10. Walking, Accessibility and Public Realm

10. Walking, Accessibility and Public Realm

10.1 Introduction

Walking is an important mode of travel, accounting for 18% of trips to work and education in the GDA in 2016, and 13% of trips to work in Dublin. In addition, most people who travel are pedestrians for some part of their journey, and adequate provision for pedestrians is therefore a matter of general relevance. A high quality walking network should be safe, coherent, direct, attractive and comfortable. However, in both urban and rural areas, it is often not of a standard that meets the needs of all users.

The Design Manual for Urban Roads and Streets (DMURS) sets out, inter alia, how our road and street network should be designed in order to serve the needs of pedestrians. This chapter does not seek to repeat the principles of DMURS but to set out the relevant measures that will be implemented across the GDA by the NTA in conjunction with the local authorities over the period of the Transport Strategy.

10.2 The Message from the Covid-19 Pandemic

During the Covid-19 Pandemic, and in particular during the period of most severe restrictions on movement, people across the GDA were walking around their local areas in great numbers and many were exploring parts of their towns, neighbourhoods and cities they may never have been before. There was a greater appreciation of the benefits of walking; of the need for high quality pedestrian infrastructure; of the deficiencies of the walking network; and a collective realisation of the need for streets to function as social spaces.

> *"A permeable district can contribute to a range of planning objectives related to design, social integration and transport.*
>
> *Permeability can enhance the attractiveness of a neighbourhood through the provision of additional useable open space; can increase social interactions by facilitating more activity in the public realm, and can maximise the potential for walking and cycling to a range of services."*
>
> *Permeability: A Best Practice Guide, National Transport Authority, 2013*

The NTA and local authorities implemented a large number of schemes to provide for this aspect of people's needs across the GDA. Footpaths were widened; streets were pedestrianised; longer crossing times implemented; and outdoor dining spaces

created. Overall, in many places, a shift in emphasis from streets as thoroughfares to streets as places where people could move about on foot more easily and, moreover, stay longer, has occurred.

10.3 Maintenance

Pedestrian infrastructure is required to be maintained at an acceptable level of service at a minimum. Footpaths can experience significant wear and tear and damage over time from weather effects as well as from damage from vehicles. It is the intention that the condition of footpaths is maintained to a high standard across the GDA.

Measure WALK1 – Steady State Maintenance of Footpaths

Development Plans in the GDA will include objectives to maintain footpaths to a high standard across the GDA.

10.4 Improved Footpaths

Good quality footpaths should be of sufficient width to accommodate peak demand, and should be well finished with even surfaces and a legible palette of materials. Width should be in accordance with the predicted demand, and should be informed by high-level pedestrian network planning.

Footpaths are also places of congregation and recreation, and often accommodate a wide array of street furniture and other items such as bins, cycle parking, benches, planting and street lighting. When determining the required width it will be necessary to take account of, and plan for, the full spectrum of uses in order to provide adequately for all needs. Inappropriate

Walking

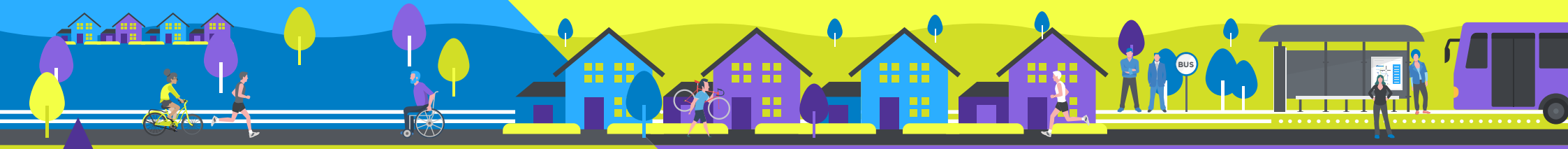
Traffic Free Streets

More Pedestrianisation

Improved
Footpaths

Lower
Speed Limits

Better
Junction Design



Better Environment for Persons with
Disabilities

Wayfinding
Information

Enhanced
Public Realm

uses such as car parking, advertising boards and encroachment by unregulated outdoor seating, must also be controlled to ensure footpaths serve their primary functions adequately.

