

Campaigners attack plan to ditch public vote guidance on LTNs

Heidi Alexander, the transport secretary, is accused of ignoring public opposition despite reviews showing overwhelming resistance to low traffic neighbourhoods

[Andrew Ellson](#), Consumer Affairs Correspondent
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The transport secretary has been urged to reconsider plans to ditch guidance that insists councils obtain community consent before introducing low traffic neighbourhoods.

An umbrella group representing 15 local campaigns against the traffic relocation schemes has written to Heidi Alexander to question why she has chosen to abandon a policy that “increased democratic accountability”.

They fear the decision will encourage councils to implement dozens more low traffic neighbourhoods (LTNs) despite public opposition.

The letter, seen by The Times, follows Labour's decision [not to endorse draft guidance](#) issued by the previous Conservative government that instructed councils to undertake certain steps before introducing the schemes, such as using "professional polling to British Polling Council standards" to ensure they had local support.

This polling standard was intended to stop councils using consultations designed by cycling lobby groups that contained leading questions and could easily be gamed by activists.

The guidance also insisted that councils consult bus operators, the emergency services and disabled groups, a practice that some had ignored, resulting in disastrous schemes such as [one in Lambeth](#) that resulted in such congestion that buses were taking two hours to travel three miles.

It also called for minimum standards of data gathering and monitoring so there could be "measurable metrics of success".

At the time, supporters of the guidance predicted it would not mean an end to LTNs but would mean an end to badly designed and unwelcome LTNs.

However, the guidance was never fully implemented before the election and, over the weekend, the Department of Transport said it had been "put on hold" and ministers were "now considering appropriate next steps".

The government says that [decisions on LTNs should be made locally](#) and supporters of the schemes argue that they make local roads safer and encourage walking and cycling.

In the letter, the group says that it was dismayed and incredulous that the transport secretary had “quietly ditched” the guidance.

It states: “On January 14 this year, we wrote to you on behalf of 15 campaign groups representing tens of thousands of residents from across the UK, to tell you about the extent to which local authorities have imposed LTNs on local communities without their consent — in many cases after public consultations showing that two-thirds or more wanted them removed.

“We also explained the many reasons why, in our experience, people object to LTNs: they damage local communities by causing huge problems for disabled and elderly residents who are car-dependent; they delay emergency vehicles, community health workers and public transport; and they destroy local economies with the closure of local high street shops and small businesses.

“In your last letter to us, dated May 21, you said that you understood the concerns ... we cannot understand, therefore, why guidance requiring public authorities to ensure that LTNs are only introduced with the support of local communities should not be brought into legal force. Why would any government not want to make it mandatory for councils to obtain public consent?”

A review of 90 LTNs earlier this year found that locals opposed the schemes in [87 per cent of cases](#) where polling was conducted. Despite this, the vast majority went ahead anyway.

Richard Aldwinckle, a spokesman for the group, said: “Despite Heidi Alexander’s personal assurance that she understands our concerns, it would appear she has chosen to ignore us, just as councils across the UK have ignored the results of public consultations in which the majority of residents said they were opposed to LTNs.

“If the Department for Transport is seriously planning to drop statutory guidance designed to stop councils from acting undemocratically, then we call on them to think again. These issues are not going away and nor are those of us campaigning for our voices to be heard.”

Supporters of LTNs argue that those who object are mostly drivers who do not want to be inconvenienced and that bold steps are required to encourage people out of their cars.