

Call to Merton Council to implement safe boroughwide transport during COVID-19 & beyond

Dear Merton Councillors and Members of Parliament

We welcome the government announcement regarding walking and cycling¹, TfL's Streetspace plan² and that Merton's response³ recognises "Major events shape our society and the way we experience everyday life." It is a time of disruption. We are pleased Merton declared a climate emergency & adopted 20mph limits. But to make walking and cycling viable for households of mixed ages - now & into the future - we need physical protection from motorists & low traffic streets across the borough.

While we may want to get back to most aspects of pre- COVID-19 life, we are now experiencing – many for the first time – how pleasant it is to live with much less motor traffic. Parks, streets, and communities have been bought back to life. Motor traffic is down to 1955 levels. We can now hear birdsong and breath clean air. The Council must lock-in less motor traffic.

Physical distancing may last for many months and years. Over 56% of Merton's population travel to work by public transport (Census, 2011) – that equates to about 60,000 round trip work journeys.⁴ Public transport capacity is predicted to fall by 85-90%. Residents will need other ways to travel. Without substantive changes to the roads to enable walking and cycling, motor-traffic levels will not merely revert to but exceed pre-lockdown levels, as seen in Wuhan. Merton will be grid locked.

Merton's emergency travel response¹ needs to go much further than it does currently; walking and cycling must be made viable for all, including children and older people. The threat of motor traffic must be cut on all streets – a boroughwide approach is needed. It is logical to redistribute space to the most efficient modes. The graph below indicates capacity by mode per 3.5 metre width per hour.

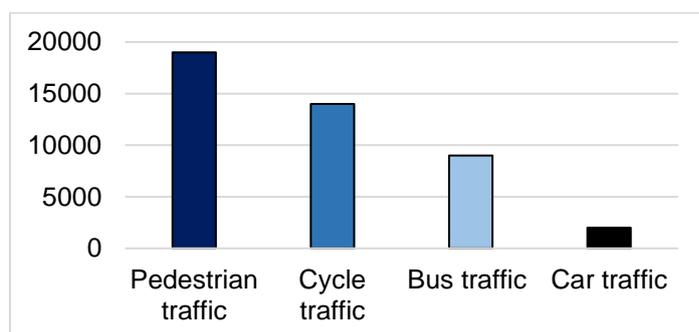


Figure 1: Capacity by mode in normal times assuming typical car occupancy rates; number of people who can be carried in 3.5m wide space per hour. Source: Cycling Embassy of Great Britain

Merton's roads are designed primarily for motor traffic. In normal times, this makes for unpleasant streets and kills residents – either directly through road collisions, or indirectly by causing ill-health. Recent studies show links between air pollution and COVID-19 death rates. Long-term exposure to fine particulate matter (PM_{2.5}) at even quite small levels is associated with an increased risk of COVID-19 death. Cars – including electric cars – produce particulate matter from brakes and tyres which weakens our respiratory systems. Lungs recovering from COVID-19 must not be forced to breathe harmful gases and particulate matter. We cannot go back; air pollution, the climate emergency and the links to COVID-19 mean permanent change is needed.

As an outer London borough, Merton faces the prospect of major increases in driving from residents and the commuter belt as people avoid public transport unless it takes drastic action. Boroughs, including neighbouring ones, are acting to cut motor traffic. If Merton does not go far enough, we will

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/2-billion-package-to-create-new-era-for-cycling-and-walking>

² <https://www.london.gov.uk/press-releases/mayoral/mayors-bold-plan-will-overhaul-capitals-streets>

³ <https://www.merton.gov.uk/assets/Documents/Merton%20Covid%20Transport%20Strategy%207%20May%202020.pdf>

⁴ Commuting accounts for 15% trips. NTS Table NTS0611. The other 85% trips will need to be provided for too.

be left behind, and grind to a halt with an increase in car traffic from pre-lockdown levels, which will hurt our recovery.

We therefore ask that all councillors work together to implement an ambitious cross-party borough-wide plan to create safe space. On residential streets, people need to be able to walk in the carriageway to avoid other pedestrians. Streets need to be suitable for children to move, cycle, play and socialise. Routes to schools, parks, food shops & hospitals should be prioritised. This should not be just an emergency response; there needs to be permanent change to the way we move.

The boroughwide plan should include:

- Modal filters (road closures) on residential streets to cut rat-running (low traffic neighbourhoods)
- Reallocation of motor traffic and car parking space to safe space for pedestrian and cycle traffic
- Protected cycling infrastructure on all main roads to ensure routes can be used by all ages
- Two-way cycling on all gyratories and one-way streets
- Temporary footway widening – Merton has highlighted some locations already
- Resident-led community or exercise streets⁵ and camera enforcement of 20mph speeds
- Trial bus gates, signal crossing timings to prioritise pedestrians and additional temporary crossings

This crisis has shown how quickly we can act as a society when facing a threat to our lives. We must act with the same haste to improve our transport system as this too will save lives. Many others wanted to sign this as individuals; there is wide support for change. We understand the Council may be overwhelmed by other issues. We would like to help and offer our support and combined expertise to the Council to create the necessary change.

Lucy Marstrand, Associate Member, **All Party Parliamentary Group for Cycling & Walking**

Dr. Rachel Aldred, Reader in Transport, **University of Westminster**

Dr Robert Davis, **Road Danger Reduction Forum**

Diana Sterck, CEO, **Sustainable Merton**

Jeremy Leach, **Merton Living Streets**

Adrian Voce OBE, **European Network for Child Friendly Cities**

Lucy Colbeck, **Playing Out**

Jemima Hartshorn, **Mums for Lungs**

Laura Collins, **Clean Air Merton**

Kathryn Stewart, **Merton Cycling Campaign**

Charles Barraball, **Cycling UK Merton Local Group**

Mariana Pacheco, **Merton Friends of the Earth**

Laura Carter, **Merton Friends of the Earth**

Katie Meech, **Merton Council Climate Emergency Working Group**

Pippa Maslin, **Merton Council Climate Emergency Working Group**

Franki Appleton, **Merton Council Climate Emergency Working Group**

Alice Rayner, **Merton Council Climate Emergency Working Group**

Lily Marcel, **Merton Council Climate Emergency Working Group**

Mehmood Naqshbandi, **Merton Council Climate Emergency Working Group**

Richard Hackforth-Jones, **Merton Council Climate Emergency Working Group**

Sara Sharp, **@savewimbledon / Merton TV**

Daniela Tilbrook, **XR Merton**

Lucy Hogarth, **XR Scientists**

Reverend Alison Judge, **Christchurch and St John's Church, Merton**

Nicola Thompson, **Haydons Road North Community group**

Sam Birnage, Head Teacher, **Hollymount School, Wimbledon**

Dr Tim Spruell. Emergency Medicine Doctor, **Guy's and St. Thomas' NHS Foundation Trust**

Dr Roberta Brambilla, Vascular surgeon, **St George's Hospital**

Dr Honey Smith, GP, **Richmond Medical Centre**

Dr David Taussig, haemato-oncology research lead, **Royal Marsden Hospital**

⁵ <http://news.croydon.gov.uk/road-closure-scheme-to-help-residents-keep-fit-and-healthy-during-lockdown/>