



## **Living Streets' written evidence to the Transport Select Committee's inquiry into urban congestion.**

1. Living Streets is the UK charity for everyday walking. We want to create a walking nation, free from congested roads and pollution, reducing the risk of preventable illness and social isolation and making walking the natural choice. We believe that a walking nation means progress for everyone.

2. Our ambition is to get people of all generations to enjoy the benefits that this simple act brings and to ensure all our streets are fit for walking. For more than 85 years we've been a beacon for walking. In our early days our campaigning led to the UK's first zebra crossings and speed limits. Now, our campaigns and local projects deliver real change to overcome barriers to walking and our ground breaking initiatives such as the world's biggest Walk to School to campaign encourage millions of people to walk.

3. Walking is a form of transport in its own right with many added benefits, but too often it is forgotten or seen as a bolt-on to transport projects. Living Streets is, therefore, pleased to be part of a delivery consortium – coordinated by Sustrans and funded by the Department for Transport's (DfT) Sustainable Transport Delivery Excellence Programme (STDEP) – providing expert advice to Local Enterprise Partnerships on how to integrate walking into the delivery of sustainable transport projects.

### **Summary**

4. We welcome the Committee's inquiry into urban congestion which aims to identify cost-effective and safe strategies for managing limited road space in towns and cities, minimising disruption to local communities and businesses, and keeping urban traffic flowing.

5. Living Streets argues for the need to put walking first in integrated transport strategies. Urban congestion cannot be resolved by increasing road capacity. It is essential to plan places and invest in transport improvements that promote walking, cycling and the use of public transport. This would help to meet the Government's objective to make walking and

cycling the natural choice for short journeys. It is also in line with the emergence of Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans.

6. Too often walking is seen as after thought. Investment in walking projects does not have to be expensive and it is cost effective, but it needs to come early in the planning process. We would like to see more evaluation of the benefits of active travel and for the cost benefit analyses of transport projects to reflect the environmental impacts of different modes.

7. In terms of managing demand, we would like the Committee to take into account the importance of parking controls and road user charging as both control measures and means of raising revenue to re-invest in walking, cycling and public transport. Maintaining (as well as improving) existing infrastructure should be the Government's first priority.

8. Our wider considerations focus on road safety. Vulnerable road users accounted for almost half road deaths between 2011-13, 23 per cent of whom were pedestrians. The ability to raise revenue through charging mechanisms could help local authorities to support road safety teams. Implementation of 20 mph as a default urban speed limit would also reduce congestion and improve road safety.

9. Finally we address the increasing road freight in urban areas and suggest measures to reduce their impact.

### **Integrated strategies: putting walking first**

10. Our streets have both a movement and a 'place' function. The latter (e.g. high streets or city boulevards) may be destinations in their own right where people enjoy spending time. It is essential to take a step back from focusing narrowly on congestion, to take a wider view of what function particular streets and roads are expected to perform. This then allows space to choose integrated transport strategies (involving walking, cycling and public transport) which can deliver improved quality of life for everyone.

11. The problem of congestion, the majority of which is in urban areas<sup>i</sup>, cannot be solved by adding road capacity (e.g. extra lanes) or by building more roads. It is well established that increasing road capacity simply induces more traffic. The solution lies in making the best use of the space available, across transport modes, for the benefit of the most users. Implicit in this approach is a modal shift from private motorised transport to active forms of travel (walking and cycling) and increased use of public transport. This must be supported by:

- incentives, such as travel planning, the re-allocation of road space and improved public transport, and
- demand management, for example, through road user charging, workplace parking levies and effective parking management.

12. It is also essential to use land use planning to create places where people want to walk, cycle or use public transport. This will help to the Government's ambition to make walking and cycling the natural choice for short journeys<sup>ii</sup>. Evidence based guidelines from the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) on promoting and create built environments that support increased levels of physical activity (PH08) and encouraging walking and cycling as forms of travel or recreation (PH41) provide a good starting point.

13. The *Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP)* process, which is due to be adopted as part of the Government's Cycling and Walking Investment Strategy (CWIS), is directly relevant too. English highway authorities will be encouraged (but not required) to draw up LCWIPs following Department for Transport guidance which will be issued shortly. They should set out evidence-based plans to develop a programme of schemes to improve both walking and cycling conditions. This will help local authorities secure improve walking and cycling conditions through the planning system and reduce congestion, air pollution and tackle Climate Change.

14. Too often walking is forgotten or seen as a bolt-on to transport projects. However, walking is part of every journey and should, therefore, be at the heart of every integrated transport strategy – especially in urban areas where compact land use patterns support more walking. Mirroring the approach to street design proposed in the Department for Transport's Manual for Streets (2007), Living Streets believes that walking should be considered first in transport projects, not last, in order of priority – followed by cycling, public transport use, specialist service vehicles and other motor traffic<sup>iii</sup>.

