

Position Statement: Active Travel and Health

Introduction

The Association of Directors of Public Health London (ADPHL) is committed to improving the health and wellbeing of Londoners and reducing health inequalities. Active travel, encompassing walking, wheeling and cycling all the way, or as part of a public transport trip, is an important way to achieve better health for Londoners.

This position statement affirms ADPHL's commitment to promoting and supporting active travel as a key strategy for improving public health, increasing physical activity, reducing road danger, improving air quality, tackling climate change, connecting communities, and benefiting London's economy.

Document aim

This position statement outlines the critical role active travel plays in improving the health and wellbeing of Londoners. It is designed as a practical tool for Directors of Public Health (DsPH) to champion active travel within their boroughs and beyond. This document equips readers with key messages, data insights and collaborative suggestions to ensure active travel is embedded as a core part of public health leadership in London.

It aims to:

- Set out the compelling case for active travel as a driver of better physical and mental health, reduced health inequalities, cleaner air, safer streets, connected communities and a stronger economy (Section 1).
- Provide tangible, locally actionable recommendations for DsPH and their teams to influence change through public health practice, partnership working, and advocacy (Section 2).

Key messages

1. London has high levels of obesity in children, increasing premature mortality due to cardiovascular disease, and poor mental health remains a public health concern.
2. Physical activity is described as a 'miracle cure' by the Academy of Royal Colleges.
3. Active travel is a feasible, equitable and sustainable way of incorporating physical activity in the daily lives of all Londoners.
4. Increasing active travel can reduce health inequalities and deliver health co-benefits through increasing physical activity, improving air quality, reducing road danger, connecting communities, increasing access to opportunities (e.g. education, employment, services), climate change mitigation and reducing noise pollution.
5. Public health teams and borough transport colleagues have the power to increase active travel locally.

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Section 1: The case for encouraging active travel in London

1. Active travel, physical activity and health

1.1 Context

In London, the premature mortality rate from circulatory disease (in persons under 75) increased from 70.9 per 100,000 in 2017-19 to 74.5 per 100,000 in 2021-23.¹ Circulatory disease is a major driver of the gap in life expectancy in London between the most and least deprived communities.

The level of childhood obesity is higher in London than the rest of the England. In 2023/24, the prevalence of overweight (including obesity) for Year 6 children was 37.8 per cent in London compared to 35.8 per cent in England. For Reception age children the prevalence was 20.9 per cent in London compared to 22.1 per cent in England.²

Heart health is a key priority for the London health system and for the Mayor of London. ADPH London is working with partners across London on a pan-London preventative campaign and programme to support heart health, due to be launched in 2025.

The government's [10 Year Health Plan for England](#) aims to make the NHS fit for the future through 3 shifts, including from sickness to prevention. Active travel is recognised as playing a key role in the prevention agenda, by increasing physical activity and improving air quality.

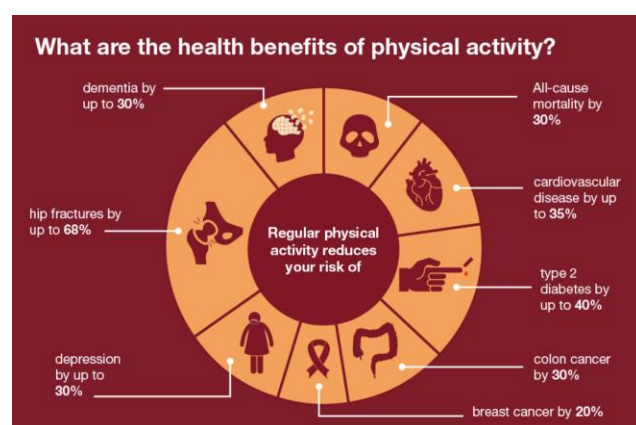
1.2 Benefits of physical activity

Physical activity has significant physical and mental health benefits. It helps to prevent and manage over 20 chronic conditions and diseases, including some cancers, heart disease, type 2 diabetes and depression (figure 1). For this reason, it was coined the 'miracle cure' by the Academy of Royal Colleges.³

It is estimated that 70% of total expenditure on health and care in England is associated with the care of people with major conditions (previously known as long-term conditions)⁴; a lack of physical activity is implicated in all of these.

