

Response to 'Observations re Journey Time data – Jesmond LTN report'
28th July 2023

Thanks for your response on the paper I put together. I have added my comments (in blue and italicised) alongside your original text below in black.

There are various ways to interpret any data set and to present findings.

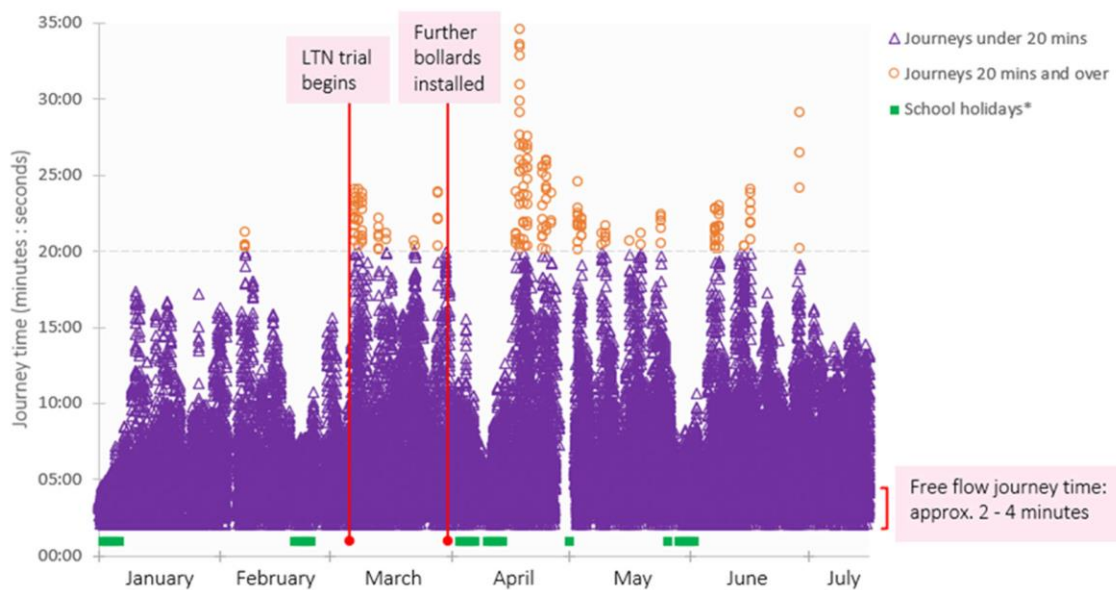
This is absolutely correct and the reason I created my own paper on this. Bias is a significant ethical concern in data analysis. I would expect Newcastle City Council (NCC) to have processes in place to ensure bias in their analysis, interpretation and publication of findings is mitigated so that they meet ethical data standards.

As documented in my paper, I listed concerns around the choices made for the data selected and the analytical approach used in the Interim Report which is indicative of confirmation bias by the authors or editors. In turn this has led to reporting bias in which the two key findings that were published imply there has been little impact on this boundary road since the LTN was implemented:

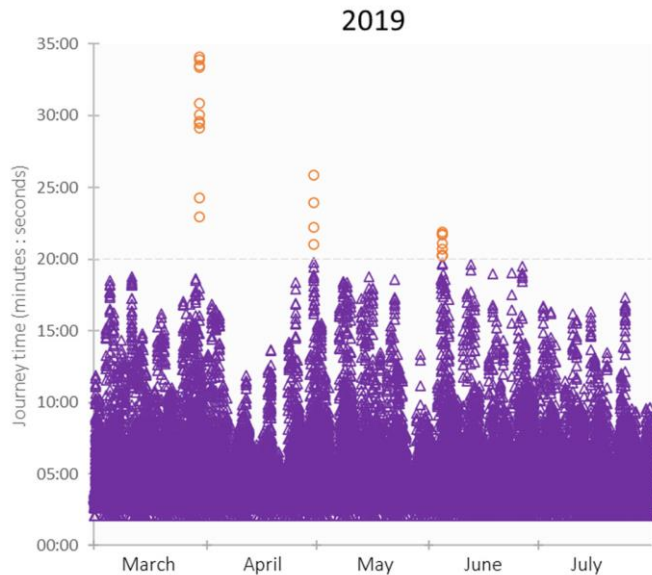
“Analysis of journey time data shows that eastbound journey times have improved since the scheme was introduced to four minutes between Sandyford Road and Benfield Road. Westbound journeys saw increased journey times initially but look to be returning to levels seen similar to 2019.”

