

A single LTN road closure to add 1.4 million extra miles to journeys

‘Green’ traffic restriction plan in Islington, North London, could generate 400 tonnes of CO2

Andrew Ellson, Consumer Affairs Correspondent
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Islington council, which declared a climate emergency in 2019, said that low traffic neighbourhoods helped to “reduce toxic air pollution”

ALAMY

The closure of a single road in a new low traffic neighbourhood (LTN) labelled as “green” is set to result in more than a million additional miles being driven each year.

Analysis by The Times suggests that Islington council’s “liveable neighbourhood” scheme in Mildmay will cause a lot more pollution because motorists will have to take a half-mile detour due to a traffic filter on to the main road through the area.

The analysis found that this could result in an extra 400 tonnes of carbon dioxide being released into the atmosphere every year alongside other pollutants such as nitrogen oxide and particulate matter, which have been linked to heart disease, stroke, cancer and lung disease.

Islington council did not dispute the findings but said that the scheme was justified in order to create “community spaces that everyone should be able to enjoy”.

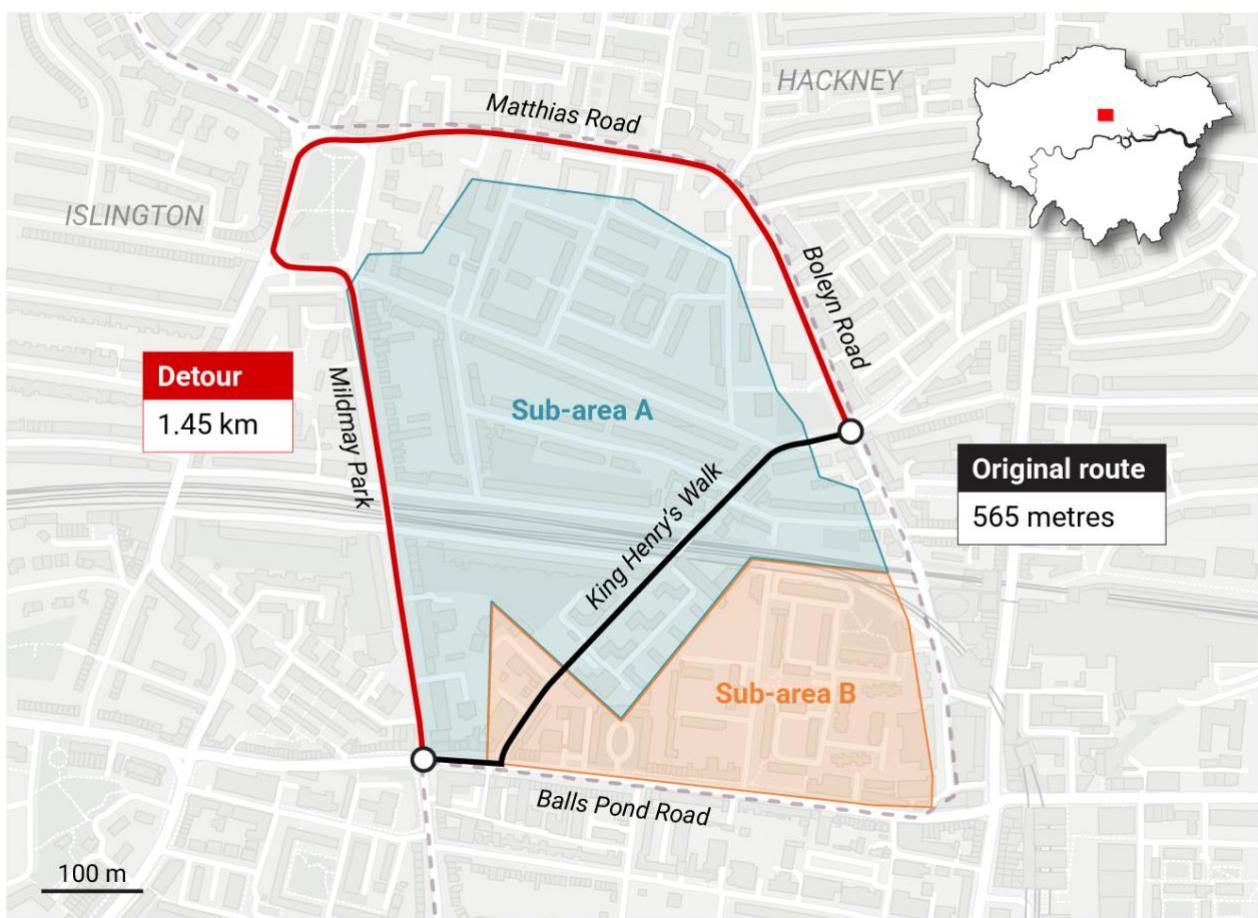
When the north London council first proposed the LTN, it said that its ambition was to create “greener” and “healthier” streets. The council’s website says that liveable neighbourhoods are

part of its goal to transform the borough's roads into "more environmentally friendly places" and are designed to help "reduce toxic air pollution". Islington declared a climate emergency in 2019.

