

Car Free London

Possible.
Inspiring climate action

London is a megacity; one of the most diverse cities in the world, and one of the fastest growing cities in Europe. This poses unique challenges for a city whose full potential is being choked by cars.

Public transport is expensive, and – particularly in the outer London boroughs – inadequate. Walking and cycling infrastructure across the whole city needs further investment.



Area	1,572 km ²
Population	8,908,081
Social Housing population	23%
People from minority ethnic backgrounds	44%
Average weekly earnings	£588
Trips made on foot	25%
Trips made by bicycle	3%
Car ownership	50% of households
Physically inactive adults	27%

At Possible, we want to see a zero carbon society, built by and for everyone, and we want to see this fast.

Our **Car Free London** campaign brings to life a positive case for fewer cars on our capital's streets.

We are working with communities currently blighted by traffic and air pollution to co-design changes to local streets, taking space away from cars and giving it back to people and nature.

We recognise that there are many people, including disabled people, who cannot get around without a car. Our aim of fewer cars on the road means more space for those who need to drive – and a better London for everyone.

At the same time, we will encourage and inspire local decision makers to raise ambitions and accelerate change at the city level.



credit: simontphotography.com for Waltham Forest Council

Our **Car Free London** campaign

There's so much we'd love to do in London to help shift us away from car dominance.

Here's what we've got planned so far.

Parklets

Many streets are lined with parked cars. What about providing some space for people to walk, cross the road, sit, rest, socialise?

Parklets are a great way of repurposing car parking spaces. They often host benches and greenery for people to enjoy, and they can lower air temperatures and increase biodiversity too.

We want parklets to become a widely recognised means of creating pleasant spaces for all.

Teaming up with other campaigners who share our passion for giving public space back to people, we will advocate for a London-wide parklet permit programme, as pioneered in Hackney.

We want to work with residents in neighbourhoods with the least access to green space to set up their own parklets. We'll be developing resources to help them through the process: from a photographic history of parklets, to developing a 'how-t

o' toolkit for individuals, to documenting the flagship '21st Century Street' project in Dalston, where several parking spaces are being replaced by a community garden.



credit: Brenda Puech

Who wants the traffic back?

Low Traffic Neighbourhoods (LTNs) use planters, bollards, and cameras ('modal filters') to remove through traffic from neighbourhoods.

Residents can still drive onto their road, or receive deliveries, but shortcutting from one main road to the next is harder or impossible. This stops people unnecessarily driving through residential roads, making them quieter, safer, and easier to walk, cycle and play.

The recent implementation of several LTNs under emergency Covid-19 measures has raised a debate about the right to public space and how we use it.

The benefits of these schemes are not immediately obvious to some residents. Change can be a challenge for many people, including those who currently own cars, but over time people tend to adapt to any perceived inconvenience, and in the end don't want their local modal filters removed.

We plan to test this assumption by surveying local residents who have lived by modal filters that have been in place for a while, and ask, 'Who wants the traffic back?'. We will recruit volunteers to carry out the door knocking survey when it is safe to do so and we will share our findings.



Traffic counting

Although many London councils are carrying out their own traffic monitoring, we want to gather data on neighbourhoods 'under the radar'.

Our focus will be areas which are not benefiting from existing monitoring, and where people are suffering high volumes of through-traffic.

We will engage new people in climate action by supporting local residents and businesses to install traffic counters in their windows.

We will analyse and publish the results to help make the case to the relevant authorities for street re-designs and changes in how we travel.

Cleaner air

The Ultra Low Emissions Zone (ULEZ), introduced in 2019, means that drivers of the most polluting vehicles must pay to drive into, or around, central London. This area will be expanded out to the North and South Circular roads in October 2021.

This is a great opportunity to support Londoners in switching to greener transport modes, instead of trading in their current vehicles for ULEZ compliant ones.

We will be starting a conversation around the costs and benefits of different transport choices, and analysing the cost of car ownership.

We want to demonstrate that a car-free life is possible, and we want to support people through this journey. We plan to launch a car-free trial pledge, and we'll be supporting people with advice on how to do a car-free school run, daily commute, and weekly shop.

We will also raise awareness of other transport options such as car share clubs and cargo bikes, examine the factors that prevent people from giving up their cars, and facilitate discussions on how these can be addressed.



credit: Jenna Selby for Waltham Forest Council



credit: Simberto Brauserich

Future filling stations

With the UK phasing out petrol and diesel cars, there's a great opportunity to do something amazing with the land currently occupied by petrol stations.

