Low Traffic Neighbourhoods: why everyone needs to take note



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Using this report

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KEY FINDINGS

– **This panel identifies the Key Findings within the research data.**

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Foreword

Professor Stephen Joseph OBE

Low Traffic Neighbourhoods have become a polarising issue in some areas. In some cases, they've become part of a "culture war", with people on both sides trading accusations and insults. This report is therefore very helpful in bringing together data from many consultations on LTNs and seeing where there are common concerns and interests.

The data humanises the Low Traffic Neighbourhood (LTN) debate, showing how people's daily lives affect their viewpoints. There are some useful pointers and differences, especially by gender: women who use cars more frequently and have childcare and carer responsibilities and so have more "trip chaining" - linking together different journeys - may face more disruption from LTNs than men, who tend to make simpler journeys. The report suggests holistic local solutions so that the need for women to make these "chained journeys" by car is reduced - for example, enabling more children to reach schools independently.

It should of course be noted that this is data from people who have responded to LTN consultations, and Commonplace is not claiming it is representative of populations as a whole. This leads to an important conclusion on comparing the make-up of those responding to consultations with the data for the area concerned - for example the main mode of transport (to avoid "write-in" campaigns by one side distorting results). As the report says, "an over-representation of car users or of cyclists will skew results as these groups' views tend to be very different".

> ...there is a need for decision-makers to understand and respond to local needs

One clear conclusion is that there is a need for decision-makers to understand and respond to local needs, find ways to obtain and share information on these needs, and adjust projects and schemes accordingly and in response to consultations. There is also a need to reach out to groups that don't engage as much with these consultations, yet are very important - for example young people, who as the report says are less likely to have a driving licence.

Overall, this report helps shine a light on the LTNs and people's attitudes to them. When the analysis was shared through the "Smart Transport" conference and website, Commonplace's emphasis on nuance, patience and communication was welcomed. If followed through it may result in better schemes with more consensus and less polarisation - and therefore better communities.

Stephen Joseph

Stephen Joseph is Chair of the Smart Transport board and a professor at the University of Hertfordshire Smart Mobility Unit. He was CEO of the Campaign for Better Transport until 2018.

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With thanks to our colleague **Reuben Matthew** for his help in assembling the data.



1. In Brief

Introduction and key points

Many public authorities are developing local transport measures to support active travel like walking, wheeling and cycling. As part of this initiative, Low Traffic Neighbourhood schemes (LTNs) and other local measures have been introduced as systematic solutions to reducing car dependency and improving general health and wellbeing.

As you may have already seen in the news and across social media, these measures have given rise to strong views, for and against.

In this report, Commonplace uses extensive data that we gathered from hundreds of these schemes to identify the various attitudes and priorities of different groups towards LTNs and similar measures.

KEY FINDINGS

- **There are clear differences between what men and women typically see as the key issues with implementing LTNs; age is also a key factor, as is how people relate to an area - do they live in, visit, or travel through it?**

Understanding the different views is vital for two reasons:

1. Insight led schemes can be shaped to local priorities:

Quite simply, a more nuanced understanding of local concerns helps shape better priorities and solutions when schemes are implemented.

2. Community engagement and communication builds trust:

Engagement information is essential in addressing concerns of the different groups that exist in every community. Each scheme can then balance these different needs and show local people that they are understood. Transparency is a key to building trust, and to successfully adjusting and optimising schemes over time.

For both these outcomes, early and ongoing engagement is vital, and will save time, money and political capital.

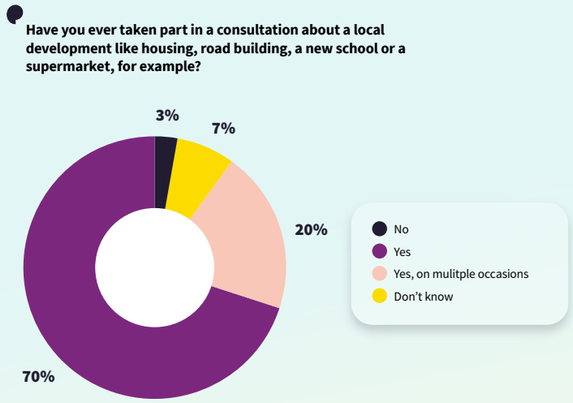
So what can the data show us?