As I have already demonstrated, by simply looking at the raw data we can quite clearly see there has been an impact since it was implemented (and in comparison to 2019). See charts below:

January to 16 July 2023: Journey times between Benfield and Jesmond Rd/Osborne Rd junction.



*Different schools in the area have different holiday dates, data presented is for West Jesmond Primary School.



Confirmation bias can lead to bad decision-making and be discriminatory to certain groups. By not fairly conveying the impact of the LTN on this road, this may discriminate against those reliant on travel by vehicle at peak hours on these roads, those that live on this road and those that need to walk or wheel on these roads at peak hours who may be affected by increased pollution as a result of the congestion. The impact extends to the whole community who, regardless of their current stance on the LTN, want (and deserve) to understand the true impact of the LTN in regard to traffic and pollution levels.

NCC have the power to publish the evidence base and direct the narrative for this LTN, and therefore have a responsibility to do this in an ethical way. The negative impact of these misleading key findings can also be seen in a cursory review of comments on Commonplaceⁱ which shows that:

- *Those in favour of the LTN appear to take these key findings as fact (and why shouldn't they?); which in turn*
- *Increases the divide and tension between those in the community with opposing views and experiences of the LTN (making an already divisive scheme even worse).*

I have listed some comments from Commonplaceⁱⁱ to demonstrate this below:

'The outrageous lies posted by the pro-car lobby have been exposed by the data. Traffic on the Coast Rd is unchanged or down,'

'Good to see factual evidence to counter the wild exaggeration and convenience car group.'

'the traffic is where it should be it is factually proven that this is no worse or better than pre Pandemic.'

'traffic on main "Distributor" roads no worse than pre Covid. Another measured fact.'

'The traffic as described on Osborne Road and Jesmond Road is measured, the published results are fact. Cleaner greener and safer in the residential suburb. The effects on Distributor roads is being measured, has been published, and is a little more accurate than the fiction from the High Traffic Neighbourhood group.'

'Looking at the interim report which the council has written, many of the comments people are making do not tally with the data. On occasions the Coast road is busy but this is often linked to roadworks or an accident.'

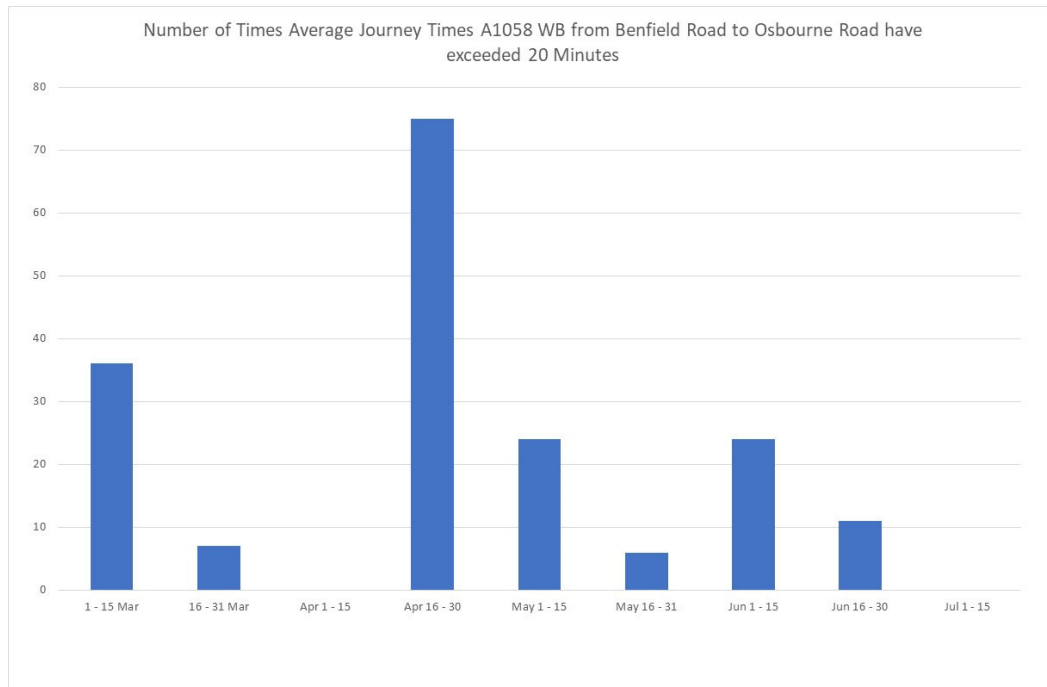
'Spectacular arguments now appearing as the empirical data supports the scheme.'

