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JUST TRANSITION WEBINAR REPORT



Fostering active travel for disabled people

BEST FOOT & WHEEL FORWARD

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WHY DO WE SAY: "Active travel must be accessible to all"

Transport is decisive in enabling (and disabling) travellers' access to fundamental human rights: from education to employment to healthcare. At the same time, active travel can — and must — play a central role in the future of our urban mobility mix.

This poses an urgent challenge for mobility and urban planning professionals; how can we ensure these services and infrastructures are accessible to all?

We cannot take our eye off the ball when it comes to rolling out new cycle lanes, developing pedestrian spaces, and reallocating space towards active modes.

Nevertheless, there is much to celebrate; indeed, urban planners are developing a range of innovative and exciting active travel infrastructure which has the potential to make cycling and walking more accessible than ever before — Low Traffic Neighbourhoods (LTNs), cycle paths, bike parking, and more!

From [Barcelona's superblocks](#) to [Glasgow's 'Livable Neighbourhoods' plan](#), [Groningen's recirculation plans](#) and [La Rochelle's cycle infrastructure development](#), metropolises of all shapes and sizes have begun to experiment more radically with urban design in ways that fundamentally reshape urban space around active travel.

Nevertheless, **ensuring that the travel needs of disabled people are taken into account is critical.** Active modes can be the most democratic modes available, but to be able to unlock this potential for everyone, cities and practitioners need to address the barriers facing many travellers.

But... What is 'accessible' active travel, really? Do we know what transit users need? How do we measure it? What more can we do to enhance the provisions we are making?

Many complex questions — but POLIS' second Just Transition Webinar brought together leading experts from Transport for All and Sustrans to find an answer.

"Many of these conversations may challenge the ways we think and act, but this is exactly what they should do!" said Andréia Lopes Azevedo, POLIS Active Travel & Health Working Group Coordinator.





WHAT IS "DISABILITY"?

Tim Burns and Alice
Cremont investigate

'Disability' is a broad term covering a wide spectrum of physical, sensory, or cognitive conditions (sometimes apparent, sometimes more concealed) experienced in multiple ways. These conditions shape how individuals — and caregivers — navigate urban mobility services. Indeed, some needs may even conflict with one another.

Much of our transport infrastructure fails to accommodate disabled people. Across public transport, parking, active travel infrastructure, and digital information platforms, disability is repeatedly an afterthought.

Many have advocated for a 'Social Model of Disability', highlighting how people are disabled by society and the barriers that exist. This shifts the focus from individuals to bringing about the world and society, and the barriers that we create.

"What this does is ensure that there is a role and a need for government, businesses, and advocacy groups to act — the emphasis is on society, not on the individual," asserted Tim Burns from [Sustrans](#).

An estimated 87 million Europeans have some form of disability, equating to 1 in 4 adults. This is a substantial proportion of the population, yet disabled people are routinely unable to access transport with the same freedom and independence as non-disabled people, and there are various reasons for this.

1. Financial barriers to accessing transport, including the high cost of mobility aids, like good quality wheelchairs and adapted cycles, which can range from £500 to £6000.
2. Physical and infrastructural barriers, such as a lack of spaces to sit and rest, the presence of street clutter, or street furniture blocking routes.
3. Communication and information barriers, such as a lack of accessible information to those who are visually impaired or have learning difficulties.

According to the UK National Travel Survey, 2020, disabled people take 38% fewer trips than non-disabled people and 30% fewer walking trips.

FROM



TO



WALKING AND WHEELING

Pause a moment to think about what 'Walking and Wheeling' really means. From bikes to trikes, wheelchairs to pushchairs, white canes to walking frames; we all use a range of devices and apparatuses to navigate the city, which changes across our lives.

Thinking about 'disability' access, therefore, as we roll out active travel infrastructure, means considering not a 'fringe user', but the spectrum of travellers the city must accommodate.

"We use these terms as **there are many different ways people use pedestrian space, and many do not necessarily identify with walking and cycling,**" noted Burns.





