

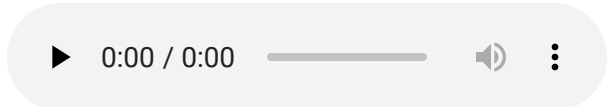
# Seznamte se s největším evropským poraženým ve válce proti autům – POLITICO

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Karl Mathiesen

November 26, 2023

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 0:00 / 0:00

Vyjádřeno umělou inteligencí.

Vypadalo to jako skupinová terapie. Jednoho pozdního letního dne seděl Sadiq Khan, starosta Londýna, se skupinou náboženských vůdců a bojovníků za čisté ovzduší v úzkém kruhu v téměř prázdné hale předměstského kostela.

Ta chvíle měla být oslavou pro Khana i pro Londýn. Označil vytvoření největší zóny čistého vzduchu v západním světě prostřednictvím rozšíření omezení znečišťujících automobilů na celé britské hlavní město, město s 8,9 miliony obyvatel. Místo toho shromáždění připomínalo skupinu spiklenců scházející se v obležení. "Jsem velmi dojatý, že jsem tady," řekl rabín Jonathan Wittenberg se svraštěným obočím a ztišeným tónem. Chválil Khanovu „odvahu“.

Vedle starosty seděla Rosamund Adoo-Kissi-Debrah, 53letá učitelka, která se stala bojovnicí. Uvažovala o tragédii, která z ní udělala aktivistku. Před více než deseti lety zemřela její dcera Ella na těžké astma způsobené znečištěním z rušné silnice u jejich domu. "Utopila se ve vlastním hlenu," řekla Adoo-Kissi-Debrah a hlas se jí třásl. "Vždy mě to bude mrzet."

Khanova ústa se zhroutila do hlubokého zamračení. Do očí se mu nahrnuly slzy. Jeho vlastní dcery jsou zhruba stejně staré, jako by dnes byla Ella. Když jsem s ním později mluvil, řekl, že to byla Ellina smrt,

kteřá sloužila jako „katalyzátor“, díky němuž byl čistý vzduch ústředním bodem jeho starostování. "Rosamunda mi změnila život," řekl. "Ella mi změnila život."

**Může se vám líbit**

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Od POLITICO Studio

Na jeho povrchu není Khanova zóna čistého vzduchu jen stěží věcí revoluce. Pod názvem London Ultra Low Emission Zone (ULEZ) uvalila denní poplatek 12,50 GBP (asi 15 USD) za vysoce znečišťující vozidla projíždějící centrálními částmi hlavního města a sankce uplatňovala pomocí silničních kamer. Jeho expanze na konci srpna však pokrřivila národní politiku Spojeného království a Khanovy politické vyhlídky a dokonce by mohla představovat hrozbu pro jeho osobní bezpečnost.

Nový poplatek za znečištění se setkal s bouřlivým odporem veřejnosti – s takovým, se kterým jsem se později setkal na vlastní kůži ve vesnici na nejzazším místě Londýna.

Podle osoby blízké starostovi – která, stejně jako ostatní v tomto článku, získala anonymitu, aby mohla diskutovat o citlivých věcech – se demonstranti proti ULEZ pravidelně objevovali v Khanově domě v jižním Londýně, včetně případů, kdy tam byly samy jeho dvě dcery. Několik dní byla před jeho domem připoutaná karavana se slogany a uměleckými díly, které zahrnovaly hákové kříže. Demonstranti se zaměřili na jeho rodinu za zneužívání na veřejných akcích.

Zasedání radnice na začátku listopadu se muselo z bezpečnostních důvodů přesunout na radnici. Během setkání jeden muž křičel, že před staletími by Khan byl pověšen na „šibenici“. Policie pravidelně prohledávala starostův dům a auto v reakci na písemné poznámky, že tam byla nastražena výbušná zařízení. V říjnu přišel poštou dopis, adresovaný jemu, s kulkou uvnitř.

"Dostal jsem výhrůžky smrtí v celé řadě problémů, od mých názorů na Trumpa až po mé náboženství," řekl Khan, který je oddaným muslimem. "Toto je nejnovější inkarnace."

