

City of Westminster Walking Strategy – London Living Streets Response to the Consultation

London Living Streets is a new community group that seeks to represent those on foot across the Greater London area. We believe that there is a unique opportunity to remake London in favour of those on foot in order to make London's residents, workers, businesses and visitors safer, healthier, wealthier and happier.

We would like to thank the City of Westminster for the development of a Walking Strategy. The City of Westminster houses some of London's finest locations and destinations and nowhere is it more important for residents and visitors to be and feel safe and at home as they walk about this vital cultural, economic and historic area.

We are supportive of the overall aims of the strategy in encouraging higher levels of walking and aspects of the measures proposed. At present we do not feel that the overall balance of the City of Westminster and its Walking Strategy is weighted sufficiently towards those on foot particularly in the West End, Soho and the Ceremonial parts of the City. We feel that the City of Westminster is in danger of losing out to other global cities such as New York, Paris and Madrid which are taking rapid action both to limit the impact of the motor vehicle (through air pollution, casualties and its domination of the urban fabric) and to improve the public realm and conditions for those on foot (through lower speed limits, restrictions of access for motor vehicles and pedestrianisation initiatives).

In the light of these approaches and the expected explosion in pedestrian usage of the City of Westminster's streets with the opening of Crossrail in 2018, we would propose further refinement of the strategy as set out in section 4 on page 46 onwards as follows:

1. We agree that Westminster has a good track record of working with land owners and developers to improve the public realm and the pedestrian environment in new developments.
2. We believe that considerable further work is needed in relation to 4.6 and the allocation of highway space. Along with how vehicle speeds are addressed, this is the greatest area of weakness of the strategy. In reality vehicle speeds and the allocation of space together are part of the same issue – how to create a fairer balance between motor vehicles and (increasing numbers of) pedestrians. While it is reasonable to talk about pedestrianisation in relation to a small number of locations and that idea that parallel routes may have a role to play in a number of locations, the reality is that on many of the Westminster streets that carry large numbers of pedestrians (because they form the most direct routes where people want to get to and from) the balance remains wholly tilted in favour of vehicle movement. This is the case of inadequate pavement widths, poor and infrequent crossing facilities and over-generous carriageway capacity for motor vehicles. This excess of capacity leads to intimidating conditions for pedestrians as motor vehicles move too quickly in free

flowing conditions. Examples of this are legion in the West End but include Shaftesbury Avenue where there are very few crossing points for pedestrians crossing between the Chinatown and Soho and pavements are crowded and the Aldwych where the gyratory remains a barrier to pedestrian movement. Pedestrian usage of the area is dramatically suppressed by the intimidating gyratory-like environment. This will be a particular problem if the Garden Bridge is constructed with a northern entrance/exit at Temple. These are two examples only but overall there is a real need to systematically review carriageway allocation in the West End and to re-allocate space towards pedestrians and to improve the ability to cross roads and streets easily and safely. The conclusion of this review should be a specific and comprehensive programme by the City of Westminster of opportunities for pedestrianisation, road closures and pavement widening so that walking is treated as and can become the priority transport mode.

3. Reducing vehicle speeds to improve vehicle safety. While we are pleased that the City of Westminster proposes to consider the potential for a pilot 20mph zone, it is now well behind the curve of the other Inner London boroughs and the thinking and initiatives of TfL itself. As of September 2016, eight of the Inner London boroughs will have introduced a 20mph speed limit on all of the roads that they control in order to a) improve road safety, b) to increase levels of walking and cycling and c) reduce the intimidation that pedestrians in particular receive from motor vehicles. All of these are the stated aims of the Walking Strategy that the City has set out and as a result it is difficult to understand why the City is being so timid in introducing wide-area 20mph limits. This is particularly curious in the most heavily used parts of the West End where the enormous numbers of pedestrians lead to high casualty levels on Westminster's streets. As well as introducing 20mph limits which tend to reduce average speeds by some 1.5mph, there are a range of other measures that can support the lower speed agenda ranging from engineering measures (gyratory removal, carriageway capacity reduction, the introduction of segregated cycle lanes and removing the centre line on roads), new technology (such as the fitting of speed limiters to buses) and greater levels of enforcement for example through Community Road Watch. We would strongly advocate Westminster to go far further in its speed reduction plans and the introduction of 20mph limits most especially in order to reduce casualty levels. We would propose that a 20mph limit should be trialled across the whole of the borough in order to support the transformation in the City that the other parts of this strategy and other strategies (eg relating to air pollution and public health) are seeking to bring about.

4. Part pedestrianisation. We welcome the City opening the door to a roll out of this innovative idea and would suggest that smaller side and link streets that could be part pedestrianised at certain times of the day when activity is at its peak. We would recommend that a programme of development of this idea is included within the strategy.

5. Walking Corridors. We welcome the achievement of the Leicester Square to Covent Garden walking corridor and the massive improvement that it has made to the Long Acre with both public realm and commercial benefits. We would propose

that more locations of this sort are included in the strategy. The selection of candidate locations may be aided by the two new maps that TfL have created. One shows the numbers of steps between stations on the same line:

<http://content.tfl.gov.uk/steps-tube-map.pdf>

and the other walking times between stations:

<http://content.tfl.gov.uk/walking-tube-map.pdf>

We hope that these big picture issues can be taken into account and the strategies proposed and the measures envisaged can be amended accordingly. We would finally comment that the number of specific actions proposed in the strategy is relatively small and that further development of the strategy following the consultation should include the creation of a more assertive set of actions to deliver this strategy.

We feel that it would be beneficial for a stakeholder meeting to be convened (and which would follow on from the one that was held at the start of the development of the Walking Strategy) to be able to discuss the issues that are being raised through the consultation process both with the strategy authors and the Portfolio Holder in City of Westminster.