

Disabled Citizens' Inquiry

Executive summary

Giving disabled people a voice in walking and wheeling policy and practice



In partnership with

Transport for All
Access, Rights, Advice

Generously funded by

 **Motability**

About the Disabled Citizens' Inquiry

The Disabled Citizens' Inquiry was designed to give disabled people, using a pan impairment approach, a voice in making walking and wheeling more inclusive.

The solutions suggested within this report were developed by 43 disabled people through citizens' workshops, before being tested through an independent representative survey of 1,183 disabled people across the UK.

We believe that everyone should have the right to walk or wheel to the end of the street, around our neighbourhoods, and to our desired destinations – with ease, independence and confidence.

Date of publication: 8 February 2023 © Sustrans, February 2023

Sustrans

We work for and with communities, helping them come to life by walking, wheeling and cycling to create healthier places and happier lives for everyone. www.sustrans.org.uk

Sustrans is a registered charity, no. 326550 (England and Wales) SC039263 (Scotland)

Transport for All

Transport for All is the only disabled-led group striving to increase access to transport and streetspace across the UK. We are a pan-impairment organisation, guided by the passionate belief that all disabled and older people have the right to travel with freedom and independence. www.transportforall.org.uk

Transport for All is a registered charity, no. 1063733

Motability

This project was funded by Motability, the national disability charity. The charity has oversight of the Motability Scheme, which enables a disabled person to use all or part of their higher rate mobility allowance to pay for the lease of a new

car, scooter or powered wheelchair. The charity also provides grants directly to disabled beneficiaries, other charities and organisations, and is investing steadily in its innovation activities. www.motability.org.uk

Motability is a Registered Charity, no. 299745 (England and Wales) SC050642 (Scotland)

Disabled people

We have engaged with a range of people who have a mental or physical impairment(s) or long-term health condition(s) during this research.

For brevity, we use the term ‘disabled people’ to include people living with a physical or mental health condition, which has a long-term, substantial effect on their ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities. By long-term we mean 12 months or more. This is the definition used within the Equality Act 2010; however, it is not necessarily how all disabled people identify.

Walking and wheeling

We recognise that some people who use wheeled mobility aids, for example a wheelchair or a mobility scooter, may not identify with the term walking and may prefer to use the term wheeling.

We use the terms walking and wheeling together to ensure we are as inclusive as possible. Wheeling covers modes that use pavement space at a similar speed to walking. It does not include the use of cycles, aside from as a mobility aid through pedestrianised environments when it is not physically possible to walk or push a cycle.

The need to improve walking and wheeling for disabled people

A rights-based approach to transport

All national UK governments have adopted the social model of disability.¹ This follows that people are disabled by barriers in society, not by their impairment or difference. Places including streets and public spaces should therefore be designed to reduce or eliminate barriers faced by disabled people.

The Equality Act 2010² legally protects people, including disabled people, from discrimination. It provides a framework of protection against direct and indirect discrimination, harassment and victimisation in services and public functions, including transport.

There is a legal requirement for public bodies to ensure their services, including provision for walking and wheeling specifically, do not discriminate against disabled people.³

However, the reality of our pavements, streets and neighbourhoods is often very different.

The Transport Accessibility Gap

Disabled people take 38% fewer trips across all modes of transport than non-disabled people.⁴ This pattern is similar for walking and wheeling. In England, for example, disabled people take 30% fewer walking trips than non-disabled people.⁵

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- 1 Scope, 2022. Social model of disability. www.scope.org.uk/about-us/social-model-of-disability
 - 2 UK Gov, 2015. Equality Act 2010: guidance. www.gov.uk/guidance/equality-act-2010-guidance
 - 3 UK Gov, 2012. Public sector equality duty. www.gov.uk/government/publications/public-sector-equality-duty
 - 4 Motability, 2022. The Transport Accessibility Gap. www.motability.org.uk/media/iwaidhvk/motability_transport-accessibility-gap-report_march-2022_final.pdf
 - 5 National Travel Survey, 'Walking Factsheet, England: 2021'. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1100998/walking-factsheet-2021.pdf

This is known as the ‘transport accessibility gap’.⁶ One reason for this gap is that our streets are often inaccessible and unsafe for disabled people to navigate. These barriers can prevent disabled people accessing what they need, from essentials like healthcare and food, opportunities in work and education, and social benefits like community and green space. This means reduced independence and a higher risk of isolation for disabled people.

