

Going down to the shops

Access and Accessibility In Historic Centres



St. John's Street, Bury St Edmunds

2.1 INTRODUCTION

2.1.1 Many of England's historic town centres assumed their current form in the medieval period when they were built around the movement scale of the pedestrian and the horse, to serve relatively small catchments. By the last century, these medieval networks were already swamped. Industrialisation and the massive infusion of rural populations (the Victorian populations of some historic town and city centres were 10 times what they are today), the explosion in horse drawn transport and the railways led contemporary commentators to alarmist predictions - not least that cities would disappear under the waste products of the main means of propulsion!

2.1.2 Although 'horse manure inundation' was ultimately proved to be a groundless fear, the advent of the internal combustion engine brought new problems in the 20th century. The use of the motor vehicle has grown enormously during the century with over eight times as many vehicles currently licensed as there were in 1950. The latest projections suggest a further fifty percent by 2025. Now, nearly twenty percent of all journeys undertaken are shopping trips, of which seventy percent are by car - a significant proportion of these will be to a town centre. Add to this large, often seasonal, volumes of people attracted to historic towns as tourists arriving by car or coach, then consider other competing users of the access infrastructure -

delivery firms, operational business users, commuters - and the seriousness of the problem is clear.

2.1.3 This Guidance is not attempting to resolve the traffic problems of historic towns. Rather, it considers the issue of access to, and accessibility within, historic shopping centres and provides some general, good practice indicators. As with other advice within the Guidance, there is no 'standard solution'. Towns vary greatly in terms of their functions and therefore their access needs (e.g., tourism role, levels of commuters, competing centres), so Local Authorities must select measures which are best suited to their own particular requirements.

2.2 THE GOVERNMENT'S VIEW

2.2.1 The Government recognises the importance of traffic management in towns to ease congestion, help the local environment and to reduce noise and air pollution. This Common Inheritance sets out that a balanced traffic management policy is needed, to take pressure off unsuitable routes and allow improvements to traffic flow on the strategic road network, improved public transport and greater priority for buses.

2.2.2. The latest version of PPG13 has been much acclaimed as changing the direction of traffic policy. It encourages local authorities to integrate their land-use and transport policies to attempt to reduce the growth in motorised journeys, encourage alternative means of travel which have less environmental impact and reduce the reliance on the private car.

2.2.3 PPG6 (Revised), "Town Centres and Retail Development" also refers to accessibility and transport, in particular stressing that new retail development should be located where it is accessible by a choice of means of transport. This emphasises the need to locate retail development in or next to town centres.



2.3 WHO NEEDS ACCESS?

2.3.1 The retailer's prosperity, and in consequence that of the whole centre, will depend upon good access to the store for customers, deliveries and employees. However, the retailer (with some exceptions) will perceive that these issues are not his/her problem. The retailer's role is to make the store work but it is someone else's responsibility - usually the local authority, but also the delivery company, the employee and the shopper - to ensure that the goods and staff turn up at the right time and that the flow of customers is facilitated. Retailers will often blame insufficient parking space or congestion for declines in trade, but will fail to make the connection that their staff may be occupying scarce parking spaces that could be used by customers or that their articulated delivery lorries are contributing to the congestion. Retailers must be engaged in the process of helping to secure efficient access and must see the wider implications of their own operational decisions.

2.3.2 Customers are the next most significant group and a failure to understand and respond to their needs may result in them choosing to shop elsewhere. A keypoint, however, is that 'the customer' is not a uniform entity and his/her needs will vary depending upon factors such as personal mobility, mode of access and specific trip functions (e.g. regular shop, comparison shop, leisure/tourism trip). The following list sets out the needs of various user groups, which are ideals and it may not always be possible to accommodate them:-

Pedestrians (general)

- convenient, intelligible, safe route to shops minimising conflict with other modes.
- safe, comfortable shopping environment
- facilities organised and located so that they are convenient and easy to understand