Our experience from which the data is drawn, shows that it is highly beneficial to consult early and widely. Engagement should be continuous and maintained between formal consultations and feedback provided at every step.

Engagement needs to be careful not to give rise to a perception of bias. For example, when offering options for local traffic changes, we recommend always giving these additional options:

- A tag that endorses the status-quo: “Don’t change”.
- A free text box where respondents can offer other options.

2. How this report uses Commonplace data



At Commonplace, we are public engagement experts. Our first aim is to create good and nuanced public engagement, which means making the engagement channels highly accessible to as diverse a group of voices as possible. Our second aim is to ensure that what we have learnt is used to shape future policies. This is a way of respecting and thanking the many people who give time to share their thoughts as part of a civic engagement.

The data we've gathered for this report provides insight into how people feel about local traffic-reduction and management measures in general, and then we are able to take a more granular look. Our starting point is that traffic reduction and management policies are here to stay and, therefore, need to be made better and be more clearly understood.

We anonymously gather demographic data from our respondents so we are able to report on the concerns expressed by people with different demographic characteristics: younger or older; different genders; what mode of transport people mostly use, and how they relate to the area where traffic restrictions have been imposed - do they live there, drive through, or is it the destination for their journey to work.

200
local transport consultations

700,000
data points

140,000
respondents

This report shows just some of the data the Commonplace holds - contact us if you are interested in a particular aspect not covered here.

Looking at the data at this level, we see the specific concerns of people with different roles in their family and community. Understanding these views is key to developing better policies - and also for explaining them better. Within a single household there can be so many opinions and opportunities to change views, provided that decision-makers seek the data, analyse it and refer back to people's concerns when devising policies.

In each of the demographic characteristics that we look at, there are differences in attitude towards LTNs. Characteristics that drive a stronger variation of views are: age, connection with the area, regular mode of transport, and gender.

Identity, though, is complex and comprises many variables. This is reflected in the Commonplace responses. Often, the demographic variables have a combined effect with each other. For example, as a whole, cyclists are more favourable towards LTNs than users of other modes of transport, but within this group older cyclists are less favourable towards LTNs than younger ones. Policies need to take such subtleties into account.

This report uses data collected between April 2020 and August 2022, with the bulk of the data relating to a period of accelerated LTN roll-out during a COVID-19 response.

Some of these LTNs have since been significantly modified or fully withdrawn. Our data suggests that over time, some objections to LTNs soften - seemingly as people adapt their local travel to new conditions and opportunities.

It should be noted that unlike mainstream social media, Commonplace is passive - we do not use algorithms that promote specific comments to particular audiences.

To make these policies acceptable we need to understand:

- What people use local transport for
- What people object to
- What benefits people see
- Who in the population are more positive or negative in their attitude.
- What triggers their positivity or negativity

Then communities and authorities can:

- Develop communication policies and mitigations that chip away at some of the opposition points
- Build a better case - and better schemes - from the outset



3. Caring & responsibilities

In responding to LTNs, women were more likely than men (considerably in some cases) to mention issues that relate to more vulnerable members of the community or families: the elderly; those requiring health services; and issues relating to children and school access. Men for their part were more likely to mention various forms of infrastructure as well as traffic conditions and also "the government."

KEY FINDINGS

– **Women in particular consider vulnerable people in judging a scheme. Their concerns will influence household views.**

