

## The signs revamping low-traffic neighbourhoods

### Level 3 • Advanced

#### 1 Warmer

Think about the road signs outside your home and place of study and/or work.

- What do the signs inform you of?
- What do the signs prevent people from doing?
- What colour, size and shape are they?
- Do they contain images or words?
- Describe any new, temporary or unusual road signs in your area.

#### 2 Key words

Find words in the article that match the definitions below. Write the words next to the definitions. The paragraph numbers are given to help you.

1. gave official information or a formal message to someone \_\_\_\_\_ (para 2)
2. people who are walking, especially in a town or city, instead of driving or riding \_\_\_\_\_ (para 2)
3. elected members of the organization that governs a city \_\_\_\_\_ (para 4)
4. make someone decide not to do something \_\_\_\_\_ (para 4)
5. a sudden increase in number or amount \_\_\_\_\_ (para 6)
6. a situation in which a place is crowded with vehicles so that it is difficult to move around \_\_\_\_\_ (para 7)
7. a container in which you grow plants \_\_\_\_\_ (para 8)
8. publicly supporting a particular policy or way of doing things \_\_\_\_\_ (para 11)
9. when you feel that someone is causing difficulties for you \_\_\_\_\_ (para 14)
10. something that causes you to feel angry because it shows a negative attitude towards you \_\_\_\_\_ (para 14)

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#### Road closed or open? The signs revamping low-traffic neighbourhoods

*Fearing red signs sent the wrong message, one resident created an alternative – and councils are taking note*

Claire Hamlett

3 September, 2020

- 1 An alternative road sign is being adopted by communities around England to promote the benefits of low-traffic neighbourhoods (LTNs).
- 2 Finding that the official signs on the temporary barriers installed in her own LTN in Brixton, London, conveyed the wrong message, Sarah Berry and other local residents designed a green sign reading “Road open to” with icons showing pedestrians, a scooter user, a wheelchair user and a bicycle.
- 3 It has become a popular alternative to red “road closed” signs frequently used at entrances to LTNs.
- 4 Campaigners, residents and councillors say red signs do not effectively communicate the point of LTNs, which are intended to deter drivers from cutting through residential streets between main roads, known as rat-running.
- 5 “The red signs are kind of the opposite of what these schemes are trying to suggest, which is that the use of this space is changing,” Berry said. “It’s no longer going to have cars streaming through; it’s going to be a place where the community can stop, have a conversation, let their kids play.”
- 6 LTNs are not a new concept, but the response to the coronavirus pandemic has led to a proliferation, on a trial basis, as councils seek to promote active travel and reduce local pollution.
- 7 While a significant majority of people are in favour of them, including community groups and healthcare professionals, they are not universally popular. Although many traffic models predict a long-term drop in traffic as a result of LTN introductions, some pro-motoring groups claim they will lead to additional congestion on main roads and say councils have planned them poorly.
- 8 Inadequate or absent signage can also feed into negative attitudes. “I’ve not seen any explanatory signs, just a big planter and a yellow ‘Road blocked’ sign next to it. That’s what is compelling the frustration,” said a resident of Tooting in south London. “There are no signs to say, ‘Access only for residents, pedestrians and cyclists.’”
- 9 Unclear signage can create further confusion when filters like plastic barriers are used instead of the attractive wooden plant boxes that appear in some neighbourhoods. This was the case in Nottingham’s Victoria Embankment before the community replaced the red signs with green ones.
- 10 “Before the new signs went up, it just looked like roadworks, and we saw some people cycle up to the temporary filters and turn around, thinking they weren’t allowed through,” said Emma Metcalfe, from Pedals: Nottingham Cycle Campaign, of the scheme to stop rat-running through the city park.
- 11 Some councils are starting to take note of the important role signs can play in community engagement and conveying the true meaning of LTNs. Salford City Council is considering replacing its red signs, while in Oxford, where ten LTNs are under consideration, the council is advocating for green signs to feature on filters.
- 12 Councillor Tom Hayes said: “The street signage has to reflect the desire to have a sense of belonging and a sense of community within the low-traffic neighbourhood area.”
- 13 The inclusiveness of Berry’s sign has also received praise on social media. Some communities want to add different icons, such as a skateboarder or a horse rider, to reflect local interests. “People are really thinking about how they can adapt these signs to fit the world that they live in,” Berry said.
- 14 She believes the signs can also speak positively to drivers who feel excluded or inconvenienced by LTNs. Describing red closure signs as “antagonistic”, she said the green signs could help drivers see the roads – and themselves – differently.
- 15 “They can see that space as a pedestrian, wheelchair user, runner, whatever. Then all of a sudden, it’s not banning me as a driver, it’s welcoming me as this other thing that I also am,” Berry said.

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#### 3 Comprehension check

Answer the questions in detail with information from the article.

1. Why do some residents in low-traffic neighbourhoods (LTNs) believe that green is a better colour for the signs?
2. How can including icons on the signs help people accept and understand their message?
3. What has been the problem with yellow 'road blocked' signs?
4. Why should plastic barriers be removed from LTNs and what can they be replaced with?
5. Which groups of people are generally in favour of LTNs and why?
6. Which groups of people are generally against LTNs and why?

#### 4 Complete the questions

Use these words from the article to complete the questions. Then ask and answer the questions in pairs or small groups.

congestion  
rat-runs

councillors  
residential

neighbourhoods  
roadworks

planters  
schemes  
wooden

1. Are there any streets near you that drivers use as \_\_\_\_\_? Have local \_\_\_\_\_ or residents done anything to stop it?
2. Which roads in your town have the most traffic \_\_\_\_\_ and at what time of day?
3. Do you know of any \_\_\_\_\_ to introduce low-traffic \_\_\_\_\_ where you live? Can you think of any \_\_\_\_\_ streets that would benefit from becoming LTNs, for example because children play in the streets?
4. Are there any major \_\_\_\_\_ going on right now where you live or planned for the near future?
5. Has your local council put up attractive \_\_\_\_\_ anywhere in your town? If you had four large \_\_\_\_\_ plant boxes that you could put up anywhere in your town, where would you place them?

#### 5 Webquest

- See the green road sign discussed in the article here:  
[www.theguardian.com/environment/bike-blog/2020/sep/03/road-closed-open-signs-low-traffic-neighbourhoods](http://www.theguardian.com/environment/bike-blog/2020/sep/03/road-closed-open-signs-low-traffic-neighbourhoods).
  - o How clear is its message?
  - o What words could you add to it to make its message clearer?
- Are there any signs similar to this in your country or where you live?
  - o If so, describe them and explain to someone who might not have seen them before what their message is.
- Would you say that the signs in your country are more inclusive or more antagonistic?

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#### 6 Small-group task

- a. **Work in pairs or small groups. Think of either:**
  - a street sign that you'd like to improve or adapt because it is unclear or inadequate
  - or a sign that is needed but doesn't yet exist.
- b. **Talk about what this sign's message is or should be. Do you think it should be (more) positive or negative? For example:**
  - No racing on this road.
  - Smile at other parents at the school gates.
  - Do not look at your phone at the traffic lights.
- c. **Decide what images and colours your sign should contain, what shape and size it should be and where it should be positioned.**
- d. **Present your ideas to the class.**