Žíla opozice, kterou Khan otevřel, je hluboká a plná vzteku – dokonce i mezi těmi, kdo řídí moderní auta a jeho politika by se jich nedotkla. Starosta uznává, že jeho rozhodnutí pokračovat v expanzi zkomplikovalo jeho nabídku na třetí funkční období v květnu – a exponenciálně zvýšilo sázky.

Tato politika pravděpodobně stála jeho středolevou Labour Party místo v parlamentu v červnových doplňovacích volbách – což vedlo k veřejné roztržce mezi Khanem a vůdcem strany Keirem Starmerem. V reakci na to britský konzervativní premiér Rishi Sunak kritizoval labouristickou „válku proti motoristům“ a vzdal se několika národních politik v oblasti klimatu.

Starostové po celém světě pozorně sledují Khanovy boje a zvažují svou vlastní ochotu postavit se znečišťujícím autům. Tyto stroje mohou produkovat emise skleníkových plynů, rakovinné částice, znečištění hlukem a přetížení, ale omezení jejich používání je výzvou pro desetiletí veřejných a soukromých investic založených na jejich široké dostupnosti. A možná, což je zásadnější, je to proti pocitu osobní svobody vykrmené stoletím autokapitalismu a snem o otevřené cestě.

Auta se zkrátka stala politicky toxická, protože jejich výpary jsou nebezpečné pro lidské zdraví. I ty nejopatrnější snahy ovládnout auta ve městech jako New York, Paříž, Madrid a Buenos Aires otevřely nové, vrčící fronty v kulturních válkách. Donald Trump ve svém návalu na druhé funkční období amerického prezidenta neúnavně zaútočil na snahu svého pravděpodobného protivníka Joea Bidena rozšířit používání elektrických vozidel.

„Udržitelná mobilita se rychle stala politicky rozdělující záležitostí,“ uvedl starosta Milána Giuseppe Sala v e-mailové odpovědi na seznam otázek o svém příteli a vrstevníkovi na londýnské radnici. "Nemělo by být."

Khan věří, že dokáže přesvědčit Londýňany, že čistší vzduch stojí za nějakou oběť, a průzkumy ho favorizují, aby si své místo v květnu udržel. Experti a zaměstnanci radnice však varují, že volby londýnského starosty jsou typicky těsné záležitosti. Pokud by Khan prohrál, dopad na sebevědomí vedení měst po celém světě by byl „katastrofický,“ řekl Sala. "Sadiq vedl cestu... Znamenalo by to, že nejpokročilejší město na světě v této věci nebylo schopno vidět výhody."

### **"Kůže ve hře"**

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Potkal jsem Khana v jeho novém sídle ve východním Londýně. Starostovi je 53 let — ve stejném věku jako Adoo-Kissi-Debrah — a je synem pákistánských přistěhovalců. Má úhledně vyčesané šedivé vlasy a mluví rychle mluvícím jazykem svého milovaného jižního Londýna. Jako mnoho Londýňanů působí dojemem, že se vám snaží prodat něco, o čem jste nevěděli, že potřebujete.

Stál u okna hranaté zasedací místnosti ve druhém patře a pustil se do nevyžádané a temperamentní řeči o pozitivních stránkách svého rozhodnutí přestěhovat radnici z prestižní budovy Norman Foster

poblíž Tower Bridge do přístaviště ve východním vnitrozemí města. Přemístění by podle něj mohlo přinést obnovu části Londýna, která je synonymem ekonomické deprese.

Aniž by to většina jeho voličů tušila, Khan je menší hvězdou globálního klimatického hnutí. Je spolupředsedou sítě starostů z 96 největších měst na Zemi s názvem C40 Cities. Tato skupina bude hrát klíčovou roli na klimatickém summitu COP28 v Dubaji, který začne 30. listopadu. Částečně v očekávání Trumpova reduxu využijí starostové setkání v Perském zálivu, aby zdůraznili, jak mohou města pokračovat v implementaci klimatických politik, když se všechno pokazí. vrchol.

Navzdory své dnešní horlivosti Khan přiznal, že se v otázce klimatu opozdil. Když byl ještě členem britského parlamentu, Khan řekl, že hlasoval pro rozšíření letiště Heathrow „aniž by o tom skutečně přemýšlel“. Jezdil 4×4. Dopad, který by mohl mít na životní prostředí a zdraví lidí, pro něj „nebyl ve skutečnosti problém“.

