



Walking Strategies

Policy Statement

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**Joint Committee on Mobility of
Blind and Partially Sighted People**

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Joint Committee on Mobility of Blind and Partially Sighted People Policy Statement on

Walking Strategies

1. Introduction

The Joint Committee on Mobility of Blind and Partially Sighted People is an independent body consisting of representatives of all the principle organisations of and for blind, deafblind and partially sighted people with a specific interest in mobility. The Joint Committee believes that blind, deafblind and partially sighted people should be able to move around safely and independently.

The Joint Committee believes that currently this is not the position and that blind, deafblind and partially sighted people experience enormous barriers to freedom of movement, seriously limiting their opportunities and choices. The Joint Committee believes that all blind, deafblind and partially sighted people should receive the support and skills they need to enable them to meet the challenges of the travelling environment.

For blind, deafblind and partially sighted people the walking environment is fundamental to independent mobility, both for complete local journeys and for accessing and interchange with public transport services.

The improvements to the accessibility of public transport vehicles and infrastructure required under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 will be of limited value if disabled people can not access services. In a Mori poll, commissioned by DPTAC, disabled people gave problems in the pedestrian environment as their main concern, ahead of public transport.

This policy statement is intended to act as a reference for local authorities, transport professionals and local organisations concerned with access issues on meeting the strategic needs of blind, deafblind and partially sighted people when developing walking strategies. It is intended to contribute to implementing the Government advice to Local Authorities “Encouraging Walking.”ⁱ Detailed technical information is outside the scope of this statement but can be found in publications like “Streets and External Environments”ⁱⁱ and “Inclusive Mobility”ⁱⁱⁱ.

2. Why walking is important

Figures from “Encouraging Walking” show that:

- Four fifths of all journeys under a mile are on foot
- 29% of all journeys in Great Britain are mainly on foot, although on 3% of the total distance travelled
- Walking is also healthy, sustainable and socially inclusive, available to nearly everyone.

3. Walking and blind, deafblind and partially sighted people

A comprehensive survey on blind and partially sighted people in 1991 entitled 'Blind and partially sighted adults in Britain; the RNIB survey' revealed that there were 1 million blind and partially sighted adults in the United Kingdom as a whole. A further 750000 would have difficulty, even with the aid of glasses, in recognising a friend across the street. Additionally, many blind people also have other disabilities.

Figures from the 1999 DSS Research report No.94 'Disability in Great Britain' indicate there are now an estimated 1.97 million people with a significant sight loss.

- For blind, deafblind and partially sighted people a safe and accessible pedestrian environment is fundamental to independent mobility.
- Walking provides independent mobility in its own right and enables access to other forms of travel, such as taxis and buses.
- Independent mobility of blind and partially sighted people is more restricted than that of the general disabled population. RNIB survey of 1991, “Blind and partially sighted adults in Britain” found that, while 87% of the general population over 65 had gone out alone in the previous week only 42% of blind and partially sighted people over 60 had done so^{iv}.
- Further, research shows that a quarter of blind and partially sighted adults never go out of their home on their own rising to nearly a third of those over 65^v.
- This contributes to isolation and social exclusion. Research published in the British Medical Journal 2002 showed that loss of sight is the third most common reason for suicide, after terminal illness and loss of a partner.
- The lack of available outdoor mobility training means 9 out of ten blind and partially sighted people have never received any assistance, despite nearly all those who had saying it improved their quality of life and independence. (GDBA)

Therefore, walking is a fundamental part of the overall transport system for everyone and is crucial to the independent mobility of blind, deafblind and partially sighted people.

Enabling more blind, deafblind and partially sighted people to enjoy walking would improve their health, reducing isolation and so depression, facilitating cardio-

vascular exercise, and providing easier access to facilities such as shops and other amenities.

The most frequent form of transport used by older blind and partially sighted people is a car belonging to a relative or friend. This is a consequence of the problems they experience moving around the pedestrian environment and in using public transport. Walking strategies which take account of the needs of blind, partially sighted and deafblind people will contribute to a reduction in car dependency.

