

BusinessLDN's response to the London Assembly Transport Committee Inquiry: Walkability of London's Pavements

Dear Chair of the Transport Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input into the Committee's investigation on the walkability of London's pavements.

As a business group representing businesses across London, we welcome the focus on making the capital's streets safer, more attractive, and more accessible for walking and wheeling. Our members recognise that a high-quality public realm is critical not only to the health and wellbeing of Londoners but also to the economic growth of our global city.

BusinessLDN is a membership organisation with the mission to make London the best city in the world in which to do business, working with and for the whole UK. We represent 170 large businesses across London, spanning a wide range of sectors.

We recognise the continuous efforts from Transport for London (TfL), the Greater London Authority (GLA), London Boroughs and industry in working towards meeting the ambitious targets set out in the Mayor's Transport Strategy (MTS). However, given the slow progress in increasing walking trips in the capital, it is vital that the MTS approach is re-focussed to ensure all stakeholders are working together effectively to meet the 80% target of all trips in London to be made on foot, by cycle or using public transport by 2041.

In response to the Committee's investigation, our views based on the seven specific questions included in your letter are:

How do street clutter, pavement quality and facilities affect pedestrians' safety, comfort, and willingness to walk in London?

1. According to Centre for London's *Reducing Street Clutter in Central London* report (Centre for London, 2023), sponsored by the Central District Alliance BID, the North Bank BID, and South Bank BID, items such as A-boards, disused phone boxes, rubbish bags, bollards, and dockless micromobility vehicles frequent obstruct pavements. While individually small, their combined effect reduces footway widths, pushes pedestrians into unsafe areas, contributes to a poor visual environment, and discourages walking or wheeling.
2. A-boards, poorly parked shared/dockless micromobility vehicles, redundant phone boxes, bins and excessive street furniture all contribute to narrowing London's already congested pavements. This often forces pedestrians, including vulnerable users, into the carriageway, putting them at risk.
3. Uneven, broken or badly reinstated pavements – often damaged by utility works – create serious trip hazards. These are especially problematic for people with mobility, visual, or balance impairments, families with prams, and visitors unfamiliar with the area. Beyond safety concerns, they also pose legal, liability, and reputational risks for both city authorities and local businesses.
4. High footfall areas, such as Piccadilly Circus, are particularly affected by pavement clutter. Congestion makes walking stressful, with people feeling crowded and

constrained. Poor surface conditions, limited seating, inadequate lighting and obstructed sightlines further reduce the comfort and appeal of walking, shortening dwell time in shopping/cultural areas and negatively impacting local businesses.

5. The quality of the public realm reflects how much a place is valued. Clean, well maintained and uncluttered pavements encourage walking and exploring. In contrast, cluttered or poorly maintained pavements can push people toward private car use. Enhancing pavement quality, route clarity, and removing clutter can boost footfall and support a more vibrant local economy.

What are TfL and the boroughs doing to reduce street clutter and improve pavement conditions in London?

6. Local authorities and TfL are applying approaches like inclusive design, the Healthy Streets framework, and Customer Experience High Street Walks to identify and address pavement defects, obstructions, and surface issues.
7. Measures such as removing disused phone boxes, tightening licensing requirements for pavement use and banning A-boards in sensitive areas have been implemented in some boroughs. However, these actions are patchy and lack consistency.
8. Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) are supplementing public sector efforts by investing in public realm improvements – such as cleaning, greening, maintenance, and safety initiatives – using levy funds and planning contributions (e.g. via S106).
9. For example, a large share of South Bank BID's budget is allocated to public realm services, including cleaning, safety (incl. South Bank Patrol and Night-Time marshals) and greening initiatives delivered through the South Bank and Waterloo Sustains Us programme.

How effective have measures to improve walkability been, and what challenges remain in managing street clutter across London?