In 2015, Khan was diagnosed with late onset asthma, contracted while training for the London marathon — a political stunt, he readily admits. This awakened him to the damage air pollution does to the human body. Cancer, heart disease, dementia and respiratory disease are all among a full diagnostic manual of maladies that can be attributed to the toxic particles and gases emitted from vehicle tailpipes.

But it was not until he met Adoo-Kissi-Debrah that clean air became a personal crusade. After he was elected mayor in 2016, Khan had been warned by his staff not to meet her. She was viewed by City Hall as potentially dangerous, a Green Party member and a grieving parent who was seeking a new coroner's inquest, in all likelihood so she could sue the city.

Ella died in 2013, aged 9. She had contracted asthma two and a half years earlier. In that short time, she was admitted to the hospital more than 30 times, suffered five heart attacks and was placed on ventilators. It was the most severe case her doctors had ever seen.



Unbeknownst to most of his constituents, Khan is a minor star of the global climate movement | Dan Kitwood/Getty Images

Her story framed the air pollution problem in terms Khan could easily understand from his work as a human rights lawyer and MP. In Ella, who was Black, he saw how air pollution was killing the poorest Londoners: people of color like him. “I’ve got skin in the game,” he said. He likened the impact of Ella’s story to the way the murder of black teen Stephen Lawrence in 1993 put a face to racism in the London Metropolitan Police service. “Ella humanizes air pollution in ways that no speech or article or interview I can do,” Khan said. “The struggles she’s had — it’s gotta be worth something, right?”

Khan was just one of many politicians Adoo-Kissi-Debrah had courted in her quest, first for the truth about Ella's death, then for changes that could bring some kind of meaning to the loss. She could tell Khan was deeply affected by her story. They met again and she introduced him to her other kids: teenage twins Robert and Sophia who lost their big sister when they were five. "I think when he met my children, that was a game changer for him," she said.

Instead of avoiding Adoo-Kissi-Debrah, Khan teamed up with her. About 4,000 Londoners die early each year from bad air, but none have ever had it formally listed as a cause of death. Khan and Adoo-Kissi-Debrah felt that a coroner's finding tying Ella's death to air pollution would transform the conversation. Working with her campaigning lawyer Jocelyn Cockburn, an old law firm colleague of Khan's, and the physician Stephen Holgate, they built a case to overturn the original coroner's finding.

Seven years after Ella's death, a new report was issued. It found toxic air from the busy road near her house had caused and worsened Ella's asthma. The decision spurred clean air campaigners across the country who had a new, watertight legal finding to ram home their public health message. They pushed city authorities from Portsmouth to Aberdeen to introduce their own clean air policies.

Adoo-Kissi-Debrah immediately lobbied Khan to expand the ULEZ to the rest of London. He disappointed her by first opening the policy to public consultation. "He wanted to do everything prim and proper," she complained. She revved up her lobbying to ensure he followed through. "Did I lay it on? Oh, hell yes," she said. "Sadiq knows not to disagree with me — I'm only joking."

Adoo-Kissi-Debrah's children did sue the city over their sister's death. The case is ongoing. Meanwhile, the mayor moved to expand ULEZ at the end of the summer of 2023.

## Information battle

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Nobody in City Hall could have predicted how badly things would go.

ULEZ had been, in many regards, a Conservative Party policy. It was created in 2015 by Khan's predecessor at City Hall, Boris Johnson, who called it "essential." In 2020, the Conservative government pushed Khan to expand the ULEZ to cover all of inner London as part of a list of conditions for a pandemic bailout of London's transport authority. Khan, who complained he was given few resources with which to ease the economic burden on drivers, expanded it, then expanded it again. But still, he believes the entire thing was a set up. "Without a doubt," he said. "For party political reasons the government has chosen to turn this into political football." (A Transport Department spokesperson said: "It is for the Mayor to justify the ULEZ expansion.")

If the expansion of ULEZ was a trap, Johnson's resignation as a member of parliament was the perfect opportunity for the Conservatives to spring it. Johnson, who had gone on from City Hall to become prime minister, vacated his seat in June, triggering a by-election in his constituency, Uxbridge and South Ruislip — on the border of West London, an area where the clean air zone was due to expand. Steve Tuckwell, a local councilor, was selected as the Conservative party's candidate and launched immediately into a month-long campaign with a single focus: "Stop ULEZ."

