

Care For Your Area

Ideas for Action

Walk down almost any urban main road in today's Britain and you will find a street environment dominated by traffic. Air pollution, noise, dirty pavements, streets cluttered with traffic signs and roads congested with vehicles all contribute to an unpleasant environment. Main roads provide vital access for local communities to shops, schools, housing and health facilities. The dominance of traffic over these needs contributes to community severance. Increased road danger discourages people from walking or cycling and parents drive their children to school rather than allow them to negotiate busy main roads.

It doesn't have to be like this. Main roads could be valued public spaces where people can enjoy the local shops, meet with neighbours and pass the time of day. They could be places that are safe for children to walk across on their way to school. They could be places that are at the heart of the local community. There are some urban roads here in the UK and in other parts of the world where this is happening; towns and cities where the needs of pedestrians and cyclists come first. Through careful design and sensitive traffic management, it is possible to reclaim the urban environment from traffic.

An initiative from Transport 2000, Revitalising Communities on Main Roads, is seeking to bring main roads back to life. They aim to encourage communities and councils to work together to reclaim high streets from traffic and turn them into attractive places for people.

The project co-ordinator said: "Pedestrians are treated as second class citizens in many high streets, yet they are vital to their success. Too many main roads are just rivers of traffic. We're not talking about banning cars but we need to civilise our main roads by resetting the balance. Slowing traffic down, improving pavements and crossings, and adding a dash of green to the concrete jungle would help turn them into streets for people.

"New life for main roads is about making high streets places fit for people, not just traffic. These are roads that carry through traffic and may not be suitable for pedestrianisation. But they are streets that have shops, schools, doctor's surgeries, places of worship and provide access to public transport. These are streets that are used every day by most of us, as part of our journey to work, school or the shops."

Case Study

Shenley Road, the main shopping street in Borehamwood, Hertfordshire, used to have traffic flows of more than 1000 vehicles an hour. Congestion and danger to pedestrians, along with falling retail sales were the result. The local authority decided to take action by redesigning the street so that pedestrians would come before traffic. The two carriageways were narrowed, the pavements widened and a central reservation installed. Pelican crossings were replaced with broad road humps that could be used as crossing places by pedestrians. Although cars are not obliged to give

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way to pedestrians at the road humps, they generally do. Parking for cars is restricted to marked bays and the street environment has been improved with the addition of trees, seating, attractive paving and street lamps.

Another excellent example is Hennef, a town of 30,000 people in Germany, situated on the main road between Frankfurt and Cologne. The main street is lined with shops and cafes and is heavily used by pedestrians. This road used to have two lanes of traffic in each direction but now has only one lane each way. As vehicles approach the centre of town, cobbled strips on either side of the road gradually widen making the road appear narrower. Motorists can use the cobbled strips but usually prefer to drive slowly on the tarmac part of the road. A central crossing area for pedestrians is provided in the centre of town but pedestrians can cross anywhere along the road and motorists are expected to give way (and usually do).

Revitalising Communities on Main Roads is helping local authorities and communities to redesign main roads so they are:

- Safe from traffic danger.
- Enjoyable to shop in or travel through.
- Less polluted by traffic emissions and noise.

How to get started in reclaiming your main road

The involvement of local people is central to identifying problems and potential solutions on main roads. To encourage this involvement, Transport 2000 has promoted the use of Community Street Audits (developed by Living Streets) to each of the local authorities involved in the project. On a street audit, small groups of local people examine the street in detail and their findings are written up into a report. Problems identified include broken pavements, redundant guard rails, a lack of trees, illegal parking, traffic speeds and poor lighting for pedestrians. These problems are fed into the redesign of the road to ensure they are resolved as far as possible and previous mistakes are not repeated in the new design. Community street audits have already been carried out in Bradford, Bakewell, Evesham, Hull and Southwark and have received enthusiastic support from local people.

Launched in August 2004 was Your Route to a Better High Street, a complete guide for local communities on how to kick-start action with their local authority, and an accompanying website at www.newlifeformainroads.org.uk. Both aim to bring local residents, shoppers, traders and councils together to bring about improvements. The manual and website describe good practice case studies from the UK, the Netherlands and Germany.

If you would like more information about Revitalising Communities on Main Roads please contact Transport 2000: info@transport2000.org.uk or log on to the website: www.newlifeformainroads.org.uk

Informal Learning Pack
Updates 2007