Effectiveness:

10. TfL has made a clear commitment to promoting walking as a core part of a sustainable, healthy, and accessible transport system. This is set out in the Walking Action Plan (2018) and reinforced through the MTS, which aims to make 80% of journeys in London by walking, cycling, or public transport by 2041.
11. To help drive this agenda, TfL appointed a dedicated Walking and Cycling Commissioner in 2017, tasked with championing active travel and shaping policies that prioritise people over vehicles. These strategies position walking not just as a transport mode, but as vital to London's environmental goals, public health, and vibrant street life.
12. Through initiatives like the Walking Action Plan and high-street walk assessments, TfL is identifying defects and problematic areas, helping to prioritise improvements in key pedestrian zones.
13. Areas with active BIDs tend to experience better cleanliness, quicker responses to pavement defects and improved maintenance. Local pilots, such as removing redundant street furniture or consolidating clutter, have received positive feedback from businesses and pedestrians. Research, including Centre for London's *Reducing Street Clutter* report, shows that removing high-impact clutter like A-boards and

disused phone boxes creates clearer routes – particularly benefitting disabled users and improving perceptions of walkability.

Challenges remaining:

14. Fragmented governance and unclear responsibilities – multiple authorities including boroughs, TfL, utilities and contractors, control different aspects of the streetscape. This leads to inconsistent rules, unclear ownership, and confusion over who is responsible for maintenance or removal of clutter.
15. Inconsistent enforcement and regulation – while rules and licensing exist, enforcement is often weak, reactive or inconsistent across boroughs. As a result, clutter persists and compliance is uneven.
16. Commercial and practical barriers – small businesses rely on A-boards, planters and outdoor displays for visibility and footfall. Without viable alternatives, there's reluctance to remove them, particularly in high-competition retail areas.
17. Limited resources and transient clutter – local authorities and TfL face funding limitations that hinder routine maintenance and enforcement. Meanwhile, temporary but frequent disruptions (e.g. badly parked e-scooters, packaging, signs, roadworks etc.) create unpredictable clutter and impact accessibility.

How have issues with street clutter, pavement quality and facilities contributed to the lack of progress towards TfL's target to increase the number of walking trips by more than 1 million per day by 2024?

18. TfL's Walking Action Plan (TfL, 2018) sets out a vision for London to be the world's most walkable city. The Plan aimed to increase daily walking trips to 7.5 million in 2024. However, as of 2023, the number had only reached 6.7 million (TfL Travel in London, 2024) – just a modest rise from the 2016/17 baseline of 6.4 million.
19. Perceptions – and realities – of cluttered, poorly maintained or unsafe streets discourage walking, especially for short, everyday trips. Vulnerable users such as older people, disabled people and tourists are particularly affected.
20. In areas where walking demand is rising, such as near new/upgraded stations and along the Elizabeth Line, pavement quality has not kept pace. Despite raised stress on local pavements, investment at street level has lagged in some parts.
21. Patchy enforcement and uneven public realm maintenance across boroughs slow the visible impact of decluttering efforts. This undermines public confidence and weakens momentum for long-term behaviour change.

What improvements could be made to walking and wheeling routes to make them more attractive and accessible?

22. As footfall increases, driven by new transport links and transformational public realm schemes, cluttered and deteriorating pavements are creating a hostile environment for pedestrians. This undermines the benefits of infrastructure improvements. HOLBA's Placeshaping Strategy (HOLBA, 2019) highlights the need for targeted improvements to walking and wheeling routes to make them safer, more accessible and more appealing:

