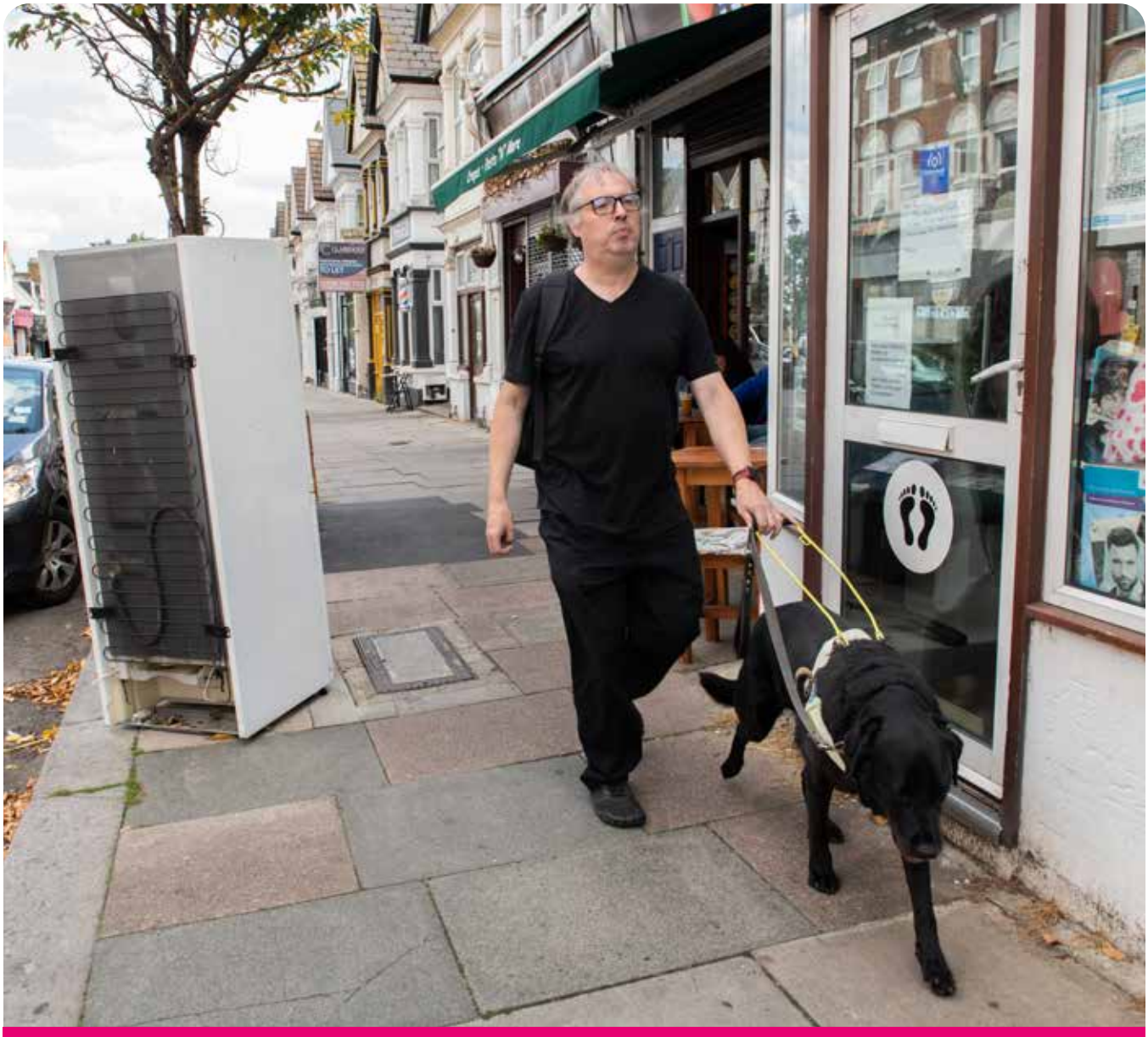
RNIB

See differently

In My Way

Navigating pedestrian journeys with sight loss



1. Contents

1. Foreword

Hi, I'm Lucy Edwards. I'm a broadcaster, content creator, author and founder of my accessible beauty brand, etia. I lost my eyesight twelve years ago – but not my vision to make a change in this world.

I'm proud to say I'm blind, not broken. Like many other blind and partially sighted people, being able to travel independently is a huge part of my life. My guide dog, Miss Molly, and I rely on safe streets to get to work, meet friends, go to appointments or just pop to the shops.

"Our experiences as pedestrians are vital to our ability and willingness to get out and about."

Yet, as RNIB's new research in this report shows, people with sight loss face barriers almost every step of the way. Pavement parking, bikes and e-scooters, long detours to find a safe place to cross the road, overhanging branches waiting silently to scratch our faces – the streets that most people take for granted can become a dangerous obstacle course for people with sight loss. These barriers threaten our mental and physical health and, most of all, our ability to make the journeys we want and need to.

David Reiss Photography

These challenges are a sign that the system isn't working for everyone – but it doesn't have to be this way. With the right support from local and national governments, we can implement the recommendations in this report and make our streets safe, comfortable and accessible for blind and partially sighted people.

Because accessible streets don't just help us, they're better for everyone.

Lucy Edwards
Broadcaster, disability activist, and content creator
September 2025

2. Executive Summary

Streets across the UK have changed a lot in the last five to ten years, from new pavement dining furniture and cycle lanes to the proliferation of hire bikes, e-scooters and an increasing number of silent electric vehicles on our roads. Despite improvements in other areas of life due to advances in technology or greater public understanding of inclusion, blind and partially sighted people are facing more obstacles in the street environment than ever before.

