



Legible Networks

Policy Briefing 5

Legibility can be defined as finding your way around a town or city. The legibility of towns and cities is reduced in modern environments. Before the twentieth century, cities worked well in terms of legibility. Places that looked important were important and places of public relevance could easily be identified.

In the modern town or city, large office blocks and other developments often visually overwhelm publicly relevant places and facilities. Legibility is a particular problem for people on foot. Separation of pedestrian and vehicular routes often result in pedestrians being expected to follow ill-defined paths. Additionally, most towns and cities do not have a network of maps and signs to assist legibility for people on foot. This often leads people to places that they didn't want to go and/or where they may feel vulnerable to the possibility of street crime.

Our policy

Living streets are not islands. We want national planning policies and local plans to include a presumption against the stopping-up of rights of way through villages, towns and cities. We also want estate developers to protect existing rights of way, including walking routes on their site plans within and through their boundaries.

Maps and signs to tell walkers where they are is also crucial. What we can do for drivers, we can do for pedestrians. Street nameplates are often missing at pavement level and directional information is rare and usually poorly presented. We want councils to review local signs from a pedestrians eye-view as part of their local walking strategies. We want damaged and vandalized street-name signs to be cleaned up or replaced. We

want new local transport investment to include improvements to signage, to display local street maps and "place of interest" signs that show people exactly where they are and how to reach their destinations.

Government policy

In the document Encouraging Walking, the Government states that "strategically, we should provide clear, connected networks of walking routes, especially to public transport interchanges and other key destinations". The report advises that "given a clearly marked, interesting and safe route, people will be prepared to walk further. In the summary table of actions, Encouraging Walking includes the following guidance:

- Publish walking route maps which connect well with public transport infor-

mation.

- Signpost walking routes

What you can do



Report damaged and vandalized name plates and directional signs to your local authority.



Write to your local authority and ask them to provide a network of directional signs and street name-plates at pavement level.



Ask your local authority to commission a street legibility audit from Living Streets.



Become a member of Living Streets and contact your Living Streets branch or local Contact. If there is no branch or local Contact nearby, why not consider becoming active on behalf of Living Streets yourself?



An example of clear and attractive signage in the centre of Newcastle

Fact Stats

1. Techniques to develop better pedestrian links between town centres and transport interchanges are outlined in the DTLR publication *Going to Town: Improving Access to Town Centres*, written by consultants Llewelyn-Davies with support from Living Streets.
2. In February 2001, Bristol City Council launched a multi-million pound project, to make it easier to get around the city. The project is called 'Legible City', and involves a co-ordinated approach that aims to ensure it is almost impossible to get lost on foot in Bristol. Artist Colin Pearce and artist-poet Ralph Hoyt were commissioned to create a launch artwork to mark the implementation of the system.
3. The City of York has one of the largest pedestrianised areas in Europe. 14% of people in the city walk to work. The city has introduced a network of priority pedestrian routes that are clearly signed as well as being safe, direct and convenient.

For further information

Contact Living Streets information and advice hotline (020 7820 1010)

Three useful publications:

- Encouraging Walking (DETR, March 2000)
- Responsive Environments: A Manual for Designers (Architectural Press: www.bh.com)
- Going to Town: Improving Town Centre Access (Llewelyn-Davies 2002: info@nrpf.org)

Websites

- www.livingstreets.org.uk Our home page. Lots of information on walking issues from Living Streets' unique perspective
- www.local-transport.dft.gov.uk Department for Transport web page with special focus on local transport issues
- www.roads.dft.gov.uk/roadnetwork/ditm/tal/walking/index.htm Department for Transport web page detailing full range of walking-related Traffic Advisory Leaflets