



**Highlighting barriers in the pedestrian
environment**

**Report into issues, good practice and
recommendations**

October 2012

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About Imtac

Imtac is a committee of disabled people and older people as well as others including key transport professionals. Our role is to advise Government and others in Northern Ireland on issues that affect the mobility of older people and disabled people.

Our aim is to ensure that older people and disabled people have the same opportunities as everyone else to travel when and where they want.

Imtac receives support from the Department for Regional Development.

About this report

Travel is a necessity in modern life enabling people to access everyday activities and services. Almost every journey we make, including those made by car and public transport involves use of the pedestrian environment. Many older people and disabled people tell Imtac that they experience difficulties using the pedestrian environment and that these difficulties have a major detrimental impact on their day to day lives. Imtac has developed this report to identify the key barriers that make using the pedestrian environment difficult and what can be done to reduce and remove these barriers.

How we compiled this report

In developing this report Imtac has considered a range of issues and evidence. Firstly we have looked at research into the impact of the pedestrian environment on the mobility of older people and disabled people as well as how good design standards can help to reduce and remove barriers. Secondly we have talked to a broad range of older people and disabled people about their experiences. Finally we have developed two case studies in Belfast and Lisburn city centres involving an audit of the pedestrian environment in both locations.

Executive Summary

Nearly every journey involves using the pedestrian environment. In this report Imtac has looked at how accessible the pedestrian environment is to disabled people and older people. We did this by talking to disabled people and older people as well as looking at physical infrastructure in two locations in Northern Ireland. We found the following:

- Disabled people and older people face numerous barriers within the pedestrian environment which make everyday journeys difficult or impossible
- Many of these barriers are avoidable, having been caused by poor design, poor application of standards, the behaviour of other road users and the lack of enforcement

Overall our findings illustrate that requirements of other road users as well as other interests such as businesses are given priority often at the expense of pedestrians. We have made a number of recommendations designed to address this imbalance and specifically improve the accessibility of the pedestrian environment for older people and disabled people. Our recommendations include:

- Possible legislation to strengthen protection for pedestrians
- Better enforcement of existing powers around pavement clutter and parking offences
- Better dissemination and implementation of existing standards around accessible pedestrian design
- Improved maintenance of existing pedestrian infrastructure
- Initiatives that educate a range of stakeholders about the impact of unnecessary barriers in the pedestrian environment

Research and the pedestrian environment

There has been significant national and international research undertaken into the impact of the design of the pedestrian environment on the mobility of disabled people¹. Research has looked at how age and disability can influence how easy people find it to move around. It also demonstrates how poor design in the pedestrian environment can inhibit mobility for not just disabled people and older people but others such as people with small children, people carrying shopping or luggage and people with temporary impairments due to accidents.

This research has informed the development of design guidelines² aimed at ensuring barriers are kept to a minimum in the pedestrian environment. Issues to be considered include the width of pavements, the design of ramps and steps, the design and provision of seating and street furniture, the use of colour contrasting, the provision and design of crossings and dropped kerbs and the use of tactile paving surfaces. Many of these design standards have been adopted locally by Roads Service and should be adhered to when introducing new pedestrian infrastructure or when upgrading existing infrastructure.

¹ Perhaps the most straightforward summary of issues can be found in the First Section of “Inclusive Mobility – A guide to best practice on access to pedestrian and transport infrastructure” DfT 2002

² See list of useful publications in appendix A

The views of disabled people and older people

In compiling this report Imtac sought the views and experiences of a range of disabled people and older people around using the pedestrian environment. To do this a series of meetings were held with disabled people and older people in locations across Northern Ireland.³ Some of the meetings were held in conjunction with Guide Dogs. In all over two hundred people attended meetings including people with a visual impairment, people with a hearing impairment, wheelchair users, people with walking difficulties, people with a learning disability and older people.

In general the feedback we received at each meeting was broadly similar. People told us that they faced many difficulties when using the pedestrian environment and that these difficulties had a major impact on their day-to-day life. Unsurprisingly people with a visual impairment, wheelchair users and people with walking difficulties (including many older people) experienced most difficulties.

