

GUIDE
DOGS



Blocked in:

the impact of pavement parking

February 2020

Introduction

Pavement parking puts pedestrians in danger, including disabled people, older people, and parents with children.

People with sight loss are particularly at risk when forced into the road with traffic which they cannot see.

Streets with pavement parked vehicles are dangerous and stressful to navigate. As well as causing an obstruction, vehicles parked on pavements damage the surface, creating trip hazards for pedestrians.¹

In 2013, a Guide Dogs survey identified pavement parking as a major safety concern for blind and partially sighted people: nine out of ten said they had problems with pavement parked cars. We know that pavement parking doesn't just affect people with sight loss. That's why in Spring 2019 we surveyed over 1800 pedestrians, including over 500 with vision impairment, on their experiences. Our survey revealed for the first time the full extent of the impact of pavement parking:

Our survey revealed:

- Pavement parking affects a wide range of pedestrians, including people with disabilities such as sight or hearing loss, wheelchair users, and parents with children
- **Four out of five** blind or partially sighted people said that pavement parking makes it difficult to walk on the pavement at least once a week
- **Virtually all people (>95%)** with sight loss have been forced to walk in the road by pavement parked vehicles, and half have changed their preferred route
- **One in five** people with sight loss has been injured as a result of a vehicle parked on the pavement
- **Almost a third** of people with sight loss said that pavement parking made them less willing to go out on their own and **just under a quarter** said that it made them feel more lonely or isolated
- **16%** said it made it pursuing work, study or training more difficult
- **Just 5%** of people with vision impairment said pavement parking rarely or never made walking on the pavement difficult



¹ Parking and Traffic Regulations Outside London (PATROL) evidence to Transport Select Committee inquiry on pavement parking, 2019. [\[Back\]](#)

² Guide Dogs, 2013 Streets Ahead survey. [\[Back\]](#)

Despite the impact on pedestrians, pavement parking is common, normalised behaviour for drivers. A 2018 YouGov poll for Guide Dogs showed that **65%** of drivers admitted to parking on the pavement.³

In London, pavement parking has been restricted to designated areas since 1974, but in the rest of the country, parking on the pavement is permitted in most cases. Local authorities struggle to tackle unsafe pavement parking using their existing powers to make Traffic Regulation Orders (TROs).⁴ The survey underlined the effect the variation in law has on unsafe pavement parking. In London, where pavement parking is limited to designated areas, just **26%** of people with sight loss faced daily problems, compared to **45%** overall.

Guide Dogs, along with other organisations including the charity Living Streets, the British Parking Association and the Local Government Association, supports a new law limiting pavement parking to designated areas as the best way to protect pedestrians and change driver behaviour.

We welcome the Transport Select Committee's recent 2019 calling on the Government to take urgent steps to tackle pavement parking, including better enforcement, creating a new offence of obstructive parking, and ultimately a new law on pavement parking. Scotland has already legislated on this issue, and the Welsh Government has assembled an expert group to look at how to tackle pavement parking in Wales.



³ YouGov Plc. Total sample size was 2007 adults, of which 1524 are drivers, i.e. have a full driving licence. Fieldwork was undertaken between 30 - 31 May 2018. The survey was carried out online. The figures have been weighted and are representative of all GB adults (aged 18+). [\[Back\]](#)

⁴ PATROL evidence to pavement parking inquiry. [\[Back\]](#)

⁵ Transport Select Committee, Pavement Parking, 2019. [\[Back\]](#)

Who is affected by pavement parking?

Our survey found that pavement parking affected all groups of pedestrians, but the impact was particularly pronounced for people with disabilities, including people with sight or hearing loss and wheelchair or mobility scooter users, and parents with children.

95% of people with sight loss reported they had encountered problems with vehicles parked on the pavement, with similar proportions in other particularly affected groups. This was significantly higher than the **75%** of pedestrians with neither disabilities nor children who reported problems.