The Government wants walking to be easier, more pleasant and safer than it is now, recognising it can help improve quality of life. An essential element of Local Transport Plans will be a Local Walking Strategy. The purpose of this policy statement is to help integrate the needs of blind, deafblind and partially sighted people in the development of these strategies.

4. Analysis of Problems and Opportunities

RNIB research “Rights of Way”^{vi} identified essential concerns of blind and partially sighted people in the street environment. These concerns were also highlighted in Travellers Tales^{vii};

- A lack of mobility training

GDBA research states 88% of blind and partially sighted adults claim to never have received any outdoor mobility training despite 84% of those who had saying it gave them the skills and confidence to be more independent.

- Obstacles and obstructions

There are a wide range of obstacles and obstructions facing blind, deafblind and partially sighted people every time they undertake a journey, including fixed items like street furniture and changing items like parked cars or overhanging vegetation. For some blind, deafblind and partially sighted people cuts, bruises and scratches are part of being independent. The Joint Committee believes that they should be able to expect to travel safely and independently.

- Maintenance

Ten times as many people go to hospital due to pavement falls than as a result of road accidents. The actual number of accidents involving pedestrians on pavements is difficult to accurately estimate since it is known that many are unreported. The Transport Research Laboratory research ‘Accidents Involving Visually Impaired People Using Public Transport or Walking’ suggests that visually impaired people have more accidents when using public transport or walking than sighted people.^{viii} Accidents, injurious or otherwise, encountered whilst walking

included those with overhanging objects such as trees, badly maintained footways and objects on the footway. A previous experience of accidents and the perception of risk whilst walking can severely undermine confidence and so independent mobility.

- **Parked cars**

More than three-quarters of blind and partially sighted people see parked cars as a problem where they live. Pavement parking in particular is a problem, often making it impossible to pass on the pavement. However, parking by junctions also makes it more difficult for pedestrians to cross roads safely and independently. Cars parked on pavements cause long-term structural damage to the footway, leaving cracked and uneven surfaces.

- **Cyclists and wheeled hazards**

Cycling on footpaths and footways is undoubtedly one of the greatest causes of concern to blind, deafblind and partially sighted pedestrians. The problem with cyclists is that their silent presence is unnerving and potentially dangerous, the perception of the danger caused can reduce the confidence to go out independently.

- **Crossing the road**

The increasing volume of traffic and high speed of vehicles is a serious problem for all pedestrians, and one that increases significantly for blind, deafblind and partially sighted people.

- **Road crossings**

Even where there are road crossings using them may involve a significant detour and for blind, deafblind and partially sighted people the facilities they provide may make them inaccessible, for example by lacking any audible and tactile signal.

These are only a selection of the common problems facing blind, deafblind and partially sighted pedestrians when they seek to undertake walking trips. What they demonstrate is a need to consider the implications of a wide range of policies on the walking environment and safe and independent mobility of blind, deafblind and partially sighted people.

Local groups of and for blind and partially sighted people and local access groups can help identify the priorities and problems in every area. Every locality will have its own problems and opportunities. While this document can identify common issues, consultation with local people is essential to ensure significant issues are included and addressed in the Local Walking Strategy. Organisations like the National Federation of the Blind have local branches, while the RNIB website has a searchable database of organisations (<http://info.rnib.org.uk/Agencies>).

The Disability Discrimination Act 1995 will place duties on service providers to ensure their goods, services and facilities are accessible to disabled people. At present, there is limited guidance on the implications of this duty for highway authorities and the pedestrian environment.

The development of Local Transport Plans requires the inclusion of the main elements of a Local Walking Strategy (LWS). The Pedestrians Association (now Living Streets) publication, "Taking the strategy step"^{ix} gives advice on preparing a local walking strategy. This advocates Local Walking Strategies including the five important elements:

- Objectives
- Analysis of problems and opportunities
- A long term strategy
- Implementation Programme
- Targets and Monitoring

The Joint Committee hopes this policy statement will contribute to a greater debate and actions to start delivering an accessible walking environment. Improving accessibility is an opportunity to improve the walking environment for everyone. As stated in Encouraging Walking "measures should not be thought of simply as facilities for disabled people. At one time or another they will benefit everyone."