In RNIB's new research, many blind and partially sighted people described feeling anxious, vulnerable and even physically and psychologically harmed by the conditions they encounter as pedestrians. The cumulative effect of these barriers is profound: blind and partially sighted people are walking and wheeling (using a wheelchair) less, suffering potentially serious injuries, relying more on sighted assistance and, in some cases, losing their ability or willingness to get out and about at all. As one survey respondent said:

"If the street environment was just for pedestrians and not shared with cyclists, I would be getting out independently and walking on my own, like I used to do. However, the introduction of cycle lanes on the pavements that were previously just for pedestrians has stopped me doing this. I find this extremely frustrating as I now have to wait for sighted assistance to take me out. I know my physical health is deteriorating as my doctor has said I need to walk more but I cannot due to how bad the local walking environment has been made. I need to get out as well because stopping inside the house is simply no good for my mental health."

The Government has a unique opportunity to remove barriers in the street environment for blind and partially sighted people as it develops the Integrated Transport National Strategy for England. This opportunity is especially timely given the significant role that transport and planning will play in the upcoming English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill.

Blind and partially sighted respondents to RNIB's survey reported facing significant barriers to their journeys overall: 57 per cent told us that they want to go out more than they currently do, and 61 per cent say that they are not able to make all of the journeys they want or need to.

The barriers blind and partially sighted pedestrians face are often

literal barriers in their way. Common obstacles include:

- vehicles parked on pavements
- e-scooters and bicycles ridden or parked on footpaths
- A-boards and pavement furniture
- hedges and other greenery overhanging footpaths
- poor quality or poorly maintained pavements
- inadequate drainage
- slippery wet leaves or icy patches.

These obstacles often lead to blind and partially sighted people experiencing collisions and injuries which have the potential to be very serious, leading to broken bones, chronic pain, lasting mobility impairments and psychological injury which can also become chronic.

Less dramatic collisions and near-misses can leave blind and partially sighted people less able or willing to go out. Negative experiences can cause increased anxiety, greater reliance on sighted assistance and potentially undo the specialist orientation and mobility training that had been previously undertaken by the blind or partially sighted person.

Unless specifically trained, the planners, designers and engineers of the street environment are likely to be unaware of the methods used by blind and partially sighted people to make pedestrian journeys. The usual design philosophy remains rooted in visual cues – "street legibility" is often defined solely by what can be seen. This approach cannot deliver genuinely inclusive public spaces.

This report considers how to make streets more inclusive and provides recommendations to support this aim. We can work together to embed these recommendations and the principles they embody across the UK: the Westminster Government, regional mayors in England, the devolved governments of Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, local authorities, planners, architects and other road users.

3. Key findings

- **92 per cent** of blind and partially sighted people have had to walk into the road due to street obstacles.
- **88 per cent** said it's easier for them to walk when bikes are kept separate from pedestrians.
- **73 per cent** say there are roads in their area which are too unsafe for them to cross because of a lack of accessible pedestrian crossings.
- **71 per cent** say that the routes they take around their neighbourhood are dependent on the position of accessible crossings.
- **70 per cent** avoid paths where they have to share space with cyclists or e-scooters.
- **34 per cent** have collided with an obstacle on the street in the last three months.
- **Only 9 per cent** strongly agreed that they feel safe making independent walking journeys in their neighbourhood.

The five biggest barriers to pedestrian journeys that blind and partially sighted people reported were:

Barriers to accessing streets	Percentage
Cars or other vehicles parked on pavement	**82 per cent**
Poor quality of pavement (uneven, cracked, potholes)	**71 per cent**
Temporary / moveable street obstacles (A-boards, bikes / e-scooters, bin bags, etc.)	**56 per cent**
Space where a path or pavement is shared with cyclists or e-scooter riders	**52 per cent**
Lack of accessible pedestrian crossings	**44 per cent**

4. Key recommendations

(full recommendations on page 28)

For the Secretary of State for Transport and their counterparts in the devolved nations

- Introduce a UK-wide law against pavement parking, except in areas where it is explicitly permitted by local regulation.
- Standardise street environment regulations to ensure consistency in design, maintenance, and enforcement.
- Co-develop with disabled people and street design professionals inclusive pavement design guidance for local authorities and revise LTN 1/20 and other cycling guidance.

For regional mayors in England

- Prioritise the accessibility of the built environment in regional frameworks for streets and public spaces.
- Where powers are devolved and hire schemes exist, regulate hire bikes and e-scooters.

For local authorities

- Introduce and enforce Traffic Regulation Orders against pavement parking.
- Resource adequate maintenance of pavements.
- Introduce 20mph speed limits in residential areas and install signalised pedestrian crossings on roads with higher speed limits or heavy traffic.
- Regulate food delivery courier cyclists.
- Ensure accessibility during roadworks.

5. Methodology

This report presents findings from an online survey of blind and partially sighted people conducted by RNIB in February 2025, with 1197 respondents, and insights from a focus group with blind and partially sighted people held in July 2025. The survey explored participants' experiences of bus, train and pedestrian journeys; the focus group focused specifically on walking.

This report on pedestrian journeys is the second of three, each covering one of those modes of transport.