WHAT ARE LTN_s- LOW-TRAFFIC NEIGHBOURHOODS

Low-Traffic Neighbourhoods (LTNs) are a set of measures taking place in many European cities where through-traffic is diverted from residential roads to main roads, aiming, amongst other things, to encourage active travel and reduce air pollution. They use various tools to redirect and filter traffic from neighbourhoods, freeing up space for more liveable streets.

However, without meaningful engagement and consultation with disabled people, LTNs might negatively impact their travel needs and lives, cancelling out the positive aspects.



UNDERSTANDING BARRIERS AND NEEDS:

Alisha Pathania and Emma Koprena *pave the way forward*



While accessibility concerns are often discussed, the voices of those most affected by urban mobility design are not often brought to the fore. This is a challenge Transport for All's research, 'Pave the Way' (PTW), seeks to rectify—by examining how LTNs and the barriers to active travel have impacted disabled people.

Transport for All is the only disabled-led group striving to increase access to all modes of transport and street space across the UK. The organisation advocates that disabled people should be able to make their journeys with the same level of confidence, independence, and ease as everyone else.

Alisha Pathania, Research and Insights Officer and Emma Koprena, Insights and Advice Manager at Transport for All joined the webinar to explore the report further, dissecting the findings and what this means for policymaking going forward.

"The disabled community is vast with many different access requirements; we sought to consult with individuals directly, where others have failed to do so." asserted Pathania.

Indeed, while some local authorities have conducted Equality and Impact Assessments of LTNs, many have fallen short of fully identifying the impacts that they are having on disabled residents.

"For example, one London Borough's assessment asserts that 'no group will be adversely affected' by changes; this is clearly at odds with our findings!" said Pathania.

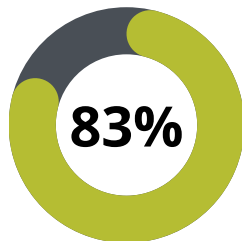
The project interviewed 84 disabled people aged 8 to 89. LTNs were found to be a complex issue, with 1 in 3 participants discussing the division these zones created within local communities. Participants also pointed out the lack of alternative options, reporting concerns with public transport, issues with the street space such as uneven pavements and several barriers to active travel.

The work also showed conflicts between environmental groups' sentiments and disability advocacy communities, and the ways in which environmental policymakers have — often unintentionally — created more barriers for disabled people, leaving them feeling excluded or marginalised from environmental movements.

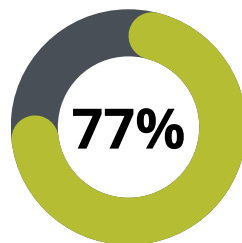
"It is not one thing or another, it is how you can make a more sustainable neighbourhood work for everybody." asserted Koprena.

However, the most critical finding emerging from the study was the feeling of lack of consultation.

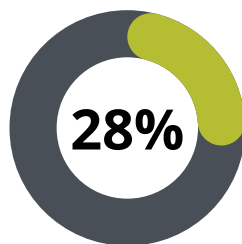
FURTHER STATISTICS ON LTNs:



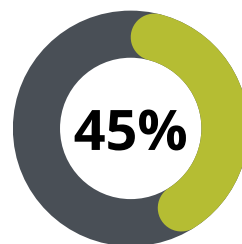
**FEEL STRONGLY IMPACTED
(FOR BAD and GOOD) BY LTNs**