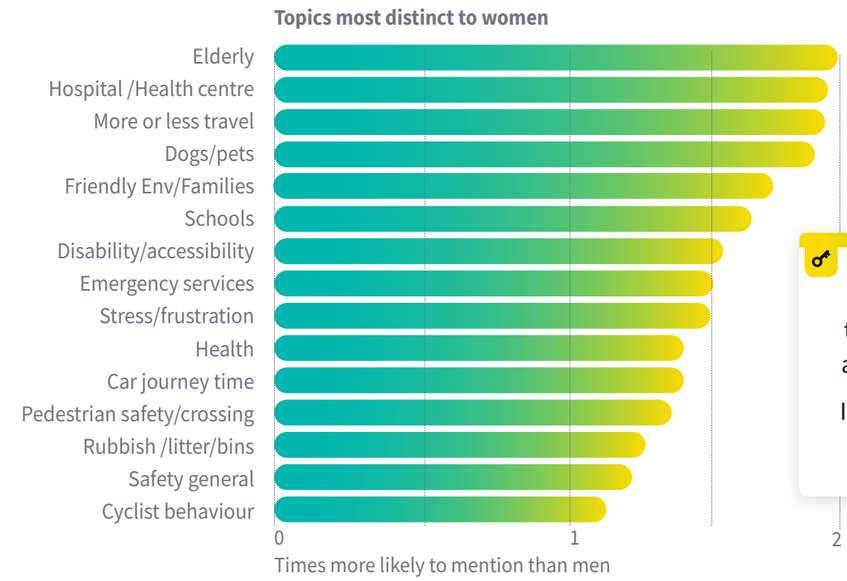
Additionally, women respondents tend to use cars more frequently for local journeys. This, too, may explain why they are slightly less supportive than men when it comes to accepting local restrictions on car movements.

This can be characterised as women being more focused on the purpose of travel, while men were relatively more focused on the means and mechanics of travel and infrastructure including details of the local schemes themselves. So while women more vividly saw the impact on caring and family responsibilities, men were triggered by the physical environment.

You can exemplify this by thinking of a safe cycling route to a school. From a carer's perspective, the utility of the change will be measured by its ability to convey children safely to school independently and without the cost and time of being driven. A household member more focused on commuting is more likely to address the change to the physical environment and not necessarily its positive functionality. They notice the restriction but don't benefit as much from its purpose.

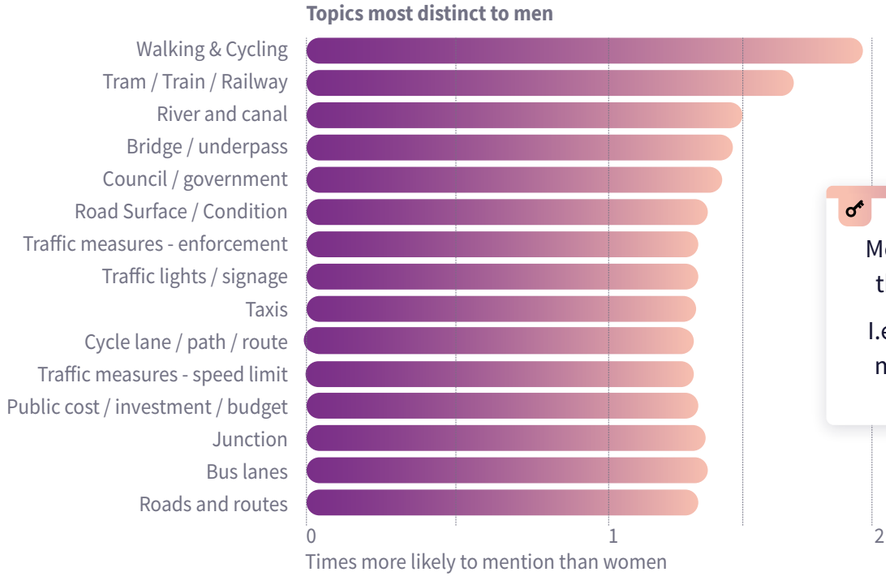
This suggests that promoters of Low Traffic Neighbourhood schemes need to focus more on the benefits to those with responsibilities for vulnerable people. Schemes need to be designed with these benefits in mind, and avoid creating obstacles to vulnerable people. This perspective is echoed in the report by Transport for All on the impact of LTNs on people with disabilities.

The two graphs below show the topics on which the frequency of mentions by women and men diverge the most