This survey defined walking as being a pedestrian, which could include use of a wheelchair or another mobility aid. Blind and partially sighted respondents were asked to think about journeys that include walking alongside other means of travel (such as walking to a bus stop) as well as journeys consisting entirely of walking (such as walking to a local shop or walking for leisure).

The proportions of blind and partially sighted respondents corresponded somewhat with the proportions of each in the population. Of the 320,000 people in the UK whose sight loss has been registered, half are registered blind and half are registered partially sighted. 54 per cent of survey respondents were registered severely sight impaired (blind), while 28 per cent

were registered sight impaired (partially sighted), and 15 per cent have sight loss but are not registered.

The survey results were representative of UK nations: 9 per cent of survey respondents live in Scotland (which comprises 8 per cent of the UK population); 4 per cent of respondents live in Wales (which comprises 5 per cent of the UK population); 2 per cent of respondents live in Northern Ireland (which comprises 3 per cent of the UK population).

As this survey was self-selecting and advertised largely through email and social media, pedestrians with sight loss who have lower rates of digital inclusion are less likely to be represented in its findings.

6. Pavements

The two biggest barriers to pedestrian journeys that blind and partially sighted people reported were pavement parking and pavement quality.

Pavement parking

People with sight loss, mobility impairments, older people, and those pushing buggies are disproportionately affected by pavement parking. Parking on pavements obstructs clear passage along footways, prevents effective use of mobility aids and forces blind and partially sighted people into roads, putting them at risk from moving vehicles they can't see. Outside London, current legislation and enforcement on pavement parking is not sufficient to meaningfully address this problem.

Vehicles parked on pavements often can't be detected by people with sight loss in time to avoid collisions and injuries. Even when physical injury is avoided, blind and partially sighted people tell us that the shock of a collision or near-miss with a parked vehicle – and being forced to divert to the road to get around them – can leave them feeling unable to safely navigate their local area. The frequency and unpredictability of vehicles parked on pavements makes this a common and exhausting problem, resulting in people with sight loss avoiding going out or needing to rely on sighted assistance to walk in their local area.

Many blind and partially sighted people use mobility aids such as white canes or guide dogs. Pavement parking poses many problems for them:

- A long cane can pass underneath a vehicle without touching it, meaning the vehicle isn't detected until it is too late.
- A narrow gap left by a vehicle on the pavement can make it impossible to scan and find the way with a white cane.
- A person walking with a guide dog requires more clear pavement space than someone walking alone. Pavement parking leaves spaces that are too narrow for guide dog users to navigate safely.
- Guide dogs are trained to stop when faced with an obstruction, hazard or gap that is too narrow to safely pass through. The owner must continually assess why the dog has stopped and what action to take.

RNIB is calling for the introduction of a UK-wide law against pavement parking. This would establish a general rule against pavement parking except where there is specific permission for it. The current situation is mixed across the nations of the UK.

Scotland

In December 2023, Scotland became the first nation in the UK to introduce a national law against pavement parking. In practice, this bans pavement parking, double parking and parking at dropped kerbs, with certain exemptions designated by local authorities – for example, to ensure safe access for emergency vehicles. Local disabled people should be consulted to ensure any exempted footway is not a key route to local amenities and services for them or others with reduced mobility, such as people accompanying young children.

Progress has varied across Scotland. The success of this pavement parking law relies on local authorities' monitoring and enforcement of the law. Initial figures from 2023-24 suggested the number of PCNs (Penalty Charge Notices) issued for pavement parking, dropped kerb parking and double parking was relatively low – though this data only covers the first few months since the law was brought in. It remains unclear whether the number of PCNs issued and settled across each local authority is a reliable indicator of how effectively the pavement parking law is being enforced.

Each local authority has its own approach to enforcement, with some initially focusing on public awareness campaigns to inform motorists of the law before issuing PCNs. In the long term, it is hoped the number of notices issued for pavement parking will decrease as awareness grows in the general population.

Northern Ireland

In 2022, Northern Ireland's Department for Infrastructure held a consultation on pavement parking. An outright law against pavement parking (with some exceptions) received the most support with 68 per cent of respondents in favour. However, there has been no movement since toward implementing a law against pavement parking in Northern Ireland, mirroring the lack of response on a UK-wide pavement parking consultation held by the Department for Transport in 2020.

Wales

In Wales, pavement parking has been under review since 2019, when the Welsh Government set up a dedicated taskforce. Rather than introducing a blanket law against pavement parking, the taskforce recommended giving local councils more powers via existing laws to fine drivers who cause obstructions. While police still handle serious cases as criminal offences, councils would be able to issue fines as civil penalties. A pilot scheme in Cardiff tested this approach in 2021, but no formal findings have been published.

Although the Welsh Government committed to introducing legislation by the end of 2023, progress has stalled due to other priorities, such

as the 20mph speed limit rollout and bus reforms. The current Senedd term ends in May 2026, and while the Welsh Government continues to express support for tackling pavement parking, there is no clear timeline for action. Public support for change in Wales is strong, and future governments are expected to continue efforts to give councils more enforcement powers. However, without concrete legislation, the problem persists, leaving many pedestrian journeys in Wales less safe and accessible than they should be.

Respondents shared how pavement parking impacts their journeys:

"Cars parked on the pavement in my area are so bad that I cannot go out as much as I like as it makes me anxious."

"Both sides of the road being obstructed by cars forces me to walk in the middle of the road with traffic following behind me, sounding horns and shouting at me to get out of the way when there was nowhere to go."