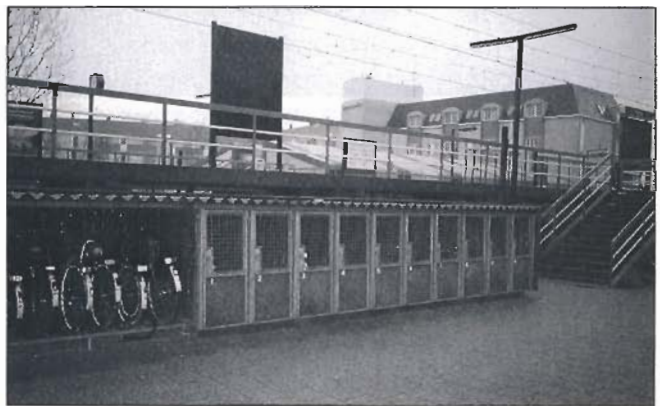
Pedestrians (mobility impaired) *

- additionally, most direct and easily negotiable route providing opportunities to rest; no conflict with other modes; user friendly surfaces; unimpaired access to shops and other facilities; opportunities to rest; essential facilities (e.g.

toilets) at ground level; opportunities to leave purchases (e.g. left luggage) or young children (crèche).

Cyclists

- convenient, intelligible, safe route to shops preferably separate from vehicular modes.
- secure and safe cycle parking as close as possible to shops and opportunities to leave equipment (helmet) and purchases.



Secure cycle parking in the Netherlands

Public Transport Users (bus including Park and Ride Bus)

- very easy access to and information about frequent, reliable, quick and comfortable services providing capacity for luggage, push chairs, etc.
- drop off/pick up points very close to shops providing shelter, comfort and safety.

Public Transport Users (train)

- additionally, good information at stations, convenient linkages to shops from remote stations (bus stops, taxis), facilities on trains for luggage, cycles, pushchairs, wheelchairs.

Public Transport Users (taxi)

- taxi ranks close to shops, direct access (circuitous routes mean higher fares), and taxis able to carry luggage, pushchairs/wheelchairs, convenient 'left luggage' facilities.

Coach Users (visitors/tourists)

- need to be deposited in or adjacent to shopping/historic core; shopping area needs to be instantly intelligible (tourist may only be there for 1-2 hours); pick up point needs to be safe, comfortable and conveniently located.



Motorists (general)

- convenient, intelligible, direct, safe and uncongested access to centre, minimising conflict
- safe and secure parking as close as possible to shops - with a preference for free on-street or surface provision
- immediate access to collect bulky purchases from shops

Motorists (mobility impaired) *

- additionally, immediate access to all shops; shopmobility facilities; crèche
- minimisation of conflict with pedestrians

** NOTE: the term 'mobility impaired' is used to cover people with a temporary or permanent physical or mental disability and people assisting them; people responsible for young children, particularly in prams and pushchairs.*

Service Operators

- need to be able to deliver the goods when required and with a minimum amount of inconvenience

2.3.3 It is apparent that many of these needs are mutually exclusive and that while the 'motorist' shopper will demand direct and unrestricted access to the shops he/she will also expect a safe and intimidation free environment as the 'pedestrian' shopper moments later.

2.3.4 The needs of servicing organisations are often similar to those of the car borne shopper. They will need the most direct access possible for reasons of convenience, but also security (e.g. collecting takings, delivering high value items). 'Just in time' servicing and the economies of remote warehousing will also often dictate a mode of servicing which requires very large vehicles and deliveries at scheduled times. This will also mean that servicing organisations will wish to avoid peaks which may result in delays and the disruption of schedules. Of particular concern to retailers is the delivery of perishable goods, especially food. Every time they are handled there is a risk of damage and a subsequent reduction in profit margins. Hence the reluctance to participate in bulk-break initiatives which seek to reduce the size of delivery vehicles entering town centres. It is also important to realise

that servicing does not mean just delivering goods, but also covers cleaning contractors, maintenance personnel, security companies and a broad range of operational business users from manufacturing representatives to the regional sales director.



Time controlled servicing in Norwich

2.3.5 Finally, employees will share many of the access needs of customers, particularly in terms of access to shops, and many will become customers during their lunch breaks and some after work (e.g. part-timers or late night openings). The relatively low wage levels in the retail sector will mean that many shop workers will depend upon non-car based modes. Others, however, may have to use cars if they finish work when public transport services are less frequent (late night or Sunday shopping).

2.4 BALANCING ACCESS REQUIREMENTS

2.4.1 Traffic planners, in the 1960s and '70s often saw the solution to resolving competing access needs as segregation. High capacity ring roads were seen as a means of moving cars efficiently round historic cores and into multi-storey car parks. The cores were often made pedestrian only with servicing from the rear of shops or by trolleys from service bays.