The following are issues raised by people at the meetings:

- Many existing pavements are uneven or contain loose and cracked paving slabs which makes walking difficult or dangerous
- Some existing pavements are not wide enough to use easily
- Drainage on pavements can be poor with a lot of standing water – some drainage solutions such as dish channels have made using pavements difficult
- Crossing roads is difficult due to a lack of appropriate dropped kerbs
- There is an inconsistency in the provision of dropped kerbs with some places having a dropped kerb at one side of the road but not the other

³ Locations included Belfast, Lisburn, Dungannon, Armagh, Ennsikillen, Derry/Londonderry, Omagh and Antrim

- Crossing times at controlled crossings were deemed too short
- Frustration around the poor maintenance of existing provision including damage to paving, kerbs and tactile paving often caused by vehicles mounting pavements
- Dog excrement on pavements
- Work undertaken by utility companies in and around pavements and crossing points often leave the pavements in a worse condition
- Slippery pavements in winter due to ice and snow was seen as an increasing problem
- People living in rural areas found getting around more difficult because of the lack of pedestrian infrastructure
- Failure to include tactile paving surfaces or inappropriate installation of tactile paving surfaces
- Failure to provide an acceptable flush/level access between the road and pavement at dropped kerbs
- Failure to provide markings around dropped kerbs to deter motorists from parking across them
- Failure to locate control units at pedestrian crossings close to tactile paving thus making it harder for people with a visual impairment to use those crossings
- Illegal advertising boards that provide a moveable barrier for people with a visual impairment and restrict the width of pavements for other disabled and older people
- Shop displays and seating on the pavement around cafes and shops that restrict the width of paving and represent a hazard for many disabled people
- People expressed concerns about proposals to legislate to license street cafes

- Bins and rubbish (from both domestic and business premises) left on pavements and pedestrian areas for long periods causing an obstruction and representing a hazard
- Random provision of furniture such as seating, bins, utility equipment, lighting and signage columns which create numerous obstacles for people with a visual impairment and reduce available pavement widths for all users
- Increasing numbers of people cycling on the pavements
- Bicycles chained in inappropriate places on the pavement causing obstructions
- Overgrown hedges and trees encroaching onto the pavement
- Works around buildings and by utility companies often obstruct the pavements with no accessible alternative route provided
- Parking partially or wholly on pavements restricting or blocking completely the pavement
- Parking across dropped kerbs and crossings making it impossible for disabled people to cross roads
- Drivers “jumping lights” at controlled crossings
- Generally high levels and speed of traffic can make people feel unsafe even when on the pavement
- There was confusion about who was responsible for correcting or enforcing the issues being raised
- There were positive comments from people who had raised concerns with Roads Service – defects with pavements and crossings were often rectified quickly when pointed out to officials

- Some people also pointed out that Roads Service did undertake enforcement of pavement clutter but often this resulted in only temporary respite as clutter soon reappeared
- Parking on pavements was felt to be a grey area as neither the police or Roads Service claim to have responsibility

Belfast and Lisburn case studies

To further inform this report Imtac developed two case studies – Belfast and Lisburn city centres. Walking audits were undertaken in both locations. In Belfast the audit was undertaken in partnership with AECOM and Disability Action examining the streets around the recently completed Streets Ahead project with a particular emphasis on links to public transport infrastructure. The Lisburn audit was undertaken in conjunction with Lisburn in Focus looking more broadly at pedestrian infrastructure in the city centre as well as links to public transport infrastructure.

Whilst both audits highlighted examples of good practice in the provision of pedestrian infrastructure many examples were identified that support and endorse the experiences highlighted by disabled people and older people who contributed to our consultation meetings. Both case studies demonstrate that significant barriers exist within the current pedestrian environment for many older people and disabled people.

Reports have been developed for both case studies with photographic examples that illustrate some of difficulties faced by disabled people and older people in the pedestrian environment. There are also examples of good practice.

Our findings

Based on our study of best practice, the views expressed by disabled people and older people and the audit of existing provision in two locations Imtac has been able to identify a number of common issues that are having a significant impact on the mobility of disabled people and older people. These issues (listed above) can be summarized under four headings:

1. The poor provision of existing pavements and crossing opportunities
2. The failure to adhere fully to design standards when introducing new infrastructure or replacing existing infrastructure
3. Obstacles and clutter on pavements
4. Problems caused by other road users

From the work we have undertaken we have found that many disabled people and older people find the current pedestrian environment a hostile and hazardous place. We have identified that there are substantial barriers within the pedestrian environment. The cumulative effect of these difficulties means disabled people and older people find making everyday journeys difficult or impossible and that this has a fundamental affect on people's ability to do day-to-day things. From a policy perspective weaknesses in the pedestrian environment seriously undermine Government commitments to delivering rights and equality for disabled people. It also undermines the goal of public transport system accessible to all as nearly every journey involves an element of walking.

More broadly our findings indicate that pedestrians in general are afforded a lesser priority than other road users and in particular car users. All of us (including car users) use the pedestrian environment and many of the issues we have identified cause difficulties for other pedestrians – parents with young children for example. Indeed there is justification for the strong application of the hierarchy for sustainable travel in Northern Ireland giving more priority to pedestrians and cyclists when developing and assessing transport and development proposals.