Pedestrian group	% reporting problems with pavement parking
People with sight loss	95%
People with hearing loss	92%
Wheelchair/mobility scooter user	99%
People with other disabilities	89%
Parent/carer with child	98%
Other pedestrians	75%



My husband and I both use powered chairs from time to time and most times we are forced into the road to carry on our journey, which is dangerous for us both."

– Power chair user, Lichfield



I encounter vehicles parked partially or wholly blocking the pavement on an almost daily basis...I have been abused, shouted at and sworn at when I have pointed out...that blocking the pavement creates real problems for many pedestrians...I have stumbled, fallen and twisted my ankle... So many unpleasant and frightening experiences."

– Guide dog owner



I live by a school and parents constantly park on the pavement...I have seen so many near misses over the years including the child who was almost reversed over when she dropped her lunch box and crouched down to retrieve it. Drivers are frequently angry if you point out that you can't get past."

– Parent with child, Manchester



Pavement parking was a regular problem for the majority of survey participants. **45%** of people with vision impairment said that over the past 12 months, pavement parking made it difficult to walk on the pavement every day; a further **35%** said it was a problem every week. Just **5%** of people with vision impairment said it was rarely or never a problem, confirming little change since the 2013 survey.

Four out of five people with vision impairment have problems with pavement parking at least weekly.

The results by region suggest that the impact of the law on pavement parking is significant. In London, to protect pedestrians, pavement parking is restricted to areas designated by the council. Our survey found that people with sight loss in London faced problems with pavement parking significantly less often than in the rest of the country, where pavement parking is widely permitted. While the problem was not eliminated, the proportion of people with sight loss who faced daily problems fell to **26%** in London, compared to **45%** overall.

People with sight loss facing daily problems with pavement parking:

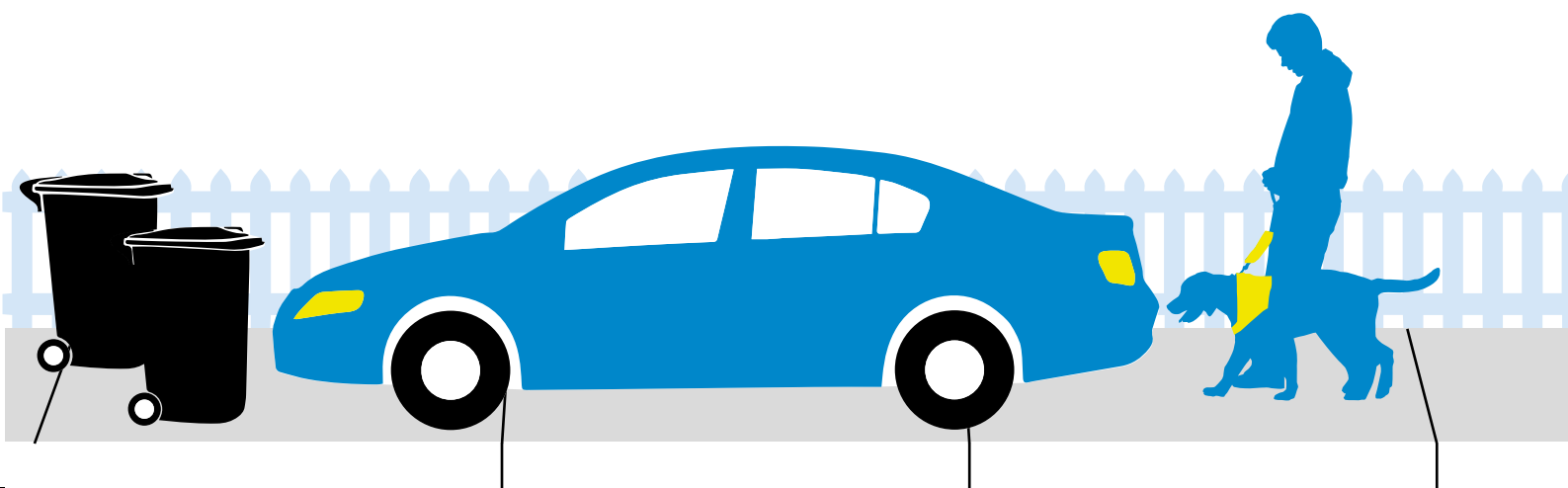
UK: 45%

London: 26%



My experience of vehicles parked on pavements in London which is my primary home has greatly improved in recent years due to vigilant traffic wardens. However, outside London... parking on pavements is much more of a problem... This means I have to squeeze in between cars or go on the road."

