

UK needs to say goodbye to drive-throughs: For the sake of our environment, our health, our culture

February 14 2022, by Eugene Mohareb, Sybil Derrible



The UK has around 2,000 drive-throughs. Credit: Andreas160578/Pixabay

Drive-throughs—services that let people order and collect food and drink without needing to leave their cars—are designed with convenience in mind. Whether it's oppressively hot, uncomfortably cold, or we're just in a hurry, drive-throughs have become very appealing in an era characterized by a desire for [immediacy](#).

In the UK, where there are around [2,000 drive-throughs](#), it's not unusual to see snaking queues of vehicles whose drivers are waiting for their turn to make, pay for, and collect their orders.

In fact, drive-throughs are on an upward trajectory in the UK. There was a [41% increase](#) in the number of drive-throughs between 2015 and 2020, and [12% of sales](#) at [fast food restaurants](#) and coffee chains were made through their drive-through sites in the year to March 2021: jumping 50% from pre-COVID figures.

This service has become indispensable for many. Drive-throughs provide benefits for people with mobility challenges as well as those with intensely busy schedules or people wrangling small children. In the US, even some banks and pharmacies offer drive-through options. And by helping customers avoid indoor dining, drive-throughs may have also helped limit the spread of COVID-19. But drive-throughs come at a cost.

First, drive-throughs require excessive idling, something that is [banned](#) on [public roads](#) in the UK but regularly and casually done in drive-through queues. In addition to increasing emissions, [wasting fuel](#) and [damaging engines](#), exhaust pipe emissions associated with idling create [local air pollution](#) with serious environmental and [health consequences](#).

Poor air quality is already a widespread problem in the UK where more than two-thirds of local authorities [breach](#) air quality targets. Even if we were to meet these targets, the [Royal College of Physicians](#) has warned that only a fraction of incidences of air quality-related illnesses—[including](#) lung cancer, asthma attacks, and overall lower life expectancy—would be prevented. Currently, air pollution leads to [40,000 deaths](#) per year in the UK, with annual costs to the NHS of more than £20 billion.

In light of the ongoing [transition](#) towards electric vehicles, the

environmental concerns of idling will diminish. The UK's plan to [phase out](#) sales of internal combustion engines will also reduce [exhaust pipe emissions](#) as we head towards 2050.

Yet even so, emissions from brake wear and tire wear are respectively responsible for [16–55%](#) and [5–30%](#) of non-exhaust emissions in UK towns and cities. That means air pollution and its associated health effects will not be completely resolved by the switch to [electric cars](#).

The bottom line

Around the world, cities have begun to crack down on the drive-through, despite [renewed investment](#) following the pandemic. Some regions in [Canada](#) and the [United States](#) have already banned or restricted new drive-throughs, while cities such as [Glasgow](#) are beginning to consider following suit. As the UK tries to [reduce car ownership](#) and use, drive-throughs will also inevitably be discouraged.

Curbing the expansion of drive-throughs now will not severely affect UK restaurants' revenue: especially given their relatively low market share when you consider that [70%](#) of fast [food](#) sales in the United States are made via drive-throughs. However, the negative implications of "drive-through culture" have deeper roots.

Car-centric transport planning has dominated UK [urban development](#) since the [second world war](#). It has increased congestion and contributed to public health problems such as the effects of [poor air quality](#) and the [growing incidence of obesity](#), while cutting the [share of trips](#) taken via more environmentally friendly options such as [public transport](#), [cycling](#) and [walking](#).

Urban development that prioritizes cars is also inconsistent with UK government goals to improve [wellbeing](#), [food systems](#) and [public health](#).

Instead, building cities with wider pavements, segregated [bicycle paths](#) and widespread public transport—where we can reduce our [reliance](#) on cars and fast food—represents the healthy urban future that [experts](#) suggest we should [try to create](#).

And for those with mobility or childcare issues, the growth of smartphone apps enabling [restaurant-to-car delivery](#) outside of drive-throughs allows people to conveniently and safely collect food without needing to queue. Food [delivery apps](#) whose riders use bicycles can also help reduce car trips while maintaining convenience.

As a society, we need to reflect on the profoundly negative effects of living in a society that has become so [pressed for time](#) that we cannot afford to get out of our cars to collect food, let alone to [eat it](#).

Fundamentally, drive-throughs are symptomatic of a mode of living from which we need to move away—for the sake of our planet. Limiting them in the UK would be a sign of progress not just for the environment but for our society too.

This article is republished from [The Conversation](#) under a Creative Commons license. Read the [original article](#).

Provided by The Conversation

Citation: UK needs to say goodbye to drive-throughs: For the sake of our environment, our health, our culture (2022, February 14) retrieved 23 June 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2022-02-uk-goodbye-drive-throughs-sake-environment.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.