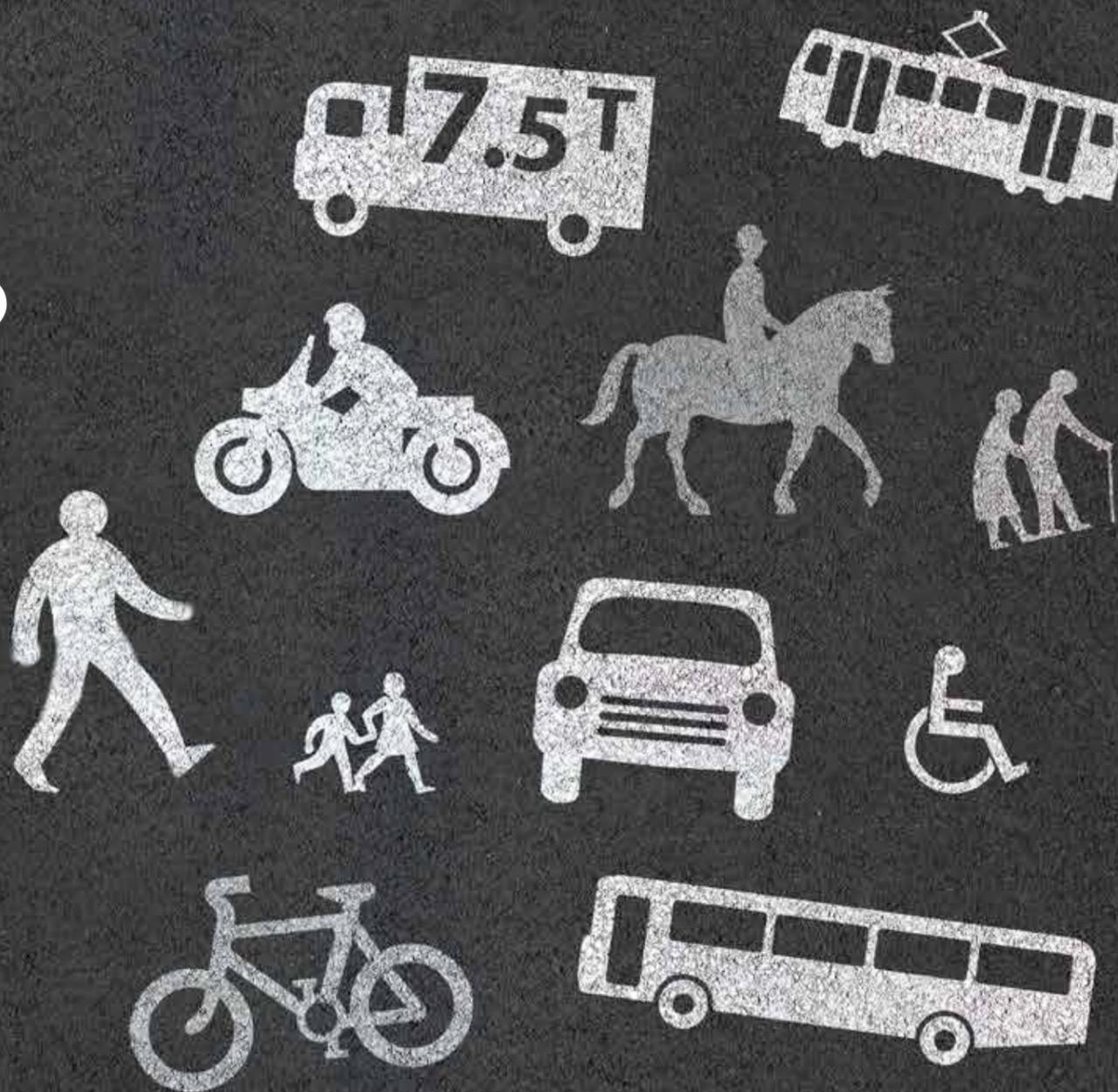


# What should streets be for? And how do we achieve those goals?

The car's dominance of our streets may be coming to an end if campaigners are successful. Planners are progressively realising that there is a lot more to streets than just being areas for cars to drive down, reports **Emma Griffin**



**F**or a few glorious weeks at the beginning of lockdown, we remembered another side of our streets. We strayed into the middle of the road, chatted from doorways, and ambled to our local shops for the grocery shopping. As lockdown measures eased, cars returned and their speeds increased and the conflict of our streets came into sharper relief.