The mayor found himself trying to inform the public about his clean air push in the middle of a political campaign and a supercharged information war. Advertising data on Facebook collated for POLITICO by Ben Collier, a researcher at the University of Edinburgh, shows interest groups on both sides took out hundreds of ads costing tens of thousands of pounds in 2023, dividing Londoners along culture war lines.





ULEZ had been, in many regards, a Conservative Party policy. It was created in 2015 by Khan's predecessor at City Hall, Boris Johnson, who called it "essential" | Ben Stansall/AFP via Getty Images

The C40 Cities coalition that Khan chairs paid for 78 separate ads, targeting people with university degrees, those who liked animals, those who cared for children. Anti-ULEZ ads were aimed at gamblers, tradespeople, nurses, cleaners, car enthusiasts and people who watch the working class soap opera "EastEnders." A watchdog group called Valent found evidence anti-ULEZ posts may have been boosted by thousands of alleged fake Twitter accounts. No source of funding to buy the accounts was identified.

The online campaign was matched with a blizzard of leaflets, delivered through doors in West London. One, from the Conservative Party, falsely claimed that air pollution had increased during Khan's tenure.

Some of these, of untraceable origin, promoted conspiracy theories that claimed ULEZ was part of a plot to lock Londoners into their immediate neighborhoods.

As election day approached, the mayor and his staff became increasingly concerned they were losing the argument. Labour campaigners knocking on doors were meeting angry Tesla drivers who thought they were going to have to pay the charge. “The Conservatives are just spreading misinformation,” Khan complained bitterly. (The Conservative Party did not respond to a request to comment.)

Meanwhile, City Hall was muzzled. The ULEZ expansion was facing a legal challenge, and the mayor’s office, as a party to the case, was advised that it risked losing if the court felt it was trying to sway public opinion. At the same time, rules governing communications by public bodies during elections forced the city authority to suspend much of its advertising in Uxbridge aimed at dispelling common misunderstandings about ULEZ.

Worst of all, the campaign drove a wedge between Khan and his party. Many of Labour’s outer London branches opposed the ULEZ expansion on the grounds that it would disproportionately affect working class people with the oldest cars, or tradespeople getting to work. Ahead of the by-election, there were “difficult conversations” between City Hall and Starmer’s office, said a Labour Party figure.

The mood in Khan’s office darkened further when the Labour candidate Danny Beales recanted his earlier support for ULEZ, telling a hustings event it was “not the right time.” The story of a split in the Labour Party exploded across national media. Two days later, Starmer backed Beales’ position and, when Labour lost the by-election by 495 votes, he said Khan should “reflect” on the outcome.

Khan, who calls himself “a tribal Labour guy,” insists the affair hasn’t dented their friendship — it was Starmer’s birthday a few days after the ULEZ expansion and the mayor made sure to give him a call. But two of the most senior Labour politicians in the land remain at odds. Khan thinks Labour “accepted the Tory narrative,” he told me. “If the public is only hearing one side of the story, you can’t be surprised if they believe it.” (Starmer’s office declined to respond.)

Khan has been criticized, even within his own Labour Party, for failing to win the public’s support for the clean air policy. Today, 40 percent of Londoners oppose the expansion of ULEZ — many more than the number of people who will be directly affected by the charge. Khan said that if he couldn’t win them over by next year’s mayoral election, it would be down to his “failings as a politician.”

Similarly, questions have been raised about why a payment for junking noncompliant cars was initially only available to the poorest households. Khan won the court case against ULEZ just days after Labour lost the election. Almost immediately, he announced he was expanding the scrappage scheme so that all drivers of the most polluting vehicles could access at least £2,000.

If it weren’t for the court case, he told me, he might have done it earlier.

## **A lynching**

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On a Saturday in October, I set out amid torrential rain to track down the legendary anti-ULEZ voters who had managed to drive a wedge through Labour, flip an election and reverse years of Conservative climate policy.

For weeks, I had scanned dozens of Facebook groups organizing the resistance. Many posts were directed at the mayor in deeply personal terms. Administrators constantly warned against outright racism lest the sites be shut down.