Making walking and wheeling accessible, safe and attractive for disabled people is a critical part of closing the transport accessibility gap. After all, almost every single journey starts and ends with walking or wheeling. Addressing the transport accessibility gap for disabled people in the UK would deliver benefits in the region of £72.4 billion per annum to the UK economy, including for local businesses.⁷

The Disabled Citizens’ Inquiry

With generous funding from Motability, Sustrans partnered with Transport for All to provide an opportunity to put the lived experience, views and ideas of disabled people at the fore of policy, investment and practice for walking and wheeling. A pan-impairment approach was used throughout all activities.

To do so we held four two-day citizens’ workshops with disabled people across the UK. Disabled people shared their experiences, explored barriers on the street locally, and worked together to suggest and design solutions for change. These solutions were then tested and refined with practitioners from the transport sector and disability organisations across the UK. The workshop facilitators, and many of the practitioners and delivery team members were also disabled people.

6 Motability, 2022. The Transport Accessibility Gap. www.motability.org.uk/media/iwaidhvk/motability_transport-accessibility-gap-report_march-2022_final.pdf

7 Motability, 2022. Transport Accessibility Gap. www.motability.org.uk/media/iwaidhvk/motability_transport-accessibility-gap-report_march-2022_final.pdf

Finally, the solutions that disabled people had developed were tested with the wider public through an independent representative survey of disabled people living across the UK.

We hope the recommendations made by disabled people within this report will help decision makers, local and national government transport and planning teams and the wider sector to make places and streets better for people.

Barriers faced by disabled people

Many disabled people face barriers when walking and wheeling

41% of disabled people in the UK told us they often experience problems reaching their destination due to the accessibility of the environment around them on a typical walking or wheeling journey. This increased to 55% for those with mobility impairments or learning disabilities, 58% of deaf or hard of hearing people and 64% for blind or visually impaired people. The likelihood of experiencing problems reaching destinations because of poor accessibility is significantly greater for disabled women, People of colour and people likely to be on lower incomes or not in employment.

It is not only physical barriers that act as a deterrent from walking and wheeling. A third (33%) of disabled people say that they are afraid of negative comments from other people due to their physical or mental health condition when walking or wheeling. Again, we found the likelihood of being afraid of negative comments is also significantly greater for disabled women, and people likely to be on lower incomes or not in employment.

Not having a suitable mobility aid can also severely reduce or remove the ability to travel safely and independently. Despite many disabled people not requiring a mobility aid, we found 16% of UK disabled people are not able to get access to the right mobility aid to walk or wheel. Disabled People of colour are almost twice as likely (27%) to not be able to get access to the right mobility aid to walk or wheel in comparison to disabled White people (14%).



“I plan all my journeys and reccy them. If plans change, I’ll experience a sensory overload and feel very upset. Smells, sounds, lights and lots of people overwhelm me. Because I’m not physically disabled, I hear a lot of ‘no’ to what I need. And I struggle with people thinking I’m controlling. I can’t help it. It’s awful to live like this.”

Swansea workshop participant

The cost-of-living crisis is making this situation worse

Disabled people are almost twice as likely to be unemployed as non-disabled people, and three times as likely to be economically inactive.⁸ Life costs £583 more on average a month if you are disabled.⁹ This means the cost-of-living crisis disproportionately affects disabled people.¹⁰

We found 59% of disabled people said they have reduced the amount they travel because of the rising costs of living. Furthermore, over half of disabled people (52%) said the rising cost of living is affecting their ability to make essential journeys to places such as shops, healthcare services, education or work.

Disabled women (62%) and disabled people on lower incomes or not in employment (65%) are significantly more likely than disabled men and disabled people from other socio-economic groups to say they have reduced the amount they travel due to the rising costs of living. Once again, the impact of the cost-of-living crisis is exacerbated for already marginalized groups.

8 Scope, 2022. Disability facts and figures.
www.scope.org.uk/media/disability-facts-figures

9 Scope, 2019. Disability Price Tag.
www.scope.org.uk/campaigns/extra-costs/disability-price-tag

10 Leonard Cheshire, 2022. Nowhere Left to Cut.
<https://leonardcheshire.org/sites/default/files/2022-09/Leonard-Cheshire-Cost-of-living%20briefing.pdf>

Disabled people want the government to do more

72% of UK disabled people say governments across the UK should do more to help people to walk or wheel more. Sustrans' Walking and Cycling Index in 2021 found that 59% of disabled people from 17 UK urban areas wanted more government spending on walking and wheeling.

Solutions developed by disabled people

43 disabled participants across four citizens' workshops developed nine solutions to make walking and wheeling more inclusive and accessible.