We've known for decades that the car has seized too much control, taking up too much space, forcing us into sedentary lifestyles, dividing communities and filling air with toxic fumes. Transport (road transport in particular) is also the UK's worst performing sector for carbon reduction.

We've also known for decades that while streets are complex, balancing everything from movement, access, parking, drainage, utilities and street lighting, they are also places. It's what the Manual for Streets says, it's what planning practice guidance says, it's what the Equality Act demands. In January, Grant Shapps became the first British transport secretary in 20 years to call for a fall in car use and for public transport and active travel to be "the natural first choice for our daily activities".

Yet the car still dominates. In May, Shapps gave unprecedented support to local authorities to find more space for people walking and cycling as they return to work. This was, he said, a "once in a generation opportunity to deliver a lasting transformative change in how we make short journeys in our towns and cities". Yet just days later, in his address to the nation, the prime minister urged us to drive to work and for local exercise. Weekly surveys by Transport Focus suggest that, once travel restrictions ease, people will primarily opt for cars over public transport.

Highway authorities also have a long way to go in ditching their preoccupation with motor traffic. A 2018 survey by Urban Design ►



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Emma Griffin** is a writer, researcher and campaigner exploring and challenging the impact of motor traffic on cities. She is co-founder of campaign support organisation, Action Vision Zero, administrator for Foundation for Integrated Transport and vice-chair of London Living Streets.

◀ Group (UDG) found that 80% were still using old street design guidance that centred the design of streets around cars.

Streets and car parking stood out as one of the major failings of poor-quality housing schemes in A Housing Design Audit for England, published in January by UCL's Place Alliance, alongside poor access to sustainable transport.

Transport for New Homes' upcoming research will reveal how the UK's plans for garden villages and towns encourage car-dependent lifestyles.

"Walking is the most universal way to travel, but is often taken for granted and overlooked in street design, highway maintenance and place-making," adds Stephen Edwards, director of policy and communications at walking charity, Living Streets.

"This is evident in the inadequate footways and crossings, 'Footway Closed' signs and newly built, unwalkable housing estates."

Since 2010, there has been unfettered support for travel by cars, manifest in fuel duty freezes, huge roadbuilding programmes, cuts to public transport and the removal of targets for casualty reduction, says Jeremy Leach, founder of campaigning support group, Action Vision Zero. As a result, UK road deaths have barely fallen since 2010 and a growing proportion of those dying on roads are pedestrians.

"It is simply not fair that people walking bear the brunt of road risk. Fear of danger also prevents people choosing to walk or cycle, which further locks us into a future of car dependency. The time has come to break this vicious circle," he adds.

As the following case studies illustrate, the majority of progress in the UK is attributed to the bravery and independence of individual leaders or organisations. For wider change, experts call for urgent and

radical form in terms of modelling and the transport appraisal process, law, governance and councils' engagement with communities.

**MANUAL FOR STREETS**

Research into the connection between transport and urban design, or the link between movement and place, began in the early 2000s with the report *Better Streets, Better Places*. This led to *Manual for Streets*, published in 2007, which replaced guidance, developed from the 1920s and into the 1960s and 1970s, that prioritised the movement of the largest vehicles, such as bin lorries.

*Manual for Streets* gave people and place equal weighting to the other street functions. Instead of bare, lonely distributor roads, it recommends streets with active shop fronts. It calls for junctions that are safe and easy to

cross on foot, rather than staggered junctions and roundabouts that prioritise the free flow of motor vehicles. It also encourages tight corner radii on side road entrances to slow motor traffic and enable shorter crossings for those walking.

The UDG survey found that fewer than 20% of highway authorities had modernised their highway standards in line with *Manual for Streets*, which was in contradiction of Government planning policy and guidance and in breach of statutory duties, including

80%

of UK highway authorities are still using old street design guidance



the Public Sector Equality Duty, climate change mitigation and public health, says Robert Huxford, director of the UDG. He added that schemes using old standards could be challenged by judicial review.

**INERTIA AND A LACK OF SKILLS**

Inertia has been blamed on lack of expertise in the traffic engineering and transport planning professions, brought about by specialisation of technical skills and inadequate coordination between departments. Technical professions are also underrepresented at a senior level, says Huxford.

"This cuts them adrift, leaving them either in an exposed or risk averse position."

