

A more liveable London

Providing a safer street environment must be a priority says Esha Banwait

With London's rapidly growing and densifying urban environment, the creation of safer streets is fast becoming a necessity. Under the existing London Plan, more than 50,000 planning approvals are granted per annum and we should ensure that the capital's growth enables a more sustainable and healthier city. There is a particular need to provide a safe and inviting environment for pedestrians and cyclists around main roads, major junctions and key transport hubs. The London Assembly's report, 'Hostile Streets – Walking and Cycling at Outer London Junctions', identifies current problems affecting the capital's infrastructure and puts forward solutions.

The report, published in December 2017, highlights how some roads in outer London fail to offer a basic level of service. Examples cited include crossings inaccessible to wheelchairs and buggy users as well as incomplete cycle lanes that throw people out into fast-moving traffic. This lack of safe street facilities restricts permeability and the usability of the street environment for all members of the public.

Whilst such problems have the potential to affect all parts of the population, TfL has found that such issues most affect people residing along main roads. As a result, these areas should be identified and targeted for works to improve road safety. Interestingly, the lack of a readily usable and inviting street environment not only affects the ability to get from point A to point B, but also impacts on health. TfL has identified health inequalities faced by people residing in such areas to include pollution, physical inactivity and obesity, curtailed independent mobility for children and young people, risk of road traffic collisions, community severance and social isolation.

Perhaps the most obvious contributor to a dangerous street environment, especially for pedestrians and cyclists, is fast-moving traffic. As a consequence, TfL has recommended lower speed limits, but speeding is far from being the only problem – incomplete cycle superhighways, busy junctions without pedestrian phases in sig-

nal lights, and interrupted pedestrian crossings can also present significant hazards.

Further threats to safety also come from sources not mentioned in the report, such as poor storm-water drainage systems or street lighting. Such infrastructure is vital in guaranteeing people's welfare during periods of bad weather, which can cause junctions to experience heavy water build-up as well as reducing visibility for drivers, cyclists and pedestrians.

Unsafe road traffic systems can be found throughout the capital, but prominent examples include Gallows Corner in Havering and Croydon Fiveways. The current and emerging London Plan seeks to improve the current situation by fostering requirements to create an inclusive environment but there are concerns about TfL's compliance with the Equalities Duty, which emphasises that London's streets must be accessible by all – including those who are disabled or visually impaired. For this to be achieved, there needs to be profound change.

At present, there is still a culture of allowing schemes that do not fit with the Mayor's safe streets vision to go ahead. For instance, there are several primary schools straddled by the A4 and M4 flyover near Brentford which face extremely hectic pedestrian crossing environments. The large network of major roads and junctions, full of fast-moving traffic, contributes to a hostile environment for children.

To prevent further hostile environments from being created as part of London's continued growth, a change in attitude is required. The methodology and recommendations for improving street health set out in the report is headed in the right direction. Where appropriate, however, it could go further to achieve healthy street objectives by embedding these priorities early on in the planning process.

In addition to ensuring that an inclusive street environment is catered for, Local Planning Authorities and TfL should seek to ensure that walking and cycling needs are met to boost both the number of cycling trips made and people's



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health. For example, in the case of major strategic development schemes, legal agreements could be used as mechanisms to complete cycle superhighway routes as well as enhance pedestrian crossings, eliminate staggered crossings and improve junctions overall where necessary.

The implementation of changes to traffic rules, appropriate and durable road markings, improved signage and street lighting, and the incorporation of tactile surfaces and cat's eyes to our transport infrastructure would also contribute to safe, usable and inviting environments for pedestrians and cyclists.

The mobility of Londoners is one of the capital's great strengths. In order to further improve London, providing a safer street environment must be a priority. This, along with the changing culture at TfL, now prioritising people over cars, is necessary to secure a more liveable future environment for London. ■