Women more vividly saw the impact on their caring and family responsibilities

I.e. nearly 2x more likely to mention the elderly than men



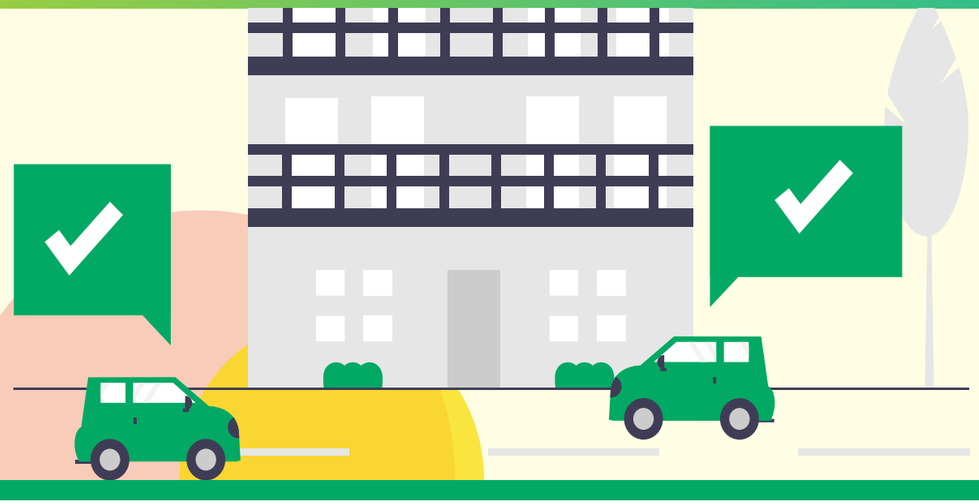
Men were more triggered by the physical environment.

I.e . nearly 2x more likely to mention walking & cycling than women

Reference Links

Transport for All report is here
https://www.transportforall.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Pave-The-Way-full-report.pdf

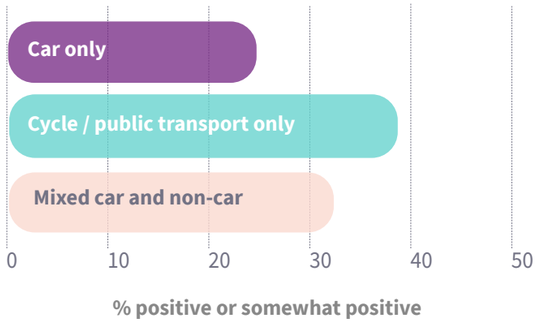
4. Mode of transport



Users of bicycles and of public transport are 50% more likely to be positive about LTNs

Commonplace respondents' mode of transport has a considerable impact on how they relate to LTNs:

Sentiment : Positive or somewhat positive feeling for active travel projects - by type of transport



KEY FINDINGS

– **Respondents who primarily use cars are least keen on LTNs and those who used bicycles and public transport are significantly more positive. More men are in the "cycle and public transport" group than women - the women respondents are more car-dependent.**

These differences are significant - statistically, even more significant than the differences when looking at the data by gender. Users of bicycles and of public transport are 50% more likely to be positive about LTNs than those who predominantly used cars for local journeys. Perhaps self evident, is that people who walk to the bus stop or cycle locally, benefit most from a reallocation of road space away from cars.

The figures can be useful as a benchmark when assessing levels of local support for LTNs and similar measures. If the distribution of respondents' main mode of transport does not represent the proportion in the community, the results in terms of support or objection may be skewed. An over-representation of car users or of cyclists will slant results as these groups' views tend to be very divergent.

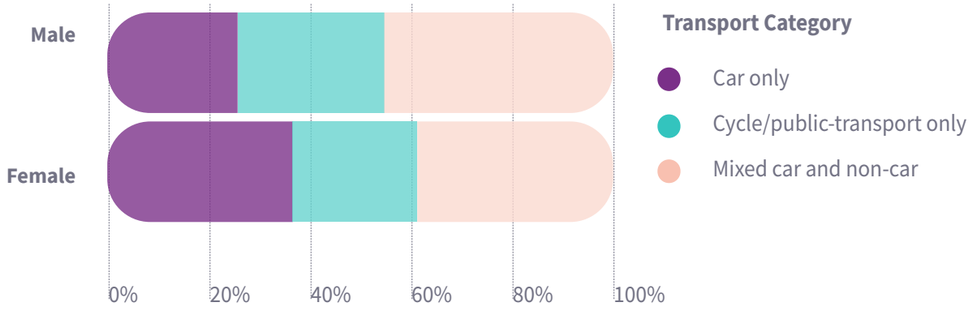
The chart below looks at gender alongside mode of transport - starting to build a more composite picture. Commonplace women respondents are far more likely to be car-dependent and less likely to mix their modes of transport. 37% of women respondents said they used "car only" as their predominant mode of transport, against 24% of men.