(For transparency and balance, I should acknowledge that there are offensive posts made by individuals on both sides of the LTN argument on Commonplace.)

The interpretation from [REDACTED] report is very encouraging. It appears to show that using journey times of over 20 minutes as the measure of delay, that the situation is improving.

Yes, this data shows that in recent weeks there have been less instances of journey times over 20 minutes on this stretch of road. This absolutely does not take away from the fact that there has been a clear impact on journey times since the LTN has been implemented, and you have failed to acknowledge or publish this. It is from this point that further work should then be done to assess whether the impact of the LTN is truly levelling off or whether other factors might be a reason for this decrease (i.e. warm weather, private schools closing in early July for summer etc.).

Please see the graph below, it should be noted that the figure of 11 occurrences for the period 16 – 30 Jun includes four instances of delay directly attributable to the A167(M) CME being closed due to a building fire.



The above is based on the complete data set from the UTMC rather than the partial dataset reproduced by the Urban Observatory.

As the owner of the data that is re-published by Newcastle University's Urban Observatory, I would like to point out that the statement in the report below is incorrect.

Every 4 minutes the journey time of a vehicle that completes this route is recorded

This is still the average journey time of all the vehicles on this route reported on every four minutes, unless the “Plates Matched” value in the dataset equals one, then it is the journey time for that one vehicle. – *thanks, noted and more than happy to be corrected on this and given more insight to how the data is collected.*

All journey times in the dataset that have zero as the “Plates Matched” value should probably be excluded, as this is a system generated free flow value. The free flow default value inserted when there are no plate matches is 127 seconds and assumes that all traffic lights are on green. This is unlikely, as traffic volume and congestion are not the only cause of delay for this and other road links.

A vehicle could have up to 60 seconds of delay at the following junctions even if they were the first vehicle at the stop line on each occasion:

- Corner House/Heaton Road;
- Cradlewell/Osbourne Avenue;
- Jesmond Road/Sandyford Road;
- Jesmond Road/Portland Terrace and Jesmond Road/Osbourne Road.

So potentially a journey time of six minutes (two minutes traveling, four minutes at traffic lights) with no other westbound traffic in real world conditions.

It is also noted that the reports sets out that:

The data presented here will allow for multiple comparisons to be made between the period of the LTN trial and:

o The months immediately preceding the trial in 2023

o The same months in 2022.

o The same months in 2019.