These solutions are presented below alongside practical recommendations. They were tested through a UK-wide survey of disabled people to ensure they are representative of disabled people's views. No significant differences were found in the responses of disabled people between the four UK nations.

Solution 1: Ensure disabled people inform walking and wheeling policy and practice

Participants in our citizens' workshops felt strongly that disabled people needed better representation in how decisions, funding and delivery happens. Representation and engagement should be at the core of every solution to ensure disabled people are understood and their needs are met.

Our survey of disabled people across the UK found that more is needed to be able to hold local and national government to account; dedicated disabled people's walking and wheeling panels would encourage 79% of disabled people to walk or wheel more.



“We are unable to participate in making our neighbourhoods.”

Norwich workshop participant

Recommendations to enable disabled people to shape policy, investment and delivery

1. All governments and local authorities to have paid expert panels of disabled people
2. Fully engage with disabled people when planning places and designing walking and wheeling schemes
3. Commit to long-term plans to diversify the transport and planning sectors

Solution 2: Create long-term dedicated pavement funding to maintain and improve pavements

It was felt by participants that pavements and walking and wheeling more broadly are often ignored by government in comparison to other transport modes, especially in making pavements accessible and inclusive. Examples discussed in the workshops included the lack of effort to improve walking and wheeling when local authorities introduce low traffic neighbourhoods, road gritting in winter without gritting pavements and pothole funding without addressing cracked and uneven pavement surfaces.



“It’s very frustrating seeing beautiful smooth roads for cars whilst walking on pavement surfaces that are falling apart.”

Norwich workshop participant

While governments often place walking at top of the transport hierarchy in theory, our participants felt ring-fenced funding for pavements was vital to make this happen in practice. Disabled participants shared that they frequently feel unsafe when navigating inadequately designed and maintained pavements, and that local authorities do not reliably address safety issues when reported.

Our UK survey found creating a national pavement fund to maintain and improve pavements would be useful for 79% of disabled people to walk or wheel more.

Recommendations to maintain and improve pavements

1. Create a long-term dedicated pavement fund to ensure that pavements are better maintained and made accessible
2. Fund footway improvements when implementing low traffic neighbourhoods
3. Strengthen national guidance for inclusive pavement design
4. Improve and fully enforce standards for maintaining accessibility during roadworks

Solution 3: Stop pavement parking and manage pavement clutter

All disabled participants felt there was an urgent need to reduce and manage pavement clutter. Participants were especially vocal about pavement parking especially when it meant having to walk or wheel out into the road to get by, causing significant safety concerns. Clutter is increasing on our streets such as outdoor dining (especially since the pandemic) and electric vehicle chargers on pavements. This needs better management to ensure accessibility. Our participants spoke of the fear and reality of tripping or falling when attempting to navigate obstacles and parked vehicles on pavements and many were reluctant to leave their homes on bin day.



“Our pavements are car parks.”

Manchester workshop participant

Our survey of disabled people across the UK found that 73% of people would find prohibiting vehicles parking on pavements useful for them to walk or wheel more.

Recommendations to manage pavement clutter to safeguard pavement accessibility

1. Prohibit pavement parking
2. Develop and implement guidance to manage pavement clutter to ensure accessibility

Solution 4: Improve walking and wheeling crossing points across roads and cycle paths

In many areas crossing the road, even in quieter residential areas, can be challenging resulting in disabled people being cut off. Disabled participants told us that crossings needed to be improved and increased, including more dropped kerbs on quieter streets and zebra or signalised crossings in busy areas. Safety concerns when crossing the road are widespread, with many participants sharing that they often walk or wheel out of their way to find a safe crossing point. Increasing cycle infrastructure is also leading to greater conflict and confusion as scheme designs are often varied.

Our UK survey of disabled people found 80% would find crossing points improved by dropping kerbs, adding tactile paving and more official crossing infrastructure useful for them to walk or wheel more.

Recommendations to improve crossing points

1. Ensure all existing and new crossing points are accessible, inclusive and safe
2. Conduct national trials of zebra markings on side roads that give people walking and wheeling priority over traffic
3. Improve crossing points between walking and wheeling routes and cycle paths

Solution 5: Make wayfinding and journey planning tools work for disabled people

Disabled people require a variety of different forms of wayfinding from visual signage to tactile and audio cues alongside the rise of digital technology. Disabled participants told us that wayfinding varies greatly in practice which can be confusing and challenging to navigate. Many also said that digital journey planning needs to better account for different impairment needs.

