

Walking as Integrated Transport – A Policy Perspective

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Abstract

The Government in the United Kingdom published a major policy document in 1998 “*A New Deal for Transport: Better for Everyone*”. This identified walking as a key component in delivering a sound transport system for the future. Subsequently, mechanisms have been developed within transport planning that have been adopted in full by local authorities for the first time during the year 2000.

The great majority of people walk some of the time. However, many see it as a necessary evil, and do not regard it as a serious means of transport. Many of the measures needed to make walking more attractive to more people are simple, well-understood and low-cost. These facts should be strengths, yet are sometimes seen as weaknesses, and proof that the issue is too low-key to justify much attention.

This paper traces the development of policies favouring walking in the UK, from an initial pledge to publish a National Walking Strategy to the emergence of detailed advice to local authorities. It sets out the main messages in the resulting strategy document, the mechanisms by which these are being translated into action, and the progress made so far. It also draws attention to the wider international interest in promoting walking, following the success of the WALK 21 conference in London in February 2000.

Reference is made to detailed technical guidance to local authorities on best means of measuring walking journeys, and to walking audit and walking review. Specific programmes such as School Travel Plans, Home Zones and Safer Routes to Stations will be illustrated. Their contribution in demonstrating the practical values of walking and in changing ingrained attitudes towards it is explored.

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The Integrated Transport White Paper

In June 1998, the UK Government published the first major policy statement on transport strategy for a generation. The “white paper” *A New Deal for Transport: Better for Everyone* signalled a decisive change in transport policy away from predicting and providing for increases in traffic, to widening personal travel choice by offering real alternatives to the private car.

A range of factors supported this new approach. Building more and more roads to accommodate ever growing levels of traffic was unsustainable; levels of congestion and pollution had to be addressed; better options were needed for people without access to a car; and encouraging more cycling and walking would benefit the physical health of the nation. The white paper statement recognised that, to create a truly integrated transport system, proper consideration had to be given to the movement of people - not just the vehicles carrying them. And that is where walking plays such an important role.

"We are all pedestrians, even if we own a car. Nearly all journeys involve a walk and walking is still the main way of getting about locally. But all too often the things that make walking a more pleasant experience have not been given the proper attention, as can be seen in the way road space and priority is so often biased against pedestrians. Too often pedestrians are treated like trespassers in their own towns. We want streets that are decent and attractive to walk in."

A New Deal for Transport: Better for Everyone, paragraph 3.1

Nearly all journeys involve a walk (even if it is only to a car park) and walking is still the main way of getting about locally. In the UK more than a quarter of all journeys, and nearly 80 per cent of those under 1.5km in length, are made on foot. This reveals walking to be a major mode of transport in its own right, and illustrates why movement on foot must form an essential part of any integrated transport policy. Pedestrian access to bus and rail stations can often be poorly thought out, with the result that it becomes unattractive, inconvenient, and sometimes unsafe. Delivery of good quality public transport services depends to a significant degree on recognising that the great majority of people arrive at a bus, train or tram on foot, irrespective of how they choose to travel to a station, and that they move within a station or interchange on foot.

In its policy statement, the Government said that it wanted to create “streets for people”, in which local authorities would be expected to give more road space and priority to walking. It specified a range of measures that would need to be considered in order to improve conditions, including reallocating road space to pedestrians, providing direct and convenient walking routes, improving footpath maintenance and cleanliness, and considering walking in the planning of new developments. The Government also said that it would encourage local authorities to make the right provision for disabled, visually impaired and elderly people to move about safely and more easily. It further

promised to develop a national context for action to make walking safer, easier and more convenient.