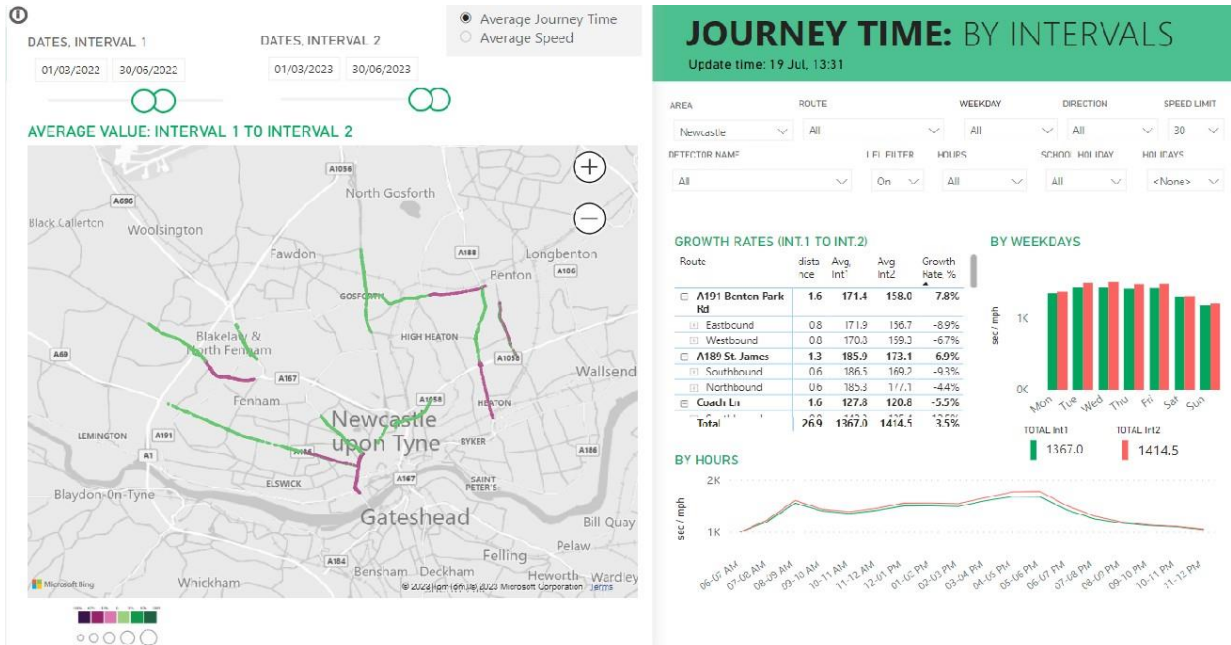
In the appendix of this report, it shows that for this year the months used were 1 January – 16 July, but a different date range was used in 2019 and 2022 (1 March – 31 July). – *I’m not overly sure why this is being noted? Yes, these are the dates I used in my report together with the explanation of why I chose them. Perhaps the author of these comments misinterpreted my explanation? I am making different comparisons here, hence the different date ranges:*

- *I compared the LTN trial period (Mar – Jul) with the months immediately preceding (i.e. Jan - Feb + Mar - Jul 2023); and*
- *the LTN trial period (Mar – Jul) with the same months in 2022 and 2019 (i.e. March – July 2022/2019). This date range could of course be expanded, but this seemed like a logical approach given the purpose of the report.*

The reason that a 2022 baseline was not used in the Newcastle City Council report was that due to changing travel patterns in 2022, journey times across the city (and region) have increased this year since the subject period in 2022. – *Thanks, agreed it is*

important to understand the limitation of any comparison. I included multiple comparisons for transparency and because the limitations vary when we compare each year/date range.

The table below show the average journey on all ANPR equipped roads in Newcastle with a 30mph speed limit (this excludes A1058 Coast Road as this link has three different speed limits) comparing 1 April – 30 June 2022 to 1 April – 30 June 2023.



It should be noted that the table above is from our Power Bi system which only holds the last three years' worth of data, so comparisons with 2019 cannot be made via that system.

In conclusion, I reiterate that the key findings published in the Interim Report are misleading and possibly a result of confirmation bias by the authors or editors. NCC have a responsibility to acknowledge this, review their ethical standards relating to working with data and publish corrections to their key findings based on fair review of the data.

ⁱ <https://jesmondeastrialsconsultation.commonplace.is/>

ⁱⁱ <https://jesmondeastrialsconsultation.commonplace.is/contributions/proposal/about-the-project>