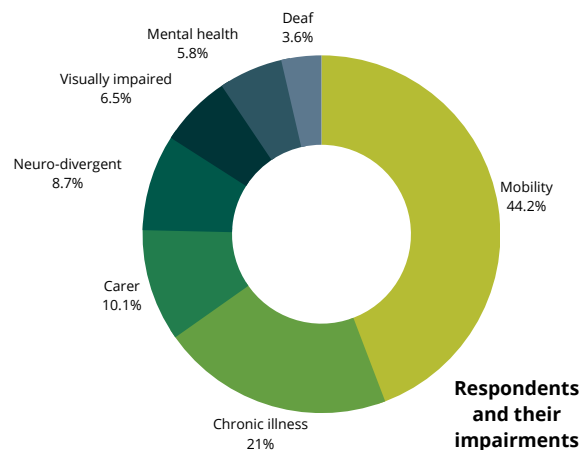
**REPORT AN INCREASE
IN JOURNEY TIME**



**REPORT AN INCREASE
IN TRAFFIC DANGER**



**RAISE ISSUES WITH
BARRIERS TO ACTIVE TRAVEL**



MITIGATING THE NEGATIVE IMPACTS INSTEAD OF STOPPING LTNs ALTOGETHER

Three-quarters of participants reported frustration at the way in which the changes were communicated, such as the lack of information provided, the accessibility of the information, and not being warned about the implementation of an LTN in their area.

Having both positive and negative impacts on disabled people, Pathania stressed that Transport for All does not believe that the right direction is to stop or undo LTNs, but rather that cities take measures to address and mitigate their negative impacts. The need for further research that, for example, investigates changes in the diversity of people walking and cycling was also highlighted.

DISABLED CITIZENS' INQUIRY

Calculating accessibility of active travel is of course a complex — maybe even impossible — task. However, there has been a range of endeavours to capture successes and shortfalls.

POLIS member Sustrans has also placed much focus on disability exclusion, providing comprehensive advice for policymakers on moving forwards, indeed, their work on gender equality and young and older age travel has opened up conversations about what a Just Transition to sustainable urban mobility really means and how we can get there.

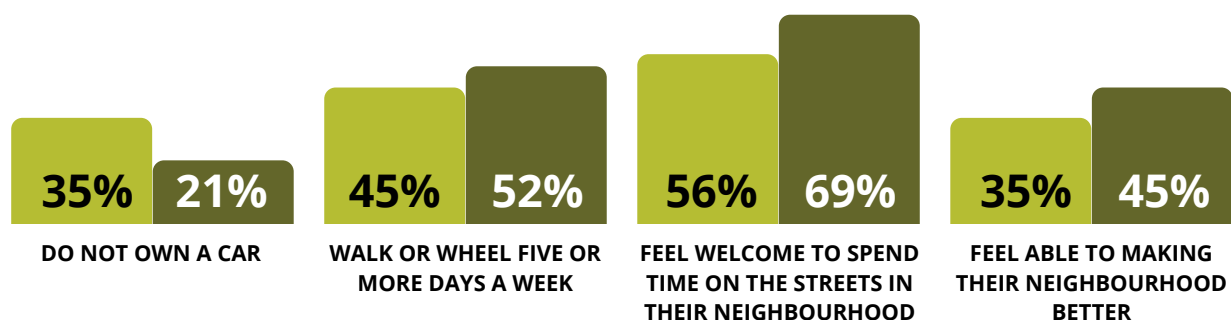
"Walking, cycling, and wheeling are foundational to confronting our mobility challenges, but we need to create the conditions required to encourage people to do so," said Xavier Brice, CEO of Sustrans, speaking at the POLIS' Leadership Summit in Glasgow earlier this year.

The guide, 'Walking for everyone: A guide to making walking and wheeling accessible, inclusive and desirable', is a collaboration between Sustrans, Living Streets and ARUP to create a guide to support people in local government, the transport sector, and spatial planning, to make walking and wheeling a more inclusive activity for everyone.



Index survey data on over 6,000 disabled people in the UK (June 2022) highlights:

■ **DISABLED PEOPLE**
 ■ **NON-DISABLED PEOPLE**



This month, Sustrans launched The Disabled Citizens' Inquiry, designed to give disabled people, using a pan impairment approach, a voice in making walking and wheeling more inclusive. Work done in partnership with Transport for All and funded by Motability.

"We work in neighbourhoods across the UK to improve design and construction, we also work with and through communities, and we use our voice to campaign for change at the political level," said Burns from Sustrans.