Khan has been criticized, even within his own Labour Party, for failing to win the public's support for the clean air policy | Henry Nicholls/AFP via Getty Images

A protest was planned in Biggin Hill, a village on the very furthest reaches of southern London, surrounded by fields and a small airstrip. Stepping off the bus — there are no other transport links — I had expected a noisy handful of people. Instead, at least 200 protestors had gathered in, as they say in the U.K., the pissing rain.

The overall effect was like walking into some kind of metaverse outgrowth of the Facebook groups. There were leaders with megaphones directing the chants — one of them a jaunty reprise of the wartime classic: “Who do you think you are kidding, Sadiq Hitler?” There were people in dinosaur costumes for no discernable reason. A man with three fingers on one hand stood in the road wearing a suit with a cardboard coffin on his shoulder with the word “DEMOCRACY” written in blue down the side.

The Biggin Hill protestors didn't stop with signs and chants. At the intersection where they gathered there was a traffic light on which a camera had been set to catch drivers of polluting cars. By the time I arrived, the thick metal post had been sliced through the middle. Doubled over, the traffic light's heavy head touched the pavement as though in prayer.

Later, the camera was subjected to what can only be described as a bizarre kind of lynching. In front of a huge picture of Khan's face with the word "LIAR" printed across the forehead, the stolen camera was hoisted up on a noose while the crowd bayed. Police officers watched passively. Reform UK mayoral candidate Howard Cox — a pro-car campaigner who has successfully fought government fuel duty rises for years — minced about in front of it, posing for photos, saying loudly: "I don't approve of this."

According to the Metropolitan Police, 987 ULEZ cameras have been stolen or damaged since April. Five people have been arrested. A vigilante group calling itself the Bladerunners claims credit.

While I was at the protest, a thickset man with generously applied tattoos sidled up to me to enquire if I was a reporter. He was, he told me, a scrap metal dealer. He said he'd never pay the ULEZ charge because he took the license plates off his van when driving in the zone. I asked him if he would ever steal or damage one of the cameras.

"I deal in scrap metal," he said. "What do you think?"

I didn't understand.

"I reckon I get eight phone calls a day to collect ULEZ cameras for scrap metal," he said.

"From the council?" I asked, stupidly in hindsight.



“No!” he said, looking at me as though I might need help finding my way home. “From the people that have cut them down.”



Because of the ULEZ protests and other threats, Khan has one of the highest levels of security protection available to a politician in the U.K. | Carl Court/Getty Images

He explained that he drove back and forth across London collecting not just the cameras, but the valuable metal they were attached to, which he would shred and sell. He said he gave the vigilantes £100 for the metal and disposed of the hated cameras.

“I pay for them, off the people, and then I chuck ‘em in the pond,” he said. “I benefit,” he added with a chuckle. He told me he had personally disposed of a hundred cameras in this manner.

He would not give me his name.

Because of the ULEZ protests and other threats, Khan has one of the highest levels of security protection available to a politician in the U.K. His security detail often uses “dummy” vehicles that roar off to give the impression Khan has left an event, while he in fact remains. On a visit to a Brixton community scheme for disadvantaged school kids in October, I saw stocky men with earpieces fan out around the mayor as he made dad-level chat with two teenage girls about their love of trap dancing.

The degree of concern among Khan’s staff for their own safety is revealing. Adoo-Kissi-Debrah said she felt nervous when her children were next to him. Khan’s family have been confined to their homes, he said, and they sometimes couldn’t go out even to walk the dog. In May, he told the Guardian that he suffers from PTSD.

### **Car vote**

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It would be a mistake to focus solely on the extreme views and behaviors of ULEZ’s most vocal opponents. For every conspiracy theorist or self-incriminating vandal at the protest in Biggin Hill, there were many more people with genuinely held concerns about how Khan’s policy was affecting their lives. Policies like ULEZ are blunt instruments, designed to change the behavior of millions of people. Unintended consequences are inevitable.

By the side of the road in a yellow vest was Dave Telford, from nearby New Addington. He uses a wheelchair and has a severely disabled 12-year-old son with Down syndrome and life-threatening epilepsy. Sometimes his son can have two or three seizures in a week, and often requires hospitalization. Because the ambulances won’t take two wheelchairs, Telford follows behind him in a Citroën minibus modified for a disabled driver. “It’s just desperate, desperate, desperate,” he said. “If he goes to hospital, and he dies, we won’t be there. Because we can’t keep paying £12.50 to go down the hospital.”