The higher proportion of men who state their mode of transport to be "cycle/public transport only" correlates with the far higher bicycle use of men in the UK compared with women. Pre-pandemic, men cycled three times as much as women; while during the pandemic lock-downs the gap narrowed to men cycling twice as much.

The higher use of public transport by men also lends itself to more mixed-mode travel - for example, walking or cycling to a bus or rail station.

Earlier we showed that women are more likely to mention caring responsibilities when assessing LTNs. Combine this with transport mode patterns and there is a distinct suggestion that the responsibilities and hence travel patterns of women can be more complex due to care responsibilities. This is a familiar pattern of "chained journeys" - whereby it is often women who need to reach multiple destinations in a day, a pattern that is difficult to achieve using only public transport (see "Other Research" section below).

% respondents by gender and transport mode



5. The Impact of Age

KEY FINDINGS

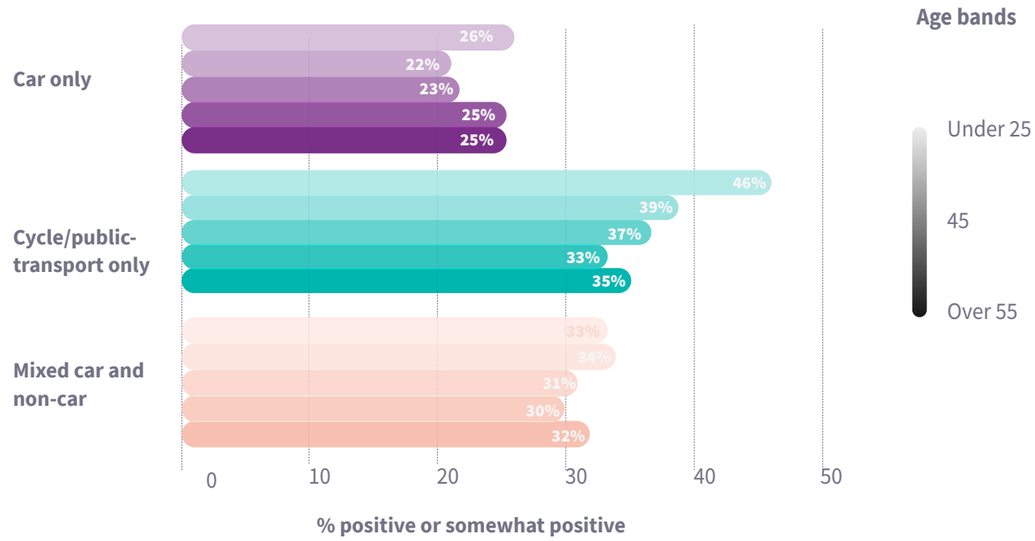
– Under 25s are most positive about LTNs, irrespective of their main mode of transport. Older people are the only group mentioning ‘public consultation’ as a factor - this correlates with relatively low civic engagement by young people.



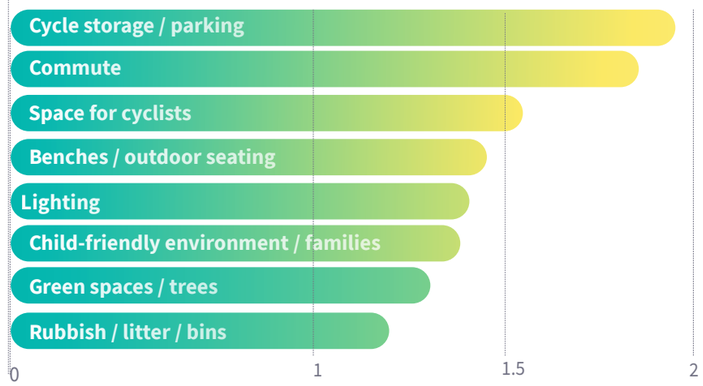
Across all “main forms of local transport”, under 25s are most positive about LTNs, although for users of mixed modes of transport, the margin of difference is very small. The most positive are under 25s who primarily use public transport and cycling to get around. This figure, and the wide margin of support by under 25s relative to other age groups not using cars, can possibly be related to the declining proportion of young people holding driving licences.

Among 17 to 20 year olds (across genders), just 21% held driving licences in 2021. Interestingly, among this age group 23% of women held licences, against 19% of men (Source: RAC Foundation). As with the earlier graph on gender and transport mode (pg 13), the gap highlights the specific transport needs and challenges faced by women and their higher reliance on cars.

