

Baroness Taylor of Stevenage
House of Lords
London
SW1A 0PW

24th June 2025

Dear Lady Taylor,

Joint letter: call for a new framework in planning law to limit congestion from new homes.

As transport and environmental organisations, we are writing to you today as the Planning and Infrastructure Bill begins its Second Reading in the Lords to urge the government to amend the bill to make provision for a new framework to limit the increase in traffic and congestion from new developments. We welcome the government's ambition to deliver 1.5 million new homes but call for reforms to the planning system to ensure that they do not lead to a damaging increase in traffic that will stifle growth, worsen air quality and drive-up carbon emissions.

Traffic congestion holds back the economy

The government's planning reforms are meant to unlock much needed new homes, but without integrating greater use of sustainable travel, they could increase congestion and lead to more car-dependent communities. It is estimated that traffic congestion cost the UK economy £7.7 billion in 2024.ⁱ But it isn't just costing the broader economy, it's costing working people. In the last 30 years, new housing has become increasingly car-dependent.ⁱⁱ Accessing work, education and amenities from many new homes requires car ownership, adding to affordability challenges during the ongoing cost of living crisis.

Our groups are calling for an amendment to the Planning and Infrastructure Bill to introduce a framework that ensures new developments do not increase congestion and have a measurably positive impact on local transport networks. The new policy would replace the current cumbersome system of transport assessments and travel plans with a new digital system focused on cutting congestion, pollution, ill health and social exclusion.

How this new congestion limiting framework would work

Under the new framework, local authorities and developers would use a digital tool to identify the best locations for housing developments linked to existing and planned sustainable transport infrastructure. This would include identifying whether additional sustainable transport upgrades and new facilities are needed beyond the development boundary. Depending on the scale of development, the impact could be measured across the local area or for a new town across a new strategic authorityⁱⁱⁱ.

Where new developments are projected to increase traffic, developers would be required to offset the impact on the local area by financially contributing to public transport improvements like enhancing bus and rail services, adding cycling and walking routes and car sharing to offset it. This framework's conditions, including long-term monitoring, would be set out in regulations and planning guidance, mirroring the approach used for Biodiversity Net Gain. This would address the problem of ineffective new bike routes funded by developers stopping at the edge of new housing or poorly designed bus routes.

The implementation of this framework should be staggered, becoming more ambitious over time, building on the opportunities unlocked by the government's public transport and devolution reforms. It will support housing closer to existing developments and around sustainable travel infrastructure, promoting healthier lifestyles, reducing air pollution and emissions and boosting local economies.^{iv} It should also reduce opposition to housing developments, as additional pressure on roads and local services is often cited by those opposing them.

This month, the National Audit Office found again that the current system of developer funding for transport is not working. With the House of Commons barely touching on the transport side of the Bill, it is imperative that the Lords scrutinises these issues and makes the changes necessary for transport to accelerate rather than delay the delivery of new homes.

With the government's planning reforms progressing through Parliament and proposals for new towns set to be revealed this summer, there is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to deliver healthier and better connected communities. By contrast, if we fail to turn around the current model of car dependent housing, congestion and pollution will be locked in, undermining the government's economic growth, health and climate missions.

Organisations supporting this call include Green Alliance, Transport Action Network, Transport and Environment, Transport for New Homes, Greenpeace, Cycling UK, Healthy Air Coalition and Campaign for Better Transport. We believe the government should explore this approach to help join up its ambitions for healthier travel, social opportunity and accelerating to net zero with its much needed housing targets, delivering homes in the right places.

Yours sincerely,

Green Alliance
Greenpeace
Transport Action Network
Healthy Air Coalition
Campaign for Better Transport
Transport for New Homes
Cycling UK

ⁱ INRIX, 2024, 'Global traffic scorecard: London most congested city in Europe; congestion costing the UK £7.7 billion'

ⁱⁱ New Economics Foundation, 2024, Trapped behind the wheel: How England's new builds lock us into car dependency

ⁱⁱⁱ 'Strategic authorities' is the new term that encompasses combined authorities, the Greater London Authority and (in rare cases) individual local authorities in the government's English Devolution Bill.

^{iv} Department for Transport, 2014, Claiming the Health Dividend: A summary and discussion of value for money estimates from studies of investment in walking and cycling.