

# Is walking a neglected mode of transport?

**Suzanne Audrey argues that walking gets a poor deal from transport planners and needs a campaign to address this neglect**



**T**he Oxford English dictionary defines transport as a system or means of conveying people or goods from place to place. Popular images of transport feature aeroplanes, trains, ships, lorries, buses or cars. Occasionally bicycles may feature but rarely, if ever, walking. It is true that traffic congestion, poor air quality, and public health messages about the dangers of sedentary behaviour have stimulated interest in active travel. But the predilection for vehicles is also evident in the world of active travel where 'walking and cycling' is frequently illustrated with a picture of a cyclist.

From a public health perspective, walking has been described as the nearest thing to perfect exercise. It is a low cost, year round, habit forming activity. Walking regularly at a moderate pace can reduce the risk of heart disease, stroke, type 2 diabetes, colon and breast cancer, and Alzheimer's disease. It helps maintain healthy weight, improves cholesterol levels, reduces blood pressure, builds healthy muscles and bones, improves balance and reduces the risk of falls.

Given the public health arguments in favour of walking, does it really matter if walking is considered transport? As far as infrastructure and investment are concerned, it does. In November 2014 the then coalition government announced a £214m investment in cycling 'to help make it easier and safer to get on your bike in the UK' bringing the total invested in cycling

to £588m. Some four months later, in its report, Investing in Cycling and Walking: the Economic Case for Action, the Department for Transport stated it had 'not funded significant programmes exclusively aimed at encouraging walking' and acknowledged 'this results in a lack of available case study

2008 and we're reviewing it at the moment because obviously it is now out of date. To be honest the walking initiatives will probably just remain as they are. We'll just role them forward to the next year because there is ... very little we can do to really actively promote it."



*Bad Walking route on important link between Old Market and Temple Meads*

or programme wide evidence held centrally by the Department'.

Research in Bristol suggests this lack of clarity impacts on workplace travel plans.<sup>1</sup> One manager suggested: "I think perhaps some people don't even think about the walking side ... We don't have that many schemes for walkers like we do for cyclists and motor cyclists and public transport users." And a travel planner revealed: "We've had the travel plan since

Jayne Mills, Bristol City Council, examined the 2011 Census data and found significantly more people walk to work than cycle in Bristol. However, there were differences in the profiles of those who walked and cycled which may help to explain the higher profile of cycling in the city. The 'typical' cyclist was a white male, aged 25-39, with a degree, working full time in a professional occupation. It proved much more difficult to describe a 'typical' walker in terms of qualification, occupation or ethnicity, although walkers were more likely to be females under 30.

There is, in fact, a Walking Strategy for Bristol 2011-21 which argues: 'Walking is a key form of transport, particularly for short trips. Walking is the 'glue' that binds the transport system'. The vision states: 'Walking will be the first choice for local journeys and, together with public transport, a part of longer ones. People will be regularly walking along high quality, safe routes to work, school, the shops, for leisure and recreation.' Unfortunately it is not clear who is taking this strategy forward, and a campaign may be required to turn the vision into reality. If you are interested in contributing to such a campaign, please contact: [suzanne.audrey@bristol.ac.uk](mailto:suzanne.audrey@bristol.ac.uk) or [alan@morrisres.fastmail.fm](mailto:alan@morrisres.fastmail.fm)

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