15. Walking projects often make common sense, but there is no one-size-fits all. When we carry out Community Street Audits we assess the quality of a walking environment against a range of criteria, such as:

- Footway surfaces and obstructions
- Comfort facilities (e.g. benches) and wayfinding
- Maintenance and management (e.g. street cleaning)
- Personal security and perceptions of safety

- Crossing points and desire lines
- Road layout and space allocation (e.g. pavement width)
- Attractiveness (e.g. street trees, heritage buildings, active street frontages)
- Traffic and congestion

Our experience of delivering community based projects shows that measures to promote more walking journeys need to focus on both physical infrastructure (the public realm) and behaviour change (e.g. Living Streets Walk Once a Week school travel awareness campaign, public transport information and marketing, promoting car clubs and so on).

16. Walking projects are cost effective. There are a number of studies which evaluate walking interventions, such as Sloman *et al* (2010) ‘The Effects of Smarter Choice Programmes in the Sustainable Travel Towns’<sup>iv</sup> (funded by DfT) or the Department of Health’s ‘Soft Measures: Hard Facts’<sup>v</sup>. ‘Claiming the Health Dividend’ a report for the DfT (2014), notes that the average return on investment for active travel schemes in the UK is more than £5 for every pound invested and the Department for Transport values very highly any scheme with a cost ratio of more than 4:1. However, more frequent evaluations of the benefits of investing in walking for transport are required. Wherever possible, pre- and post-project evaluation should be built into active travel transport projects.

17. WebTAG should adequately reflect the environmental costs and benefits of different transport modes. It has been suggested that conventional transportation planning practices treat walking as a minor transport mode and recognize only modest benefits from improved walkability and increased walking activity<sup>vi</sup>. Key challenges in measuring the impact of investment in the public realm include the difficulty in isolating variables (e.g. for area-based interventions it can be difficult to identify good control groups), a poorly defined public realm (e.g. the division between public and privately owned spaces) and the long-term nature of the change being measured<sup>vii</sup>. However, as was concluded by the Environmental Audit Committee (2016) there is also a need to give greater weight, for example, to air quality in transport appraisal “so that local authorities are able to target their sustainable transport measures on air quality in particular”<sup>viii</sup>.

### **Managing demand**

18. Despite Government views to the contrary<sup>1</sup>, parking controls form an essential part of an integrated transport strategy. Parking helps to manage traffic, improve road safety, manage congestion and encourage the use of public transport – and such controls are fundamental

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<sup>1</sup> See for example <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/parking-reform-tackling-unfair-practices>

in ensuring local authorities fulfill their duties under the Traffic Management Act for the expeditious movement of traffic on 98 per cent of the road network. Kerbside space is at a premium, as roads in local shopping centres were not designed to cope with today's traffic volumes. The use of this limited resource has to be balanced between the needs of bus passengers, loading activities, residents, businesses, visitors and the disabled and provide safety at junctions and for pedestrians to be seen when crossing the roads

19. Living Streets would like to see wider adoption of road user charging schemes, such as the Nottingham workplace parking levy or London's congestion charge. In operation since 2012, Nottingham is the only city so far in England to have a workplace parking levy. Bucking the national trend 477,523,000 miles were covered by car drivers in the city in 2000, down to 439,761,000 in 2015; jobs growth in Nottingham has been faster than other cities, while traffic congestion has fallen<sup>ix</sup>. The scheme also raised £9million in revenue for reinvestment in transport projects across the city (e.g. bus and tram networks, with an associated package of support measures e.g. personal travel planning and season ticket loans)<sup>x</sup>. With cuts across local government budgets, the Government should be encouraging the use of charging schemes to fund sustainable transport objectives.

20. It is also worth noting the disparity between the treatment and funding for revenue and capital costs. Most investment is concentrated in capital funding, although as we have shown for active travel a mix is preferable. However, revenue funding also needs to be available to enable the maintenance of existing infrastructure. This should be the Government's first priority. This would, for example, facilitate the maintenance of puffin and other intelligent crossings (an example of innovative technology) which make it easier for pedestrians to cross the road and are used smooth the flow of traffic.

21. Besides the problem of congestion, there is the equally if not more urgent problem of air quality. The Government has proposed that congestion charges and/or low emission zones could form part of the implementation of Clean Air Zones. Living Streets supports this move. When the Congestion Charge was first introduced it made significant changes to the way people travelled around central London. The decrease in traffic gave space for more sustainable modes of travel: walking, cycling and public transport. It brought revenue into London's transport system to pay for these improvements and made London a better city to live, visit and work. That was 13 years ago and it has paved the way for Transport for London to look again at how congestion and air quality can be managed in London through the introduction of the Ultra Low Emission Zone.

## **Wider considerations**

22. According to the Department for Transport, Britain has one of the best road safety records in the world<sup>xi</sup>. However, a 2016 report by the Transport Research Laboratory ranked the UK in 19<sup>th</sup> place for pedestrians' share of all road deaths by country in the European Union. It found that vulnerable road users (pedestrians, cyclists and powered two wheeler users) accounted for almost half of UK road deaths between 2011 and 2013; of these 23 per cent were pedestrians<sup>xii</sup>. The situation is even worse for children – in 2015, 1,283 child pedestrians (aged 0-15 years) were reported killed or seriously injured in Great Britain compared to 278 cyclists and 334 car users<sup>xiii</sup>. Pedestrians are the most vulnerable road users and more needs to be done to protect them.