2.4.2 The high capacity roads often segregated the immediate catchment from their shopping centres, access roads carved through ancient frontages to



meet brutal multi-storey car parks which soon filled up with commuters. Service areas appeared as alien insertions into the historic fabric and were often in use for no more than an hour or two each day.

2.4.3 More recently a much more flexible approach has been adopted which attempts to respond to different needs and to achieve the most effective use of former infrastructure that has been developed, but misapplied. Thus major shopping streets are turned over exclusively to pedestrian use during main shopping hours, but just before and after this period they become on-street servicing areas and in the evenings, they provide parking opportunities for the evening economy, thereby affording the opportunity for additional safety, and improving the vitality. In other streets, where traffic removal is not possible, high profile paving or pavement widening associated with traffic calming have created a 'shared space' greatly reducing accidents and increasing pedestrian security while maintaining vehicle access. Even multi-storey car parks have been recycled by the introduction of better finishes, lighting, lifts and CCTV, by a revision in charging regimes to deter commuter use and by the use of computer linked signing and space availability systems.

2.4.4 The Forum's document "Traffic in Historic Town Centres" published in 1994 recommends the introduction of Historic Core Zones in town centres encompassing both central conservation areas and traffic control zones. Within these zones special provision may be made for controlling traffic speeds, parking, servicing and access. Consideration can also be given to reducing the number and design of traffic signs and physical traffic calming measures to ensure that priority is given to enhancing the historic environment. As a consequence to this idea, the EHTF have been asked by the Department of Transport (DoT) to co-ordinate a number of experimental Historic Core Zone projects from its membership. The chosen schemes, including Bury, Halifax, Lincoln and Shrewsbury, are being monitored by the DoT, Department of National Heritage, Department of Environment, English Heritage and the Civic Trust.

2.4.5 A further complication to the resolution of accessibility issues resulted from the 1974 re-organisation of Local Government, whereby County Councils became Highway Authorities while the districts assumed local planning functions. Although Agency arrangements, where the district acts as highway authority, have sometimes aided the process, it is clear that the fragmentation of local planning and local transport has hampered rather than eased the introduction of innovative transport solutions. Districts have often taken forward new schemes frequently in the face of County opposition. In the wake of the most recent Local Government Review it may be appropriate now for the Government to reconsider the local transport function to enable a more co-ordinated approach to the access problem in historic towns, particularly since few historic towns and cities have attained Unitary status.



Entrance to underground servicing and car parking at Castle Mall in Norwich

2.4.6 The key to effective access to shopping is to maximise the satisfaction of as many needs as possible while minimising the conflicts and to do so in ways which make more efficient use of the resources available. The essential point is that if shoppers find historic centres more difficult to get to and less convenient to get around than competing centres then they will exercise their preference to shop elsewhere. Similarly, retailers will withdraw from centres which lose custom and which present operational difficulties.



2.4.7 As a footnote, it is necessary to consider other forces at work which may undermine efforts to make historic centres more accessible and therefore more attractive. One of the primary forces is parking, which can be a major attribute to determining the shoppers' destination. The provision of high quality parking and access infrastructure in centres will invariably mean that parking will not be provided free at surface level and that access to shops will be constrained to a degree. However good the in-centre standard, it will not be able to compete directly with free, surface parking in out-of-centre schemes. If town centres are to compete on a 'level playing field' then local authorities may have to consider restraining out of centre parking in the future or imposing commuted payments and the Government may need to consider an environmental surcharge which is passed on to improving established centres.

2.4.8 In the Mixed Uses Survey undertaken by the Forum, the availability of car parking was mentioned as the fifth most important attraction of historic towns. At the same time, parking facilities were stated as the third most unattractive aspect of a town centre. The location of shoppers' parking is an issue which is of importance to many users of town centres. The revised PPG6 suggests that most shoppers are unlikely to wish to walk more than 200 to 300 metres carrying shopping. This may be too prescriptive and the distance is likely to be dependent upon the environment through which shoppers are expected to walk. For example, walking through a secondary shopping street could be perceived as a shorter walking distance than an uninteresting residential street of the same length. Surface level car parks can create a land use over a large area which is uncharacteristic to the historic surroundings. In such circumstances it may be appropriate for historic towns to consider placing parking underground, although there may be problems because of the frequency with which archaeological remains occur in historic towns and the sheer economic and environmental costs.

