

# TfL suppressed report showing LTNs don't cut car use

Sadiq Khan and his mayoral officials have spent years saying low-traffic neighbourhoods deter motorists

exclusive

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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Funding for the completion of the project was withdrawn in June last year.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 research asked more than 4,500 residents about their travel over the previous week  
JOHNNY ARMSTEAD/ALAMY

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 research asked more than 4,500 residents about their travel over the previous week and cross-referenced their responses against the percentage of roads that were within LTNs.

It found that people in areas with more LTNs had cycled more but that “none of the models show a significant association between the proportion of LTN roads and minutes of past-week car use”. LTNs had no statistically significant effect on walking.

The study was led by Professor Rachel Aldred, director of Westminster University’s Active Travel Academy. Aldred used to be a trustee of the London Cycling Campaign, a charity that lobbies councils to introduce LTNs.

Over the past five years, Aldred has published at least seven academic papers about LTNs, all but one of which were funded by TfL. Each of these seven papers has been [positive about LTNs](#) overall and her research is often cited by public bodies, such as TfL, and campaign groups, such as the London Cycling Campaign, to justify the introduction of more of the schemes.



The study was led by Professor Rachel Aldred

In the emails between TfL and the university, one of the researchers said that the conclusions of the study “may be a bit underwhelming to merit much fanfare”. It is unclear whether the email was sent by Aldred or one of her team because the name is redacted. However, whoever sent the email offered to create a “suitably contextualised and caveated summary” that TfL could publish.

Critics suspect the report was buried because officials did not want to admit that LTNs have no impact on car use.

**John Stewart, of the campaign group Social and Environmental Justice,** said: “The failure to publish is a serious omission because it could have helped inform decision-makers. Councils and local councillors often support LTNs because they believe or are told that they are green and help reduce air pollution but this study hugely undermines that argument.”

Since the pandemic, when the first wave of LTNs was introduced, both TfL and the mayor have repeatedly claimed that the schemes help reduce traffic.

In 2021 Khan said that the “main benefit of LTNs is to reduce short journeys by car” while in 2022 he said the schemes were “effective in reducing car use”. Even last year, following the debacle of the Streatham Wells LTN in Lambeth, which caused congestion so bad that buses were taking [two hours to travel three miles](#), Khan reiterated that he was supportive of the “important benefits that LTNs provide” including “reducing car use”.





Sir Sadiq Khan has put clean air at the centre of his mayoralty

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TfL said: “We are committed to supporting high-quality research that helps us understand how our policies and programmes are working. This particular study was initially funded to explore the impacts of LTNs but following a review of the second year’s findings, we concluded that the data didn’t offer sufficient new insights to justify further investment in continuing the survey.

“We remain confident that LTNs can reduce traffic levels in the area, making streets safer and enabling more walking and cycling.”

**Aldred declined to comment.**