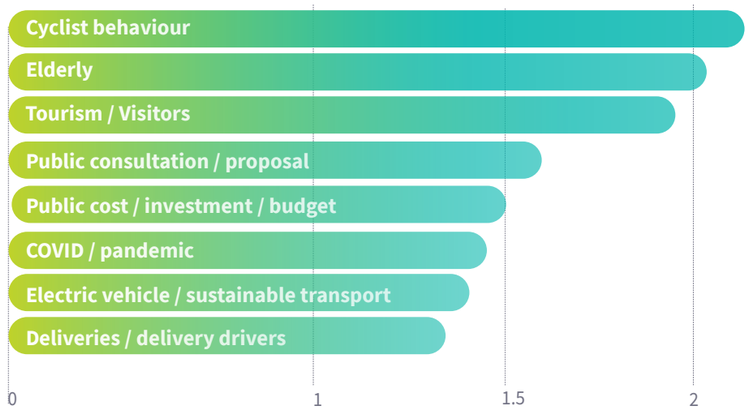
Average user feeling for Active travel projects by age



Topics where under 45 diverge the most from older



Topics where over 45 diverge the most from under



Some interesting findings emerge when we look at the most common topics for younger audiences. Perhaps not surprisingly, we can find topics related to families, such as play areas. Commute is also a higher priority for these groups, with themes related to cycling and cyclist facilities a top priority.

When we look instead at the topics more common for older demographics, we can find a number of concerns, such as [inappropriate] cyclist behaviours and the elderly, but we can also find more ‘abstract’ themes related to the public costs and financial impacts or the proposal itself.

These groups potentially have more time to analyse an LTN proposal in detail, and perhaps to identify inconsistencies or details of the scheme. Within this age group, public consultation is an area of concern - not mentioned by the younger cohort.

6. Living locally or commuting?



KEY FINDINGS

– **The way people are connected to an LTN area significantly shapes their views as their view of gain versus inconvenience can be a lot different depending on how they use the space. Authorities should decide and clarify the weight they ascribe to the views of different groups.**

Most transport-related Commonplaces ask respondents to describe their connection to the area. For example; are they residents? Do they travel through? Or is it a destination for a commute?

The patterns are quite divergent. Perhaps most intriguing is that among car users, residents are more supportive of traffic calming measures than those commuting through. This may demonstrate that for residents who are car users, there is a balance of upsides and downsides. It may take a bit longer to get around by car, but there are also benefits in improved air quality, reduced noise and greater safety, that can be balanced against the inconvenience.

Non-residents who don't habitually drive tend to be more supportive - maybe enjoying local benefits without some of the downsides. A typical feature of LTNs is preventing rat-running. A removed rat-run is highly likely to be more popular with residents than those whose shortcut is removed. The non-local drivers who find their rat-run blocked feel they are losers without an upside.

Those using mainly public transport and cycles are overall the most supportive - especially if they are "commuting or visiting the area". Again, this could be because people enjoy the benefits of the road space reallocation, without the downsides felt by some residents.

These findings suggest that, when seeking opinions on LTNs, it is important to probe the subtle and sometimes contradictory factors that shape opinion. Just a simple yes/no is not enough either for forming policies or for meaningfully engaging the public around the issues that are involved.

Feeling by transport mode and residency



7. Conclusion: Nuance, patience and communications

Our LTN data provides insight into the issues that shape attitudes to LTNs. Our data shows a wide range of community concerns and priorities. These differ according to demographic factors; travel modes; connection to the area, and personal and family responsibilities.

At Commonplace we encourage our customers to chase nuance. This means looking at information from different angles and asking questions in a way that slows down the initial gut reaction. Social media feeds often push towards outrage, taking sides to encourage clicks rather than a nuanced view. Something as complex as an LTN needs the opposite - consideration for the complication of policy and the factors that may make LTNs more acceptable in the long-term.

A main take-away is the need for holistic local solutions so that the need for “chained journeys” by car is reduced. Enabling more children to reach schools independently would be an example of such policy emphases.