“Encouraging walking” – a national framework for action

In March 2000 that context was published as *Encouraging walking: advice to local authorities*. It was based upon the report of an advisory group drawn from a wide range of organisations with an interest in the issues. These included the Department of Health, the Department for Education and Employment, voluntary organisations like Sustrans, the Pedestrians Association, Transport 2000, the Disabled Persons Transport Advisory Group, and the Local Government Association which represents the interests of local authorities - the bodies responsible for bringing about change on the ground. Three working groups looked in depth at the issues surrounding planning, the provision of facilities, and the social and behavioural aspects of walking.

Encouraging walking is a working guide for the people charged with putting policy into action. It is not an exhortation to the public to walk more, but aims to make it safer, easier and more convenient for them to choose to do so. It outlines how improvements to the walking environment can be made at both the strategic and the tactical level.

While recognising the importance of walking as a mode of transport, it also notes the wider benefits that improving conditions for pedestrians can bring:

- Places that are pleasant and safe to walk in are places that people enjoy. Giving careful consideration to the walking environment can improve the quality of the public realm and, in turn, help foster a sense of community;
- Walking more can improve personal health and fitness. Over half the population of the UK is overweight – a particular concern because of the links between obesity and heart disease, the largest single cause of premature death in the country. Improving health can also benefit the economy by reducing sickness absence and healthcare costs. (Current advice is that people should do 30 minutes of brisk walking a day.)
- Three in ten households in the UK do not have a car, a statistic that people often find surprising. Creating better conditions for walking is fundamental to improving transport opportunities. This means better access to jobs, schools, health care and other services, tackling social exclusion and bringing economic and personal benefits to the whole community.

Local Transport Plans

One of the cornerstones of the recent UK policy on Integrated Transport is that, to obtain central government funding for local transport activities, local authorities are now required to submit Local Transport Plans (LTPs). These are closely scrutinised.

The process represents a major change in the way that local transport policies are planned and delivered. LTPs are essentially 5-year integrated transport strategies, put together locally in partnership with the local community. Walking is one of the key areas that are required to be covered, using the principles set out in *Encouraging walking - advice to local authorities*.

The *Guidance on Full Local Transport Plans* states that walking should be encouraged, both for short journeys and for access to public transport. It points out that walking is a low-cost, healthy and socially inclusive way of travelling. Investment in it can benefit everyone.

Each local authority has been asked to develop a Local Walking Strategy, and to reflect its main elements in their LTPs.

The guidance also stresses that land use planning is a major component of an integrated transport policy, because it can help in promoting more sustainable travel choices, and in removing the need to travel. Planning policies can ensure that day to day facilities are available in local centres, and focus new housing developments within existing urban areas, so that they are accessible by people on foot and using bicycle. Parking policies can be used to promote transport choice, and reduce reliance on private cars for work and other journeys. In town centres, major planning decisions affecting the road network in the area can ensure greater road space for pedestrians, as well as for cyclists and public transport.

Local Walking Strategies

Local walking strategies set out how local authorities intend to make it easier, safer and more pleasant to travel locally on foot. They also demonstrate how walking can best be integrated with other means of transport. Local targets for increasing the amount of walking in the area are usually established.

Highway and streetscape design, traffic management and provision of other facilities should always take walking into account. In some places where the amount of walking is limited, there may be suppressed demand that could be released by better facilities. The measures needed include reallocating road space to pedestrians through wider pavements, reducing vehicle speeds, more and better pedestrian crossings of roads, pedestrianisation schemes and vehicle restricted areas.

There needs to be clear, convenient and safe networks of walking routes to key attractors, including urban centres, schools and major employers. Direct, safe, well-lit and attractive walking routes to rail and bus stations, and to main bus stops, are essential in delivering good quality public transport opportunities.

Traffic Advisory Leaflet 2/00

The Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions (DETR) has undertaken research to establish a practical framework for local walking strategies. Details were published in Traffic Advisory Leaflet 2/00. The leaflet sets out the minimum actions needed in order for a strategy to achieve measurable change.

The framework is not prescriptive. It offers a schematic approach, that sets out the key issues involved in moving progressively from broad aims, through objectives, specific measures, and the desired outcomes, through to indicators of performance.

