
ON THE MOVE: BY FOOT

1 SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report seeks Members' views on a discussion paper prepared by the Department of Transport on options for improving conditions for walking and increasing the number of journeys made on foot. Comments are required by 26th September 2003.

2 INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 One of the recommendations from the Environment, Transport and Regional Affairs Committee's report on "'Walking in Towns and Cities" was that the Government should publish a national walking strategy. In response, a document called "Encouraging Walking" has been published.
- 2.2 The discussion paper "On the move: by foot" is now published following a series of seminars to find out views and obtain ideas/options for a future strategy. A copy of the discussion paper has been placed in the Members' Library.

3 THE CASE FOR WALKING

- 3.1 The aim of the discussion paper is to suggest how conditions might be improved for walking in order to increase the number of journeys made on foot. The case for walking is made on the basis of:
- Health - exercise resulting in reduced illness and injuries, improved strength and co-ordination
 - Transport - no negative environmental costs on the environment; good provision for walkers can help public transport; take cars off the road at busy times re walking to School
 - Equity - 3 in 10 households in the UK have no access to a car
 - Sustainable Communities - contact with public spaces, support for local facilities and community cohesion.

4 KEY ISSUES

- 4.1 The discussion paper asks a series of questions about walking and these are listed below, together with some comments:

Q.1 - Is there any further guidance that needs to be given to local authorities about how good provision for pedestrians can be secured through the planning system?

Clear guidance is provided in PPG3 on the creation of more sustainable patterns of development. In particular, PPG3 requires Planning Authorities to:

- place the needs of people before ease of traffic movement when designing the layout of residential developments
- seek to reduce car dependence by facilitating more walking and cycling, particularly by planning for mixed use
- promote good design in new housing developments

Overall, it is considered that adequate guidance is available, although there is always value in making examples of good practice widely available.

Q.2 - How far is current practice reflecting the objectives of existing guidance?

There is no doubt that, for example, the layout of new housing schemes has changed significantly over recent years, with more attention being paid to creating people friendly environments. That having been said, there will always be a balance to be struck between the needs of pedestrians and vehicle access. In housing schemes on the edge of settlements, residents will continue to rely heavily on their cars and there will continue to be a dilemma about ensuring pedestrian safety/friendliness versus accessibility for vehicles. Nevertheless, this Authority, in partnership with County Highways, is pursuing the introduction of residential zones designed to create safer environments and redress the balance between cars and pedestrians.

Q.3 - Could more be done to ensure that developers provide well designed, convenient and direct pedestrian access to all buildings, particularly new ones, and public spaces and if so, what?

These issues are considered during the planning application process.

Q.4 - What particular problems do transport authorities face in balancing the needs of pedestrians and other road users? Is further guidance needed from Central Government and would you support a Government initiative to produce guidance for those streets which are not part of the trunk road network?

In many ways, the ongoing examination of traffic movements in Rayleigh Town Centre reflects the theme of this question. The quality of the street environment is a potential physical barrier to walking. On the other hand, keeping road traffic moving has, in the past, been an objective to be delivered to the exclusion of all others.

The Government now states that there should be a better balance of interests between pedestrians and road vehicle users so that, for example:

- roads must be designed for pedestrians as well as motor vehicles;
- footways must be wide enough;
- there are well designed crossings;
- footways must be clear of obstacles; and
- surfaces must be well maintained.

In Rochford certainly, it is considered there is little need for additional guidance, since the issues are well understood. The real challenge is reaching solutions that to some degree satisfy all interests.

Q.5 - What changes to policy or practice could help reduce the impact of speeding traffic in both urban and rural areas?

Residential zones are being developed in Rochford and this is a start. There are many examples of successful speed control schemes through rural Villages and these can have a dramatic impact on the environment. 20 mph speed limits might very well be an option for Urban areas, although physical speed management controls may be required to ensure success. In any event, it is considered that appropriate measures must be part of the national policy framework, rather than ad hoc measures introduced across individual Districts.

Q.6 - In addition to perhaps more seats and toilet facilities, what other basic amenities could lead to an increase in walking? How could this be achieved?

Other options are: better street lighting; maps, integration with public transport; links to the cycling networks; segregation from vehicular traffic.

Q.7 - Would the development of a website to share current good practice be a worthwhile initiative?

Yes - such information is always helpful.

Q.8 - Is research needed to find out more about why people decide whether or not to walk?

A lot of information is available, particularly in respect of "fear of crime" issues.

Q.9 - What other measures can (i) the Government and (ii) Local Authorities take to reduce fear of crime for pedestrians?

Certainly the quality of the environment is important and street lighting, good surfacing, etc., can play a part. There have been a number of initiatives in respect of schools, including school travel plans, walking buses and so on.

Overall, though, there is no one single change that will reduce the fear of crime.

Q.10 - What measures are needed to address the specific needs of the increasing number of older people or people with mobility impairment?

The type of changes being introduced in the Rochford Town Centre enhancements provide improved access for people with mobility impairment.

Q.11 - What are the most effective ways in which the NHS can influence walking?

No comment.

Q.12 - What more needs to be done to tackle the skills shortage among transport professionals with particular emphasis on walking?

No comment.

Q.13 - Would it be helpful to establish a Walking Regional Development Team (as with cycling) to advise and support Local Authorities?

Not clear whether this would be of any significant help.

Q.14 - How might a one-off Walking Projects Fund help partnerships between sectors for practical projects to encourage walking?

Any funding is to be welcomed and could help contribute to develop a pool of Best Practice schemes.

Q.15 - Which of the indicators suggested are the best ones to use, either locally or nationally?

The Government suggests:

- public perception and reality of reaching a destination without motorised transport (how to measure though?);
- proportion of trips under one mile on foot;
- a modal share indicator for school travel;
- health related indicators; and
- a proportion of LTP funding spent on improving conditions for walking.

Q.16 - What, in your experience, are the most prominent barriers to walking - be they physical, psychological or institutional - that need to be tackled most urgently.

Members will have views based on their experience of the District.

Q.17 - What campaigns or marketing initiatives are needed to promote walking?

At the heart of any marketing initiatives must be the aim of integrating the different perspectives on walking. For example, encouraging children to walk to school has potential traffic benefits, but perhaps more importantly, has long-term health benefits.

Q.18 - How can Central Government ensure that Local Authorities and other agencies maintain a commitment to the walking environment over time?

From a planning perspective, through planning policy statements, of course. From a highway perspective, through funding of the LTP.

Q.19 - Where does the primary responsibility lie for addressing the problems identified?

National Government.

Q.20 - What partnerships to promote walking have been effective at a local level, and how?

Some success with walking school buses. In terms of the environment and new development schemes, there is a good working relationship between Rochford District Council and the County Highways.

5 RECOMMENDATION

5.1 It is proposed that the Committee RESOLVES

That, subject to additional comments from Members, this report forms the basis of the Council's response to the Department of Transport's discussion paper "On the move : by foot".

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Background Papers: "On the move : by foot" - A discussion paper issued by the Department for Transport - June 2003.

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