However, 2023/24 data shows only 47.3% of children (5-16 year olds) met the CMO guidelines of at least 60 minutes moderate to vigorous intensity physical activity per day across the week.⁵ Only 66.7% of adults achieved the recommended 150 minutes of physical activity per week in 2023/24.⁶

Figure 1. Benefits of physical activity.⁷

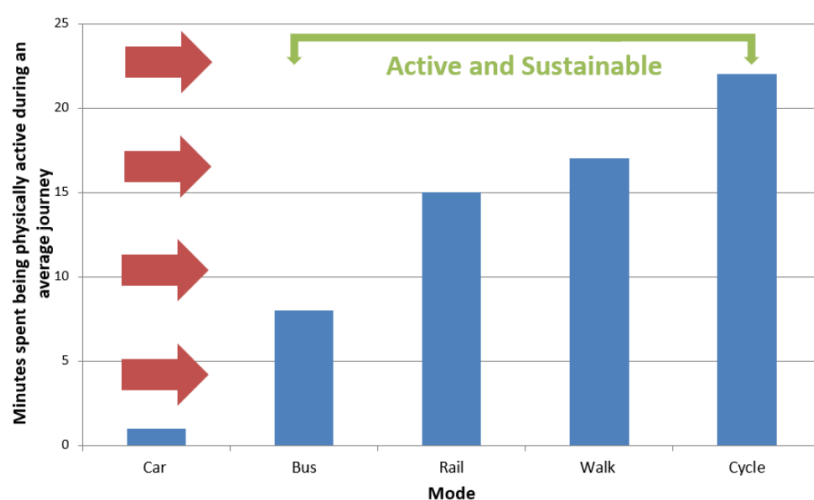


1.3 Active travel as a feasible and equitable solution

Active travel is the primary source of physical activity for many Londoners and serves as an equitable form of physical activity that can be built into an everyday routine. Walking, wheeling and cycling are considered as moderate to vigorous forms of physical activity, contributing to physical activity weekly guidelines. Walking, wheeling and cycling can also be integrated with journeys to/from public transport hubs for onward journeys. Approximately 73% of walkable trips in London are currently made by car.⁸ Figure 2 shows the increase in physical activity when car journeys are switched to active and sustainable modes of transport.

Analysis from 2017 showed that if all Londoners walked or cycled for 20 minutes a day, it would save the NHS £1.7bn in treatment costs in London over 25 years.⁹

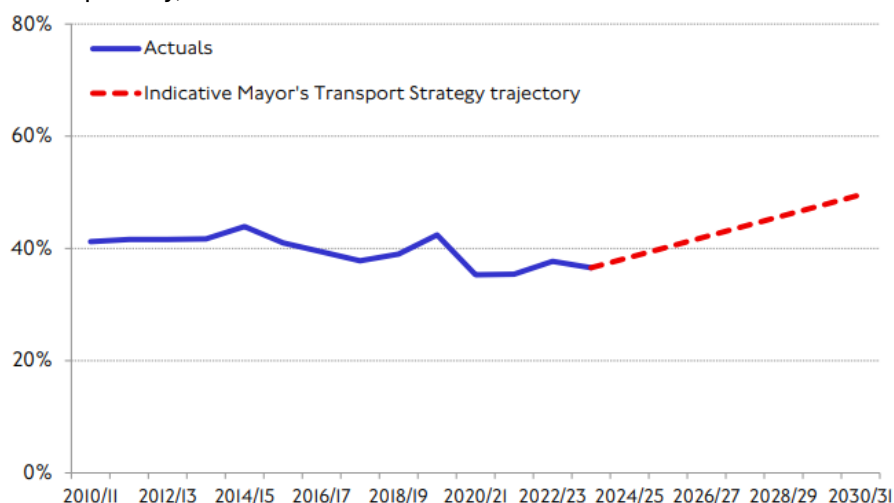
Figure 2. Minutes spent being physically active during an average journey in London.