"Parking on pavements is a MASSIVE issue. In some places I walk, I spend more time on the road than I do the pavement, and I literally pray as I walk that I'm not hit."

"Pavement parked cars, especially at schools, are a nightmare for me, causing a lot of anxiety and upset. I have had to walk into busy oncoming traffic, not knowing how close the speeding cars are."

"Car wing mirrors are bad for injuries. They're just the right height when I'm in my wheelchair to bruise me."

"I smashed my head into a van's wing mirror. When they park on the pavement, those mirrors are just at head height."

Survey respondents highlighted the particular issue of drivers parking their vehicles on the blister tactile paving at the dropped kerb on pedestrian crossings. This is an exceptionally difficult barrier for a blind or partially sighted pedestrian to overcome as the tactile paving is an essential safety feature for orienting themselves to cross the road safely. One survey respondent said, "I get so angry because the tactile paving is put at a good point for people to cross the road, it's not for drivers to park over."

Another described the difficulties caused by cars parked at a crossing:

"I was two streets from home, but I couldn't get there because cars had blocked the pavement close to the junction. I couldn't hear if it was safe to get onto the road and around the parked car. At the time it was the only route I knew so I was completely stuck on a wet January evening. It was really scary and made me feel really vulnerable."

Pavement quality

Poor-quality pavements can render whole routes inaccessible and even dangerous. They pose a particular trip hazard for blind and partially sighted people. Common issues include:

- Trip hazards due to uneven pavements, broken paving slabs and tree roots breaking up the pavement
- Poor drainage leading to standing water
- Tactile paving worn down, cracked or incorrectly laid
- Lack of clearing or gritting in icy conditions.

Several survey respondents shared their frustration that the poor state of pavements is as serious as the potholes in roads, yet pavement repairs are understood to be a lower priority than road repairs. The same concern was raised about clearing and gritting pavements compared to roads. Modern cars are getting bigger and heavier, which means they cause more and quicker damage to pavements, which are not built for such loads.

Uneven pavements have led to falls and injuries among blind and partially sighted people, resulting in broken glasses, abdominal bruises (when a cane user's white cane gets stuck and jabs them), A&E visits, broken bones and further eye injury. The "dreadful state of pavements" in one survey respondent's local area led them to say "I cannot walk alone." Another said, "I tend to avoid going out after heavy rain," because the pavement on their street floods, forcing them to walk in the road to avoid standing water. Other survey respondents said:

"Council officials fail to understand how footpath defects affect those with visual impairment. I reported the poor state of the tactile paving at a local bus stop. The official who looked at it considered only a portion of it and wrote it off as not urgent.

"On one occasion I tripped and fell, badly damaging my foot which took months to heal. I now walk more slowly and nervously as I am afraid it will happen again."

"I only take routes I know extremely well, due to being a full-time wheelchair user with severe sight loss. I struggle to know where or whether kerbs have been dropped well enough to safely cross roads."

7. Safety

Only 9 per cent of survey respondents strongly agreed they feel safe making walking journeys in their neighbourhood without sighted assistance.

Much of the street environment cannot be relied upon to provide the specific tactile, audio and visual indicators that are vital for blind and partially sighted pedestrians. Safe pedestrian routes need to be reliable, unobstructed, away from vehicles and equipped with crossings where all moving vehicles can be reliably expected to come to a full stop.

People with different level and types of sight loss access environmental cues in different ways [1]. People with little or no useful vision rely on what can be felt and heard: raised dots in tactile paving felt underfoot or by a white cane, or the audio and tactile cues (a beeping noise and a cone that spins) at signalised crossings. People with low vision may make use of visual clues, such as the contrasting colour of tactile paving slabs at controlled crossings.

For regular journeys, such as commuting, doing the school run or shopping, blind and partially sighted people will often memorise specific routes. It is therefore necessary to accessibly communicate any changes that might affect those routes, whether temporary (such as road works) or permanent (moving a crossing).

The next three most significant barriers to accessing streets, after pavement quality and pavement parking, were:

- temporary street obstacles such as hire bikes / e-scooters
- shared use (space where a path or pavement is meant to be shared with cyclists or e-scooter riders)
- lack of accessible pedestrian crossings.

The impact of cyclists and e-scooter riders

The effect of bikes and e-scooters on blind and partially sighted people's experience in the street environment is stark. 81 per cent of survey respondents said bikes or e-scooters left on pavements make their journeys harder, and 11 per cent strongly agree that bikes or e-scooters left on pavements stop them getting out and about altogether. E-scooters and e-bikes pose particular risks because, like pedal bikes, they are agile and silent, making them equally difficult for blind and partially sighted pedestrians to detect, but they are often faster and are significantly heavier – Lime bikes for example weigh 39kg, four times the weight of a normal bike.

Cyclists

82 per cent of survey respondents reported that the behaviour of cyclists makes them feel unsafe. Some of the most common complaints RNIB receives from blind and partially sighted pedestrians are about cyclists not following the Highway Code: running red lights, going over zebra crossings when pedestrians are on them, riding at excessive speed for the conditions and riding on pavements.

Respondents shared their experiences:

"I'm a confident, experienced blind traveller and a qualified Vision Rehabilitation Specialist. I've had a couple of bikes nearly hit me when out with clients last year. I wear a hi viz vest or coat. Twice cyclists came up from behind, swore just before they hit me, swerved and nearly hit the client. It's as if they're in a daydream and don't see you until they almost hit you. Not a shared pavement either."