2.4.9 In some instances new 'hi-tech' car parks are being constructed in which computer technology takes over to park the car in a multi-storey structure which accommodates 50% more cars than traditional decked parking. Furthermore, because the public are not allowed access to the parking areas, security is substantially increased. Because of the efficient use of space, such a solution could be of significant benefit in historic towns in particular. However, as in the case of traditional multi-storey car parks, design is an issue which needs addressing, as well as the highway implications of traffic arriving at the car park. Furthermore, as with underground, construction costs are high, and Government funds will not be available through Traffic Policy Programmes for new car parking. It is also questionable whether, due to a wide range of increasing costs, there will be a high demand for car parking.

2.4.10 The management of off-street parking is an issue which has received considerable government attention. Although the Secretary of State has suggested that the private sector is best placed to manage such car parks, such action could effectively remove the strategic management from local authorities and the control of pricing. There are occasions in which parking will be created as part of a private sector town centre foodstore development. The local planning authority needs to be aware of the role which that parking will play, in particular whether multi-purpose shopping trips will be supported from this store. Developers may argue that more than the standard parking requirements might be required to satisfy this demand, but there is also a case for limiting parking on sustainability grounds.

2.4.11 Park and ride must also be given serious consideration as a means to relieving traffic problems in historic towns. Park and ride is often advocated as a solution to traffic congestion in historic towns. However, there may be problems of accommodating it, for example bus lanes fitting within historic street patterns. This has been addressed separately in the EHTF study on Park and Ride.



GUIDANCE

1 Pedestrians:

- establish safe crossing links into town centres (avoid underpasses). Include textured surfaces and other facilities for people with disabilities
- establish a route network of pedestrian 'finger' signs.
- through time control, create pedestrian only access in streets with greatest pedestrian flows, narrow streets unsuitable for daytime traffic, spaces where ancillary activities may take place (markets, street entertainers).
- through careful paving, design and landscaping create pedestrian priority shopping streets where vehicles remain and ensure that speeds are kept low

(Note: while UK legislation enables 20 mph zones, in France speeds can be controlled to 10 mph)

- in paved areas ensure that sufficient flat surface is provided for wheelchair/pushchair users
- provide sufficient seats, ground level toilets, information/interpretation/orientation boards to a co-ordinated design
- assess opportunities for luggage deposit facilities (with public transport termini, tourist information centres, libraries, commercial organisations)

2 Cyclists:

- establish 'safe routes' network
- establish safe crossing links to centre
- provide and promote safe and secure cycle parking close to shops (preferably supervised) with locker facilities
- produce route and parking information for cyclists
- prevent cycling in densely used pedestrian streets during 'pedestrian only' phases

3 Public Transport Users:

- establish bus lanes and implement bus priorities at traffic lights in co-operation with public transport companies and the Highway Authority (HA) on routes into centre
- produce information on services in the form of leaflets and display boards and promote the

development of 'real time' journey information in association with public transport companies and the HA.

- provide, or work with shelter companies to secure the provision of well designed modern bus stops/shelters in close proximity to the main shopping area.
- work with the public transport companies and HA to avoid unacceptably high numbers of buses in sensitive areas and to achieve the introduction of environmentally sensitive buses in core areas providing sufficient luggage space and other facilities for all users.
- ensure that bus stations are attractive, comfortable, safe and include a range of passenger facilities.
- develop cross ticketing regimes between different services (eg park and ride to ordinary services, train to centre link bus)
- develop, or co-operate in the development of, park and ride services available to shoppers and visitors (Note: in Salzburg, tourist coaches are stopped at the outskirts and visitors are transferred onto Park and Ride coaches).
- allow bus only penetration of pedestrian streets where volumes and narrowness permit.
- promote links from rail stations to the shopping core by bus and effective timetable co-ordination.
- lobby railway companies to consider the needs of shoppers more pro-actively by providing shopper information and facilities on trains for luggage, wheelchairs, pushchairs, cycles etc.
- provide taxi ranks close to shopping areas
- allow distinguishable taxis to use bus lanes.



9 m.p.h. traffic calming area in Auxerre, France



- provide coach drop off/pick up points where this does not create problems or consider park and ride/shuttle as an alternative.
- provide orientation information at coach drop off point.