We will first audit London's petrol stations and find out how much land they currently occupy.

We will support local groups to register petrol stations as Assets of Community Value (ACV), which is land or property, nominated as important by a local community group, that then has added protection from development. If an owner of an ACV wishes to sell, they must first inform the local authority. If a qualifying community group wants to buy the ACV, they can have more time (up to six months) to raise the money to purchase it.

We also want to run workshops with local communities to develop ideas for what these petrol stations can be – perhaps a community garden or a space for young people.



credit: Jenna Selby for Waltham Forest Council

Getting people talking

Not talking about the problem with mass private car ownership makes it easier for us all to ignore.

This is why we want to get people talking; sharing their stories and experiences of getting around our city – the good and the bad!

We'd love to showcase these stories in a creative way with local art groups and encourage people to change how they talk, and think, about travel.

Key dates

Key dates in the calendar will provide a focus for our activities, often working in partnership with other stakeholder organisations across London.

Clean Air Day	17 June 2021
London Climate Action Week	26 June – 4 July 2021
Climate Coalition Festival	18–26 September 2021
Car Free Day	22 September 2021
UN climate talks	1–12 November 2021

We'd love to hear your ideas about how we can work together on these events and maximise collaboration.

The **problem with cars** in London

We all want to live in a neighbourhood where we can breathe clean air, walk around safely and feel connected to our community.

But London is congested with traffic, choked by fumes and is often dangerous for people who walk and cycle. This affects all Londoners, but older people, disabled people, children and communities where people of colour, and poor people live are hit the hardest.

1. The climate emergency

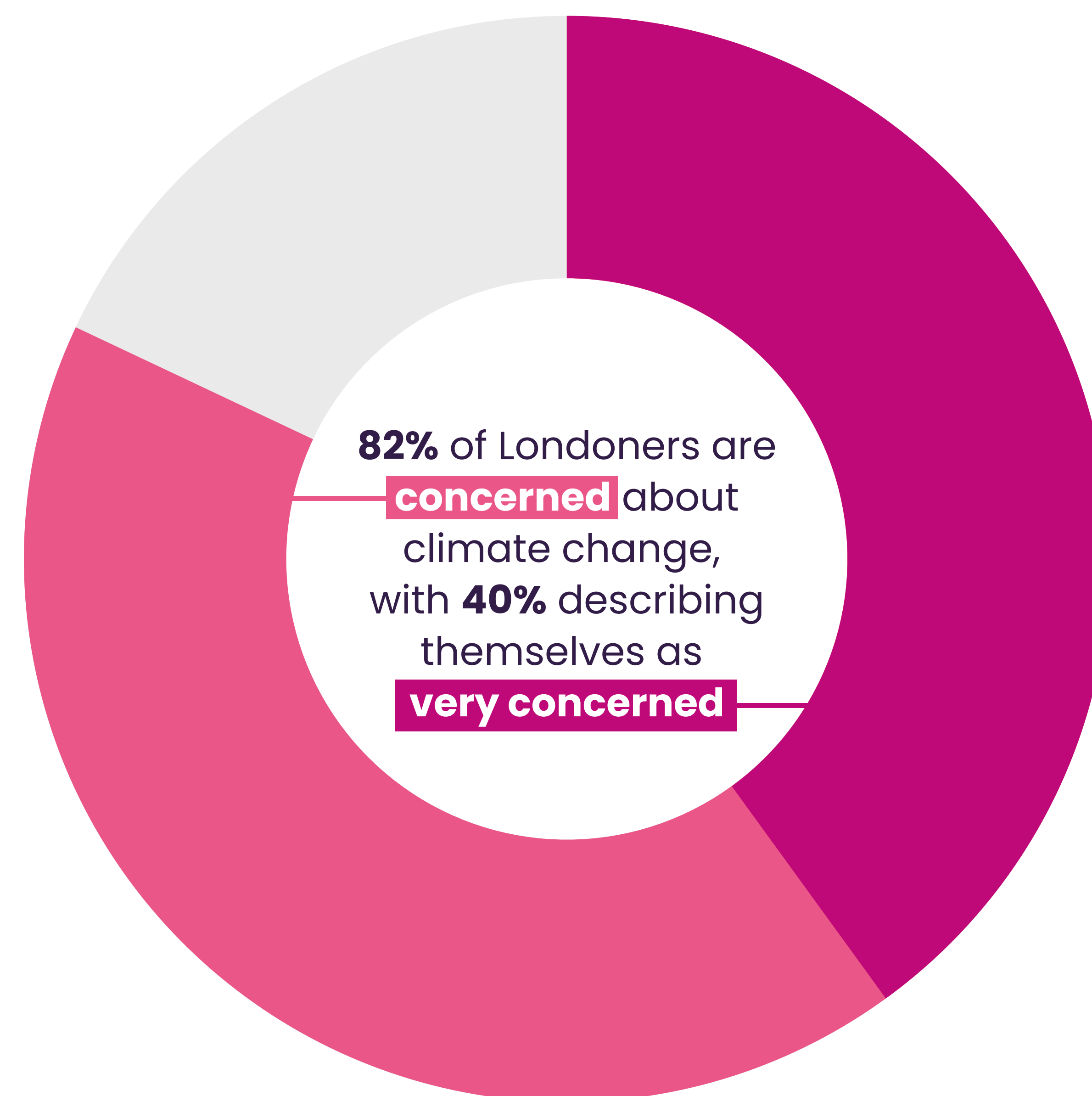
To tackle climate change, we need to significantly reduce the amount of carbon dioxide (CO₂) pumped into the atmosphere each day. Right now, transport emissions account for around 25% of London's greenhouse gas emissions, and 20% of this comes from road traffic.