"Walking on Baker Street in London, I collided with a cyclist I did not see who was riding on the pavement. My arm was bruised, and he fell off but later he followed me and punched me in the head from behind."

"Couple of months ago, I was walking along a bit of footpath, now split into a pedestrian and cycle lane. A cyclist nearly struck me. He suddenly appeared in front of me passing the back of the bus shelter as I approached. I shouted, 'That's dangerous' and he returned to spew out a string of obscenities. This is not unusual. If one speaks up, the cyclist or electric scooter rider launches into obscenities, and almost fisticuffs."

"I was walking in the centre of Belfast along the side of a building – narrowish footpath, narrow road lane, so buses brush the kerb. At the next junction, a cyclist emerges from behind the building to my right at speed – VERY CLOSE SHAVE. He swore at me when I called after him."

"I have twice nearly been knocked over by cyclists coming through red lights at a crossing with the pedestrian green light lit and the beeping sound activated. A 'sorry, love' from the cyclists does not make it acceptable! My husband and others had to stop an e-bike from hitting us on the pavement in London by shouting at the rider."

"I was crossing the road on a pedestrian crossing. I got hit by a cyclist who did not stop and knocked me over. I had to call my wife to take me to A&E. I had to use a walking crutch due to my injuries sustained. I was extremely stressed, in a lot of pain. I had severe pain for well over a month and had real problems sleeping and being able to get around."

E-scooters

77 per cent of blind and partially sighted survey respondents said that the behaviour of e-scooter riders makes them feel unsafe. E-scooters are extremely difficult for blind and partially sighted people to see or hear, and riders can't always tell when pedestrians have sight loss – expecting them to move out of the way, even when they cannot determine when or where they would need to move.

In the Department of Transport evaluation of the e-scooter trials in England [2], 93 per cent of residents in e-scooter trial areas reported encounters with at least one form of anti-social behaviour from e-scooter riders, most commonly e-scooters being used on pavements and riders going too fast.

E-scooters are currently illegal to use in public places in the UK outside of trial areas in England, but they are legal to purchase and increasing numbers of people are using them illegally, including modified models that exceed the speed limit for legal trial e-scooters.

Even if a blind or partially sighted pedestrian hasn't yet had a negative encounter with an e-scooter, their judgement of the increased risk can lead them to limit their walking journeys and even lead to self-exclusion. This has a detrimental effect on the physical and mental health of blind and partially sighted people as well as on their ability to get out and about in their community.

"In Northampton, on more than one occasion, I have had an e-scooter hit my left arm, leaving me bruised and frightened. I have to make myself go out again and not allow this to stop me from going out!"

"I have had many near misses with e-scooters being ridden on the pavement, which I have found extremely scary and very shocking. They whizz past me so quickly on the pavement and in very close proximity. I did not know which way to move to get out of their way and was terrified of getting hit. I could not protect myself. I just cannot get out of their way safely and the riders think you know they're there, but you do not know which is the safest direction to move to get out of the way."

Greater Manchester's Food Delivery Charter

Food delivery couriers using bicycles and e-bikes have significantly increased in the last few years as demand has grown. These workers are providing a vital service of delivering hot food and groceries, but their prevalence has led to increasing numbers of negative interactions for blind and partially sighted people, as our survey respondents shared:

"It's quite a regular thing now to have a very fast e-bike shoot past me on the precinct. They're usually delivery riders. Bikes usually make you stop and worry a bit, but these are so fast. The sound and feel of them shooting past a few inches away is quite scary."

"I was almost run over by an e-bike delivery man on the crossings on Oxford Road, Manchester. It was only due to my guide dog stopping dead in the middle of the road that he avoided hitting us."

In April 2025, Greater Manchester Combined Authority and the UK's three biggest food delivery companies launched a charter aiming to create an industry standard for couriers who use bikes, including e-bikes, without endangering themselves or others [3]. This builds on the principles of Transport for London's Meal and Grocery Delivery Motorcycle Road Safety Charter, extending its principles to couriers using standard bicycles and e-bikes. RNIB welcomes this effort and will monitor its results.

The impact of shared use

Shared use designs do not physically separate pedestrian paths from those intended for cycling – and often e-scooters. Shared use areas pose potentially serious dangers for both pedestrians with sight loss and those riding bikes or e-scooters. 88 per cent of survey respondents said it's easier for them to walk when bikes are kept separate from pedestrians, and 70 per cent said they avoid paths they have to share with cyclists or e-scooters.

Even if the new design has been introduced along a previously familiar and safe route, blind and partially sighted people report they now judge it safer to avoid the area. One survey respondent said the resulting situation "prevented me from independently walking in my own city," while another shared: "I did try to use it, but it was too difficult and dangerous, so I stopped going out and lost my independence."

Other respondents shared their concerns about the increasing prevalence of shared use areas:

"Over the years that I have been registered as severely sight impaired, getting out and about has become more and more unpleasant. There are far more obstructions to navigate, and the introduction of shared space and floating bus stops are beginning to make me consider my journeys and whether it's worth the problems that they give. Shared spaces are never friendly to those who have sight loss, and their use of tactile paving is never good."

"Where there are shared areas for both pedestrians and cyclists, I avoid them, they are far too dangerous to use without sighted assistance. As a person who has to rely on public transport, I feel that my needs are being ignored in favour of cyclists and car users. I take far less journeys now than I used to."