1.4 Active travel targets

The Mayor of London aims for all Londoners to undertake at least 20 minutes of active travel daily by 2041. In 2023/24 this proportion was 37 per cent, down from 38 per cent in 2022/23. Progress towards this target was impacted by the pandemic and has not yet recovered to pre-pandemic levels. (Figure 3). This is likely due to the continuing shortfall in the post-pandemic recovery on public transport use. Transport for London's Travel in London reports provide more detail on active travel trends and show this proportion by borough of residence, see appendix B.¹⁰

Figure 3. Proportion of London residents aged 20 and over who achieved at least 20 minutes of active travel per day, 2010/11-2030/31.¹¹



Source: TfL Strategic Analysis, Customer & Strategy.

1.5 Co-benefits of active travel

1.5.1 Air quality

Road transport is one of the biggest contributors to air pollution in London.¹² Despite significant improvements, air pollution remains a major environmental health risk for Londoners, with vulnerable groups, including those with pre-existing conditions and communities in deprived areas, being disproportionately affected. Areas of higher deprivation are often exposed to higher levels of pollution, particularly in neighbourhoods with a higher proportion of non-white residents. Nowhere in London meets the World Health Organization's air quality guidelines.¹³

Key statistic: Modelling showed that air pollution contributed to the premature deaths of around 4,000 Londoners in 2019.¹²

Interventions to increase active travel and minimise private vehicle use can significantly reduce road transport emissions, contributing to cleaner air and a healthier environment. The importance of investing in active travel is highlighted in the 10 Year Health Plan in order to clean up our air and prevent ill health.

1.5.2 Road danger reduction

In London in 2023, 95 people were tragically killed and 3,706 seriously injured on London's roads.¹⁴ Road danger disproportionately impacts people walking, wheeling and cycling, as well as those living in deprived neighbourhoods, children, older people and ethnic minorities.¹⁵

Key statistic: Twice as many people living in or travelling through London's most deprived areas are killed or seriously injured in road collisions than those in the least deprived areas of London, despite being less likely to own a car.¹⁵

60% of all deaths and serious injuries on London's roads in 2023 – 2024 occurred in collisions with cars.¹⁴ Reducing the dominance of motor traffic will reduce the number of people killed and seriously injured on London's roads. Simultaneously, reducing road danger will encourage more people to walk and cycle – the National Travel Attitudes Study found that fear of road danger is the greatest barrier to cycling.¹⁶

The Mayor's Vision Zero goal aims to eliminate death and serious injury from the transport network by 2041.¹⁷ Working closely together, Transport for London (TfL) and London's councils have introduced measures including 20mph speed limits, School Streets, Low Traffic Neighbourhoods, protected cycle lanes and safer junctions which have been shown to improve safety and cumulatively significantly reduce the number of people killed or seriously injured on London's roads. However, more action is needed to achieve the Mayor's target.

1.5.3 Connecting communities

Studies demonstrate an inverse relationship between traffic levels and social contacts.¹⁸ Busy roads create physical and psychological barriers hindering people's ability to move freely, separating communities from essential services and from each other. Coined 'community severance', it heightens social isolation, which is a risk factor for worsened health outcomes and mortality.¹⁹ Community severance reinforces inequality with certain populations disproportionately affected, including those experiencing deprivation and those with mobility difficulties.²⁰

TfL's Healthy Streets approach emphasises the need for more attractive, accessible and enjoyable streets.²¹ This is often achieved through redesigning streets for pedestrians and cyclists, replacing space previously used by vehicles with green infrastructure.

