

Walking in London

By Bruce McVean, Principal Strategy Planner, Transport for London (TfL)

Talk given to Wandsworth Living Streets, 22 September 2015

KEY FACTS

How much do Londoners walk?

People in London walk 6.3 million door to door trips every day. This is a quarter (24%) of all such daily trips. If one looks only at people living inside London (ie excluding commuters from outside London), this 'mode share' rises to nearly one-third (32%).

If we look at 'journey stages' (where walking is only a part of a person's overall journey), the number of stages done on foot rises to an incredible 30 million daily. And 13 million of these walked journey stages are for more than 5 minutes.

If we look at **Inner London only**, the figures for walking are even more extraordinary. 93% (more than 9 out of 10) journeys under 500 metres in length are walked, and 64% of all journeys between half and one kilometre (just over half a mile) are walked.

In Wandsworth, residents walk on average 25 to 30 minutes a day.

Is the amount Londoners walk in future years likely to rise or fall?

The absolute number of journey stages made on foot is rising since 2007 slightly faster than the growth in London's population. But the number of trips made entirely by walking is static. This is likely to be because children are doing fewer 'all the way' trips on foot as a result of increased public transport use. It should be noted this does not necessarily mean that children are spending less time walking.

Over the next 25 years (ie by 2041), there is likely to be a 30% increase in daily walked journey stages (an extra 10 million a day). Partly because of the likely growth in London's population. And partly because increases in public transport (e.g. Crossrail 1 and 2) encourages more people to walk from their homes to get to their nearest public transport point. If we encourage Londoners to walk more (for example, in order to benefit their health), the growth in walking will be even greater.

Challenges and Opportunities

1. Managing competition on London's streets for time and physical space

It may sound rather extraordinary, but Transport for London has to think about how to manage the competing needs of Londoners on foot with those travelling by car, or bus, or train etc. This is first of all a matter of **how one shares street space** between pavements for pedestrians; and the carriageway for bus lanes, cycle lanes, and other vehicles. But there is **also competition for the amounts of time** pedestrians have for crossing roads, and other vehicles have for moving along roads.

How TfL shares out scarce space and time will vary with the type of road. The Mayor's Roads Task Force mentioned 9 different kinds of roads. London's roads vary in how much they are mainly to facilitate **movement** (for example, the A3 in Wandsworth) versus what is called their **place** function – ie roads where people spend time shopping, going to cafes and restaurants and pubs, and generally like to congregate and socialise (Trafalgar Square is an example). The general trend is towards recognising that more and more London streets have a big place function (in our borough, Bellevue Road for example). Big businesses in the City of London have made clear they see its streets as more and more as places rather than primarily to facilitate movement.

2. People on foot remain a silent, often unnoticed, majority of Londoners

This is a second challenge. Londoners take their walking for granted. There is no powerful lobby for pedestrians to be able to walk without constraint and danger to life and limb.

There is no public groundswell of demand for better facilities for us when moving about on foot.

What's more, we pedestrians may experience 'pain points' – poor pavements, dangers posed by other road users, long waiting times at crossings – but we tend to grit our teeth and forget about them afterwards.

This relative absence of pedestrians organising to assert their fair share of the public realm contrasts greatly with cyclists and car drivers. And it matters politically because the Mayor and London Assembly do not feel under great pressure from London pedestrians when they guide Transport for London as to how it sorts out the competition for space and time on our streets.

This tolerance by Londoners of the conditions they encounter when on foot is reflected in surveys. TfL prides itself on being 'data-led'. It likes to have facts and statistics available in making its decisions. So it conducts Customer Satisfaction surveys. These find that 68% of pedestrians are 'satisfied' or 'reasonably satisfied' with their streets. The figure for cyclists, by contrast, is only 46%. This seems to be partly because pedestrians, while annoyed at the time, may not at the end of the day (when responding to a survey phone call or Internet questionnaire) remember just how inconvenienced or endangered they had been.

One interesting finding is that on-street surveys suggest that people's experiences of a street fall below their expectations. What's more, we modify what we expect of a street, depending on how we perceive the main function of that particular road. So, the more we expect a street to have a big place function, the bigger often is the gap between what we actually experience on it and our expectations of what it ought to be like when we are there on foot.