The importance of accessible crossings

Blind and partially sighted people report that the lack of sufficient and adequate crossings results in them reducing or avoiding walking journeys they otherwise would make. A signalised pedestrian crossing (with a button to press and audio and tactile signals alongside the visual signals of the lights) provides the safest route across a road or cycleway. 89 per cent of blind and partially sighted people said that accessible pedestrian crossings are vital for them to be able to make independent walking journeys.

The construction and maintenance of crossing facilities affect how inclusive they are. Many blind and partially sighted people cannot see oncoming traffic, so rely entirely on audio and tactile indicators for information about when it is safest to cross. 73 per cent of survey respondents said roads in their area are too unsafe for them to cross because of a lack of accessible pedestrian crossings.

Blind and partially sighted people report regularly encountering audio and tactile signals on pedestrian crossing boxes that are faulty or missing. While audio signals are at times not appropriate to the environment – when other, differently timed crossings are within earshot and might cause confusion about which crossing is being indicated as safe to cross – the lack of functional tactile cones inevitably increases the risk for blind and partially sighted pedestrians crossing the road. One survey respondent explained when the rotating cones are broken or absent that they have to find an alternative crossing. If no suitable alternative can be found, blind or partially sighted people can be prevented from making their journeys altogether.

Blind and partially sighted people also report being forced to take walking journeys that are sometimes much longer than they would otherwise be in order to use accessible crossings. 71 per cent say that the routes they take around their neighbourhood are dependent on the position of accessible crossings.

The recent increase in investment in cycleway infrastructure in the UK has caused a greater need for cycleway pedestrian crossings. Attempts to meet this need with mini-zebra crossings have not resulted in inclusive crossings for blind and partially sighted people, as cyclists do not reliably stop at them and zebra crossings rely on visual cues to cross safely. As one survey respondent said of a near-miss with a cyclist while crossing: "I froze, but had to carry on. One incident like that can change somebody's confidence."

Another respondent explained the severe impact caused by a fault with a previously accessible crossing for eleven months near their home: they had to ask friends to travel to them because they couldn't easily leave their area of London. They were forced to ask for sighted help, which left them feeling deeply vulnerable. They shared:

"For sighted people, this may not be such a big deal: all they have to do is find and use an alternative crossing. But because I am blind, my entire route changes, and I have to be taught a new set of crossings in such a situation. An issue such as a dismantled control box might hugely impact a disabled professional's ability to get to work!"

8. Injury

While there is consistent media interest in injuries sustained by blind and partially sighted pedestrians due to collisions within the street environment, most injuries go unrecorded – especially psychological injuries, which may have the most profound effects on blind and partially sighted people's willingness and ability to make solo pedestrian journeys.

Physical injury from collisions with street obstacles

34 per cent of our survey respondents told us they have collided with an obstacle on the street in the previous three months. The two most frequent sources of injury were overhanging greenery and temporary, moveable obstructions.

"Overhanging trees and brambles are my main cause for concern. At certain times of the year, I go home covered in scratches to my face."

"Temporary obstacles which blend into the surroundings – such as metal scaffolds and overhanging branches or bushes – are most likely to hurt me because I do not see them in time, or am unprepared for them."

"My already very poor vision is seriously affected by lighting conditions. I can barely see in strong sunlight and therefore completely depend upon the street conditions remaining static."

While some blind and partially sighted pedestrians' injuries required only first aid at home or care from a GP, 11 per cent of those who said they'd been injured in the previous three months had injuries serious enough to need hospital treatment, including for broken bones and broken teeth.

"Overhanging brambles scraped my face badly. I screamed, fell backwards and tore a ligament in my left foot. It took 9 months to recover."

"Overhanging greenery resulted in a branch going into my eye, furthering my sight loss."

"Sharp thorns on greenery cut my skin on my arm and got infected after. I get infections easily because of health conditions and being blind it took longer to identify the infection."

The full impact of injuries to blind and partially sighted pedestrians is not just in the severity of any one incident but in the cumulative effect of repeated or chronic injuries. One survey respondent explained, "I've broken my foot and ankle due to obstacles. The breaks never really healed properly and is one of the reasons I'm now a nearly full-time electric wheelchair user."

Psychological injury inflicted by infrastructure

In Designing for Inclusion, sight loss charity Guide Dogs determined that the standard measure of safety in transport – KSI (killed and seriously injured) – was not appropriate for assessing the inclusivity of infrastructure for blind and partially sighted people. KSI fails to capture the amount and extent of negative effects, leading to inaccurate conclusions about how safe or suitable a street environment truly is. Guide Dogs instead proposed a model of psychological injury inflicted by infrastructure [4]. This psychological injury can worsen over time if a person is repeatedly exposed to the infrastructure causing it. However, avoiding such environments also harms blind and partially sighted people's quality of life by limiting their ability or willingness to make all of the journeys they want or need to.

"I'm more afraid of walking now. My walking stick went down a hole in the path and I hurt my back. I have had to have an MRI scan and a lot of physio. I feel very vulnerable now. I walk really slowly and hesitantly, thus causing more health problems. As my sight diminishes, I'm more frightened."

"I am also deaf so have lost all confidence in going outside of the house. I can't hear electric cars, bikes, scooters and bin day is a no-go day. All outside activities are with company and I get so upset about it I physically shake."

"Lately I do not go out because I'm afraid. I'm severely sight impaired and I worry about the bikes, street furniture, parked cars on the pavement, bins, etc. I'm really scared to go out and I feel very very vulnerable."

