

# Disabled Citizens' Inquiry

## Executive summary

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

## **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.

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### **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](http://www.sustrans.org.uk)

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

## **Transport for All**

group striving to increase access to transport and streetspace across the UK. We are a pan impairment organisation, guided by the

people have the right to travel with freedom and independence. [www.transportforall.org.uk](http://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](http://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,

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

# 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.<sup>1</sup> 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 2010<sup>2</sup> 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

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Scope, 2022. Social model of disability.  
[www.scope.org.uk/about-us/social-model-of-disability](http://www.scope.org.uk/about-us/social-model-of-disability)

UK Gov, 2015. Equality Act 2010: guidance.  
[www.gov.uk/guidance/equality-act-2010-guidance](http://www.gov.uk/guidance/equality-act-2010-guidance)

for walking and wheeling specifically, do not discriminate against disabled people.<sup>3</sup>

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.<sup>4</sup> This pattern is similar for walking and wheeling. In England, for example, disabled people take 30% fewer walking trips than non disabled people.<sup>5</sup>

This is known as the ‘transport accessibility gap’.<sup>6</sup> One reason for this gap is that our streets are to navigate. These barriers can prevent disabled

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UK Gov, 2012. Public sector equality duty.  
[www.gov.uk/government/publications/public-sector-equality-duty](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/public-sector-equality-duty)

Motability, 2022. The Transport Accessibility Gap.  
[www.motability.org.uk/media/iwaidhvk/motability-transport-accessibility-gap-report-march-2022-final.pdf](http://www.motability.org.uk/media/iwaidhvk/motability-transport-accessibility-gap-report-march-2022-final.pdf)

National Travel Survey, ‘Walking Factsheet, England: 2021’.  
[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/1100998/walking](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1100998/walking)

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.<sup>7</sup>

## **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

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.

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



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.

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

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.

### **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.



would encourage 79% of disabled people to walk or wheel more.

making our neighbourhoods.”

**Norwich workshop participant**

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

All governments and local authorities to have paid expert panels of disabled people

Fully engage with disabled people when planning places and designing walking and wheeling schemes

Commit to long term plans to diversify the transport and planning sectors

### **Solution 2: Create long-term**

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

Create a long term dedicated pavement fund to ensure that pavements are better maintained and made accessible

Fund footway improvements when implementing low traffic neighbourhoods

Strengthen national guidance for inclusive pavement design

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

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

Prohibit pavement parking

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

Ensure all existing and new crossing points are accessible, inclusive and safe

Conduct national trials of zebra markings on side roads that give people walking and wheeling priority over traffic

Improve crossing points between walking and wheeling routes and cycle paths

### **Solution 5: Make way finding and journey planning tools work for disabled people**

Disabled people require a variety of different forms of way finding from visual signage to tactile and audio cues alongside the rise of digital technology. Disabled participants told us that way finding

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.

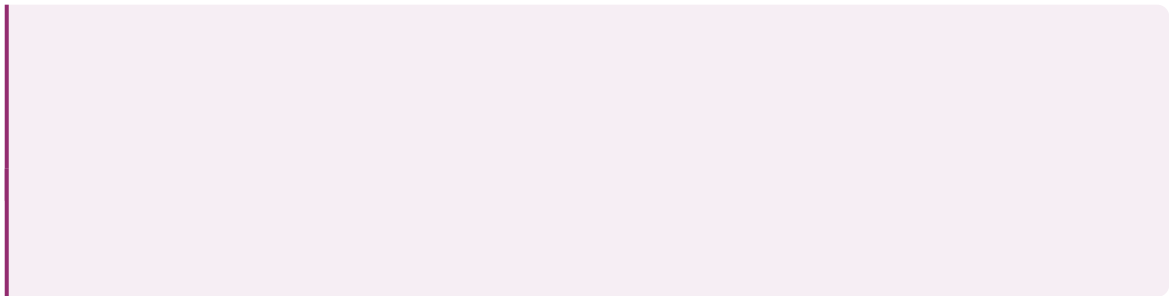
Our UK survey found 77% of disabled people would find an app or website where disabled people can share information, experiences and rate routes or destinations useful for them to walk or wheel more.

### Recommendations to improve wayfinding and journey planning

- Develop standardised guidance and practice for accessible wayfinding provision

- Create fully accessible digital journey planning

do not have the same choices. They may walk or







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