The problem is that the scheme blocks one of the last east-west routes between the neighbouring boroughs of Islington and Hackney because of LTNs introduced previously.

Traffic counts recorded by Islington council and obtained by The Times using Freedom of Information laws showed that between 6,800 and 12,000 vehicles passed along the route every day. This traffic will now have to complete an extra 0.55 miles on the detour to complete the same journey. The high number of neighbouring LTNs mean there is no credible alternative route for most of this traffic.

Longer journey



Graphic by The Times and Sunday Times

Assuming the lower of the two traffic counts recorded by Islington, the vehicles taking the detour will have to travel nearly 4,000 extra miles every day, which works out at nearly 1.4 million miles a year. Between one in six and one in every ten vehicles now using the route are

heavy goods vehicles or vans. The council conducted no traffic modelling in advance of the introduction of the scheme.

Supporters of LTNs say that they encourage drivers to give up their cars and walk or cycle. If 15 per cent of traffic “evaporates” because of the scheme, which is the level generally suggested by supporters of LTNs, there will still be an additional 1.1 million miles driven because of it.

However, academic research that Transport for London tried to suppress found that while LTNs were associated with more cycling, they did not reduce the volume of cars.

Clair Battaglino of Social and Environmental Justice, which campaigns against LTNs, said: “It has become a common theme with LTNs that they are disingenuously branded as ‘green’ or ‘liveable’ by local councils, when in reality they increase congestion, miles driven and pollution. It leads us to ask: who really benefits?”

The Times analysis of the scheme, which was introduced in October, also found that it would redirect traffic along roads that have a greater density of residential addresses and social housing.

King Henry’s Walk, the main road on the route being blocked, has only 169 addresses on it, of which 93 are either owned by the council or housing associations. The three roads that will take most of the displaced traffic on the detour route have a total of 545 homes, of which at least 303 are council-owned or social housing.

Accessing the area

- One-way access/egress
- ↔ Two-way access/egress
- Traffic filter with Blue Badge exemption
- - - Borough boundary



Graphic by The Times and Sunday Times

Battaglino said: “All too often these types of traffic location schemes just create clean air haves and have nots, which should be unacceptable in our society.”

- **Labour council acted unlawfully over low traffic neighbourhood**

In 2022, Islington apologised after it misleadingly claimed in a report that its LTNs reduced air pollution, when the data showed that in many areas it had increased. Since then the council has introduced or is planning six more LTNs under its “liveable neighbourhood” banner.

So far it has implemented only part of its scheme for the Mildmay area. At a later date, it promises to make one of the roads on the detour route a one-way system. This is likely to force a significant amount of the diverted easterly traffic to take an even longer detour. Most vehicles will be forced to use the A104, already the most congested east-west route between Hackney and Islington.

Hackney council has removed part of the bus lane on this road to accommodate a new cycle lane, causing buses to get stuck in congestion.

Last month data published by the London Assembly showed that the average speed of a London bus had sunk below 9mph in October. The Confederation of Passenger Transport said the introduction of cycle lanes, LTNs, 20mph limits, wider pavements and roadworks had all contributed to slower buses.

If Islington does introduce a one-way system in the Mildmay area, it will leave only two easterly routes from Islington into Hackney over a north-south distance of more than three miles. The two inner London boroughs have a combined population of 440,000 people.

- **Residents hate them ... so why do officials keep making more LTNs?**

Rowena Champion, Islington's executive member for environment, air quality and transport, said: "We believe that Islington's streets aren't just routes from A to B, they're community spaces that everyone should be able to enjoy using, and play a vital role in creating a safer, healthier borough.

"The Mildmay liveable neighbourhood combines measures to reduce cut-through traffic with improved pavements, cycle paths and public spaces, as well as new trees, planting and seating. We engaged hundreds of local people to hear their thoughts on the scheme before making any changes."

She added: "Liveable neighbourhoods like this one are introduced on a trial basis and carefully monitored so they can be adjusted or removed if needed. They are about boosting people's wellbeing, giving them cleaner air and enabling more people to walk, wheel and cycle. They also provide greener and cooler spaces that are becoming increasingly vital as we see more heatwaves due to climate change."

Islington has yet to remove any of the other LTNs it has introduced.