Objectives are suggested, such as to improve the physical infrastructure, to improve safety and personal security, to promote walking, and to involve others. Measures that

might be included cover: methodical inspection and rectification of defects in facilities and equipment; identification and improvement of walking routes; road safety training; safer routes to schools and to stations; workplace travel plans; travel awareness; and health campaigns. The various outcomes could include: increases in the amount of walking; fewer complaints from pedestrians; lower vehicle speeds and fewer pedestrian injuries; more young people walking to school; more employees walking to work; and increased public awareness of the benefits of walking. These are all forms of outcome that can be readily measured, allowing reasonable targets or performance indicators to be set.

Institution of Highways & Transportation Guidance

Another valuable piece of guidance for local authorities and others is “*Guidelines for Providing for Journeys on Foot*”. This is a 164 page manual, published by the Institution of Highways & Transportation (IHT) with financial support from J Sainsbury plc, Sustrans, the London Walking Forum, the European Union LIFE Project, the CSS (County Surveyors’ Society), and DETR. This comprehensive technical document is aimed at professionals within local authorities and consultancies who are tasked to provide for pedestrians and promote walking.

The Guidelines encourage local authorities to take an integrated approach to walking issues. This involves not only traditional schemes, such as pedestrianisation and road crossings, but also more radical approaches, such as reducing traffic speeds and re-allocation of road space.

Clean, safe and well-maintained pavements are a high priority. The Guidelines emphasise the importance of footway maintenance and cleansing, improving personal security, and tackling illegal uses of the footway such as driving and parking motor vehicles on it, obstructing it with retail goods displays, cycling along it, and dog fouling. They also suggest means of promoting walking, from transport, health and leisure perspectives.

The Guidelines draw attention to the importance of planning and land use judgements in influencing the location of new development, and ensuring accessibility to local facilities by people on foot. They give detailed planning and design advice, with information on appropriate footway widths and surfaces, pedestrian crossings and pedestrian-friendly traffic calming. They suggest how walking audit and walking review techniques can be applied. And they carry information on monitoring the amount of walking and its growth, at the local level.

Traffic Advisory Leaflet 6/00

Any targets that are set for achieving growth in walking need to be monitored to establish the effectiveness of the actions taken. The DETR undertook research into means of monitoring levels of walking, as an input to the IHT’s guidance. It was decided to publish a Traffic Advisory Leaflet (TAL 6/00) to highlight the issues and techniques, and at the same time to help publicise the IHT material.

Sound methods of acquiring information on walking already exist. To use these in identifying changes over time, an organised monitoring programme is needed.

The leaflet describes the range of survey methods available, the location of survey sites, and when to undertake surveys. It also sets out a number of general principles that should be borne in mind when setting up a monitoring programme.

Walking audit and walking reviews

Research is planned by DETR to establish an authoritative basis for advice on both walking audit and walking review. This would extend the information available within the IHT's publication. Adopting the principles of DETR's earlier work on cycle audit and cycle review to walking:-

Walking Audit will be a systematic process, applied to planned changes to the transport network. It will examine new highway schemes for pedestrian friendliness, involving the audit of schemes at various stages of design and implementation. It will be designed to ensure that opportunities to encourage walking are considered comprehensively, and that conditions for walking are not inadvertently made worse.

Walking Review will also be systematic, but applied to existing transport networks. It will be designed to identify their positive and negative attributes for walking and to assess ways that those networks can be changed in order to encourage walking. It will have wider application than walking audit, as it potentially involves examining entire road networks.

Home zones

Home zones have been created in a number of European countries, such as the Netherlands, Germany, Austria and Denmark. They typically incorporate low traffic speeds, pedestrianised areas and design features to emphasise a change in priority favouring pedestrians and cyclists.

The aim is to create pleasant and safe local environments for people to live in, where vehicles are catered for but are not the dominant feature. Measures include reduced speed limits (usually 15km/h or below), traffic calming, re-allocation of road space and changes in design (such as signing and road surface colour) to emphasise the change in status.

