

End of road for sat-nav shortcuts to cut down traffic on quiet streets

Software firms will adjust algorithm to direct motorists away from 'rat runs' and back on to main roads

Nicholas Hellen Transport Editor

Neighbourhoods plagued by motorists who use their sat-navs to shave time off their journeys by taking shortcuts on residential back streets are set to get a little quieter.

TomTom, one of the most popular sat-nav systems, says the industry, including rivals such as Google Maps and Waze, is going to adjust its algorithms to reduce "rat-running" and funnel more traffic on to main roads.

Ralf-Peter Schaefer, the company's vice-president, said talks were under way at the European Commission to try to "protect people in neighbourhoods from noise and emissions". Despite Brexit, the changes will also come into force in the

UK as sat-nav technology is not country-specific. He expects the changes to be introduced in 2025 or 2026.

Sat-navs were introduced in 1995 and became ubiquitous with the rise of smartphones in the past 15 years. Every motorist suddenly had the knowledge to weave through residential back streets to shave a few minutes off their journey, regardless of the tensions they inflicted as they sped past.

Edmund King, president of the AA, said: "One person's sat-nav-inspired rat run is another person's front garden so it makes sense to introduce a hierarchy of roads to ensure that through traffic is not pushed into the most sensitive areas."

"We don't see this as Nimby [not in my back yard] regulation as many of these small roads are not suitable for diverted traffic in safety, environmental or even aesthetic terms."

The DVLA has included sat-navs as part of the practical driving test since 2017. Candidates have to be able to follow directions on a TomTom. Figures from the Department for Transport (DfT) show that traffic levels on quieter residential

streets in London increased by 72.2 per cent between 2009 and 2019, probably thanks to sat-navs. There was a similar phenomenon elsewhere, with a 47.1 per cent rise in traffic on minor roads in northwest England, and 40.5 per cent in Yorkshire and Humber, although the DfT subsequently revised down the figures.

Stephen Edwards, chief executive of Living Streets, formerly known as the Pedestrians' Association, said: "People have become so used to traffic being funnelled down their streets by sat-navs, and felt powerless to do anything about it, that changes to the algorithm are very welcome."

In principle, sat-navs should add to the common good because they improve the efficiency of the road network. In practice, they can turn everyone into a queue-jumper, with negative consequences.

David Metz, a former chief scientist at the DfT, now an honorary professor in the Centre for Transport Studies at University College London, has published academic research which indicates that sat-navs slow the traffic on motorways.

He discovered that projects to increase

capacity on the M25 and the M1 had failed to deliver the forecast increases in speed, because motorists were being diverted onto the motorway by their sat-navs for short legs of one or two junctions. "The impact is to increase local use of motorway capacity, to the disadvantage of longer-distance users."

Metz says that sat-navs often nudge motorists to drive further than they intended, simply to save time, thus adding to fuel costs and pollution.

The Brussels review will also seek to tackle the disruption caused by sat-navs misdirecting heavy goods vehicles (HGVs) into narrow streets and lanes.

Ian Fairweather, 65, who has driven an HGV for more than 40 years, and heads a committee of the Institute of Transport Administration, said they often defy common sense. For example, they are programmed to take account of low bridges and narrow roads, but not parked cars in residential streets.

"Your sat-nav is screaming at you to turn left and you can't turn because of parked cars," he said.

@nicholashellen

ZEEZEE POP

GARY COX/MEDIADRUMIMAGES



The latest addition to Chester Zoo's growing troop of more than 20 western chimpanzees is a male born in December. The new arrival, son of a chimp called ZeeZee, is a success for the zoo's breeding programme of the endangered ape



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His daughter's feet were severely fractured, needing surgery. His wife is pregnant. Right now, Mansur¹ needs a safe shelter for his family whilst they recover.

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¹Name changed to protect identity.

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Now Baftas might go gender-neutral

Liam Kelly Arts Correspondent

First the Grammys did away with male and female categories, followed by the Brit awards. Now Bafta, the organiser of Britain's most coveted film awards, which take place tonight, is exploring a change.

Jane Millichip, 57, Bafta's chief executive, said the charity was in consultation with the film industry over the "complex" matter, despite claims that gender-neutral categories harm women's chances of winning.

She said she had to "canvass all opinions and viewpoints". "We are in the middle of that consultation, and it will go on until we have a sufficiently informed view," she said.

Emma Baehr, Bafta's executive director of awards and content, added that any change would have to be "meaningful" and not "something that we just put in and take out the next year".

The debate over whether awards should be divided by artists' gender is one of the most polarising in showbusiness. Advocates say that having one winner is more inclusive for those who do not identify as either

gender. Critics say it may result in fewer women winning if men dominate shortlists.

The Grammys, America's premier music jamboree, became gender neutral in 2012. The Brits followed nine years later, after the singer Sam Smith came out as non-binary. "I look forward to a time where awards shows can be reflective of the society we live in," Smith wrote on Twitter at the time.

Adele won the first genderless best solo artist Brit award last year, and addressed the issue when she accepted the accolade. "I understand why the name of this award has changed, but I really love being a woman and being a female artist," she said. "I do. I'm really proud of us."

Dame Joanna Lumley told Nadine Dorries, the former culture secretary, on *Friday Night With Nadine* on TalkTV: "I know that if my name was just put up as best actor against lots of men, I wouldn't have a chance. But as best actress, you might."

The Baftas, broadcast tonight on BBC1 from the Royal Festival Hall in London, will be hosted by the actor Richard E Grant. Dame Helen Mirren will pay tribute to the late Queen.

Welsh accent was held against me, says TV host

Sian Griffiths Education Editor

When Alex Jones started out as a presenter at the BBC, she remembers being pulled up on her Welsh accent.

Jones, 45, who now fronts *The One Show*, says viewers complained that they could not understand what she was saying. "There was a bit of a backlash," she said. "My boss at the time, and he was a lovely man, he would roll his eyes and say 'Oh Jones, can't you just say 'fruit' rather than 'frewt' [because] I get emails complaining. Can't you just do it this way?'"

For Jones, who started on the sofa in 2010, what happened then ties into a wider theme of discrimination. "I was really surprised because we talk so much about people being racist. What is that if not racist? It is just a different sound to your voice, the way you form words is slightly different," she said. "Regional accents then were relatively new, so this was the first time apart from Huw Edwards that they had heard a Welsh accent."

Jones lives in London with her New Zealand-born husband Charlie Thomson and their three children. A fluent Welsh speaker, she passionately supports the Welsh government's efforts to preserve the language, one of

the oldest in Europe. This week she will present a programme for the Welsh language TV channel S4C that explores the government's aim of reaching a target of one million Welsh speakers by 2050, almost double the current number. Despite complaints about her own accent from "a minority of viewers", she refused to dilute it.

When some interviewees would question her pronunciation it "did affect my confidence", she said. "I said 'no, they will either get used to it or they won't', and of course they did," she said.

Some Welsh friends, including actors and presenters, softened their accents, Jones said. "But I did not feel that was necessary, no more than Ronan [Keating] who sits next to me will soften his Irish accent."

Jones speaks only in Welsh to her own three children: Ted, 5, Kit, 3, and Annie, 1. "Children are like sponges. They have grown up completely bilingual so all the information is there. They do not speak to their friends in

Welsh; but it is there when needed. And for me, that is good enough."

@SianGriffiths6



Alex Jones speaks only in Welsh to her three children

Stori'r Iaith (The Story of Welsh) with Alex Jones airs on February 22 at 9pm on S4C (with catch-up on Clic and BBC iPlayer)