

Bristol Walking Alliance:

Statement to Bristol City Council Growth & Regeneration Scrutiny Commission 25th January 2023

Bristol Walking Alliance (BWA) would like to take the opportunity of the committee's agenda item "Active Travel/Walking and Cycling Strategy" to give BWA's assessment of provision for walking in Bristol, and Bristol City Council's plans. Our comprehensive assessment is in our 50 Ways progress report 2022. In this paper to Scrutiny, we highlight some items from the full list.

Pedestrians - everywhere but nowhere

Most people walk, but almost all the transport talk tends to be about vehicles. We forget the sheer numbers of pedestrians on our streets, and the provision we should be making for them. Recent research by Bristol City Council and the University of the West of England has shown that on a single day over 6000 people walk across Gaoil Ferry Bridge, 22000 cross Bristol Bridge, 15000 cross Prince Street Bridge, 29000 cross the Centre, 18000 walk along Queens Road at the Triangle. We rarely count numbers of pedestrians to help plan transport provision: we should do more of it.

Providing for walking: what's good

We welcome the following recent developments:

- restriction of motor traffic on Baldwin Street/Bristol Bridge
- pedestrianisation schemes at Old City, King Street, Cotham Hill, Princess Victoria Street
- public realm scheme at Arnside in Southmead
- the pilot Liveable Neighbourhood scheme in St George
- the School Streets schemes
- continuous footways across side roads are accepted as good practice by Bristol City Council, and they are being implemented in strategic corridor schemes
- there is a steady flow of schemes to improve pedestrian crossing points
- the Council's new moving transport enforcement powers
- development of Mobility Hubs (WECA)

Providing for walking: what could be better

- the development of Liveable Neighbourhoods could be quicker. We acknowledge the careful community engagement in the St George pilot, but the pace is much slower than in other local authorities. The second pilot scheme promised by 2024 has yet to be announced.
- we welcome the regular announcement of new schemes, but the roll-out of School Streets is slow compared with other local authorities. Now that several schemes have been delivered, we suspect that the process could be streamlined to quicken the pace. The Council's new moving transport enforcement powers could be used in future schemes
- we supported the bus gate proposed on Park Street in the A37/A4018 corridor scheme as it would improve the environment for pedestrians. Disappointingly, it seems that this will not proceed due to a mixed response from traders.
- highways maintenance. Within a stretched budget, the team is not able to respond to all reported issues: it prioritises safety issues. Dropped kerbs are important for wheelchairs and buggies, but there is no budget for responding to reports of missing dropped kerbs, nor a proactive programme for adding them.

Providing for walking: what's bad

- we recently considered our 10 top Bristol sites requiring improvement. We list them overleaf.
- pavement parking. We despair at the creeping encroachment of vehicles on to pedestrian space. Long overdue central government action on improving local authority powers will help, but implementation will still require scarce council resources. (Sheffield City Council has recently banned pavement parking, but only for a small city centre area.)

- e-scooter parking. We argue for e-scooters to be parked in the road, not on the pavement.
- traffic signal crossings. The Council's traffic signals team has done some good work on optimising signal timing to benefit pedestrians, but the work has stalled for lack of staff and the overall framework continues to prioritise motor traffic flow.
- public toilets. Provision has been cut across the country, not just in Bristol, and is a symptom of government underfunding of local authorities. This particularly affects older people, small children and their parents, disabled people, people with incontinence problems, and women. The community toilet scheme is not working well, and we think the Council should allocate more officer time to managing and developing the scheme. The government's Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill may reinforce the responsibility that Councils have.

Planning/organising for better provision for walking

- a transport decarbonisation plan: we are impatient for imminent government guidance to local authorities, and WECA's consequent development of local policy and the resulting JLTP5, which should drive the change in transport priorities that is needed.
- we are concerned by the Council's latest proposed budget cuts, and restructuring of the Transport function. We fear that less provision for pedestrians may be an outcome.
- we are concerned about WECA's capacity to deliver. WECA has seen churn at senior officer level, a breakdown in relationships between its constituent leaders, and a sudden huge increase in workload from the City Region Sustainable Transport Settlement (CRSTS) schemes. On top of this upheaval, we suspect WECA may not be in a position to accept a move of staff from the Council
- WECA's self-assessment of Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP) capability (cycling and walking combined) is:

Criterion	Level (scale 0-4)	Interpretation of level
Local leadership and support	2	'some' (next level up is 'strong')
LCWIP development	3	'comprehensive plans'
Schemes delivered	1	'isolated interventions'

Source: completed Active Travel England questionnaire, obtained by Freedom of Information request

There is scope for improvement. We await sight of Active Travel Fund 4 3-year funding bids, and the Active Travel England funding awards in the light of the self-assessment.

- It would be good to have a Council plan for walking (specifically 'walking', not 'active travel' or 'cycling and walking') that brings together in one place what the Council aims to do support walking. We do not want a strategy with lots of warm words that sits on the shelf: we would like a plan that responds to our 50 Ways to Better Walking list of possible improvements, updated once a year.

Bristol Walking Alliance
January 2023

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BWA's top 10 Bristol sites for improvement

These are all places where there are high volumes of people on foot. It is not a complete list: there are other places in neighbourhoods across Bristol that need improving. The list will change as improvements are made and other sites come into prominence. BWA will continue to campaign for improvements.

Site for improvement	The pedestrian experience and what we know about plans for improvement
Unimproved	
1) Queens Road at the Triangle, north side	High pedestrian traffic with insufficient pavement width. In scope of A37/A4018 corridor scheme, but no improvement proposed.
2) Bath Road bridge (and as far as Three Lamps junction)	High pedestrian and cycle traffic on shared pavement with inadequate width, now also shared with e-scooter users.
3) Gaol Ferry Bridge	High pedestrian and cycle traffic with inadequate width. Needs a new separate bridge.
4) junction of Blackswarth Road/ Chalks Road/Church Road in St George	High pedestrian traffic crossing Church Road, with long waits at traffic lights.
5) M32 Junction 3 and Lawrence Hill underpasses	These underpasses flood after heavy rain. Late news: remedial work at Lawrence Hill is set to start at end January.
Badly improved	
6) the Centre, southern end by Cascade Steps and Anchor Road (and along to Baldwin Street)	High pedestrian traffic sharing space uneasily with cycle traffic.
7) Temple Meads, crossing Bath Road at the bottom of the Station Approach ramp	Two-stage crossing forcing pedestrians to wait between streams of motor traffic. (The nearby single-pass crossing at Brunel Way is much better, and is convenient for the north station entrance.)
8) Temple Meads, crossing Bath Road between Cattle Market Road and Clarence Road	Two or more crossing stages depending on your route, across streams of motor traffic. (There are plans for a new south station entrance, which is likely to increase the use of this crossing.)
Due to be improved	
9) Baldwin Street to Castle Park	Long pedestrian wait times at lights. Junction to be improved in the first half of 2023, but not pedestrianised. There is less motor traffic since the bus gate was introduced.
10) East Street, Bedminster	Widely ignored ban on private motor traffic. The East Street Vision aims to address this but the implementation date is unknown.