We urgently need to reduce car use and make it easier for Londoners to choose 'greener' transport options.

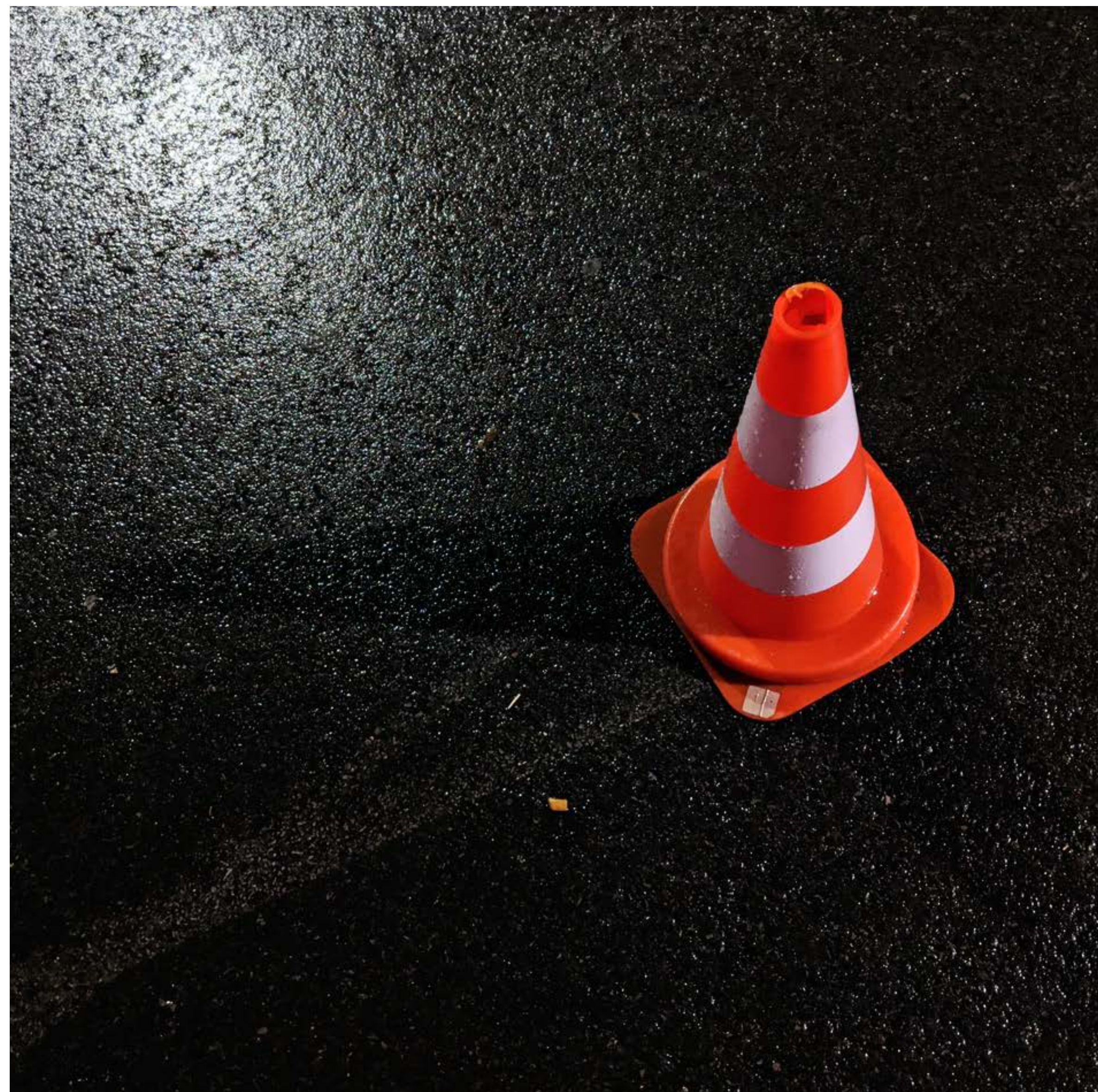
In 2019, the London Assembly (which holds the Mayor of London to account) was successful in securing a commitment from the Mayor to make London 'carbon neutral' by 2030 instead of 2050. This means the same reduction of emissions need to be occur, just much much faster.