5. Vision

The Joint Committees vision is of a world where blind, deafblind and partially sighted people are able to move around safely, independently and without undue restriction as pedestrians.

6. Objectives

In seeking to deliver its vision, the Joint Committee identifies the following objectives;

- To make walking easier
- To remove barriers to an accessible pedestrian environment
- To equip blind, deafblind and partially sighted people with the skills and confidence to use the pedestrian environment safely and independently

7. Justification

For blind, deafblind and partially sighted people journeys are made up of a number of links in a chain. If any of the links in the travel chain present a barrier or risk of personal safety then the whole journey may become impossible.

In order to develop a situation where blind, deafblind and partially sighted people can travel safely and independently, it is necessary not only to address public transport issues, but also each element that comprises a link or potential break in the travel chain.

Walking is sometimes the whole travel chain, even more significantly, most people access public transport by walking. In effect, walking is the glue that ties together all journeys, whatever the mode. It accounts for a third of all journeys and for some blind, deafblind and partially sighted people, it is their only form of independent mobility.

Walking needs to be given a higher priority in transport planning and the requirements of blind, deafblind and partially sighted people need to be integrated. Too often the needs of blind, deafblind and partially sighted people are only considered at the facility level, which can lead to the well intentioned but ultimately discriminatory situation where blind, deafblind and partially sighted people are invited into an environment, only to find they can go no further as a key link is inaccessible.

Blind, deafblind and partially sighted people's needs need to be considered strategically in developing Local Walking Strategies. Every decision should consider the impact on accessibility and the potential barriers that are created or that could be removed.

However, the detail is also vital when considering accessibility measures. Ill-informed access solution can and do create worse barriers than the problems they are seeking to involve. Accessibility needs to be considered at every stage in the process and involve people aware of the problems and how to implement effective solutions.

The Joint Committee believes that encouraging walking through meeting the needs of people will make a huge positive difference to the independent mobility of many blind, deafblind and partially sighted people.

8. To make walking easier

8.1 Planning

It is easier to walk to facilities and destinations if they are available locally. At the strategic level, policies to retain and provide local facilities for day to day activities should be promoted to make walking possible for more people, this would have particular benefits for disabled people.

Reducing the need to travel through land use policies will contribute to overall sustainability objectives. For blind, deafblind and partially sighted people it will help ensure independent access to facilities like banking, primary health care, locally shopping and public transport services. Travel statistics from DfT show that there has been a 10% reduction in the number of households within a six minute walk of a local foodstore between 1998/91 and 1998.

Even if facilities can not be retained and delivered locally there should be access to public transport routes that will enable people to reach such facilities. Access to public transport services should consider the routes all potential customers may need to take, remembering many disabled people will have limited mobility ranges, perhaps as short as 50m, and ensure accessibility throughout the whole route.

Site planning is as important as overall location planning. It is important that any pedestrian route continues to be accessible even within the curtilage of the site itself. The location of buildings within sites can influence the overall distance people need to walk to reach services located within them. Careful design can minimise the distance needed to walk, the number of potential conflicts with other travel modes and improve linkages with public transport services. There may also be opportunities to provide pedestrian routes across and around existing sites that offer shorter trips overall, making walking easier.

Key walking routes can be identified in walking strategies that show essential routes and linkages between different areas. This is not to imply that people will walk the length of the route but that facilities for walkers will be linked together and co-ordinated within a strategic framework.

Good quality inclusive signage is also an important element for pedestrian routes.^x

Transport planning decisions must take account of the needs of pedestrians, including blind, deafblind and partially sighted people. Too often traffic schemes include measures that make it difficult for people to cross roads safely in their local areas, for example with roundabouts, filter lanes or bus priority junctions.

8.2 Enforcement

Some of the hazards facing blind, deafblind and partially sighted people are created by the actions of others and are a function of the use of the pedestrian environment, rather than its design. Enforcement can be crucial to ensure that safe and independent journeys are possible.