– Person with sight loss, London



The impact of pavement parking

When pavement parked vehicles block safe walking routes, there may be no alternative but to walk in the road with traffic. Across all groups, over **90%** of survey respondents said that they had walked into the road to get around vehicles parked on pavements in the last 12 months, including **96%** of people with sight loss. Guide dogs are trained to take their owners to the kerb when they encounter an obstacle they cannot get past, but it is up to the owners to decide when it is safe to step into the road.

As well as the dangers of walking in the road with traffic, pavement parking can cause injuries when people with sight loss hit a wing mirror or collide with the vehicle. Our survey found that one in five people (**20%**) with sight loss reported that they had been injured due to vehicles parked on the pavement. Survey participants reported bruises, cuts, falls and ankle injuries.

One in five people with sight loss have been injured as a result of pavement parking.



Nearly all streets local to me have cars parked on the pavement, meaning as a long cane user it is hard to negotiate the way round. Having to go into the road is extremely dangerous for me."

– Person with sight loss, Swindon



We cannot push my grandson's pushchair past between pavement parked cars and the hedges, so we end up walking into the road, on a blind bend. This often happens on a road where there is pavement on only one side of the road and the speed limit is 40 mph."

– Grandparent, Kent



Long-term consequences

The impact of pavement parking is not limited to the immediate danger to pedestrians. A significant proportion of disabled pedestrians are forced to change their routine to avoid the danger of pavement parking. This can mean taking longer routes, limiting unaccompanied travel, or avoiding leaving the house altogether. Losing independence and becoming more isolated can be just as significant for health and wellbeing.

Around half of all survey respondents (**51%**) said that they had changed their preferred route in the past twelve months because of pavement parking. Wheelchair and mobility scooter users were the worst affected group, with four out of five (**78%**) reporting that they had changed their route.

Navigating pavement parked vehicles can itself be a difficult experience. Over half of people with sight loss (**52%**) reported a negative emotional impact from pavement parking. Survey responses described feeling angry, frustrated, afraid, stressed and anxious. Some participants reported suffering verbal abuse when walking in the road or asking owners to move their vehicles.

“There are many routes that I am permanently unable to access due to cars constantly parked on the pavement. I have even asked some drivers politely if they could move their vehicle to allow me to pass in my wheelchair but I have suffered verbal abuse and refusal to move.”

– Wheelchair user, Swansea



I often have to navigate past parked cars...when I walk into my village. Sometimes cars parked on the pavement...mean I have to walk an extra half mile to avoid the area or negotiate the main road. Sometimes there is a narrow gap but I am afraid that if the vehicle sets off, we'll be run over. It makes my guide dog very afraid as well, as he thinks it is too dangerous and doesn't want me to do it.”

– Guide dog owner,
Cheshire

The stressful and dangerous environment created by pavement parking has a clear impact on people's ability to live their lives. Almost a third **(31%)** of people with sight loss said that pavement parking made them less willing to go out on their own. Just under one in four **(23%)** said that pavement parking made them feel more lonely or isolated.

“Almost one in three people with sight loss said pavement parking made them less willing to go out on their own”.



I only go out if I have to. Knowing I have to deal with parked cars and vans just adds stress to something that's already stressful.”

– Person with vision impairment and other disabilities, Belfast

Pavement parking can create a physical barrier cutting people off from their work, study or social lives. Over a third **(38%)** of people with vision impairment said that pavement parking made it more difficult to go out socially. **16%** of people with sight loss said that pavement parking made pursuing work, study or training more difficult. Some reported feeling unable to continue activities because of the difficulties of navigating pavement parked vehicles:



Some of the classes that I wish to go to are held in a college a few miles from my home but unfortunately due to the number of cars which block the pavement by very busy roads, I feel unsafe trying to get to the college...When I try to walk in the road cars just whizz past me, making me feel so unsafe. I often get blown into the side and have dropped my cane. So now I don't bother going as the bus stop is too far away for me to walk safely because of the vehicles parked on the pavement.”