28 of London's 33 Local Authorities also passed 'climate emergency' declarations during 2019. This is a great step, but action is now needed to achieve the targets critical to those declarations.

As recent polls have shown, Londoners are increasingly concerned about climate change and want to see action.



Data: London Councils



Credit: Lucian Alexe

2. Collisions

In 2019, over 25,000 Londoners were recorded as having been injured in road collisions, with almost 4,000 of those injuries categorised as serious, and 125 fatalities.

The Mayor's Vision Zero strategy has set a target of zero fatalities or serious injuries on London's roads by 2041, and a 65% reduction by 2022.

The Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (ROSPA) has been calling for a reduction of the speed limit to 20mph on all urban roads, on the basis that this would reduce the number and severity of road collisions and take pressure off the NHS.

20mph speed limits are now widespread in some boroughs, with over 95% of streets covered in Southwark, Hackney and Islington - but fewer than 5% in Bromley and Barnet.

Hackney is a clear leader in increasing walking and cycling in the borough, but it also has high rates of serious or fatal collisions for pedestrians and cyclists. To combat road danger, we need motor traffic reduction measures, as well as support for walking, cycling and scooting.

Fewer cars means fewer collisions, and more space for pedestrians to move, play and socialise safely.

3. Toxic air

Motor traffic is a major contributor to air pollution, responsible for about half of harmful nitrogen dioxide (NO₂) emissions in London. All vehicles produce non-exhaust emissions (particles from brake, tyre and road surface wear, known as particulate matter, PM2.5 or PM10). These pollutants have both direct and indirect effects on the environment and our own physical and mental health.

According to the [World Health Organisation](#), air pollution-related deaths are most closely linked to PM2.5 emissions. In London, toxic air causes an estimated 9,500 early deaths in London annually.

Many of London's primary schools are in areas where air pollution is illegally high. Children in Tower Hamlets [have a 10% reduced lung capacity](#), which prevents their lungs from developing fully.

In a landmark verdict in January 2021, a coroner ruled that a nine year old child, Ella Kissi-Debrah, died from illegal levels of air pollution – the main source being traffic emissions. Ella, who had severe asthma, lived within 30 metres of the infamous South Circular Road. The judge is expected to make recommendations for legislation to prevent future deaths.

Waltham Forest carried out a large scale Healthy Streets programme from 2015–2019 to reduce traffic dominance and improve walking and cycling infrastructure.

Subsequent research predicted that the borough's five-year olds [would live an extra six weeks](#) thanks to air quality improvements. Research also found that, compared to a decade ago, more than 51,000 households in Waltham Forest are no longer living in areas with dangerously high levels of air pollution.

This demonstrates the improvements to London's air quality that we can achieve through further measures to reduce motor traffic.

In March 2021, the UK was found guilty by the European Court of Justice of "systematically and persistently" breaching air pollution limits.

4. Noise pollution

Traffic is a big contributor to noise pollution in London – especially for those who live on or near major roads, for whom the exposure to traffic noise is constant.

