

## **Who put that there!**

### **The barriers to blind and partially sighted people getting out and about**

#### **Pedestrian Crossings**

Crossing the street is an essential part of negotiating our built environment. The provision or absence of accessible crossing points affects blind and partially sighted people's desire and ability to use their local streets. The lack of an accessible crossing point means people with sight loss are left with real difficulties in getting across roads. This severely restricts their ability to get around independently and can mean increased reliance on an assistant.

RNIB research has shown that people have to walk long distances to get to an accessible crossing point, that crossing beacons have faulty audio and tactile indicators, or that audio and tactile indicators are missing [1].

Where a crossing is not fitted with dual audio and tactile indicators, it is a hazard. This is because many blind and partially sighted people cannot see on-coming traffic and therefore rely entirely on the beacon as their primary source of safety information.

- Joyce's experience - "I have some peripheral vision, and can walk around with a symbol cane in daylight. Unfortunately I can't go out at night at all as I just can't see anything. In my town I only have one crossing with a cone on. I constantly ring the council, as the audible signals often don't work. In order to cross the road safely, I need to hear the sound from the other side of the road. Hearing the sound on the opposite side of the road, helps me walk in a straight line, I walk towards the noise. If this isn't working, it's a big problem. I often have to plan my route, I can't be spontaneous. I don't let it stop me going out though, because if I stopped going out I'd never go out again."

## **The Law**

There is a significant amount of legislation, regulations and guidance which are relevant to blind and partially sighted people's access to the street environment.

## **Equality Act**

Local authorities have a duty to promote and include disability equality in their work and the planning and installation of pedestrian crossings is covered.

Equality Act 2010 states that it is unlawful for a public authority to discriminate in the exercise of its public functions. This includes highways functions. Section 20 (4) requires that where a physical feature (which includes increases in traffic) puts a disabled person at a substantial disadvantage in comparison to a person who is not disabled, an authority is required to take such steps as is reasonable to have to take to avoid the disadvantage.

As well as the requirements of the Equality Act, outlined above the following provisions are relevant:

Guidance on the use of tactile paving surfaces, published by the Department for Transport, advises the use of tactile paving at crossings. This guidance is mandatory unless the local authority has a good reason to depart from it.

Local Transport Note 2/95 The Design of Pedestrian Crossings recommends the use of audible **and** tactile signals unless local conditions suggest otherwise. Again this guidance should be followed unless there is a good reason to depart from it.

## **Inclusive Mobility**

The Department of Transport have published "Inclusive Mobility - A Guide to Best Practice on Access to the Pedestrian and Transport Infrastructure". It clearly states:

"Tactile indicators should not be considered as a substitute for audible signals as they are required by different people, although some will benefit from both."

In relation to the likely requirements of the Equality Act, the following example is taken from guidance published by the Disability Rights Commission (predecessor of the Equality and Human Rights

Commission) in relation to the Disability Discrimination Act. It is likely to be persuasive in relation to the interpretation of the Equality Act:

“A highway/roads authority is installing a new pedestrian crossing at a busy junction. The highway authority is likely to be carrying out a public function in determining that the crossing is required, where to site the crossing and what type of crossing it will be. It will thus be covered by the public authority function provisions. When designing the crossing the authority considers the design requirements of disabled people. Consequently, it consults with disability groups and ensures that the crossing has a flush kerb, is fitted with audible, visual and tactile indicators and that the appropriate tactile paving is installed. It also ensures that there is adequate time allowed for the ‘safe to cross’ phase.”

### **Providing accessible information to all**

The Equality Act 2010 makes it unlawful for public authorities, including highways authorities, to discriminate in the exercise of a public function. They also have a duty to make reasonable adjustments including changing practices, policies and procedures which have a discriminating effect and to take reasonable steps to enable disabled people to avoid substantial disadvantages caused by physical features. The Act also requires local authorities to provide information that is accessible for everyone.

### **What we think should happen**

Local authorities should explore the following options, with blind and partially sighted people:

- Review their policy in relation to pedestrian crossings. A postcode lottery approach to policy and decision making by those who have an impact on the design and enforcement of the street environment is having a negative impact on blind and partially sighted people. Local authority staff, residents and businesses would all benefit from more clarity, and policy statements would help inform decision making at a local level. It would also help to address some of the inequality due to local authorities taking differing approaches to some of the most common problems.
- Work with blind and partially sighted people to review and audit their crossings.
- Enforce national guidance when it comes to the use of audible beeps, rotating cones and tactile paving.
- Regularly monitor and maintain the accessibility of crossings and look at increasing the crossing times, especially in busy areas.

- Ensure that reporting processes for potential new crossing points are accessible for blind and partially sighted people.

**For more information contact**

Please visit [www.rnib.org.uk/onmystreet](http://www.rnib.org.uk/onmystreet) for access to more information and resources.

RNIB have Regional Campaign Officers all over England (and campaigns teams in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales).

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