"In Charlton, at a crossing with a cycle lane where the spinning cones told me I should be safe to cross, a bicycle hit my cane, breaking it. The cyclist didn't stop. The anxiety and mental issues from this incident made my wife and me move away from London (there were other incidents but that was the catalyst)."

"I have to get more taxis for short journeys because I have to walk a lot further to a safe crossing point around my home so don't get out as much as I used to. It is cruel – like losing your licence all over again. I give up and spend a fortune on taxis to visit my elderly mother and son in hospital over 2 hours away. I can only work remotely now unless I fight Access to Work [a government scheme to fund disability support in employment] to provide a driver. I am so tired of discrimination on every front."

This psychological injury affects not just blind and partially sighted people themselves, but also their guide dogs:

"My guide dog has just been withdrawn as he was getting stressed while working. We didn't always have easy walks, sometimes due to obstacles. I am back to using my cane but have no confidence now."

9. Obstacles

The obstacles most likely to hinder walking journeys for blind and partially sighted pedestrians are vehicles parked on pavements, wheelie bins and other bins, overhanging greenery, bikes left on the pavement and A-boards.

The problems these obstructions cause are significant:

- **92 per cent** of survey respondents have had to walk into the road to pass an obstacle on the pavement.
- **55 per cent** have had to ask for help to get around an obstacle.
- **38 per cent** have had to stop their journey due to an obstacle.

Pavement obstructions can be permanent or temporary, and some aren't on the ground at all:

- Permanent obstacles like benches, electric vehicle charging points and street cabinets for utilities are very difficult to relocate if they obstruct access.
- Temporary obstructions like A-boards and pavement dining furniture are moveable, which makes it impossible for blind and partially sighted people to learn their locations reliably enough to avoid them. Several survey respondents reported that they don't like to go out on bin day, even planning their appointments and errands to avoid it.
- Road works and building works can put scaffolding, hazardous equipment, building materials and other obstructions on the pavement, sometimes entirely blocking it off.
- Bikes and e-scooters left on footways present unpredictable trip hazards that can lead to injury and self-exclusion from the areas where such micromobility vehicles can be left.

- Obstructions at head-height such as overhanging branches or hedges are a hazard blind and partially sighted people are often unable to detect or avoid. These pose a high potential for head or face injuries.

Having to walk in the road to get around an obstacle was called "dangerous and frightening" by one survey respondent, and others shared the effects that obstacles have on their walking journeys:

"I would say that a lot of these issues regarding street obstacles apply to all people and degrade all of our experiences as pedestrians. It's criminal that e-scooters and e-bikes are just able to litter pedestrian walkways – not least in their especially detrimental effect on disabled street users – but also in how they severely constrict the pedestrian experience and disincentivise the primary form of active travel: walking."

"I rely on public transport to get about and, on a number of occasions, I have missed my local bus because it took me so long to navigate all of the bins blocking the pavement. I give myself plenty of time but more than once the obstacle course of bins has forced me to wait by a busy road until it is clear to get past the bins by walking into the road, and then I missed the bus."

"I recently tripped over an e-bike that was abandoned and had fallen over to lie in the middle of the pavement. I was carrying a bottle of prescription medicine that I'd just got from my local pharmacy. I was not physically injured but the bottle smashed. I had to ask the GP to re-issue the prescription. I tried to complain to the e-bike service, but the first info requested was the serial number of the e-bike which I was unable to provide because I could not see it. I did receive an email from the e-bike service, but my assistive tech could not read the email! What a saga!"

"I have anxiety due to bikes and wheelie bins being left on pavements. I have to walk extra slowly to ensure I don't miss anything."

"I avoid going into Cambridge four miles away because of the obstructions caused by e-scooters, e-bikes, bicycles, delivery bikes and A-boards."

10. Road works

Many survey respondents specifically mentioned the difficulties that they have encountered because of construction work. Road works and building works pose particular disadvantages to pedestrians with sight loss who may not have any way to know they're approaching a new set of dangerous pavement obstacles.

Information of upcoming works, or how to safely avoid the work site, is only sometimes available and is usually inaccessible to blind and partially sighted people. Safe physical barriers or adequate staff training means blind and partially sighted pedestrians are very unlikely to be alerted to the existence of the work site, provided a safe path through, or be offered sighted guidance by workers.

"Every time there's a road traffic worker, they leave their equipment on the road or close the road completely, so I have to walk to a different road that I wasn't familiar with. That's made me panic and lose the way to my house twice."

"I got stuck inside temporary road works and could not get out. There were no workmen around. Thankfully someone in their driveway was able to help."

"There's loads of construction going on in London – which is good, it shows growth – but while boarding is put up to keep pedestrians away from the work site, there are no accessible directions to where I should walk, how to avoid danger, when to cross and when to come back."

"Work to redo a junction near my home was noisy. I struggled to find the temporary traffic lights. The council didn't understand my challenges... after I complained they put barriers up to help guide me, but these didn't line up on each side of the road. I did keep crossing as this is the way to the shops, but I regularly needed assistance or crossed dangerously. Rarely did workers come and help me. It was 10 weeks where I did reduce going to the shops. Guide Dogs had to come out afterward as my dog wasn't working well after the road works were finished due to anxiety at the location."

"The amount of roadworks that block the pavements without having a safe route around them is a daily occurrence. When challenged, highway departments say there is nothing that they can do about it, they have to give permits for the work. What they don't do is put restrictions on those permits."