23. Reductions in revenue funding have resulted in many local authorities removing or significantly reducing their road safety teams. A number of authorities are discontinuing or significantly curtailing their school crossing patrol services due to the limitations of revenue funding. Living Streets believes that it is essential that local authorities are provided with adequate financial resources to enable them continue and where necessary reinstate essential road safety services.

24. Changing the default speed limit in urban areas to 20mph would also reduce the 'stop-start' nature of congestion and improve road safety. It is the quickest and most cost-effective way to implement 20 mph across our villages, towns and cities. 20 mph limits do not require traffic calming. They are similar to other local speed limits and normally apply to individual or small numbers of roads but are increasingly being applied to larger areas. Although the effect of 20 mph limits is more modest than 20 mph zones – e.g. reducing average speeds by 1-2 mph in Portsmouth – this is still enough to reduce collisions by 5-10 per cent<sup>xiv</sup>. At least 20 UK cities have adopted 20 mph limits<sup>xv</sup>.

25. The Committee should also consider the impact of increases in certain types of vehicle, such as delivery vans and minicabs. For example, in London van traffic was 10.1 per cent higher in 2014 than in 2011 and the number of licensed private hire vehicles increased by a net 27.2 per cent between 2008 and 2014, up by 18.8 per cent over the latest year alone<sup>xvi</sup>. A paper for the Roads Task Force suggested that there was significant scope to reduce van traffic in London, because:

- The average load factor for vans was 38 per cent, and
- On average, 39 per cent of vans are less than 25 per cent full<sup>xvii</sup>.

Consolidation centres could help to maximise the efficiency of deliveries into central London, by consolidating materials at another location and ensuring a full load at least one way if not both – for example, by collecting waste for the return trip.

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<sup>i</sup> See the Eddington Report

<http://collections.europarchive.org/tna/20100408160254/http://www.dft.gov.uk/about/strategy/transportstrategy/eddingtonstudy/>

<sup>ii</sup> See [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/512895/cycling-and-walking-investment-strategy.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/512895/cycling-and-walking-investment-strategy.pdf)

<sup>iii</sup> Department for Transport (2007). 'Manual for Streets', see

[https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/341513/pdfmanforstreets.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/341513/pdfmanforstreets.pdf)

<sup>iv</sup> See [http://www.transportforqualityoflife.com/u/files/Sustainable\\_Travel\\_Towns\\_Evaluation\\_summary\\_report.pdf](http://www.transportforqualityoflife.com/u/files/Sustainable_Travel_Towns_Evaluation_summary_report.pdf)

<sup>v</sup> See [http://www.sthc.co.uk/Documents/DoH\\_Soft\\_Measures\\_Hard\\_Facts.pdf](http://www.sthc.co.uk/Documents/DoH_Soft_Measures_Hard_Facts.pdf)

<sup>vi</sup> Litman, T. A. (2003). 'Economic Value of Walkability', Transportation Research Record: Journal of the Transportation Research Board 1828 (-1): 3–11.

<sup>vii</sup> Living Streets (2013). 'The Pedestrian Pound', see

[https://www.livingstreets.org.uk/media/1391/pedestrianpound\\_fullreport\\_web.pdf](https://www.livingstreets.org.uk/media/1391/pedestrianpound_fullreport_web.pdf)

<sup>viii</sup> Environmental Audit Committee (2016). 'Sustainability in the Department for Transport' see

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201617/cmselect/cmenvaud/184/18402.htm>

<sup>ix</sup> See <http://www.nottinghampost.com/huge-drop-in-car-journeys-on-nottingham-s-roads/story-29686589-detail/story.html#SI0m1LEFiPuvXQt8.99>

<sup>x</sup> See <http://www.nottinghampost.com/workplace-parking-levy-clocks-up-9-3-million-for-nottingham-city-council/story-29708392-detail/story.html>

<sup>xi</sup> See <https://www.gov.uk/government/policies/road-safety>

<sup>xii</sup> Brian Lawton and Chris Fordham (2016). 'Understanding the Strengths and Weaknesses of Britain's Road Safety Performance' a report by the Transport Research Laboratory for the Parliamentary Advisory Council for Transport Safety (PACTS).

<sup>xiii</sup> Department for Transport (2016). 'Reported Road Casualties Great Britain: 2015 Annual Report', Table RAS30062

<sup>xiv</sup> Department for Transport (2010). 'Interim Evaluation of the Implementation of 20 mph Speed Limits in Portsmouth: final report', report by Atkins.

<sup>xv</sup> [http://www.20splenty.org/20mph\\_places](http://www.20splenty.org/20mph_places)

<sup>xvi</sup> Transport for London (2015) Travel in London Report 8

<sup>xvii</sup> Transport for London (2013) Roads Task Force – Technical Note 5: What are the main trends and developments affecting van traffic in London?