Our UK survey found 77% of disabled people would find an app or website where disabled people can share information, experiences and rate routes or destinations useful for them to walk or wheel more.

Recommendations to improve wayfinding and journey planning

- 1.** Develop standardised guidance and practice for accessible wayfinding provision
- 2.** Create fully accessible digital journey planning and wayfinding tools which account for different impairments and health conditions

Solution 6: Ensure disabled people have a choice to live within walking or wheeling distance of services and amenities

The 20-minute neighbourhood concept has recently gained significant support amongst cities wanting to reduce car use and make neighbourhoods more walkable and liveable. Disabled people have been largely left out of this conversation. Disabled participants told us they do not have the same choices. They may walk or wheel more slowly or not be able to walk or wheel as far as non-disabled people. Furthermore, many walking or wheeling routes and destinations are inaccessible making journey times longer. This needs to be better considered by transport and urban planners.



“10 minutes (each way) is not inclusive for everyone.”

Online workshop participant

Our UK survey found 88% of disabled people say that a planning system which ensures more essential services are provided within walking or wheeling distance of where people live would be useful for them to walk or wheel more.

Recommendations to improve planning

1. Amend national planning guidance to ensure new developments are built in the right locations and with high enough housing density to support services and amenities within walking and wheeling distance
2. Develop supplementary planning guidance to measure walking and wheeling proximity that fully considers accessibility and inclusion
3. Ensure local plans and decisions facilitate walkable and wheelable neighbourhoods

Solution 7: Improve access to mobility aids

Disabled participants told us that having the right mobility aid is vital to get around independently, especially when walking or wheeling. Many participants had personal stories or friends who didn't understand how to get a mobility aid, had not been eligible to access one that fully met their needs, or had to wait a long time to get the right mobility aid.

Our survey found that 86% of disabled people across the UK would find it useful for them to walk or wheel more if we ensured everyone who requires a mobility aid is given financial support and advice to get access to one that meets their needs.

Recommendations for access to mobility aids

1. Review and address barriers to disabled people accessing mobility aids and other support, ensuring people can access the right mobility aid, when they need it
2. Ensure cycles are legally recognised as mobility aids and roll out schemes to support access to cycles, including non-standard cycles

Solution 8: Improve off-road routes

Many off-road routes such as canal towpaths, routes through green spaces and the National Cycle Network should be fully accessible for disabled people. Disabled people told us the reality was very different. Numerous barriers exist that can stop disabled people from walking or wheeling, reducing access to green space and the countryside.

Our UK survey found removing physical barriers, such as steps and narrow gates from off-road walking and wheeling routes would be useful for 82% of disabled people to walk or wheel more. As custodians of the National Cycle Network, Sustrans' Paths for Everyone strategy is seeking to do just this, removing barriers, improving safety and wayfinding to make the existing network more accessible and inclusive. We need to go further and faster with all off-road routes.

Recommendations for making off-road routes accessible and inclusive

1. Develop guidance and invest in national plans for making off-road routes accessible and inclusive
2. Develop local area-wide plans for making off-road routes accessible and inclusive

Solution 9: Improve the integration of walking and wheeling with public transport

Most disabled people see walking and wheeling as an essential part, before and after, of travelling by bus, train, or other forms of public transport. Disabled participants told us if public transport services were improved and made more accessible this would support more walking and wheeling to, from and at public transport hubs.

The Walking and Cycling Index in 2021 found 70% of disabled people believe the government should invest more in public transport.

Recommendations for improving integration with public transport

- 1.** Improve and adequately resource public transport provision
- 2.** Ensure fully accessible walking and wheeling access to and on public transport, including stations, and interchanges where disabled people need to connect between modes

Next steps

This guidance provides an opportunity for decision makers and the transport and planning sectors to hear the views of disabled people and put disabled people at the centre of policy, investment, and delivery.

We believe walking and wheeling should be the most equitable mode of travel across the UK. Everyone should have the freedom to walk or wheel independently and enjoy being out and about in their neighbourhood, feeling safe and comfortable.

It is imperative that local and national governments, the third sector and businesses work together to make walking and wheeling inclusive and unlock the huge benefits for society, the economy and the environment.

We call for governments across the UK and other organisations working to improve places and transport to increase the rates of walking and wheeling. We must ensure that what is delivered has inclusion and equity at its heart.

Date of publication: 8 February 2023 © Sustrans, February 2023

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The full report and alternative formats are available at
www.sustrans.org.uk