It is important to intervene actively and consistently in these local conversations to remind residents that LTNs are often about competing needs. Consequences of air pollution, for example, are severe and may justify some inconvenience to drivers. It is also important to draw young people into the discussion. They are not car users - but nor are they typically engaged in civic conversations.

Local authorities who promote LTNs need to be prepared for long-term communication campaigns about local changes. Ensuring that a plethora of views are expressed is important, and it is not uncommon for discussions on social media concerning LTNs to attract considerable interventions from well outside the locality. Having a curated digital space such a Commonplace can mitigate the polarisation through providing more information and consistently providing feedback to residents on how local input is shaping plans.



KEY FINDINGS

- **Nuance : Consider different peoples concerns even within the same household**
- **Patience : Allow time for consultation, iteration and modification.**
- **Communication : Start well before implementation, keep it continuous and maintain post implementation.**

8. Other Commonplace resources and insights

Please refer to www.commonplace.is for a large number of articles on digital engagement, civic engagement and specific information on how Commonplace works on local transport issues.

Blog May 2022



Low Traffic Neighbourhoods
Maintaining transparency with Commonplace
https://www.commonplace.is/blog/low-traffic-neighbourhood

Blog October 2020



Active Travel Projects
Getting concent for change
https://www.commonplace.is/blog/active-travel-projects-getting-consent-for-change

Blog August 2022



School Road Safety
Reducing car traffic
https://www.commonplace.is/blog/schools-road-safety

Blog April 2020

Commonplace's Invitation
Why we are giving free access to Local authorities amid COVID-19?

Good Practice August 2022



Transport Engagements
4 Commonplace uses
https://www.commonplace.is/blog/transport-engagements

Commonplace Website

Overview of Commonplace transport solutions
https://www.commonplace.is/solutions/transport-planning

9. Other research on LTNs and related issues

There is a growing amount of research on the impacts of - and attitudes towards - LTNs. We are grateful to colleagues conducting this research and particularly would like to mention the research by Transport for All on the impact of LTNs on people living with disabilities.

Commonplace's data analysis should ideally be seen alongside other research on LTNs. Our subjective, sentiment-based approach can be superimposed on objective data such as the traffic impact study (item 3 below).

1. Transport for All report is here: https://www.transportforall.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Pave-The-Way-full-report.pdf

2. Transfort for London funded research on levels of support in London for cycling and walking infrastructure investment View article

3. University of Westminster based research on the impact of LTNs on traffic patterns in London: "Changes in motor traffic inside London's LTNs and on boundary roads" View article

4. Low-traffic neighbourhoods put on trial : A very good summary of research findings on LTNs is provided in this recent article by Mark Smulian in the journal "Smart Transport" (November 2022 edition) https://www.transportforall.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Pave-The-Way-full-report.pdf