3. Walking is more than just a mode of transport

When you think about it, walking is much more than just one way of getting from A to B. It has at least 3 other contributions to make:

- (i) **Walking is a mode of transport:** As we can see in all the statistics above.

- (ii) **Walking is good for our health:** We all need physical exercise for our health. This applies to children, older people, and everyone in between. Only just over half of Londoners (56%) take at least the medically recommended amount of exercise each week (150 minutes). But a quarter of Londoners get all the exercise they need through the walking they do in the public transport system.
- (iii) **Walking is good for the local economy:** Local shops, eating and drinking places, and other commercial facilities depend on pedestrians. TfL surveys find that Pedestrians walking to their local town centres spend more over a week or month than any other kind of shopper (those coming by car, or bus, or tube, or bike). Pedestrians spend less per trip in the shops, but they visit them more frequently. Many shopkeepers have not yet caught up with this reality.
- (iv) **Walking is conducive to social interaction:** There are lots of examples – parents accompanying children to school; neighbours bumping into one another on the street; friends coming home from the pub or a restaurant.

The Challenge is to give Londoners new reasons to walk more journeys and to enable us to walk further in safety and in attractive circumstances

There is scope for doing this. A quarter of trips less than one mile in length are still made by car. There are often good reasons for those Londoners with access to a car to use it (poor weather, heavy purchases etc). But many of these short trips could be performed on foot. Transport for London can help people to make this healthy choice by making the streets safer and more attractive.

What Transport for London (TfL) is doing for Walking

1. **Encouraging more journey stages undertaken on foot:** This follows from the expansion in public transport provision that TfL is constantly engaging in (notably Crossrail, Night Tube services etc).
2. **Its Road Modernization Plan:** A lot of this money is being spent on making London's streets safer for pedestrians (and other road users) and more attractive to walk. For example, the Better Junctions Programme has moved beyond focussing primarily on cyclists' safety, and

now also stresses pedestrian safety. (Queen's Circus on Queenstown Road, with its lights-controlled pedestrian crossings on all four arms of the roundabout is a recent example.)

3. **Pedestrian Safety Action Plan:** published recently by TfL.
4. **Pilot 20mph Schemes on TLRN Roads:** These are major arterial roads managed by TfL. There may be more of these to come.
5. **Pedestrian Town Centre Safety Pilot Schemes:** There are two of these, one in Tooting Town Centre, just starting. Each has a budget of £5 million to be spent over three years. If they improve conditions and safety for pedestrians, they can be repeated in other parts of London in future years.
6. **'Softer' measures:** for example, rolling out *Legible London* signage for pedestrians in additional parts of London.

Making London a better city for walking

Bruce McVean ended on a personal note with his own ideas which, he stressed, are not TfL policy. He touched on:

1. **Maximise opportunities for Place-making and Walking in all TfL and Borough activity.** And better communicating improvements for pedestrians.
2. **Identify specific opportunities, area by area, to grow walking and enhance the place function of certain streets.**
3. **Improve 'Walkability'** (ie how easy it is to walk locally) **when regenerating an area** (for example, in Wandsworth, the Nine Elms on the South Bank development) and in planning policy.

4. **Design streets to be more accessible for people at all stages of their lives** (all the way from childhood through to old age).

5. **Create more opportunities for people to enjoy London's streets:** for example **Play Streets** (where local authorities facilitate temporary closures of a street to enable children to play safely on them) and **Open Streets** (an occasional closing to vehicles of a street).

6. **Motivating and Enabling People to walk.**

Q and A

A long and vigorous Q and A followed. Those present raised a wide range of issues. They included: TfL-financed Pedestrian budgets for London's borough councils; increasing the Congestion Charge in Central London significantly; prioritising walking and cycling in some streets/localities (rather than managing competition between different modes of transport); introducing an expanded ULEZ area to improve air quality; the role of lorries and motorbikes in some 25% and 10% of pedestrian deaths respectively ; road pricing; and using planning policy to encourage a denser city and more interesting, ground-level building facades; etc.