

Living Streets is the national charity that stands up for pedestrians. With our supporters we work to create safe, attractive and enjoyable streets, where people want to walk.

## **Living Streets Research Briefing: Pedestrian crossings – extending the time to cross – September 2014**

We are the national charity that stands up for pedestrians. With our supporters we work to create safe, attractive and enjoyable streets, where people want to walk.

### **Key messages**

Living Streets believes that pedestrians should be given enough time to cross streets safely, directly, and where it suits them. Across the UK millions of older people, people with mobility issues and parents with children are struggling to cross the road at the very places that are meant to be safe for pedestrians.

[A new independent report](#) found that the current assumed walking speed, used to calculate the time available for pedestrians to cross the road, is not fit for purpose.

We are calling on the Department for Transport, in its review of Traffic Signs and the national guidance provided to local authorities on pedestrian crossings, to increase the time available for pedestrians to cross the road by an average of three seconds.

### **Call to action**

We would like you to write to transport minister, Robert Goodwill to raise this issue ahead of the Government's decision on Traffic Signs policy and raise the issue in Parliament.

### **Background**

Well designed, responsive pedestrian crossings can benefit all road users. They can provide safe and direct routes for pedestrians leading to healthier, active and sociable lifestyles, and they enable vehicles to proceed when there is no longer a pedestrian demand. Problems can arise as a result of unclear guidance and inadequate minimum standards or a tendency for engineers to focus on the needs of one particular road user. A lack of adequate pedestrian crossings has the ability to create community severance and discourage sustainable travel choices, and in the wrong place they can become redundant and increase road danger. National statistics for 2012 [showed](#) that 50% of pedestrian casualties occurred while they were crossing the road without using a pedestrian crossing, 14.2% occurred on a crossing and 9.4% occurred within 50m of a crossing. Living Streets research [revealed](#) over one in five children and young people are concerned about the lack of safe crossing points on their journey to school.

Thousands of our supporters wrote to their MP to ask for more time to cross the road. Many MPs wrote to the transport minister, Robert Goodwill, raised the issue in Parliament and to their local council. The Government responded to say it was up to local authorities to decide on signal timings locally. However it is important that there is clear national leadership on this issue to guide local highways authorities who are concerned about strictly following national guidance. Whilst we know the Government has listened it is yet to take action. With the decision pending on the Traffic Signs policy review now is the time for the Government to respond and put vulnerable pedestrians first.

### **The Problem**

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A new [literature review by Transport Research Laboratory](#) found that the current assumed walking speed is not fit for purpose, particularly for older people. The literature review includes studies from academics, including Musselwhite et al (2014), Knoblauch et al (1996), Gates et al (2006), Hoxie et al (1994), Asher et al (2012) and Romero-Ortuno et al (2010) highlighting that older people are unable to walk at 1.2m/s. We are asking for the current assumed walking speed to change to 0.8m/s.

The report indicates that changing the walking speed to 1.0m/s at junctions operating at low to medium capacity would have minimal impact. Where junctions are operating close to capacity we recommend that modal shift is encouraged to mitigate any impact on traffic flow whilst maintaining safety and comfort for vulnerable pedestrians. It is also possible for signal timing changes to be conducted during routine maintenance programmes helping to minimise any potential cost.

The current assumed walking speed in Department for Transport (DfT) guidance is 1.2m/s, which is used to calculate how much time pedestrians are given to cross the road. This is based on evidence from the 1950s and therefore it is not up to date. Given this latest research it is necessary to review the assumed walking speed and for the Department for Transport to update pedestrian crossings guidance as part of the Traffic Signs policy review.

The origins of an assumed walking speed of 1.2 m/s is thought to be from post graduate research in America from the 1950's.<sup>1</sup> It is clear that the current assumed walking speed does not take into account the major demographic changes which are taking place in the UK in terms of an increasingly older population. The number of disabled older people is projected to double from approximately 2.3 million in 2002 to approximately 4.6 million in 2041<sup>2</sup> whilst the number of people in the UK aged 65 and over is projected to increase from 9.9million in 2008 to 16.4million by 2033<sup>3</sup>.

Our supporters and the people we work with in communities across the UK have highlighted that this is a problem to them. Val Foster, 72 who lives in South London told us:  
*“Just a few extra seconds would make a difference. As it is, you haven't even got on to the pavement before the traffic's whooshing past.”* Likewise, older people taking part in our Streets Apart project also highlighted this to be a concern to them when they took part in a community street audit in Rotherham. It's time for the Government to act to help make walking safer and easier for Val and millions like her.

## Recommendations

As part of the Traffic Signs policy review, the DfT is currently reviewing pedestrian crossing guidance which includes reference to the current assumed walking speed of 1.2 m/s which for local authorities use in order to calculate how much time pedestrians are given to cross the road.

We believe the Government should:

- Amend relevant pedestrian crossings guidance

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<sup>1</sup> It is believed that the original walking speed came from research in 1952 conducted by James Exnicios whilst a student Graduate of Yale University.

<sup>2</sup> *Lifetime Homes, Lifetime Neighbourhoods* (DCLG, 2008)

<sup>3</sup> Office of National Statistics. 2009. National Population Projections: 2008-based.  
London: Office of National Statistics.

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- Review the assumed walking speed by reducing it to 0.8m/s which, on an average road width, would increase the pedestrian crossing time by around three seconds.

### **About Living Streets**

We work with professionals and politicians to make sure every community can enjoy vibrant streets and public spaces. We started life in 1929 as the Pedestrians Association and have been the national voice for pedestrians throughout our history. In the early years, our campaigning led to the introduction of the driving test, pedestrian crossings and 30mph speed limits. Since then our ambition has grown. Today we influence decision makers nationally and locally, run successful projects to encourage people to walk and provide specialist consultancy services to help reduce congestion and carbon emissions, improve public health, and make sure every community can enjoy vibrant streets and public spaces.

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