– Person with vision impairment, Scotland



Tackling pavement parking

In many cases, it is not clear to pedestrians who has the responsibility to deal with unsafe pavement parking. **56%** of those who responded to the survey told us that they had complained or tried to complain about pavement parking in the last 12 months, including **35%** to their local council, **22%** to their MP and 19% to their local police force (some complained to more than one of these). People with sight loss faced additional problems when complaining about pavement parking: **12%** said they tried to complain, but found the process inaccessible.

In most areas, local authorities have responsibility for enforcing parking offences. However, outside of London, parking on the pavement is not a specific offence unless the council has passed a Traffic Regulation Order (TRO) restricting it – a lengthy, bureaucratic and expensive process. In most cases, the council will be unable to do anything without a TRO.

The police do have the power to ticket vehicles that cause an obstruction, including vehicles parked on the pavement, but parking offences are often quite naturally a low priority for police forces.

With councils unable to act outside of the unworkable TRO system and police forces' priorities lying elsewhere, unsafe pavement parking is left largely unpoliced. The result is that complaints on pavement parking are often passed between council and police force, and even when they do receive a response, it is unlikely to resolve the problem.



Complaining to the council just gets a response saying it's a problem for the police, but a complaint to the police gets a response saying that it is now the council's responsibility. It makes me feel like no one cares about...my safety!"

– Guide dog owner, Preston



Finding a solution

The findings from this survey clearly show the impact of pavement parking on pedestrians. For most pedestrians, pavement parking is a problem, but for disabled pedestrians or parents with children it is a serious safety issue. People with sight loss are among the worst affected. Pavement parking can mean the difference between walking the streets with confidence or being forced to stay at home, cut off from work, study or social activities.

Outside London, councils simply lack the tools to deal with unsafe pavement parking. Councils' powers to make Traffic Regulation Orders, which have extensive requirements for consultation, advertising and signage, mean that tackling pavement parking is impractical and prohibitively expensive. Police forces are in no position to pick up the slack.

Guide Dogs supports any solution which would get vehicles off pavements and protect pedestrians, but we believe that a new law limiting pavement parking to areas determined by the local

council would be the most effective way of tackling the problem.

The survey results from London show that this system is highly effective at reducing the occurrence of unsafe pavement parking. The Transport (Scotland) Act 2019, recently passed by the Scottish Parliament, will extend similar rules to Scotland. The Welsh Government are also now considering how to implement similar proposals in Wales.⁶

In 2018, the Department for Transport conducted a review of pavement parking in England, but as of October 2019 no action has followed.

The Transport Select Committee published a report on pavement parking in September 2019, calling for a range of actions to tackle this urgent issue. Their recommendations included reform to Traffic Regulation Orders to make them easier and cheaper for councils to use, an awareness campaign on the negative impacts of pavement parking, better enforcement, a new offence of obstructive parking and ultimately a new law on pavement parking.

We call on the UK Government to:

- **Publish the review of pavement parking**
- **Bring forward proposals for a new law on pavement parking**

Appendix: Survey methods

An online survey was conducted in April 2019, publicised on Guide Dogs' and partner organisations' networks. The survey was completed by 1,876 participants. 508 participants identified themselves as people with vision impairment, 164 with hearing loss, 131 as wheelchair or mobility scooter users, 322 with other disabilities and 99 as parents

with children. 464 did not identify in any specific group. 174 participants were from London, where there are different rules on pavement parking.

Participants could identify themselves in up to two different groups, for example, as a person with sight and hearing loss, reflecting the overlapping nature of these groups.

⁶ Responsibility for pavement parking is devolved in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. The Northern Ireland Executive is currently suspended. [\[Back\]](#)