Enforcement will be an issue for a number of different authorities and bodies. Increasing awareness and understanding of why enforcement is necessary should reduce any potential conflict from greater enforcement. Making walking easier for blind, deafblind and partially sighted people requires action on;

- A-boards
- Cycling on the footway
- Lighting
- Litter and dog fouling control
- Footway maintenance
- Parking restrictions
- Pavement parking
- Shared use facilities
- Street cafes
- Unnecessary street furniture and its location
- Vegetation
- Wheelie bins

9. To remove barriers to an accessible pedestrian environment

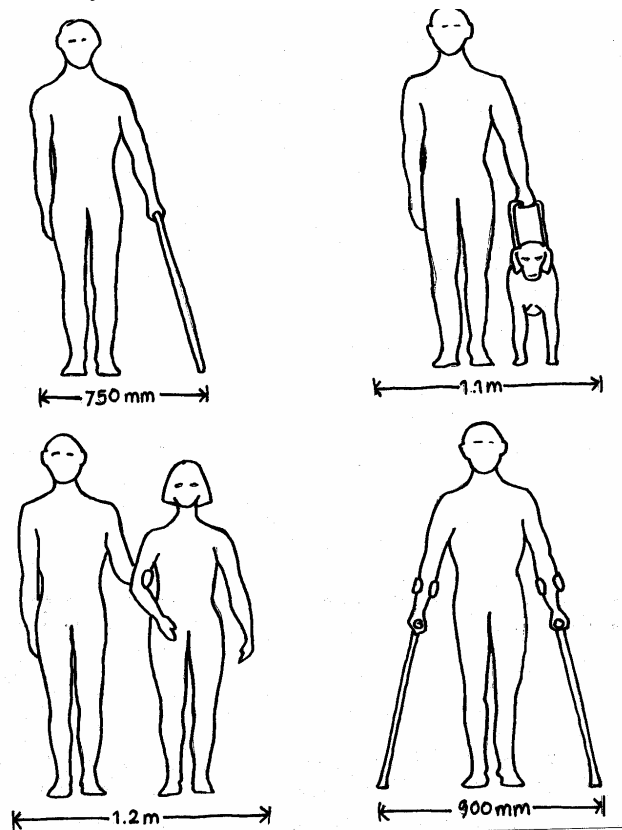
9.1 Basic dimensions

If blind, deafblind and partially sighted people are to be encouraged to walk more safely and independently then the design and management of the walking environment needs to take into account the widths required by different people.

Walkers are not a homogenous group, having different needs, abilities and desires. An inclusive design approach seeks to meet as many needs as possible without creating barriers for other people with different needs. Tactile paving and dropped kerbs is a clear example of where the different needs of different people can be addressed through careful design.

It should not be assumed that blind, deafblind and partially sighted people will only visit certain facilities, disabled people are not a homogeneous group and will want and expect to be able to use the whole external environment.

For blind, deafblind and partially sighted people the following dimensional characteristics usefully illustrate how even basic dimensional needs vary;



9.2 Access Standards

For blind, deafblind and partially sighted people even the smallest barrier in a route can make the whole journey impossible. There is a need for a greater understanding of the access issues affecting blind, deafblind and partially sighted people and the solutions that make independent mobility possible.

There are increasing numbers of people offering to provide access solutions to meet the needs of disabled people. It is vital that those receiving advice are confident it covers the needs of all disabled people, including blind, deafblind and partially sighted people, and represents best practice, based on researched solutions.

Various references are available detailing access standards to meet the needs of blind, deafblind and partially sighted people. The JMU "Streets & External Environments" specifically includes the needs of blind, deafblind and partially sighted people.

Several local authorities have developed Supplementary Planning Guidance on Access Standards. Agreeing standards on accessibility criteria can help guide future developments and strategies to improve accessibility. The National Register of Access Consultants will identify contacts that have met essential criteria in knowledge and experience in providing access advice.

9.3 Walking and Cycling

Walking and cycling are distinct travel modes in their own right, although some of the concerns may be similar the needs of each are different. Increasing use of shared facilities and the increasingly illegal use of footways by cyclists is one of the greatest concerns of blind, deafblind and partially sighted pedestrians, limiting independent mobility.

