



The impact of shared surface streets and shared use pedestrian/cycle paths on the mobility and independence of blind and partially sighted people

TNS-BMRB Report JN:197369 March 2010

Executive Summary



1. Executive Summary

Introduction

TNS-Social (now TNS-BMRB) was commissioned by The Guide Dogs for the Blind Association (Guide Dogs) to conduct a survey examining the impact of shared surface streets and shared use pedestrian/cycle paths on the safety, mobility and independence of blind and partially sighted people in the UK. Telephone interviews took place between 21st July and 1st November 2009. In total 500 interviews were achieved with blind and partially sighted respondents from around the UK and on average the telephone interviews lasted around 15 minutes.

Shared surface streets are associated with implementation of the shared space concept which aims to create shared areas for all users. A shared surface street has a level surface shared by pedestrians and traffic.

Shared use pedestrian/cycle paths are paths designed to be shared by pedestrians and cyclists. The sections for pedestrians and cyclists may be divided, for instance by a tactile surface, or a painted white line, or they may be non-segregated so the full space is shared by both groups.

Impact of shared surface streets on independence and mobility

This survey has found that the vast majority (91%) of blind and partially sighted people interviewed had concerns about using shared surface streets.

Most respondents were able to provide specific explanations as to how shared surface streets affected their independence and mobility. These areas were seen by many as stressful and dangerous. The difficulty of orientation, lack of boundaries such as kerbs or crossings and tactile signage in these shared surface streets were commonly given as reasons behind reduced levels of confidence and higher levels of anxiety. Being unaware of approaching traffic and difficulty crossing the street were also highlighted as problems.

In many cases people's experiences of, or feelings toward, shared surface streets had a direct practical impact on independence and mobility, as people said they would seek alternative routes and actively avoid shared surface streets (44%) or were very reluctant to use them (18%).

Impact of shared use pedestrian/cycle paths on independence and mobility

The majority of respondents (86%) had concerns about using shared use pedestrian/cycle paths.

Most respondents were able to provide specific explanations as to how their experiences of, or their feelings towards, shared use pedestrian/cycle paths have affected their independence and mobility. One of the factors mentioned is that they felt less confident and less safe, in regards to shared use pedestrian/cycle paths and that they caused wariness, anxiety or stress.

28% of respondents said they would go out of their way to avoid using shared use pedestrian/cycle paths.

Accidents and near misses on shared surface streets

In terms of accidents and near misses, relatively small numbers of respondents with experience of shared surfaces had actually had an accident on shared surface streets (7%). However 42% of respondents had had a near miss – meaning that around half of the respondents who had experience of shared surface streets had had an accident or a near miss on one.

15% of these accidents/near misses were reported, 5% required medical attention. The vast majority of those who had had an accident or a near miss on a shared surface street (85%) felt it had affected their confidence to some degree.

Accidents and near misses with cyclists

65% of all respondents had had a collision or a near miss with a cyclist at some point. This comprises 20% of all respondents who have had a collision with a cyclist and a further 45% who have experienced a near miss with a cyclist. 88% of these accidents and near misses had not been reported: nearly 9 out of 10.

Over half of the incidents described occurred on pedestrian only paths or pavements where cyclists were thought to be riding illegally. 38% of incidents with cyclists occurred on shared use pedestrian/cycle paths where there was no segregation or only a white line; while only 3% were on paths where the pedestrian and cyclist segments were clearly separated.

The majority, 74% of blind and partially sighted respondents who had been involved in an incident with a cyclist said their confidence had been affected.

Conclusion

These research findings reveal that both shared surface streets and shared use pedestrian/cycle paths affect the independence and mobility of blind and partially sighted people. These pedestrian environments are seen to be difficult and stressful for blind and partially sighted people to use and navigate.

Many respondents reported that they would try to avoid shared surface streets and shared use pedestrian/cycle paths. Therefore there is a danger that these areas will become 'no-go' areas for blind and partially sighted people in towns and cities across the UK.

In order to make streets and pedestrian environments safer and more inclusive, it is important that the concerns which blind and partially sighted people have revealed in this research report are addressed. The requirements and experiences of all people, including those who are blind and partially sighted, need to be considered by those responsible for their design, development and management; and in government policy and guidance which influences this.

TNS would like to extend their thanks to the National Association of Local Societies for Visually Impaired People (NALSVI), the Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB), the National Federation of the Blind (NFB) and the Northern Ireland PCT for their help in distributing to their members the advert to recruit participants for this research.

Key findings about shared surface streets

- 6 out of 10 respondents (61%) had experience of a shared surface street.
- 9 out of 10 blind and partially sighted people interviewed (91%) had concerns about using shared surface streets.
- 8 out of 10 respondents (81%) with experience of shared surface streets described how their independence and mobility had been negatively affected.
- 6 out of 10 of all respondents would go out of their way to avoid shared surface streets (44%) or were very reluctant to use them (18%).
- Half of those who had experience of shared surface streets had had an accident (7%) or a near miss (42%) on at least one occasion.
- Only 15% of these incidents were reported.
- 85% of those who had had an accident or a near miss felt it had affected their confidence to some degree.

Key findings about shared use pedestrian/cycle paths

- 6 out of 10 respondents (58%) had experience of using shared use pedestrian/cycle paths.
- Almost 9 out of 10 (86%) had concerns about using shared use pedestrian/cycle paths.
- Half the respondents would go out of their way to avoid a shared use pedestrian/cycle path (28%) or were very reluctant to use them (22%).
- More than 6 out of 10 of all respondents have experienced a collision with a cyclist (20%) or a near miss (45%).
- 9 out of 10 of these incidents had not been reported (88%).
- 38% of incidents with cyclists occurred on shared use pedestrian/cycle paths where there was no segregation or only a white line; while only 3% were on paths where the pedestrian and cyclist segments were clearly separated.
- Over half of the incidents (52%) occurred on pedestrian only paths or pavements where cyclists were thought to be riding illegally.
- 74% of those who have had a collision or near miss with a cyclist feel it has affected their confidence.

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Copies of the report in print, large print, audio CD,

Braille and electronic format can be obtained from

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