Many of the objectives of home zones are achievable within existing UK legislation. The UK Government is committed to working with local authorities to assess the effect of home zones, as they are introduced under current powers. If the measures already available are insufficient to get the desired result, then it is likely that changes will be made in the law.

In response to an initiative from the Children's Play Council and Transport 2000, a number of local authorities are considering the introduction of home zones within their areas. The DETR is monitoring nine pilot schemes to provide early feedback on the effectiveness of different approaches. These pilots are in Ealing and Lambeth (both in London), Leeds, Manchester, Magor Village in Monmouthshire (Wales), Nottingham, Peterborough, Plymouth, and Sittingbourne in Kent. Elements being measured include: traffic volume, speed and displacement; environmental improvement; street activity; and changes in attitudes.

Construction work on the pilot schemes is to begin towards the end of 2000. Outputs from the DETR monitoring programme will start to emerge towards the end of 2001. The DETR research covers schemes in England and Wales. The Scottish Executive and Northern Ireland Assembly are also planning to introduce and monitor home zone schemes.

The support of residents is important to the success of home zones. We expect local authorities to liaise closely with local people in the design and implementation of schemes. Successful consultation and involvement will increase the likelihood of “ownership” of schemes by local communities.

It is likely that there will be a steady increase in numbers of home zones over the next few years. The DETR is working closely with the Children’s Play Council to ensure that, as experience develops, there is an effective exchange of information through websites, printed information and direct contacts.

School Travel Plans

The concept of School Travel Plans incorporates the safer routes to school experience that has been pioneered in recent years in the UK by Sustrans and various local authorities.

Despite a drop in the proportion of children who walk to school, walking is still by far the main mode of travel to school and is likely to remain so. School Travel Plans set out to:

- Improve safety and security for school children
- Promote the health benefits of walking and cycling
- Reduce the use of cars with their attendant problems of traffic congestion and air pollution
- Minimise demands on local education authority transport budgets

The general aim is to return by 2010 to the level of walking, cycling and bus use of the mid-1980s. The scope for each will vary between areas, but at the national level it would mean 80% of primary pupils and 90% of secondary pupils cycling, walking or using the bus.

Key elements in the development of safer routes to schools include:

- Participation/Survey
- Development of Proposals
- Implementation
- Maintaining Contact/Media Coverage
- Promotion

The perceived barriers to walking to school usually include the following:

- Safety (traffic danger)
- Personal security (stranger danger and bullying)
- Effort (too far, too lazy, too much to carry, easier by car/bus/bike)
- Environment (bad weather, traffic pollution, poor quality of route)
- Other (no one to travel with, not allowed)

The most successful school travel plans are those where the school children, their parents and the teachers are involved in the process from the beginning. School travel plans can address the twin fears of traffic and strangers - when the proportion of non-car journeys is increased there is a sense that "more people are about". For this reason, other local measures that promote bus use and cycling can assist pedestrians in the majority of cases.

There are now several guides specifically about school travel plans. *School Travel Strategies and Plans* from the DETR (1999) is a best practice guide for local authorities. *A Safer Journey to School* by Transport 2000 (1999) is a guide for parents, teachers and governors. Further advice on walking aspects is provided in *The Walking Class* from the Pedestrians Association (1999).

Safer routes to stations

Walking and cycling to stations can often be frustrating, due to poor signage, frequently having to cross enormous car parks, and the lack of properly engineered routes. Safer Routes to Stations is a joint project involving Sustrans, Railtrack, the DETR, local authorities, train operating companies and bus companies. The aim is to make it easier to cycle and walk to rail and bus stations. Primarily, this involves developing well-signed, direct and safe cycling and walking routes, improving route facilities, and providing good cycle parking. Twelve pilot schemes have been started in 2000, with the intention of around 100 localities benefiting over the next five years.