The solutions suggested 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 took a pan-impairment approach, to understand what is needed to make walking and wheeling inclusive, accessible and desirable," reported Burns.

The research found that only 56% of those with disabilities felt welcome when navigating their neighbourhoods, and 41% said they frequently experience problems reaching their destination due to accessibility barriers—something compounded by the current cost of living crisis.





A 15-MINUTE CITY... BUT FOR WHO?

This webinar posed critical questions about the "15-minute city" concept. It is an urban design model fast dominating the urban mobility lexicon; yet, to fully consider if disabled people's needs are addressed within it, we need to move away from the assumption that everybody "can walk or wheel the same distance" or in the same manner. As Sustrans and Transport for All revealed, this is an incredibly privileged vision of mobility and motility.

88% of disabled people say a planning system which ensures services are within walking or wheeling distance of where people live would help them walk or wheel more. However, to ensure that, the types and quality of services and housing cannot be ignored, and pavements, crossings, signalling, and wayfinding all should respond to the experience of disabled people.

"We need to develop supplementary planning guidance to measure walking proximity that fully considers disabled people's needs," asserted Alice Clermont, Sustrans. Clermont also invited us to consider what it means for a disabled person to have to take a taxi to get to public transport.

NO MORE UNKNOWN UNKNOWNNS:

Engage the community

Involving a broad spectrum of disabled people in decision-making was one of the key takeaways from this webinar. As this research revealed, it is only by bringing a diversity of voices to the fore, that we can comprehensively address universal access and develop truly *just* mobility services.

Sustrans' research found that just 1/3 of respondents felt they had the opportunity to shape mobility in their neighbourhoods.

"At present, our decision-makers are not representative of those we need to work harder to serve: we need to put lived experiences at the heart of what we do. Disabled people have often been used as justification for removing LTNs, but often their voices are not even heard or represented here," warned Burns.

Sustrans advocates for the creation of paid expert panels of disabled people as well as a greater focus on diversifying the transport sector.

"These experts need to be paid for their time and effort, all too often this is not the case, and something we put into practice throughout our research," asserted Clermont.

Furthermore, diversifying the mobility workforce will ensure representativeness in the long run and help to change organisational structures to allow inclusivity to be the norm. As a result, current issues would be lessened and barriers removed.



As Koprena pointed out, "We need to sort of combine all of the transport methods and protect the ones that are accessible to everybody. We have to make sure that it stays that way going forward, because if you cut off access and funding goals at the same time, there is just no alternative". So again, promoting representative engagement, co-creation, and a diverse mobility workforce will tackle such issues.

Change needs to happen, and only by raising issues and openly talking about our shortcomings, hearing marginalised voices and how they are experiencing our cities without being defensive of outdated practices, we will be able to foster these changes.

As Burns said, "We need to do better at making sure that people are represented, bringing people with us and changing the way that we have designed streets, neighbourhoods, cities around cars to something that is more inclusive, that gives people — including disabled people — a genuine choice to get about independently and freely, in a way that is attractive, healthy, and sustainable for the long run".

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Create meaningful engagement:

Paid advice and consultation groups are imperative for understanding the precise and diverse range of needs of citizens. However, it is rather essential to not always put all the responsibility on disabled people, but to set up co-production approaches and balance responsibilities.

Diversify the workforce:

You cannot represent those whose needs you do not reflect. A diversity of voices in decision-making is critical for thinking beyond a normative understanding of transport needs. This will support cities and authorities to be more proactive towards inclusivity issues. There are many ways to improve diversity in recruitment, from flexible working options (job shares, return to work schemes, work-from-home options, childcare provisions, adapted shift patterns), as well as the use of blind CVs, addressing bias in job advertisements and diverse recruitment panels.

(Re)focus on pavements:

Sustrans' research found 79% of disabled people said that a dedicated pavement fund would help them walk and wheel more. Sustrans, therefore, recommends creating such a long-term dedicated fund, which would ensure that not only Low-Traffic Neighbourhoods could improve pavements from the start, but would also strengthen guidance for inclusive pavement design and maintenance.