- Footway widening and continuous pavements to improve pedestrian safety and comfort, particularly at busy junctions and near cultural venues.
 - Raised crossings and level transitions to improve accessibility for wheelchair users, families with pushchairs, people with mobility issues.
 - Traffic calming and reduced vehicle dominance by reallocating carriageway space, timed closures to vehicles, and cycle contraflows on one-way streets.
 - Improved lighting and decluttering of street furniture to improve visibility and safety, especially at nighttime.
 - Public seating/rest zones and pocket parks/spaces to break up long routes, o support people with limited mobility or endurance.
 - Greening, trees and shade areas to enhance comfort, air quality and visual appeal.
 - Improved wayfinding and signage to key destinations, landmarks and transport hubs.
 - Special paving treatments, public artwork and thematic routes (e.g. outside cultural venues) to create distinctive, engaging streetscapes.
 - Animated walls, projections, and active shopfronts to reduce dead frontages and enrich pedestrian experience.
 - Quietway cycle routes and contraflows to create safe, low-traffic cycling streets integrated into the Central London Cycling Grid
 - Improved cycle connections at junctions with clearer priority and safer crossings for those wheeling.
 - Outdoor events, cultural programming, and spill-out uses (e.g., café seating, seasonal displays) to drive footfall.
 - Enhancing the night-time experience through lighting, inclusive public realm design.
23. We recognise the importance of promoting cycling but this must not come at the expense of pedestrian safety. In many areas, poorly managed cycling infrastructure and behaviour have made walking feel more hazardous, particularly at junctions and on shared spaces. At the same time, rising rates of phone theft are discouraging people from using navigation apps while walking, which can make the capital feel harder to explore and enjoy – especially for tourists and new visitors. Addressing both issues is essential to support safety and encourage more walking across London.

What is considered good practice for businesses reducing street clutter?

24. Comply with pavement licensing rules: ensure all outdoor items (e.g. tables, seating, planters, signage) are properly licensed and strictly follow regulations on size, placement, operating hours, and maintenance.
25. Minimise and carefully place A-boards: avoid using A-boards where possible. If used, position them so they don't block sightlines or reduce the clear footway. Explore alternatives like digital or projection signage where permitted.
26. Coordinate with BIDs and local authorities: collaborate on shared services such as street cleaning and wayfinding. Adopt consistent design standards and branding to reduce visual clutter and maintain cohesion.

27. Maintain pavement frontages: keep the immediate pavement area outside the business clean, well maintained and free of hazards.
28. Manage commercial waste responsibly: minimise obstruction from bins or waste bags by coordinating collection times, placing waste in discreet locations, and using shared infrastructure when available.
29. Use street furniture minimally and purposefully: install minimal, well-maintained features (e.g. planters, benches) that enhance the space without creating obstacles. Adapt or remove them as footfall or traffic patterns change.

What are the current barriers faced by businesses trying to reduce street clutter?

30. Regulatory and governance complexity – multiple authorities (boroughs, TfL, utilities) operate under overlapping, inconsistent rules. This creates confusion for businesses and service providers about what's permitted and who is responsible for what.
31. Enforcement gaps and inconsistency – existing regulations are often enforced irregularly, with limited inspections. This patchy enforcement undermines business confidence, creates perceptions of unfairness, and weakens compliance.
32. Economic and commercial pressures – Councils rely on revenue from on-street advertising, bike dock concessions and pavement licensing. Meanwhile businesses depend on items like A-boards and outdoor seating for visibility and survival.
33. Cost and logistical burdens – removing or relocating street items involves costs (i.e. labour, redesign, storage, licensing fees) that are especially burdensome for small businesses.
34. Ongoing temporary disruptions – even with permanent clutter addressed, issues like roadworks, waste bags, packaging and misparked micromobility vehicles regularly obstruct pavements, degrading the pedestrian experience.

Conclusion

Walking and wheeling are fundamental to London's identity, sustainability ambitions, public health outcomes, and economic growth. The barriers to a more accessible and inviting streetscape are well known: street clutter, poor pavement quality, inconsistent maintenance, fragmented responsibilities and unevenly shared costs.

What is needed now is political commitment at all levels, sustained investment and resourcing, strong and consistent enforcement, simpler and clearer rules and responsibilities, and strengthened business-public sector partnerships that share stewardship of the public realm. With these in place, London has the opportunity not only to meet but to exceed its walking targets, enhance daily life for residents and visitors, and strengthen its global reputation as a world-class, walkable city.

We would be pleased to share relevant case studies or collaborate further with the wider stakeholder group or the Committee to support this agenda.

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