The authors of *Housing Design Audit for England* call on local authorities to "deal once and for all with the highways/planning disconnect".

The report asks for "multi-disciplinary urban design teams" and to involve highways authorities in the commissioning of design review.

At Leicester City Council (see panel, page 34), cycling co-ordinator Andy Salkeld commends mayor Peter Soulsby for giving officers the confidence to "learn, self-direct and get things wrong. We embrace the challenge of trying different solutions," he says.

**TIME FOR A REVIEW OF THE HIGHWAYS ACT**

But this sort of confidence is rare, says Phil Jones, chairman of Phil Jones Associates and one of the authors of *Manual for Streets*.

Individual officers might be sympathetic to the case for a tree-lined street, but when push comes to shove, there is nothing in the duties of the highway authority that says they have to provide trees

PHIL JONES, PHIL JONES ASSOCIATES

impede traffic you can't do it," says Jenny Raggett, project lead of Transport for New Homes. "This is because we have no way of appraising the non-monetised benefits such as the pleasure of walking, the community benefits, the lack of pollution."

David Metz, honorary professor at the Centre for Transport Studies at University College London and former chief scientist at the DfT, is a "great critic" of TAG's use of travel time savings in scheme appraisal. New transport infrastructure has a marginal impact on travel time, he says.

"In the long run, people take the benefit of faster travel in the form of greater access or distance, for example to access more job opportunities or schools."

When these notional time savings are aggregated for millions of road users, they emerge as enormous 'benefits' of a road scheme.

The UK Government pledged a whopping £27 billion for road building this year, compared with £1bn for "green transport solutions" in the recent Budget. Cycling and buses have been promised a combined £5bn, of which £2bn will go on the former.

The Walking and Cycling Alliance, made up of Bicycle Association, British Cycling, Cycling UK, Living Streets, Ramblers and Sustrans, is asking Government to commit at least £6bn to meet its target of doubling cycling and increasing walking by 2025, with an additional £2bn to spread the benefits across a wider range of places and demographics.

"At this macro level we need a methodology that proves cycling and walking is good value for money," says Roger Geffen, policy director at Cycling UK.

There is a similar level of frustration with local and micro-simulation traffic models that fail to count people walking. Even in London with its Healthy Streets methodology, this means that if a proposal – for example to convert a staggered cross-

"Individual officers might be sympathetic to the case for a tree-lined street, but when push comes to shove, there is nothing in the duties of the highway authority that says they have to provide trees."

He thinks it's time to step back and consider what we want highways and highway authorities to do.

"At the moment there is no statutory requirement for them to consider anything other than the free movement of traffic, reducing road casualties and minimising maintenance costs. I believe authorities would make different choices if they were, say, required to reduce carbon emissions, increase biodiversity, reduce rainwater runoff and improve public health."

He points out the current Highways Act is now 40 years old but much has changed in that period. "I think the time has come for its review, so society gets the kind of streets it deserves. It is big stick time," says Jones.

**TRAFFIC MODELLING AND TRANSPORT APPRAISAL**

Reform also depends on an overhaul of modelling and transport appraisal processes (see page 18). At a national level, there has been widespread and longstanding criticism of the Department for Transport (DfT) Transport Analysis Guidance (TAG, previously WebTAG) that is used to prepare the economic case for DfT's large transport investments.

Critics contend current methodologies place too much emphasis on the movement of cars and not people. They also struggle to account for the impacts of transport schemes on the environment.

"If you design a scheme with more crossings or wider pavements, the minute you

**Side-road zebras**



"In most of the north west and most of the country we have been thinking, organising and building for the car for pretty much all of our lives," Andy Burnham, mayor of Manchester told the Living Walking Summit in March. "There comes a point when that has to end and I think we are reaching that point now."

Manchester's Bee Network is the city's proposed joined-up cycling and walking network covering 1,800 miles across Greater Manchester. This includes separate space for people walking and cycling on busy roads, modal filters to create low traffic neighbourhoods and safe junctions. But perhaps most revolutionary of all – not just for Manchester but for rest of the country – are its proposals to install zebras at side road junctions.

The Highway Code asks drivers to give way to pedestrians that have stepped into a road into which they turning. Few drivers know about this requirement and few pedestrians risk testing it.