Information exchange

Apart from the publication of guidance to providers, and the resulting feedback, there is a need for information exchange at a number of levels. Central government needs some form of sounding board to ensure that any impediments to action are identified as early as possible. Seminars and teach-ins locally and regionally help local authority staff and others to be up to date with current thinking and to exchange ideas. A regular series of technical meetings provides an opportunity for relaying professional experience, and web sites provide access to the wealth of information that is accumulating.

Wider international context

We have long recognised that the development of interest in walking in the UK is not taking place in isolation. Many other countries have advanced policies and plans for ensuring that the transport, environmental and health gains available from encouraging walking are realised.

The DETR and the Countryside Agency have jointly funded a Delphi study to provide some information about how walking, and attitudes to it, might change in the future. The study was undertaken by the Centre for Alternative and Sustainable Transport at Staffordshire University. The expert panel that contributed views for the study believed that all groups in society would see walking as being more important by 2010. It was thought that environmental managers, non-governmental organisations, advocacy groups and health practitioners would see walking as being much more important; whereas academics, planners and recreation /countryside managers/planners would see it as slightly more important. Generally speaking, the conclusion was that walking

would be seen as more important by professional groups, though less so by the media and the public.

In February last year, the United Kingdom played host to Walk 21, the first ever international conference on walking. Around 230 delegates from 22 countries discussed how to halt the decline in walking. The Conference Report (produced in September) was submitted by the DETR to the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD), which is taking sustainable transport as a main topic for discussion in April 2001.

CSD consistently generates a high level of public interest. It ensures a high profile for sustainable development issues within the United Nations and helps to improve the UN's co-ordination of environment and development activities.

In undertaking a review of Agenda 21 in 1997, CSD noted that over the next twenty years, transportation would be the major force behind a growing demand for world energy. It was further noted that current patterns of transportation were not sustainable, and might compound both environmental and health problems.

The United Kingdom, together with the rest of the European Union, will be calling on CSD to recognise that walking is a pre-requisite for sustainable transport. Governments need to adopt a national walking strategy that addresses the impact of walking within a cross section of policy frameworks. For example, land use planning policy can ensure sustainable development patterns and direct major development to locations that maximise the opportunities for travel by means other than the car. This in turn can make an important contribution towards meeting the objectives of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Kyoto Protocol.

Opportunities and constraints

We have seen that an informed audience, both in the UK and further afield, have identified readily with the idea that walking merits being taken seriously. Its advantages are manifest - as are the reasons why people have chosen to walk less in recent years. Yet there remains a tendency for some to ridicule efforts to make progress.

There are huge opportunities to explain to the uncommitted (or unconvinced) why walking matters, if we can avoid the tendency to make it sound prescriptive. Walking can be an appropriate part of transport journeys for more people, it can confer significant health benefits, and it can contribute to environmental improvements. How these advantages are presented is all-important in securing the shift in habits and attitudes that is so desperately needed. The demonstrable benefits that flow from practical schemes and projects like school travel plans, home zones and safer routes to stations can be highly influential to the process of change.

Conclusions

There are compelling reasons for creating the conditions that will encourage people to walk more, as part of a 21st century transport pattern that is sustainable. Promoting walking as transport is probably best done within a transparent framework of policies that offer people genuine alternatives to private car use wherever feasible. Many people

will nevertheless be apathetic about embracing the changes involved, or be uneasy about the personal impact of any reappraisal they are offered. Some will be reactionary or antagonistic, because they are faced with a new order that they perceive as a threat to established interests.

Behavioural shift towards a society that values the utility of walking will be hard won - but worth winning. Careful positioning of messages is needed. Practical projects have a major role in demonstrating the advantages. And good communication and marketing are vital in ensuring that people have sufficient information to make mature and balanced decisions.

Disclaimer

Views expressed in this paper are those of the author, and do not necessarily represent those of the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions.

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