

Labour and Lib Dem councils dodge own low-traffic zone limits

Boroughs running low-traffic neighbourhoods allow more than 330 council vehicles free passage, while residents and firms face huge fines, The Times finds

Andrew Ellson

Consumer Affairs Correspondent

18 January 2026, 6

The Times



Protesters in Islington oppose fines for those caught travelling through low-traffic neighbourhoods

Labour and Liberal Democrat councils are dodging their own low-traffic neighbourhood restrictions by exempting hundreds of their vehicles.

Freedom of information requests by The Times found that the boroughs of Lambeth, Hackney and Islington, which between them have introduced nearly 40 LTNs since 2020, allow more than 330 council vehicles to travel through unimpeded.

- **Campaigners attack plan to ditch public vote guidance on LTNs**

Residents and commercial vehicles that ignore LTN restrictions face fines of up to £160 a time.

Outside of London, Liberal Democrat-controlled Oxfordshire county council, which has been criticised for causing congestion and delays because of its LTNs, has exempted 69 of its own vehicles from the schemes.

The figures do not include exemptions for emergency services vehicles or buses carrying disabled or special needs passengers.

LTNs are designed to stop through traffic in an area but have been criticised for adding [large detours to journeys](#), leading to increased costs, congestion and inconvenience for residents and commercial vehicles, such as home delivery vans.

Hackney has introduced numerous LTNs which are not popular with residents



ALAMY

Most of the council vehicles exempted are rubbish lorries, street cleaning vehicles and vans and trucks involved in maintenance and repairs, although other “miscellaneous public sector vehicles” have been exempted, such as parking enforcement vehicles.

- [TfL suppressed report showing LTNs don't cut car use](#)

Islington council, for example, exempts 128 of its own vehicles from its LTN restrictions. These include multiple vans, a pick up truck, tipper trucks, road sweeping vehicles, rubbish lorries and gritters. The north London council said there were 22 “unclassified” vehicles that it could not provide data on.

In south London, Lambeth council has 144 vehicles exempt. It explained that these were for the purposes of “waste and cleansing” including multiple vans, sweepers and rubbish lorries as well as 18 vehicles identified only by their brand, including five Peugeots, three Citreons and two Fiats.

Lambeth has one of strictest exemption policies for disabled residents, only allowing blue badge holders to pass through a single filter in a single nominated LTN. It has also been criticised for issuing hundreds of thousands of pounds in fines to police vehicles travelling through the restrictions.



Local residents rally with placards on Streatham High Road in south London, part of the Lambeth LTN

In 2023, The Times revealed that Lambeth had issued nearly 3,000 LTN fines to officers over the preceding three years. At the time, the authority said marked police cars were

exempt but that “it’s important that emergency vehicles follow the rules of the road when not responding to an emergency to reduce their danger to other road users.”

Critics said it looked like there was one rule for councils and another for residents and commercial vehicles.

John Steward, of the group Social Environmental Justice, which has campaigned against LTNs, said few people object to emergency services and disability transport from being exempt but questioned why council vans and trucks were allowed to avoid the restrictions.

“Councils have repeatedly insisted that LTNs do not cause congestion, delays and longer journeys — and have often provided ‘evidence’ to back up these claims — so why do they need to create exemptions for their own vehicles? Either these schemes are important and should be respected by all commercial vehicles or councils are being hypocritical and dishonest.”



JOHNNY ARMSTEAD

The Local Government Association defended exemptions, arguing that their scale and purpose was “very different” to commercial vehicles in the private sector.

- **Sadiq Khan must stop hiding the truth — LTNs don’t work**

However, not all councils have decided to allow their own vehicles to break the rules.

Labour-run Camden council, for example, has not offered a blanket exemption to its fleet, including road sweepers and rubbish trucks.

ADVERTISEMENT

A separate FOI to Islington council has also revealed the council is spending nearly £1 million a year maintaining its network of automatic number plate recognition cameras, which are used to police its LTN restrictions.

Over the past five years, it has spent £2.6 million installing the cameras and a further £4.2 million maintaining them.



ALAMY

However, the cameras, which are also used to fine motorists for infringements such as occupying a yellow box on a junction and no right-hand turns, have more than paid their way for the council. Over the same period, the council has received £22.7 million in revenue from LTN fines alone.

In a statement, the Local Government Association said: “Council vehicles, including bin lorries that visit homes in an area either side of the barrier a few times a week to keep communities clean, will have access. This is on a different scale and for a purpose very different to commercial online delivery vehicles.

“Councils are best placed to make decisions with their communities about how to make LTNs work effectively to support residents and businesses. They continually review all kinds of services and schemes based on local circumstances.”