

CREATING WALKABLE COMMUNITIES IN SCOTLAND

Briefing from Paths for All

Ian McCall, 11 December 2018

1. About Walkability

Walking is the most accessible and practical way for most people to get more active and offers huge physical, social and mental health benefits. The quality of our environment influences whether we choose to walk or not and we believe every Scottish community should have well designed walkable streets and paths. Places that are more 'walkable' have more people using the streets.

Walking can be the natural choice for short journeys and, combined with public transport and cycling, creates healthier, more inclusive, more economically vibrant, and environmentally friendly places.

Levels of walking for travel are currently stable and not increasing significantly (unlike recreational walking which has increased for the last five years). Making walking, cycling and public transport (usually encompassing walking as well) attractive options is key to encouraging less car use. There will need to be an increase in resources to meet these aspirations – so we welcome the recent increase in the Scottish Government budget for active travel.

2. Walkable neighbourhoods across Scotland

The National Transport Strategy is currently being revised. We believe it is important that the new strategy is faithful to the transport hierarchy identified in the current strategy – making walking the top priority.

This will also inform the Strategic Transport Projects Review 2 and ensure that walking is represented within strategic priorities. Many active travel measures are local in scale so there needs to be a shift in emphasis from big road projects to more dispersed strategic plans that benefit communities across Scotland.

Walking should be at the heart of transport planning and investment in Scotland so that the NTS delivers on national policy priorities:

- public health - health inequalities, physical activity, mental health and obesity,

- the environment - air quality and climate change,
- sustainable economic development – retail footfall, tourism,
- Planning – the National Planning Framework and the
- National Walking Strategy.

To achieve this, walking infrastructure improvement needs to be supported by behaviour change interventions. The walking environment needs to be high quality, fit for purpose and well maintained. Local authorities should undertake footways condition surveys to inform maintenance and improvements.

In our experience, the top 5 “must haves” for walking infrastructure are:¹

- Well maintained streets, paths and public spaces – including level, smooth surfaces that are fully accessible, fit for purpose and with reduced street clutter;
- Information on walking routes to key destinations and places to walk, including more paths with signage;
- Seating, public toilets and good lighting, as a minimum provision in a high-quality, person-centred public realm;
- Safe places to cross roads with pedestrians given priority at signalised crossings;
- Vehicle speeds limited to 20mph.

Relative priorities will depend on location – the Scottish Government's new Place Approach, the Place Standard Tool and Community Street Audits are ways of exploring this.

3. Walkable communities

Equality – Walking is available to everyone – in this context it includes the use of wheelchairs,

buggies and similar mobility aids with the aim of ensuring easy and convenient independent mobility for all. It is free, easy and does not require any special equipment. It is, therefore, the ideal mode of travel to promote equality.

Health and well-being – Walking is well evidenced as being the perfect way to promote health and well-being; it promotes physical, mental and social health. It has been described as a ‘miracle cure’ and ‘wonder drug’ by the CMO, the ‘best buy in public health’ by the Faculty of Public Health and ‘the activity to perfect exercise’ by academics.

Climate action – walking is a carbon neutral mode of travel. Walking is also the best link to mass transit modes and the more people who choose to walk, the less people are travelling by more polluting forms of transport particularly for the first and last mile of a journey.

Our economy – walking is an effective form of preventative spend (Christie Commission). Investment and uptake of walking improves health, reduces congestion and air pollution, which all have a significant saving on the public purse. Equally, there is a wealth of evidence that creating places for walking also has a positive impact on retail footfall.²

4. Social Return on Investment

The economic benefits associated with increased physical activity levels far outweigh any initial costs. Cost Benefit Ratios for walking developments show significant value for money. Social Return on Investment (SROI) evidence shows a return of approximately £8 for every £1 invested in health walk and path development projects.³

5. Active travel and public transport

Walking and public transport are intricately linked. Virtually every trip by public transport involves walking at some stage. Buses are particularly important given the number of people that use them and the range of communities they serve. 76% of all public transport journeys are by bus.

However, over the last ten years bus routes have reduced by a fifth and fares have increased by 50%. Some areas, including many rural areas are poorly served by buses. This can prevent people accessing basic services, cause social isolation and increase inequality. Many people suffer from “transport poverty” due to a lack of affordable transport options. We would like to see a better, fully-integrated, accessible and affordable public transport network for everyone in Scotland alongside promotion of active travel.

Smarter Choices, Smarter Places (SCSP) is Paths for All’s behaviour change programme, grant-funded by Transport Scotland. It aims to get more people walking, cycling and using public transport as part of their everyday travel to make Scotland a healthier, happier country.

The projects encourage and promote active and sustainable transport in innovative ways.⁴

6. Walkipedia

Walkipedia is an online resource that signposts users to key sources of information and evidence relating to walking, pedestrians, and active travel. It provides quick access to relevant legislation, policies, strategies, guidance, research and statistics as well as to organisations, their programmes, initiatives and toolkits. Walkipedia will be available in early 2019.

¹ Public attitudes to walking in Scotland PFA/Living Streets Scotland (2014)

² <https://www.livingstreets.org.uk/who-we-are/press-media/the-secret-to-saving-our-high-street-is-in-our-feet-new-report>

³ Paths for All (2013) SROI - Glasgow Health Walks, Social Return on Investment Analysis. Alloa: Paths for All

⁴ <https://www.pathsforall.org.uk/active-travel/smarter-choices-smarter-places>

Scotland’s alliance for sustainable transport

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We campaign for walking, cycling and public transport to be the easiest and most affordable options for everyone. Our diverse membership brings together public, private and third sector organisations from across Scotland. We are a registered Scottish charity (SC041516).