People with disabilities have until 2027 to comply with the new clean air regulations. But three years and £10,000 from the scrappage scheme won't get Telford anywhere near the cost of replacing and fitting out a new vehicle with the hydraulic ramps, nursing equipment and other fittings, he said.

I also spoke with Christine Dawson, a pensioner who worried she'd have to go into debt to replace her car. "It's my freedom," she said. Sinead O'Shea, a financial administrator, said her vehicle complied with the rules but that ULEZ had isolated her community. "I'm a Labour supporter, but I won't vote Labour because of him now," she said of Khan. Josie McDonald, a grandmother of seven from Bromley, said she received £90 per week in her pension and had stopped being able to help her kids with childcare. She'll be voting for Reform, she said.

Next year's mayoral election is unlikely to hinge solely on an anti-ULEZ vote. But the opposition will provide the Conservative contender, London Assembly member Susan Hall, with a base to build upon. She has promised to roll back Khan's expansion of ULEZ "on day one" if elected.





All Londoners caught by the ULEZ charge will be eligible to receive a scrappage fee of at least £2,000 for their old car | Carl Court/Getty Images

Hall is a relative unknown and “to put it delicately, an accident prone candidate,” said Tony Travers, an expert on London politics at the London School of Economics. Many Londoners first came to know her after it emerged she had liked a post on Twitter, now X, that praised Enoch Powell, a white Tory minister who stoked racial tensions in the 1960s. She declined to be interviewed for this article.

Khan is favored to win, but “it’s quite competitive,” said Travers. “If the Conservatives had come up with a different candidate, they might easily have won.”

### **Carrot or stick**

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With elections approaching, politicians tend to avoid punitive policies that curtail freedoms. But as he prepares to face voters in May, Khan has plowed on, arguing that, in the face of Ella’s death, there is really

no other option.

In the meantime, the national Labour Party is preparing for the general election in 2024 with quite a different strategy. At a POLITICO event in September, the shadow climate secretary, Ed Miliband, disavowed ULEZ, adding later: “I’m about carrots, not sticks.”

When I asked Khan about this, he shot back: “The carrot is longer life, right? The carrot is not having to do CPR on your child X times a day like Rosamund did. The carrot is less pressure on the [National Health Service] so they can treat other people. The carrot is you not taking time off work because you’ve had an asthma attack.”

Khan still thinks he will win the debate, pointing to a “silent majority” who want clean air and a safe planet. He maintains that most of the opponents of ULEZ will eventually see that their fears are unfounded. “Some of them have got genuine concerns,” he said. “And there’s ways of addressing those concerns, which we’re seeking to do.”

All Londoners caught by the ULEZ charge will be eligible to receive a scrappage fee of at least £2,000 for their old car. It might not be enough to get them a like-for-like replacement. Diesel cars as recent as 6 years old may not be exempted from the charge. During the reporting of this article (the timing was entirely coincidental) I bought a 2001 gasoline-powered Ford Fiesta that complied with the requirements. It cost me roughly £1,700 to get it on the road. But, like most cars at that price point, it’s a rust bucket.

In its purest essence, however, the debate about Khan’s clean air policy isn’t about the cost of a replacement car. As combating climate change moves from setting targets to implementing them, policymaking is entering an era of messy — and contentious — interventions. To meet emissions goals, governments will have to change the ways their

citizens consume, fly, eat, work, heat their homes and move around their cities — and they'll have to convince voters the cost of making those changes is worth it.

When it comes to ULEZ, on one side stands the iconic object of 20th-century capitalism and the individual freedom it has provided. On the other, there's the freedom to breathe clean air and live in less congested cities. For people across the planet, it's the freedom to live in a world with a relatively benign climate.

For Khan, and for those around the world watching his prospects, the most worrying aspect of the protest in Biggin Hill might not be the protesters at all. Nine out of every 10 cars in Outer London will not pay a ULEZ charge, City Hall says. But during the hours of the demonstration, the cars rolled through like a line of soldier ants marching in defense of their queen. As they passed, the noise was constant and driver after driver leaned on the horn and let out a supportive wail of indignation.

*Mark Scott contributed reporting.*