The requirements of rural footpaths are less complex than in urban areas. In many cases minimum provision may be adequate, and it may be sufficient to provide footpaths on one side of the road only. Such minimum provision should nevertheless form a coherent network of safe routes, with adequate lighting (where appropriate), reasonable width to allow for passing and good quality surfaces.

Measure WALK2 – Improved Footpaths

The NTA, in conjunction with local authorities, will implement footpath improvement schemes across the GDA where required throughout the period of the Transport Strategy in order to ensure that they are of sufficient width, adequately lit, serve both sides of the road in urban areas (in most cases) are of good quality surfacing and are free of unnecessary clutter.

10.5 Improved Junctions

While the provision of high quality footpaths is an essential component of a good walking network, it is most often the case that the manner in which junctions in urban areas are designed causes the most issues for pedestrians. Traditionally designed to cater for the maximum throughput of motorised traffic, many junctions in urban areas are characterised by multiple vehicle lanes; wide entry and exit flares; lack of formalised crossings and slip lanes.

Many of these junctions require the operation of multiple traffic signal phases for a pedestrian to fully complete a crossing, potentially up to 8 movements to complete a diagonal crossing – footpath to slip lane island; slip lane island to median island; median island to slip road island; slip road island to footpath; and a similar arrangement to cross the second perpendicular carriageway.

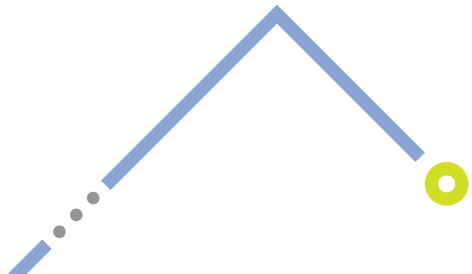
These types of junctions are not conducive to the promotion and facilitation of walking and cycling, in particular for local trips, with the design of such junctions being too focused on maximising vehicle throughput rather than people throughput. It is essential that the NTA and local authorities continue to address these deficiencies and seek to rebalance the operation of many of these junctions to reflect the needs of the non-motorised modes. Actions that can be taken include the

creation of more compact junctions through the removal of slip lanes and/or the narrowing of carriageway entries / exits. The introduction of more single stage crossings can also be considered in addition to the potential inclusion of an "all movements" pedestrian phase, enabling parallel, perpendicular and diagonal pedestrian movement.

Measure WALK3 – Improved Junctions

The NTA, in conjunction with local authorities, will implement junction improvements across the GDA as follows:

- To enhance safety at junctions, a programme of "narrowing" junctions by reducing kerb-line radii will be undertaken as a means of managing vehicular speeds; and
- To enhance movement by pedestrians and cyclists, a programme of removal of slip lanes will be undertaken at appropriate locations, together with consideration of junction signalling changes to better balance the use of the junction between motorised and vulnerable modes.



10.6 Pedestrian Crossings

The amount of time dedicated to pedestrian crossings at signalised junctions should take account of the full range of pedestrian speeds, people with disabilities, wheelchair users, and those with buggies or luggage must be sufficiently catered for. Furthermore, in urban areas the volume of waiting pedestrians at crossing points can give rise to crowding on footpaths, particularly in locations such as the environs of train stations or retail streets with high footfall. As such, the time spent waiting for the pedestrian phase may also need to be reduced.

Shorter waiting times for pedestrians can reduce crowding in waiting areas by avoiding the build-up of people, while longer crossing times allow greater numbers to cross in each phase, and can improve the crossing experience for all users. More green time for pedestrians may also discourage pedestrians from crossing busy roads while traffic is moving. While longer crossing times benefit pedestrians, the additional time allotted may be at the expense of traffic green time, and a balance is required to ensure the needs of all modes are met.

Measure WALK4 – Crossing Times

The NTA, with the cooperation of the local authorities, will address identified deficiencies in pedestrian crossing times at signalised junctions, in particular at locations where demand for pedestrian movements is likely to be high.

10.7 Additional Crossing Points

Junctions in the road and street network generate demand for pedestrian crossings. However, existing crossings are not always on pedestrian desire lines, and the requirements to maintain traffic flow can compromise the delivery of a street network that provides adequately for pedestrians. Specific land uses or trip generators, such as schools, bus stops and park entrances, also generate crossing demand that can be mid-block, i.e. not associated with junctions.