1.5.4 Climate change

Climate change has been described as the greatest public health challenge of the 21st century.²² The London Climate Resilience Review published in July 2024, calls for collective action from London's partners to adapt to and mitigate the effects of climate change.²³

Interventions to enable more active travel contribute to climate mitigation and adaptation. Encouraging a shift to sustainable modes of transport from private vehicle usage reduces carbon emissions and therefore reduces further environmental damage. Additionally, green infrastructure mitigates the effects of climate change helping London to cope with extreme weather events: green space reduces excess heat within cities, whilst sustainable drainage systems built into streets can prevent flooding.

1.5.5 Noise pollution

Nearly all Londoners are exposed to noise levels exceeding World Health Organization (WHO) guidelines, and transport is a large contributor. Deprived communities are often located near busy roads, industrial areas, or transport hubs, making them more vulnerable to high noise levels. Noise pollution has negative impacts on health outcomes, through sleep disturbance and annoyance, and is associated with ischaemic heart disease.¹⁸

An increase in active travel and decrease in private vehicle use, will reduce noise pollution and its health impacts.

1.5.6 Economic Benefits

The preventative powers of physical activity achieved through active travel can reduce public spending on healthcare.⁹ Active travel also alleviates congestion which is estimated to cost London's economy around £5.1 billion per year.²⁴ This figure includes the economic impact of delays, increased fuel consumption, and other related expenses.

Mode shift interventions also benefit local businesses, despite concerns that interventions that reduce traffic would negatively impact the high street. Research in the 2024 update to 'The Pedestrian Pound' show people who walk or wheel to do their shopping spend more money and pedestrianised high streets see bigger sales. The weekend pedestrianisation of Shrewsbury town centre saw 25% higher growth in sales.²⁵

Transport poverty refers to the difficulty or inability to make necessary journeys due to income, cost and/or service availability. This is the experience of 300,000 people in London, accounting for 3.5% of the population.²⁶ Interventions to encourage active travel could be designed to reduce this inequality by offering alternative and accessible travel options.

1.6 Evidence and toolkits on how to increase active travel and reduce road danger

- [Healthy Streets Approach](#) and accompanying toolkits describes how to put people and their health at the centre of decision-making, helping everyone to use cars less and to walk, cycle and use public transport more.
- [The impacts of Low Traffic Neighbourhoods in London](#) - This summary of evidence shows that LTNs are having a positive impact on the lives of people living and working in London including making streets safer and enabling people to walk and cycle more.
- Investment in street design and active travel infrastructure in outer London has shown to increase active travel and bring economic benefit, an additional 62 minutes walking and 43 minutes cycling per week among those living in high-intervention Mini-Holland areas compared with those living in non-Mini-Holland areas. Compared to the programme cost of £100 m, the 20-year health economic benefits are ten-fold higher, at £1,056 m.²⁷

- [Lower speed limits](#) have significantly reduced the number of collisions on the Transport for London Road Network.²⁸ Analysis of 157 20mph schemes on borough roads in London has shown a 34% reduction in people killed or seriously injured in the 3 years after implementation compared to the 3 years before implementation.²⁹
- [10 principles of Active Design](#) describes how to create active environments that encourage people to be active through their everyday lives, including 3 principles to support active travel.
- WHO's [Promoting walking and cycling: a toolkit of policy options](#) outlines 7 strategic policy options that collectively aim to enable safer active transport for people of all ages and abilities.

Section 2 – Key Recommendations for Directors of Public Health to promote active travel

DsPH have a unique and powerful role to play in embedding active travel into local systems, strategies and public discourse. While transport may sit outside of public health's traditional remit, DsPH influence as a health leader — especially across council teams and through networks — is essential to achieving the outcomes outlined in this statement.

Below are practical ways DsPH and their teams can act.