In encouraging walking, and cycling, there needs to be recognition of both users needs. It is clear that the best facilities for cyclists are to make it safer and easier to remain on the carriageway, protecting pedestrian routes for walkers, who may have no other independent travel choice. The Government should make it easier to reallocate roadspace to allow this to happen, and local authorities should be required to demonstrate why carriageway solutions are not possible if there is any loss of pedestrian amenity.^{xi}

9.4 Monitoring and auditing

Any strategy should also include information on the existing walking environment in the area and how it is used. Information and data collection concerning walking is generally poor but there is a need to ensure information is collected so that the effect of policies can be monitored.

Access and mobility audits can be useful to assess the accessibility of the pedestrian environment for people with disabilities against set criteria, either minimum standards or preferably good practice. There are many different ways to undertake an access or mobility audit ranging from an overview to a detailed assessment with recommendations on design. Auditing for accessibility could also be built into a more general walking audit. Where a specialist Access Consultant is to be used, it is important to ensure s/he is a full member of the National Register of Access Consultants, a government supported initiative to raise standards of consultancy. JMU Access Partnership is a leading access consultancy which provides the secretariat for JCMBPSP and endorses its policies.

Any audit can usefully involve the participation of actual users of the environment. For an initial overview this can help reduce the costs of collecting information and give greater involvement to local people. It is important to ensure the information

reflects the wide range of needs of all users including blind, deafblind and partially sighted people. Local access groups can be a useful starting point. Local Authority Access Officers should also be involved.

Some issues affecting accessibility for blind, deafblind and partially sighted people will become more or less important depending on the time of day or season in the year. For example, concerns about fallen leaves or icy pavements will not be identified in summer audits.

Audits should include issues like;

- functional criteria, like widths and cross-falls
- availability of facilities like seating and audible and tactile signals at road crossings
- ease of crossing roads, such as the location of crossing points and any diversions, for example created by guard railing
- other traffic effects on walkers, such as the prevalence of pavement cycling, parking and over-hanging vegetation
- whether the walk is pleasant, such as the quality of lighting and clear sign-posting
- Whether the route is well maintained, free of litter and clear of unnecessary clutter.

It may also include specific “customer” satisfaction surveys with local blind, deafblind and partially sighted pedestrians to monitor the effect of changes over time and highlight priority issues.

Information and standards are essential prerequisites to developing a strategy to improve accessibility. Once collected this information can be used to guide the priorities for improving accessibility. Involving local blind, deafblind and partially sighted people in identifying priorities and setting relevant local targets is essential.

9.5 Management

It is not only the physical environment that affects accessibility but also how that space is used and managed. Policies on enforcement were mentioned above. Additionally, issues like maintenance, street cleaning and waste collection and location policies can all affect accessibility.

Ensuring drop off points from private hire vehicles are close to important destinations but not blocking public transport access is also important.

Within the context of the strategy, it is important to have effective reporting of day to day problems and issues that affect accessibility. Issues like how to report defective streetlights or pavement obstructions should be clear, accessible and explained to

all users of the pedestrian environment. Some local authorities have established telephone hotlines to report defects and problems and town centre management approaches show what can be achieved.

9.6 Promotion and marketing

It is also important to promote the improvements to the walking environment. New journeys may become possible now accessibility improvements have taken place or from the greater priority given to walking issues. Promotional material on walking should include accessibility issues. It should also be accessible itself, available in a variety of media.

10. To equip people with skills and confidence to use the pedestrian environment safely and independently

Losing your sight can be a traumatic experience signalling major changes in your day to day life. Being able to get out and travel safely and independently becomes much more difficult.

GDBA research states 88% of blind and partially sighted adults claim to never have received any outdoor mobility training despite 84% of those who had saying it gave them the skills and confidence to be more independent.

Therefore, the majority of blind, deafblind and partially sighted people are left to develop their own techniques for ensuring limited independent mobility. The Joint Committee actively promotes the greater availability of mobility training for those who request it because of the benefits in providing skills and confidence to travel safely and independently.