The London Mayor recognises in his Environment Strategy (March 2018): “there are a number of widespread adverse effects of noise, the most common of which are annoyance and sleep disturbance.”

Noise pollution contributes to an increase in heart and circulatory problems, sleep disturbance, chronic annoyance, physiological effects, mental health effects, hearing impairment, reduced performance and communication and learning effects.

The World Health Organisation recognises environmental noise as the second largest environmental health risk in Western Europe, behind air quality.

5. Inactivity crisis

London is facing an inactivity crisis. Over decades, machines, cars and technology have gradually taken over many of the tasks that used to require physical effort.

More than 40% of Londoners do not achieve the recommended 150 minutes of activity a week. 28% do less than 30 minutes a week. Almost without realising it, we have engineered physical activity out of our daily lives.

The consequences of this shift to more sedentary lifestyles are severe. Lack of physical activity is now one of the biggest threats to our health, increasing the risk of developing a range of chronic diseases including diabetes, dementia, depression and the two biggest killers in London – heart disease and cancer.

We urgently need to design physical activity back into our everyday lives. Walking more, cycling more, using public transport more, are the easiest and most affordable ways for many of us to get more active and live healthier lives.



Data: DfT car ownership figures multiplied by standard size of a parking space © Mapbox, © OpenStreetMap

6. Public space

The Covid-19 lockdowns, and the closure of parks and urban green spaces, highlighted how access to outdoor space is a luxury denied to many people, particularly those from low income households living in tower blocks. Even in boroughs with some of the best parks, these are not easy to access for people in all neighbourhoods.

The Mayor of London has made a commitment to make more than half of the capital green by 2050.

The average car sits unused for 95% of the time. In London, over 50 square kilometres of land that should be available to the public is given over to the storage of private cars – compared to only 20 square kilometres of parkland.

We could use more of this land to increase our green spaces through measures such as parklets and increasing cycle storage space.

Six boroughs now have 100% restricted parking (where only those cars with residents, visitors or business permits can park).

But just 9% of roads in Bromley and Sutton have restricted parking and even one inner London borough, Lewisham, has a very low rate at just 24%.

7. Inequality and social justice

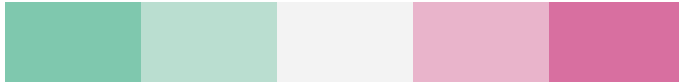
Car dominance is also a matter of social justice. Data shows that the poorest people in London are the least likely to own a car, and are more likely to walk or take the bus to work. More than half of London's low income households have no access to a car.

