reduction of noise pollution.

Rishi Sunak announced a “Plan for Drivers” in October 2023, aimed at making it harder for local councils to introduce anti-car schemes.

But confirmation by Labour ministers of no further government-commissioned investigations into the efficacy of LTNs or their impact on neighbourhoods signal that these controversial schemes are here to stay.

Councils given authority over schemes

Sir Keir has previously voiced support for LTNs. Ahead of the general election last year, he said they were a “good idea” in certain areas but it was down to “local authorities to decide where they were implemented”.

Asked by crossbench peer Baroness Deech whether any further examination of the impact of LTNs would be undertaken, Lord Hendy said: “The Government is clear that traffic management measures such as low-traffic neighbourhoods (LTNs) are a matter

for local authorities as they know their areas best. The department has no plans to undertake further research on the impacts of LTNs.”

A Department of Transport spokesman said: “As is longstanding policy, local authorities are best placed to decide what traffic management schemes are appropriate, but they should always be developed through engagement with local communities. There are no plans to change this.”