Imtac hope our findings can start a debate about how we can address what we believe are avoidable barriers that make walking difficult for many people. It is common in transport planning to talk about a road user's hierarchy where pedestrians should be placed at the top. Our report indicates that there remains a huge gulf between a notional hierarchy with pedestrians at the top and the day to day experiences of pedestrians in Northern Ireland. By way of simple illustration imagine the outcry from car users if just some of the barriers highlighted in this paper began to appear on our roads.

Our recommendations

Based on our work it appears that a barrier free pedestrian environment is still a long way off. Imtac recognises that resolving every issue with the pedestrian environment will take resources way beyond those currently available to Government here. However the Committee believes that a lack of resources should not be a barrier to doing something. Below Imtac has identified the recommendations aimed at improving current provision. We have divided our recommendations under a number of headings including legislation, enforcement, policy and practices and education.

Legislation

Our findings have identified a number of areas where additional legislation could be useful in strengthening protection for pedestrians. Issues include pavement parking and planned legislation for the licensing of pavement cafes.

Recommendation 1 – DRD and DoJ should review current legislation around parking on pavements and bring forward recommendations (including changes in legislation) that strengthen protection for all pedestrians

Recommendation 2 – DSD should ensure that planned legislation for the licensing of pavement cafes includes provision that protects and enhances the mobility of disabled people and older people – Imtac is happy to advise on how this can be achieved

Enforcement

Many of the barriers we have identified in this paper are already illegal and can be enforced. Imtac would like to see greater use of existing powers to strengthen protection for pedestrians particularly where other approaches have not worked.

Recommendation 3 – DRD working with local councils should make greater use of enforcement powers to remove illegal clutter from pavements, particularly in areas where other approaches to the problem has failed

Recommendation 4 - Roads Service should examine ways to ensure that parking across all dropped kerbs is an enforceable offence and is enforced in future

Policies and practices

Many of the issues identified by this paper involve avoidable difficulties created by a lack of clear standards, poor implementation of established standards or poor maintenance of footways where improvements have been made. It is imperative that when spending public money on improving pedestrian facilities that work is carried out to the highest possible standards and steps are taken to ensure these routes are maintained.

Recommendation 5 – DoE and DRD should review current planning policy and guidance to ensure that proposals for new development include best practice in accessible pedestrian infrastructure and that procedures are in place to ensure implementation during construction together with the provision and maintenance of accessible routes during construction

Recommendation 6 – DRD, DSD and DoE should undertake a review of current standards and make any necessary changes to ensure that they meet best practice in providing accessible pedestrian infrastructure and ensure that all guidance is disseminated to all responsible agencies

Recommendation 7 – Roads Service should review procedures relating to work undertaken by utility companies and other contractors with a view to strengthening measures that minimize impact of work on disabled and other pedestrians ensuring that pavements are reinstated to an acceptable standard and in a timely manner

Recommendation 8 – Roads Service should review procedures for regular maintenance checks with a view to ensuring greater priority is given to making improvements that enhance accessibility for example replacing broken or missing tactile paving

Recommendation 9 – Roads Service should review current procedures around crossing times at controlled crossings with a view to enhancing priority for pedestrians

Education

Some of the issues and barriers identified by this report may be resolved or reduced through initiatives that educate stakeholders about the difficulties they create. We are aware that an initiative was being planned in Ballymena involving Roads Service, the local council and the Chamber of Trade targeted at reducing illegal pavement clutter. Imtac would like to see other such initiatives developed to deal with the range of issues identified by this report aimed at education of the public and other stakeholders.

Recommendation 10 – Government should identify opportunities for cross-sectoral approaches to highlight the avoidable barriers created in pedestrian environment with the aim of reducing through education the impact of issues such as pavement clutter and parking and cycling on pavements and ensure that all existing guidance is disseminated to all responsible agencies

It essential that all agencies involved in improving the pedestrian environment work closely with disabled people, older people and their organisations when developing and implementing solutions to issues identified by this report. In the first instance Imtac is happy to work with and advice agencies but the Committee would also encourage strengthening links and consultation with other organisations of and for older people and disabled people particularly at the local level.

Appendix A – Useful Publications

Inclusive Mobility – A guide to best practice on access to pedestrian and transport infrastructure (DfT)

Guidance on the use of tactile paving surfaces (DfT)

BS 8300:2009 Design of buildings and their approaches to meet the needs of disabled people. Code of Practice (BSI)

Manual for Streets (DfT)

Manual for Streets 2 (CIHT)

Shared use by cyclists and pedestrians – LTN 2/86 (DfT)

Belfast Streets Ahead – Quality Walking Corridor Review (AECOM)

Walking Northern Ireland – An action plan (DRD)

Ensuring a sustainable transport future: a new approach to Regional Transportation (DRD)