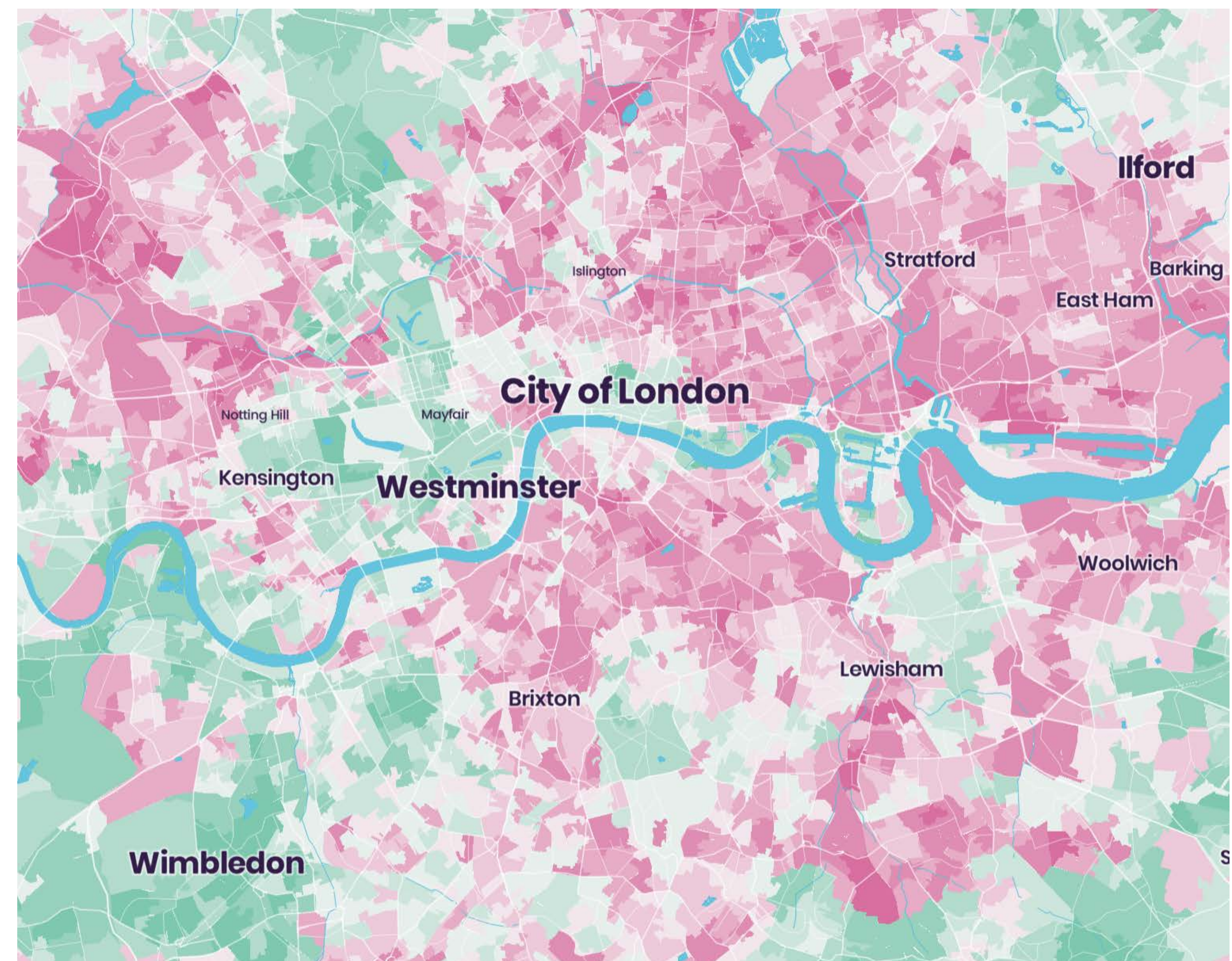
But it is these people who suffer the most from the toxic air, noise, stress, congestion and traffic danger from other people driving through their streets.

Disabled Londoners and those with health conditions make 32% fewer car trips each day than other Londoners: yet as pedestrians disabled people are five times more likely to be injured by a motor vehicle than non-disabled people.

Black, Asian and other ethnic minority groups are disproportionately affected by air pollution from motor traffic. A large proportion of the workforce of taxi drivers and bus drivers are from ethnic minority backgrounds, and are thus consistently exposed to vehicle fumes for long hours.

UK index of multiple deprivation, 2019

Least Deprived  Most Deprived



Data: Consumer Data Research Centre © Mapbox, © OpenStreetMap

8. Congestion

London was not designed to accommodate the vast numbers of vehicles it currently endures. The average speed of a car in London is just 7 mph. Drivers waste eight minutes of each car trip, on average, driving around looking for somewhere to park.

Unavoidable congestion affects the speed and efficiency of emergency services, buses and taxis. The spillover into residential streets (shortcutting) causes frustration and aggression towards other drivers and road users.

Worryingly, over the last ten years, motor traffic in London has increased after a decade of decline. Between 2009 and 2019, motoring on London's residential roads increased from 5.5 billion vehicle miles to nearly 9.5 billion! Much of this increase is likely to be due to sat-nav systems turning residential streets into cut-throughs that allow drivers to avoid main roads.

This growth in motor traffic is unsustainable.



credit: Steven Lu



credit: Aleksejs Bergmanis

9. Social isolation

A major threat to our quality of life in London is the impact of high motor vehicle traffic on neighbourhood social interaction.

Where traffic volumes are high, residents report limited social contact with people on the other side of the road. They have fewer friends and acquaintances than on lower traffic streets. The extent of people's "home territories" also diminishes as motor traffic increases and limits the mobility of people walking and cycling.

People often perceive more road danger in their neighbourhood as a result of traffic conditions on their street, and this affects the degree of independence granted to children.

This all highlights the need to reclaim urban residential neighbourhoods from motor traffic, and that political will is required to make this happen.



credit: Andrew Roberts

Are electric vehicles the solution?

All vehicles – even electric and hydrogen ones – produce non-exhaust emissions (particles from brake, tyre and road surface wear, known as Particulate Matter or PM2.5 or PM10).

These can enter all major organs of the body, not just the lungs, heart, and brain, but also the placenta, affecting life chances of unborn children.