In order to provide a high quality walking environment, network planning is required to identify pedestrian desire lines. Where such desire lines interact with the traffic network, crossing facilities that support direct alignments are required. Care is required in the siting and design of mid-block crossings, as the absence of potential conflict with other traffic may affect drivers' perceptions of risk. In urban areas in particular, given the complexity of pedestrian movement, it is recommended that crossings be provided on all junction arms, wherever practicable.

Measure WALK5 – Crossing Points

The NTA, with the cooperation of the local authorities, will install additional pedestrian crossing points where requirements are identified.

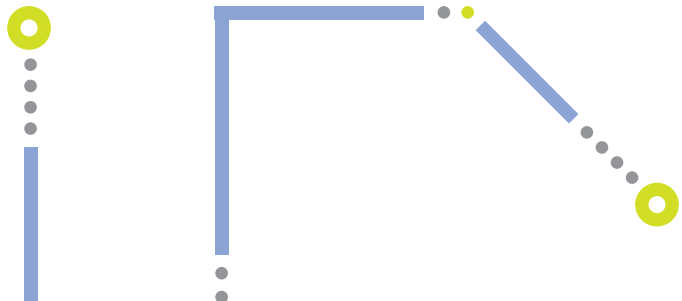
10.8 Wayfinding Information

While passengers on board public transport follow a pre-determined route, the trip to or from public transport stops and stations does not follow a set route. This applies equally to other walking trips, and legibility of urban areas is critical in promoting the shift to sustainable transport.

The built environment itself can be made legible through physical means, but additional measures may be required to support independent navigation. Wayfinding information includes infrastructure such as area maps and directional signage, but also incorporates other technical means such as audio assistance and journey planning apps.

Measure WALK6 - Wayfinding

The NTA, with the cooperation of the local authorities, will support the delivery of new, and the expansion and improvement of existing, wayfinding systems particularly in Dublin City Centre, Metropolitan centres and towns and villages across the GDA and their integration into journey planning apps.



10.9 Traffic-Free Streets and Pedestrianisation

When considering the change of use of a street from one where all modes have access, to one where access is more limited, consideration needs to be given to the new function which is being proposed for the street. There are a number of levels of modal restrictions that can be applied to a street, as follows:

- Removal of Private Car Traffic – the street functions as a public transport, walking and cycling route;
- Removal of all motorised traffic – the street functions as a walking and cycling route; and

- Removal of all modes except pedestrians – a fully pedestrianised street.

These options should be considered in the order above. In all cases, arrangements for goods delivery will require to be considered.

Change of use of a street which excludes all modes except pedestrians should only occur where it can be demonstrated that a safe, convenient and attractive alternative route for cyclists can be provided. Similar attention should be paid to the provision of alternative public transport routeings if applicable.

At all times the permitted uses of the street should be clearly understood by all users, and physical measures may be required to enforce the modal restrictions in place.

Trials and pilot pedestrianisation schemes could form part of the approach to implement such schemes.

Measure WALK7 - Pedestrianisation

The NTA will support local authorities in the provision of pedestrianised streets in town centres where there are benefits to transport and /or the local environment and/or the local economy.

10.10 Persons with Disabilities

The needs of persons with disabilities, including wheelchair users and those who are visually impaired, or those with reduced mobility, including those using buggies and older people are key requirements in designing our pedestrian environments. In addition, there are many people with reduced mobility generally. Many aspects affect them such as width, gradient and the presence or absence of dished kerbs, in addition to those issues which affect all users such as surface quality, the presence of signalised crossings and adequacy of crossing times.

Above all else, the presence of street clutter is an issue which affects walkers with visual impairments and persons with disabilities most seriously relative to other users. Excessive street clutter or the presence of parked vehicles on footpaths can prevent movement by wheelchairs and buggies and will present a particular hazard for visually impaired pedestrians.

Measure WALK8 – Persons with Disabilities

Local authorities in the GDA and the NTA will take full account of people with disabilities and pedestrians with mobility impairments when delivering transport schemes which affect the pedestrian environment; and will implement improvements to existing facilities where appropriate and encourage the enforcement of the Road Traffic Laws in this regard.