

Carspreading in the UK: Key facts.



Share our
graphics
& images

Cars are getting ever bigger:

New cars are getting 1cm wider on average every 2 years and bonnet height is increasing at a similar rate (source: [T&E](#)). More than half (52%) of the top 100 models sold in 2023 were too wide for the minimum specified on-street parking space (180 cm) in major cities ([T&E](#)).

As cars get bigger, so do the risks:

Children under 10 are three times more likely to be killed in a collision with an SUV than a passenger car ([Safety Findings, 2025](#)) and the heavier the car, the more likely it is to be involved in a fatal collision ([UK car weight study, 2025](#)).

Bigger cars consume more fuel and resources:

Petrol and diesel SUVs burn around 20% more fuel than smaller cars and electric SUVs require more resources and critical battery minerals (source: [IEA](#)).

Carspreading.

— verb | car-spread-ing | kār,spredɪŋ

The continued trend towards wider, longer, higher, and heavier cars, which is linked primarily to the rise of SUVs* and, in its most extreme form, pickup trucks. Manufacturers are often prioritising bigger cars for greater profit.

The new car market is now dominated by larger cars.

Around two-thirds of all new car sales in the UK are SUVs and this could reach 75% of sales by 2027 if trends continue ([T&E](#)).

*SUV stands for 'Sport Utility Vehicle'. While there is no official definition, the term is used to refer to cars that are particularly large, heavy and have raised ground clearance. They often also have more powerful engines.

Why is Carspreading a problem?

Carspreading is taking over our cities:

There are a record number of cars on our roads and more of them are SUVs.

- The number of SUVs has increased in major urban areas in England, from 3% to 30% of existing cars in the last two decades (2002/3 – 2022/3) (source: [Clean Cities](#))
- There are over 8.2 million SUVs in England, to park them all would require more space than the entire city of Manchester.
- The bigger the cars, the greater the challenge with traffic congestion, space for cycle lanes and parking capacity. On average, SUVs are longer (+26cm), wider (+10cm) and heavier (+205kg) ([WWF France](#)).

Carspreading is putting lives at risk:

Evidence shows that larger vehicles pose a far greater risk to vulnerable road users.

- The height of car bonnets is increasing by 1cm every 2 years, which is especially dangerous given children are less likely to be seen ([T&E](#)).
- Children under 10 are three times more likely to be killed in a collision with an SUV than a regular car in the UK ([Safety Findings, 2005](#)).
- A pedestrian or cyclist hit by a car with a bonnet 10 cm higher than average has a 30% higher risk of fatal injuries. ([Belgian Road Safety Institute VIAS](#))

Carspreading is damaging our planet:

- Over the course of 2022 and 2023, SUVs accounted for more than a quarter of the overall annual growth in oil demand - more than 600 000 barrels per day ([IEA](#)).
- High bonnets are not necessary for electrification. In fact, lower bonnets reduce energy use, delivering more range for less battery. Enhancing road safety and producing cleaner cars go hand in hand ([T&E](#)).

What can be done to address the problem?

Cities: Dense urban areas like cities are affected the most by carspreading - scarce public space being taken away and road deaths. Cities should therefore:

- **Adjust parking policies** to support households with normal sized cars and to discourage large SUVs which are unnecessary and impractical. Some authorities have already started to incorporate vehicle size into car parking tariffs, such as in [Cardiff](#), (UK), [Paris](#) and [Lyon](#) (France) and [Koblenz](#) and [Tübingen](#) (Germany).
- **Enable better car club options** so that households can share cars and they don't need to buy and park their own car. Most cars are parked on average 95% of the time (source: [RAC Foundation](#)).

UK Government: National policies can help to reverse the carspreading in the new car market before it becomes a city problem. The government should therefore:

- **Set a maximum size for new cars** so that carmakers prioritise the production and sales of cars that are suitably sized for our cities. It is absurd that EU & UK regulations allow manufacturers to build a car as wide as a truck. There are also no laws to limit bonnet height ([T&E](#)).
- **Make vehicle tax fairer** in favour of lighter and more appropriately sized cars. The UK ranks 16th out of 27 European countries regarding SUV purchase taxes. Including a simple Large Vehicle Levy on heavy cars in Vehicle Excise Duty could help to close this gap while raising almost £2 billion annually for public services ([T&E UK](#)).

What do people think?

A majority of **UK car owners** agree that more SUVs:

'will make parking more difficult'

71%

'are bought more as status symbols than for practical use'

60%

'are not necessary in towns and cities'

59%

When asked how the money raised from additional charges on SUVs be spent, the most popular measures amongst car owners were:

Fixing potholes 54%

Safer roads 40%

Better public transport 36%

Only 19% said there should be no additional measures for SUVs.

Source: [YouGov](#)

City residents want change.

Around two-thirds of Cardiff residents agreed that larger vehicles should pay more as part of a public consultation on a new Parking Plan, approved in October 2025. The most deprived and disabled people were particularly in agreement ([Cardiff Council](#)).

A majority of Londoners (59%) support higher parking charges for SUVs (18% disagree) ([YouGov](#), 2025)

Parisians voted in favour of higher parking charges for large SUVs as part of a public referendum held in February 2024 ([City of Paris](#)).

Zurich residents voted in favour of higher parking charges for heavier cars following a public referendum in September 2025 ([ETSC](#)).