Electric vehicles still cause congestion and road danger, they do nothing to encourage space or transport equity, and they compound the inactivity crisis and social isolation in our communities.

So, no – the answer isn't just newer cars, but fewer cars.

Moving away from car dependency

This campaign brings to life a positive vision for major cities to move away from mass private car ownership – we want to take space away from cars and give it back to people and nature.

Let's be clear, our vision of a car-free city is one free from the dangers caused by mass private car ownership. That's not the same as a city with no cars at all. We recognise there are many people, including disabled people, who cannot get around without a car, and our campaign to reduce the number of cars in cities will make their lives easier too.

Car journeys

Between 2014–2019, 35% of London trips were made by car. The Mayor’s transport strategy wants to reduce this to 20% by 2041. But there is growing evidence that if we are to meet agreed climate change targets, we need to hit this target by 2030.

Three out of five inner London households are now car free, compared to only a third of outer London households (where most people live). We need more investment in those outer London boroughs to enable a greater shift away from cars.

School Streets

School Streets restrict motor traffic at school opening and closing times. They help improve road safety and air quality, and increase the number of children who walk or cycle to school.

The pandemic led to a swift increase in School Streets, with almost 400 implemented across London during Autumn 2020 and another 50 planned. Whilst 53% of Islington’s schools have School Streets, some outer boroughs like Barnet and Bexley currently have none. Our report found that about half of London’s schools may be suitable for a School Street.

Low Traffic Neighbourhoods

During the Covid-19 lockdown, many councils quickly took advantage of emergency funding from the Department of Transport to trial low traffic neighbourhoods (LTNs). LTNs can help rapidly transform the character of urban spaces.

Our report found that approximately nine out of ten Londoners across all backgrounds live on residential streets that could benefit from LTNs. We also mapped the distribution of London’s existing low traffic neighbourhoods, showing that most lie in boroughs with high levels of deprivation such as Lambeth, Hackney and Islington. There has been much less change in wealthier boroughs like Bromley and Richmond which have introduced no new LTNs.

Ultra Low Emissions Zone

The introduction of the Ultra Low Emissions Zone in 2019 reduced nitrous dioxide (NO₂) emissions by 37%. The expansion due in October 2021 is expected to reduce NO₂ emissions by a further 30%.

Public transport

Almost 50% of Transport for London's funding comes from passenger fares. When passenger numbers plummeted during the Covid-19 lockdown, TfL was brought within hours of near collapse.

With great uncertainty in regards to its future funding, TfL are currently focusing on reassuring passengers and attracting them back to public transport post-Covid-19.

TfL is upgrading various tube lines, trains, and stations. It has made some progress in electrifying buses, but it is no secret that some areas (particularly south London and the outer boroughs) are particularly underserved.

Walking and Cycling

Covid-19 has led to a massive increase in walking and cycling, but more needs to be done to ensure greater equity so that Londoners from all communities can participate. For example, cycle training budgets need to be protected, with access to bikes provided.

Only 3% of trips are by cycle - and yet half of all vehicles across some of the city's bridges at peak time are bicycles. We need to make active and sustainable travel work beyond the city centre.

Mobility as a service

Car clubs can help unlock a new model of urban mobility for London by offering an alternative to private car ownership. London already has one of the largest car club markets in Europe with six car club operators.

London is also one of the first UK cities that will be trialling e-scooters for hire in five boroughs.

Green Space

Currently 18% of London's land is made up of green space.

In 2019, London became the world's first National Park City with the Mayor committing to make the city greener, healthier and wilder.

Parklets are created by turning parking spaces into community spaces. They're a great way for people to access outside space where they can't otherwise. The London Parklets Campaign had been working for more green space and parklets across our city.



credit: Jenna Selby for Waltham Forest Council

Collaboration

We want to work with residents, businesses, individuals, campaigners, community groups and other organisations to drive forward the car free vision and re-imagine London as a place designed around people, rather than cars.

We are also keen to work in partnership with other organisations already doing fantastic work in this area, and add value to existing initiatives.

We particularly want to engage with groups and individuals who are most affected by the harms of cars, to amplify their voices and co-design solutions. We want to work with disabled people's organisations, communities of colour, schools, and faith groups as well as local authorities.

If you like the sound of this and want to help us work towards the vision of a Car Free London, we'd love to hear from you!

Find Out More

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