Mobility training and providing skills and confidence to blind, deafblind and partially sighted people should be an essential component of a Local Walking Strategy.

11. Consultation and support

The Government wants full and effective public consultation and participation and that it should be an inclusive process^{xii}. Blind, deafblind and partially sighted people are often excluded from traditional consultation methods and techniques, particularly those focusing on print media. Advice on contacting and involving blind, deafblind and partially sighted people is readily available from organisations such as RNIB and the National Federation of Blind People, and from local access groups which integrate the needs of visually impaired people.

However, in some areas these organisations do not exist. There should be greater support for local access groups that bring together people with mobility impairments, including blind, deafblind and partially sighted people, and those with the ability to address them to discuss problems, priorities and opportunities on an on-going basis.

Access groups can act as a forum for consultation and have often proved invaluable in preparing advice to developers and others on the needs of disabled people.

12. Targets & Monitoring

Targets are an essential part of a Local Walking Strategy as they can help provide a focus for the strategy and its implementation. Targets must be challenging but also realistic.

“Taking the strategy step” includes further guidance on the role of targets and examples of good practice. The Joint Committee would advocate specific targets focussing on accessibility being considered as a sub-set of wider targets.

For example a target considering improvements in public satisfaction with the condition of the pedestrian environment, as measured by opinion polls, should ensure the opinions of disabled people can be highlighted separately.

Summary of Recommendations

- The repair and maintenance of paths and pavements must be given a higher priority and adequate budgets provided.
- Street works should be planned and co-ordinated to minimise disruption to pedestrians and to enable opportunities for access improvements to be built in.
- Improving the pedestrian environment for visually impaired and other disabled people must be a core criteria in best value indicators
- Laws and regulations governing pavement parking and obstacles in the pedestrian environment must be reviewed, improved and adequately enforced
- Policies relating to the provision of pedestrian and cycle routes must ensure the protection of safe routes for pedestrians
- Management arrangements should be in place to enable effective reporting of problems such as defective lighting, and ensure these are promptly remedied.
- Central and local government plans for improving the pedestrian environment must adequately reflect the government’s commitment to social inclusion and accessibility

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- Local visual impairment groups and disability access groups should be effectively involved in the design and prioritisation of the pedestrian environment
- Access specialists should be used to ensure cost effective access solutions are integrated in any work.

The access needs of visually impaired people should not be dealt with separately, but they must be understood in order to integrate these with the requirements of other disabled people into effective strategies for the provision of inclusive pedestrian environments.

The Government, in its 10 year plan for Transport, gave a commitment that public funding is conditional on access for disabled people. Thus local transport plans and walking strategies that are public funded must adequately take account of the requirements of disabled people.

The Joint Committee has Policy Statements on a range of issues including Shared Pedestrian and Cycle paths, Concessionary Fares and Taxis and Private Hire Vehicles.

Further Reading

ⁱ DETR, 2000, Encouraging Walking: Advice to Local Authorities – available from DETR Publications 0870 1226 236

ⁱⁱ JMU, Streets and external environments and Building Sight – available from RNIB Customer Services, 0345 023153

ⁱⁱⁱ DFT, 2002, Inclusive Mobility – available from DETR Publications 0870 1226 236

^{iv} RNIB, 1991, Blind and partially sighted adults in Britain – available from RNIB Customer Services

^v GDBA, 1999, A New Way Forward – available from GDBA 0118 9835 555

^{vi} RNIB, 1999, Rights of Way – available from RNIB Customer Services

^{vii} RNIB, 2002, Travellers Tales - available from RNIB Customer Services

^{viii} Transport Research Laboratory; 1995, Gallon, C et al, Accidents Involving Visually Impaired People Using Public Transport or Walking

^{ix} PA, 2000, Taking the strategy step – available from Pedestrians Association 020 78201010

^x JMU Access Partnership and The Sign Design Society, Sign Design Guide - available from RNIB Customer Services, 0345 023153

^{xi} JCMBPSP Policy Statement Shared Facilities for Pedestrians and Cyclists

^{xii} DETR, 2000, Guidance on Full Local Transport Plans – available from DETR Publications

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