1. Champion active and sustainable travel within your borough

- Use your leadership voice to advocate for safe, inclusive infrastructure for walking, wheeling, cycling, and accessible public transport.
- Influence funding by supporting borough transport teams in developing ambitious Local Implementation Plans (LIPs)³⁰, drawing on the health, equity, and economic case for active travel. LIP funding is the process through which TfL provides boroughs with financial support to improve their transport networks in a way that is consistent with and supports the Mayor's Transport Strategy (TfL awarded £80.4 million in funding to boroughs in 2024/25).
- Make the most of tools such as the Department for Transport [Active Mode Appraisal Tool](#), WHO [Health economic assessment tool \(HEAT\) for walking and cycling](#) and the [Propensity to Cycle tool](#) to present the health and cost-saving benefits in funding bids or strategic discussions.

2. Embed active travel and road danger reduction in public health strategy

Include the Mayor of London's targets — 20 minutes of active travel per day and Vision Zero — and borough data in your Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) and related strategies, such as:

- Joint Local Health and Wellbeing Strategies (JLHWS)
- Physical Activity or Mental Health strategies

This anchors active travel and road danger reduction in your borough's overarching vision for health and wellbeing, providing leverage for cross-departmental collaboration and with the wider health system, including Integrated Care Boards (ICBs).

3. Work across council departments

Convene or strengthen relationships with colleagues in **transport, planning, regeneration, housing, and communications** to co-develop shared actions on active travel.

For example, public health teams can:

- i. support case making within their local authority, sharing best practice and data to emphasise the value and importance of active travel.
- ii. support their local authority's role as an anchor institution through increasing active travel in staff.
- iii. ensure that the local authority specifies road danger reduction interventions in their procurement for their fleets and supply chains, including the Fleet Operator Recognition Scheme (FORS), the Construction Logistics and Community Safety Scheme (CLOCS) and Direct Vision Standards.³¹ Contact TfL at samweller@tfl.gov.uk and GLA Group Public Health Unit at GLAPublicHealthInbox@london.gov.uk for further information on procurement contract clauses.
- iv. collaborate with comms teams to ensure campaigns include health framing and use borough channels to highlight walkable spaces, cycle training, or community initiatives.

4. Engage pan-London partners

Harness support from partners such as:

- **ADPHL** (e.g. Obesity or Climate & Health Networks)
- **GLA & TfL** (data, guidance, policy influence)
- **OHID London** (insight into inequalities, evaluation frameworks)

Consider borough-led contributions to shared pan-London initiatives that build the evidence base — such as evaluations, pilots, calls for evidence or shared learning on reducing car dependency or addressing transport poverty.

5. Leveraging the influence of the NHS and other public facing roles

Recognise the key role of health professionals and other public facing roles to promote the benefits of physical activity to patients, and active travel as a feasible way of moving more:

- **'Making every contact count'** recognises the vast and far-reaching resource of NHS, local authorities, voluntary and community sector staff to give Londoners consistent, simple messages and signposting them to services that help improve their health and wellbeing. [MECC Link London](#) provides advice on starting helpful conversations about health.
- Social prescribing link workers connect people with activities, opportunities and support to meet practical, social and emotional needs, recognising the factors which influence our health are often outside the healthcare system. Boroughs can engage social prescribing teams at ICS or Primary Care Network level to share local opportunities to engage in active travel. This [case study](#) illustrates how an NHS patient found a sustainable way of fitting exercise into their life through active travel.

As large employers and anchor institutions, NHS organisations can also implement measures to support increase in use of active and sustainable travel modes among staff and partners.

Engage with London ICBs and London Greener NHS, which convenes the Travel and Transport London Forum and supports ICBs with development of their Green Plans.

6. Monitor and advocate for what works

Make use of existing data, including the TfL borough data packsⁱ, to track impact on:

- Physical activity levels - [Public Health Outcomes Framework](#)
- Road safety – [TfL’s road safety data and interactive data dashboards](#):
 - [Road danger reduction dashboard](#)
 - [Inequalities in road danger dashboard](#)
 - [Vision Zero enforcement dashboard](#)
- Air pollution - [London Air Quality Network](#)
- Community experience (e.g. severance, cohesion)

Encourage local evaluation of initiatives and share learning through regional forums or ADPHL network meetings.