Improve physical and digital tools for wayfinding:

Wayfinding is essential for enabling people to plan and navigate journeys confidently and independently. Tech is not the solution, but it can help, and there is a range of innovative tech-based tools to collect and share accessibility in the city.

Communicate changes clearly and thoroughly:

Engagement must continue across the planning and deployment process. As streets, bike lanes, and public transport access are redesigned, all those affected need to be fully informed and understand how these changes will affect them and the support available for any necessary mobility changes they may need to make.

Invest in research and mapping:

Amsterdam's accessibility map-based tool allows practitioners to identify inaccessible zones to demonstrate where the action is required — maybe it is time to replicate this outside the Netherlands.

Invest in accessible street space:

In the UK, a recent funding announcement of £200m for walking, wheeling, and cycling provides more opportunities for local authorities to improve the situation. This type of targeted funding is critical for finding solutions and supporting other needed changes, such as capacitation or schemes to support access to bikes. A re-balancing of the allocation of funds from automotive infrastructures and measures to walking, wheeling, and cycling is urgently needed all over Europe.



8 **Improve integration between public transport and active travel:**

Multimodality is a hot topic for urban planners, yet 'seamless journeys' need a comprehensive focus on the transition points. For disabled people, seamless journeys are a way to fight isolation and dependency on cars and taxis. Door-to-door and on-demand transport schemes are also essential and should be part of public transport planning and funding.

9 **(Re)examine accessibility standards:**

Reexamining urban planning guidance for land use and densification that considers services, leisure, and housing is critical for doubling down on accessibility. How are we measuring walking proximity for disabled people?

10 **Measure, measure, measure:**

Sustrans' Walking and Cycling Index is the biggest-ever study on walking, wheeling, and cycling in urban areas across the UK and Ireland. Including data from 18 cities and regions, it provides fresh insight into behaviours and perspectives around active travel. Amsterdam is also conducting work on this — find out more about Amsterdam's use of AI [here](#). Your city or region could be next!



FIND OUT MORE

- [Towards equity in the public realm](#), Naima Ihsan & Manuela Piasentin, Southwark Council
- [Silver Ribbons: Research on user-friendly walking routes for older adults](#), Naomé Carmeliet, Voetgangersbeweging vzw
- [Gender differences in active travel](#), Marianne Weinreich, Ramboll
- [Every step of the way: Supporting women who walk in Dublin](#), Lorraine D'Arcy, TU Dublin
- [Transforming public spaces with citizen involvement – Examples from Budapest](#), Andor Háznagy, BKK Centre for Budapest Transport
- [Sustrans' Cycling and Walking Index- Sustrans publishes new Walking and Cycling Index - POLIS Network](#)
- [Active travel and mid-life: Evidence on attitudes and the role of the built environment- \[active-travel-mid-life-full-report.pdf \\(ageing-better.org.uk\\)\]\(#\)](#)
- [Bruges in the spotlight: A transport transition tour - POLIS Network](#)
- [Puglia reveals plans for more bicycle-friendly infrastructure in the region - POLIS Network](#)
- [Steps ahead! The future of Barcelona's superblock - POLIS Network](#)
- [Disability Pride Month: How cities can become proud champions of accessibility - POLIS Network](#)
- [It's everyone's journey – Making transport more inclusive: championing equal access for all on public transport \(everyonesjourney.campaign.gov.uk\)](#)
- [Blended 'Copenhagen' Crossings - Enjoy Waltham Forest](#)



ABOUT THE JUST TRANSITION WEBINAR SERIES

At the 2021 Annual POLIS Conference in Gothenburg, we launched the [Just Transition Agenda](#).

This webinar series traverses the multifaceted ways affordability, gender-related mobility patterns, age, cognitive capacities (and more), can guide the future of our cities and regions.

From freight to parking, traffic efficiency to active travel, electromobility to safety- and everything in between- we begin to discuss how each sector has its part to play, the challenges ahead, and how cities and regions are treading new ground.