4 Motorists:

- revise off-street public parking tariffs to discourage commuters and maximise spaces available for shoppers/visitors.
- consider allowing additional on-street parking for shoppers on Sundays and for extended hours trading.
- liaise with companies controlling private off-street parking, particularly retailers, to make it available for shoppers/visitors.
- liaise with retailers so that they urge their staff to use non car based means of commuting to free up space for shoppers.
- consider charging for on-street parking to achieve a more efficient use of space and to generate income for other central area traffic improvements. (Note: traders in Bath since saw on-street charging as beneficial to trade.)
- introduce clear car park direction signing from approach roads and within the centre.
- consider the introduction of a computer linked system to indicate car park spaces availability.
- introduce a co-ordinated system of car park information including remote information at tourist information points linked to announcements on local radio stations.
- adopt charging systems which reduce the users need to queue (e.g. pay on foot).
- ensure that car parks are well lit and maintained and are supervised by CCTV.
- provide orientation information at car parks closest to shops.
- where space is limited, ensure that spaces are allocated to those with greatest need (e.g., people with disabilities, lone parents with children, women).
- enforce against illegal 'fly parking' which provides a low quality service detracting from the centres quality and undermining quality parking provision.
- introduce residents parking permits to avoid

- parking adversely affecting residential amenity.
- promote shop mobility schemes adjacent to car parking
- provide crèches close to car parking.
- provide on-street spaces just within pedestrian areas for the use of disability badge holders.
- allow disability badge holders into pedestrian areas during servicing times.
- allow bulky goods pick-ups by general motorists in pedestrian areas during servicing times.
- co-operate with retailers to encourage deliveries to home or bulk collection from remote warehouses (the latter is practised by the John Lewis Partnership).
- assess more efficient systems of parking cars (e.g. automated stacking)

5 Service Operators

- seek to constrain servicing to outside peak shopping hours in pedestrian areas (e.g. before 10.00 am. and after 4.00 pm).
- provide clear signing from beyond the centre to assist deliveries.
- seek to contain servicing to specific routes to avoid damage and congestion in historic streets (e.g. lorry bans/weights restrictions).
- co-operate with retailers to encourage bulk break and reduction in the size of vehicles using historic centres.



Hydraulic Bollard which restricts access for servicing. The Netherlands

6 Retailers

- seek to ensure that shops are accessible to all by advice, grants, and planning controls.
- encourage retailing to co-operate in the provision of shopmobility schemes



CASE STUDY : BURY ST EDMUNDS

1 The importance of secondary shopping streets is highlighted in section 10 of the Guidance. Access and accessibility are key issues in the success of secondary shopping streets. In Bury St Edmunds, the local authority has placed an emphasis on improving the quality of the secondary shopping streets where most of the town's independent retailers are located.

2 In St John's Street, for example, St Edmundsbury Borough Council has invested significant sums of money to improve the environment for the pedestrian without excluding the motorist. As in many historic towns, rear servicing was not an option and the traders did not want the road closed to traffic during the main shopping periods. The final solution comprised of extensive environmental improvements which have:

- reduced the dominance of the motor vehicle
- significantly increased the width of footways
- reduced the amount of on-street parking and provided loading bays
- reduced the dominance of highways furniture, such as illuminated signs and yellow lines.

3 High quality materials have been used in the project, which has resulted in a vastly improved environment. A survey of shoppers indicated that 75% felt the scheme has been successful. The success of the works in St John's Street is providing a basis for other projects in the town which are being implemented as part of the EHTF Historic Core Zone initiative.



St. John's Street, Bury St Edmunds (before) - "after" photo on front page

Further reading:

1. *Bus Based Park & Ride: A good practice guide.* EHTF June 1993
2. *Traffic Measures in Historic Towns: An introduction to good practice.* EHTF/Civic Trust, July 1993
3. *Traffic in Historic town Centres:* EHTF, June 1994
4. *Traffic in Townscape: Ideas from Europe:* EHTF/Civic Trust, November 1994
5. *Managing Transport Demand: "How to do it" Summary of Conference Proceedings.* EHTF 1995
6. *Tomorrow's World: An Urban Environment Initiative.* Institution of Civil Engineers. 1993
7. *Lorries in the Community:* Civic Trust: County Surveyors Society: Department of Transport 1990
8. *Strategy to Guide Improvement to Historic Streets:* Newark and Sherwood District Council, 1993
9. *Park & Ride Briefing Document:* York City Council, 1993
10. *Pedestrianisation and Traffic Management, NR3, 4 & 5:* Norwich City Council
11. *Traffic Congestion and the Survival of an Historic City:* Day, C. Exeter: The Planner 78, 21:52-54.

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