7. Build public momentum

Promote the co-benefits of active travel — particularly its potential to reduce inequalities and improve quality of life — in community engagement efforts.

Consider developing a local narrative that highlights residents’ stories or case studies showing the real-world impact of safe, accessible streets.

Conclusion

Increasing active travel is essential in improving Londoners’ health. There are multiple public health benefits including increasing physical activity, improving air quality, reducing road danger and noise, mitigating and adapting to climate change, reducing community severance, and reducing inequalities. Enabling active travel also increases residents’ access to a wide range of opportunities, including education, employment and social activities and benefits London’s economy. This position statement highlights the multiple ways in which DsPH can advocate for and support an increase in active travel in their borough.

ⁱ To support boroughs in planning their LIPs, TfL provides London boroughs with detailed data packs which help boroughs plan interventions that maximise benefits and ensure alignment with LIP guidance. TfL also provides updates to boroughs on their progress against the Mayor’s Transport Strategy (MTS) objectives at borough level. See latest LIP MTS outcomes borough data pack at planning.data.tfl.gov.uk.

Appendix

A. Further Useful Resources

Strategies

- [The Mayor's Transport Strategy \(MTS\) 2018](#)
- [Vision Zero for London - Transport for London](#)
- [Encouraging cycling & walking - TfL](#) (Cycling action plan; Walking action plan)
- [Transport & health - Transport for London](#)
- [Pollution and air quality | London City Hall](#)

Data and evidence

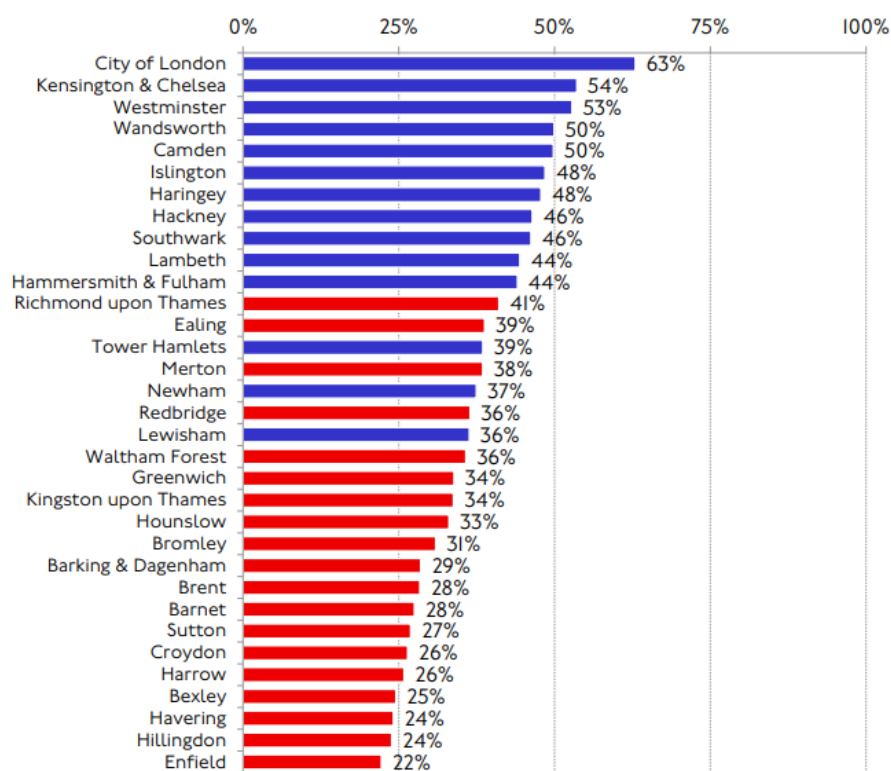
- [Travel in London annual reports](#) - data from TfL's London Travel Demand Survey (LTDS)
- [TfL's LIP MTS outcomes borough data pack](#)
- [TfL's road safety data and interactive data dashboards](#)
- [Inequalities in road danger in London \(2017-2021\). Transport for London. 2023.](#)