Some councils, for example in London's Waltham Forest, have installed continuous crossings (also known as Copenhagen crossings) to ensure priority for people walking across the mouths of side roads. But these are expensive and have caused some concern for people with visual impairments. Zebras aren't often used currently at side roads because current law requires them to be installed with Belisha beacons (wired to the mains) and zigzag markings.

Manchester has commissioned the Transport Research Laboratory to investigate the use of a stripped-down version of the zebra, currently used across the world at side roads and in most UK supermarket carparks. Interim results have shown that zebras are recognisable to walkers and drivers even without zig-zag markings and Belisha beacons.

The simple zebra would cost approximately £300 to install, compared with £30,000 for a zebra with Belisha beacons, saving Greater Manchester an estimated £400million if installed on all the Bee Network's 20,000 side roads.

If the findings are supportive of the side road zebras, they will be presented to the DfT as a case for legislative change and on-road trials.

ing (that leaves pedestrians exposed to passing traffic) into a straight-across crossing – is modelled to cause congestion, it can be rejected on the grounds of increasing bus journey time. The needs of bus users must be balanced with the needs of people cycling and walking, say London campaigners. Every bus trip starts and ends with a walk, after all.

Transport models and the appraisal process are also criticised for their “predict and provide” approach, based on the assumption that traffic levels will continue to increase. This fails to recognise the concept of ‘induced demand’, or the role that new roads play in increasing traf-

fic levels, and “traffic evaporation” where traffic levels reduce in response to changes in transport behaviour. This means that wider pavements or safer crossings might also reduce motor traffic if they enable people to walk to the shops.

**TAG ALTERNATIVES**

The debate about TAG continues, with no resolution on the horizon. One concern, is that any attempt to assess the place aspects of a scheme would add further complexity to an already complicated process, says Metz.

Geffen would like greater emphasis on experimentation and monitoring.

“The Dutch approach to planning is to try an idea, monitor what happens and learn from that. The important bit is not to be afraid of making mistakes,” he says.

Paul Gasson, council liaison officer at Waltham Forest Cycling Campaign agrees. “Government is wasting billions on road building programmes. Why not channel a fraction of this into projects to gather in-depth data on the air quality, health and economic impacts of schemes. Traffic engineers love data,” he points out.

Martin Tugwell, programme director for England’s Economic Heartland (EEH) and president of CIHT also challenges central government’s concentration on capital funding and major infrastructure projects, when a great deal of revenue funding is also needed to boost active travel. The EEH is in process of developing its first Transport Strategy.

“We want to offer a programme of investment that means local authorities needn’t waste their resources bidding for separate pots of funding. Instead, this will give them the confidence that there is funding available when they are ready,” says Tugwell.

Another option is to base investment decisions on desired outcomes for highways projects. This could be “the right to have a linked, frequent public transport system and the right for people to cycle and walk in freedom and safety”, suggests Raggett.

**CITY REGIONS**



This is what London and Manchester have been able to do with the freedom of a devolved budget and a responsible, elected mayor. London’s mayor

published a Transport Strategy in 2018 with new targets, no longer based solely on journey time reliability but also on the health and wellbeing of citizens. By 2041, London wants everyone to undertake 20 minutes of active travel a day to stay healthy; 80% of all trips to be made by walking, cycling, public transport; and to eliminate all deaths and serious injuries on London’s transport system.

London’s ground-breaking Healthy Streets Approach provides the framework to link human health with planning, using 10 evidence-based indicators of success. This means streets are no longer assessed just as conduits for movement, but also as places where people feel safe and relaxed, that have clean air, aren’t too noisy, provide shade, shelter, offer opportunities to stop and rest, things to see and do and are easy to cross.

The Healthy Streets concept is filtering to borough streets via TfL’s Liveable Neighbourhood Programme. Waltham Forest was one of the first boroughs to receive funding, gaining £27 million in 2013 to build a mini Holland scheme in Walthamstow Village.

Just one year after the implementation, residents were walking 32 minutes and cycling on average nine minutes more per week, according to a 2018 study by London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine and University of Westminster.

These are startling results, especially considering how cheap it was. Gasson estimates it would cost £1.4bn to implement high-quality, low-traffic neighbourhoods across the capital. Compared with a standard road-building exercise and considering the impact on health, environment, road safety, the quality of public realm and our lifestyles, “this is peanuts”, says Huxford.