5. A useful discussion of "chained journeys" https://drcommute.com/trip-chaining-a-new-way-of-commuting/

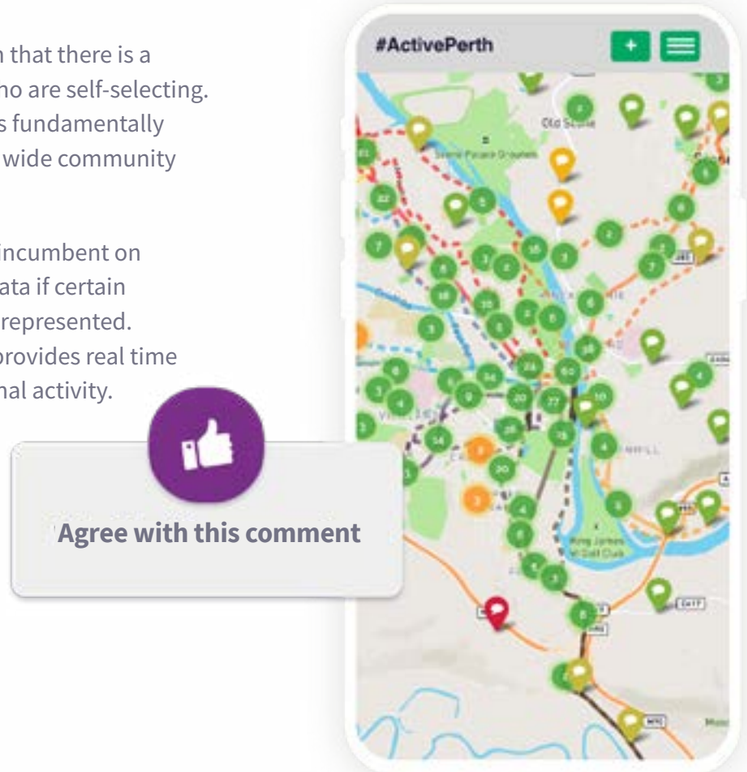
10. How Commonplace works

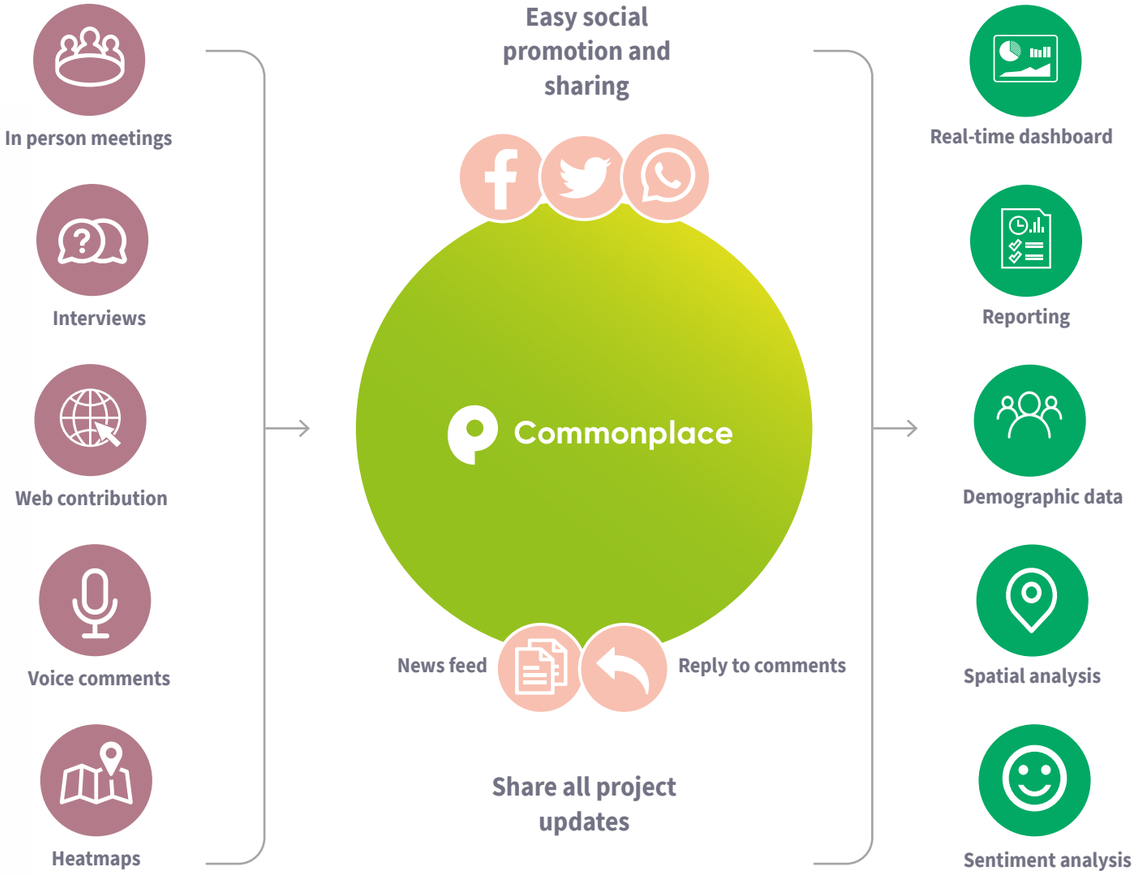


Commonplace supplies websites for local community engagement that are used by local authorities, communities, private developers and other organisations to inform the public on plans and also gather feedback.

Commonplace data is distinct in that there is a huge number of respondents who are self-selecting. This is because Commonplace is fundamentally an engagement tool, aiming for wide community participation.

It provides rich insight, but it is incumbent on policy-makers to access other data if certain demographic groups are under-represented. The Commonplace dashboard provides real time data that facilitates this additional activity.







Found this interesting?
that's just the start...

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