Funding opportunities

- [Local Implementation Plans \(LIPs\)](#) [funding from TfL for local authorities]
- Developer contributions can be used by local authorities to fund active travel programmes and infrastructure [Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) and Section 106 funding]
- [Walking and Cycling Grants London \(WCGL\)](#) [for community groups]

B. Additional data

Figure 4. Proportion of London residents aged 20 and over who achieved at least 20 minutes of active travel per day, by borough of residence, LTDS, 2023/24.¹⁰



Source: TfL Strategic Analysis, Customer & Strategy.

References

- ¹ [Cardiovascular Disease - Fingertips Public health profiles](#)
- ² [Public Health Outcomes Framework - Data | Fingertips | Department of Health and Social Care - obesity prevalence](#)
- ³ [Exercise: The Miracle cure and the role of the doctor in promoting it. Academy of Royal Colleges. 2015.](#)
- ⁴ [House of Commons Health Committee. Managing the care of people with long-term conditions. 2014](#)
- ⁵ [Public Health Outcomes Framework - Data | Fingertips | Department of Health and Social Care – physically active children and young people](#)
- ⁶ [Public Health Outcomes Framework - Data | Fingertips | Department of Health and Social Care – physically active adults](#)
- ⁷ [Physical activity: applying All Our Health - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)
- ⁸ [Walking Action Plan. Transport for London. 2018.](#)
- ⁹ [Healthy Streets for London. Transport for London. 2017.](#)
- ¹⁰ [Travel in London 2024 - Active travel trends. Transport for London. 2025](#)
- ¹¹ [Travel in London 2024 - Annual overview. Transport for London. 2024.](#)
- ¹² [London Health Burden of Current Air Pollution and Future Health Benefits of Mayoral Air Quality Policies. Imperial College London. 2021.](#)
- ¹³ [Air quality exposure and inequalities study part 1 – London analysis. Aether Ltd. 2023.](#)
- ¹⁴ [Road danger reduction dashboard. Transport for London.](#)
- ¹⁵ [Inequalities in road danger in London \(2017-2021\). Transport for London. 2023.](#)
- ¹⁶ [National Travel Attitudes Study: Wave 9. Department for Transport. 2024.](#)
- ¹⁷ [Vision Zero for London - Transport for London](#)
- ¹⁸ [Transport, health and inequality. An overview of current evidence. Mindell & Watkins. 2024.](#)
- ¹⁹ [Community Severance and Health: What Do We Actually Know?. Mindell & Karlsen. 2012.](#)
- ²⁰ [Transport and Community Severance. Mindell & Anciaes. 2020](#)
- ²¹ [Healthy Streets for London. Transport for London. 2017.](#)
- ²² [The Lancet Countdown on health and climate change. 2024.](#)
- ²³ [The London Climate Resilience Review – July 2024](#)
- ²⁴ [Cost of congestion in capital revealed as car use remains high. Mayor of London. 2022.](#)
- ²⁵ [The Pedestrian Pound 2024, Living Streets.](#)
- ²⁶ [Getting the Measure of Transport Poverty. Social Market Foundation 2023.](#)
- ²⁷ [Impacts of active travel interventions on travel behaviour and health: Results from a five-year longitudinal travel survey in Outer London. Aldred et al. 2024.](#)
- ²⁸ [New data shows significant improvements in road safety in London since introduction of 20mph speed limits - Transport for London. 2023](#)
- ²⁹ [The safety impacts of 20mph speed limit introduction on borough roads in London, 1989 - 2013. TfL. 2025.](#)
- ³⁰ [Local Implementation Plans. TfL.](#)
- ³¹ [Vision Zero action plan progress report. Transport for London. 2021. See page 39.](#)