Success of the Waltham Forest scheme, once again, came down to political bravery, a can-do attitude from council officers,

community appetite, an effective council communications team, and informed and supportive campaigners who could ensure the council’s vision is was ‘gold-plated in terms of aspiration,’ says Gasson.

But this type of political leadership is not widespread, says Simon Munk, infrastructure campaigner at London Cycling Campaign.

“Amazingly enough, some boroughs, even in Central London, are still wedded to the ‘car is king’ mentality and their car parking revenue streams, even when their residents are crying out for better air quality and lower emissions. That is just lunacy,” he says.

**COMMUNITY SUPPORT**

This is a key consideration for politicians in areas where cars still dominate: don’t assume that residents fear change.

“Politicians assume that residents will be against traffic limitation without really checking,” says Kit Allwintter, senior consultant at AECOM. “It depends on how you approach the question. If I tell an owner of a 4x4 that I’m going to stop him driving to the shops, then he will immediately be against it. But if I talk to him about children not playing on streets, not knowing our neighbours, the impact of poor air quality, losing shade and shelter from streets, then he will understand the impact of rat-running.”

London Cycling Campaign is about to publish material to support the public, council officers and councillors in engagement. This is a matter of gathering data,



asking people general opinions about what they want, establishing principles and then establishing scheme options, says Munk. “Don’t show them a scheme that is fully finished. Show them what you have done to recognise their concerns.”

**NO SUCH THING AS THE PERFECT STREET**

Freight is another area of potential conflict. John Crosk, vice-chairman of the Brewery Logistics Group, says operators are starting to turn down London deliveries as a result of rising costs. “Whatever you add at the kerbside, whether that’s install protected cycle lane or introduce cargo bike deliveries, it will mean our members take longer to make deliveries, which puts more vehicles on the road to deliver the same amount of goods,” he says.

He is pragmatic and is determined solutions can be found, but this relies on a co-ordinated approach across the freight and transport industry. “Someone delivering food will have very different issues so we need to put these requirements into the melting pot,” he says.

In January, TfL launched a freight innovation challenge, bringing together 10 partners from across the freight industry to develop solutions. Elsewhere, BIDs including Better Bankside and Team London Bridge are starting to convert business deliveries to cargo bikes.

But these problems should not get in the way of progress, says Robert Huxford and might simply require a little compromise from all sides. “There isn’t this brilliant cosmic optimum out there. Streets will always be a bloody and inadequate compromise. We have to deal with what we have got.” **ST**

**80%**

of all trips to be made by walking, cycling or public transport is London’s goal



**CASE STUDY: LEICESTER**



Manchester and London’s transport strategies have hit the headlines for rebalancing the life of streets, but provincial cities are also making rapid progress.

Leicester, for example, has one of the largest pedestrianised city areas in the UK and is slowly dismantling the divide created by its inner ring road. A flyover was taken out in 2014, traffic lanes have been removed, cycle lanes installed, and new links created for pedestrians and cyclists to the railway station. Within the city centre, two car parks have been replaced with public squares.

Leicester is a story of determination from both political leaders and council officers. “Our mayor understands the value that good quality public realm brings to the economy, environment and people’s health,” says Cllr Adam Clarke, deputy city mayor for environment and transportation. “He has been out, putting one foot in front of another to measure the width of central reservations to find space for cycle lanes. That is how much he cares about this.”

This determination was particularly valuable when the city was dealing with failed bids for Department for Transport (DfT) funding. Leicester missed out on Cycle Demonstration Town funding and Cycle City Ambition Grant from the DfT in 2014. But it did secure

£7.8 million from the DfT’s Transforming Cities Fund in 2019.

Developer-funded contributions have helped Leicester cut its own path. “Being able to negotiate directly with property owners adjacent to the public highway has given a level of innovation and ability which you probably don’t get from more stringent funding schemes,” says Clarke.

He points to the Mill Lane scheme, funded by De Montfort University, that provides a linear park through the heart of the campus and links the city centre to the riverside. “The street still provides access to essential vehicles, but people don’t recognise it as a public street,” Clarke says.

The next step is to embed a cycling culture in communities that have not considered it an aspiration or even an option, for example the Hindu community in Leicester’s Belgrave area. “It is not always a case of build it and they will come,” says Clarke. Infrastructure is always the starting point, but this must be followed by community outreach work that helps people build new habits.

In addition to bespoke training programmes with residents, Leicester City Council plans to launch a bike share scheme this year.