"On two occasions recently, workers have been pruning trees in the road where I live. They didn't use cones or any other indicator that there might be any obstruction on the pavement. In one case I blundered into branches. In another, I noticed another pedestrian veering into the road, which alerted me to an obstacle, and I followed them into the road."

11. Vehicle headlights

The Highway Code, supported by the Road Vehicles Lighting Regulations 1989, states that lights cannot be used "in a way which would dazzle or cause discomfort to other road users, including pedestrians."

Yet blind and partially sighted people increasingly report struggling with pedestrian journeys in the dark due to headlights that dazzle them with excessive glare. Glare can also worsen the symptoms of some eye conditions. A focus group member with no usable vision who wears sunglasses to avoid eye pain in bright daylight has had to start wearing them on nighttime journeys because car headlights are now causing the same pain as bright sunshine.

Bright spots of light against the dark background of nighttime can negatively affect people with a range of sight conditions. A survey respondent said:

"In the winter, I cannot see the pavement or where the path is once it gets dark because the headlights of cars cause my vision to deteriorate dramatically so I cannot go out in the dark."

A variety of factors contribute to headlight glare, including the alignment of a vehicle's headlights, brighter lighting technology (including cheap aftermarket LED bulbs which are not road legal in the UK) and newer taller vehicles replacing conventional styles that sit lower on the road.

The problem is not limited to blind and partially sighted pedestrians. Car drivers are reporting increasing difficulty due to the changes in vehicle headlights. A report by the Royal Automobile Club (RAC) found that dazzling headlights are having a profound impact on some drivers [5]. Almost all drivers said that some, if not most, vehicle headlights can be too bright.

The report reveals significant numbers of drivers saying that headlight glare makes it difficult for them to judge the position or speed of oncoming vehicles. Half of drivers affected by glare describe themselves as "temporarily blinded," while almost as many say they feel less safe driving as a result.

Similar effects of increased difficulty judging vehicles' speed and position are likely to apply to blind and partially sighted pedestrians. This also raises concerns over how effectively drivers are able to see blind and partially sighted pedestrians in time to safely avoid them, if the drivers' vision is so profoundly affected while they are behind the wheel.

The number of drivers who report that overly bright headlights make driving more difficult and uncomfortable rises for ages 65 to 74 and rises again for those aged 75 and over – groups also more likely to be affected by sight loss.

In late 2024, the UK Government commissioned a project to investigate the conditions most likely to lead to headlight glare and what can be done to address these conditions. RNIB awaits publication of its findings with interest.

12. Delivering accessible pedestrian infrastructure

Lack of strategy in the street environment

The role of the House of Commons Transport Committee is to scrutinise the work of the Department for Transport. The Committee's March 2025 report, Access Denied [6], highlights that the street environment does not feature at all in the Department for Transport's overview of the rights of disabled passengers [7].

The UK's approach to accessible pedestrian infrastructure is limited to non-statutory guidance. The Government's most recent strategy for inclusivity in transport across England, 2018's Inclusive Transport Strategy, states that "Local authorities are responsible for the design of their streets. It is for them to ensure any pedestrian environment scheme is inclusive and that they meet the requirements of the Equality Act 2010." The Government is currently developing an Integrated National Transport Strategy for England, but it is unclear whether this will address disabled people's access and inclusion in transport.

There is a continued lack of understanding of how the street environment disables blind and partially sighted pedestrians and the consequences of the barriers placed in their way. A new strategy is needed to address the new or worsened barriers

caused by changes in the street environment over the last 5 to 10 years, including:

- more areas shared between pedestrians and cyclists, with no specific space for either
- more street obstacles like A-boards and pavement dining furniture
- more bikes and e-scooters being ridden on the pavement or abandoned there
- fewer signalised crossings
- a lack of pavement maintenance, including trimming overhanging hedges and greenery.

This lack of a standardised strategic approach leads to a patchwork of designs, differing significantly even within a single city or town. Many street scheme consultations ask similar, basic questions, leaving blind and partially sighted individuals and the organisations representing them unable to respond exhaustively each time.

Without meaningful monitoring or evaluation of the current streetscape, new projects do not consider how those already in place have affected inclusion, positively or negatively. Expensive street schemes are intended to last decades, so once the built environment is in place it is likely to stay that way for a significant period of time, especially when local authorities are under financial strain.

The problem of enforcement

The Commons' Transport Committee concluded that there is no effective or easily available enforcement for accessibility in the street environment in particular. This differs from other modes of transport such as bus, rail or air travel.

Regarding their pedestrian journeys, blind and partially sighted people are left with no options for accessibility enforcement other than pursuing burdensome and costly legal action under the Equality Act – a possibility only available in a tiny fraction of cases.

Equality Impact Assessments (EqIAs) have the potential to recognise and address barriers before schemes are implemented. However, this potential can only be realised if the likely barriers are sought out and action is taken to avoid them.

EqIAs should be undertaken in early stages of projects, before commitments are made and budgets are spent; investigate how plans might negatively affect blind and partially sighted people (as well as those with other protected characteristics); and be open to changes, including the possibility of abandoning a plan if it can't be made accessible. Instead, the Access Denied report found that decision-makers regularly acknowledge the difficulties that their chosen outcome will cause for disabled people but continue with that plan regardless. By mentioning the barriers, they claim they have fulfilled their "due regard" duty and can continue implementing inaccessible infrastructure.

There is no legal route to challenge an EqIA, other than a judicial review of the decision reached, which is not feasible in more than a tiny fraction of cases. Even if legal recourse were possible, it is very likely to be after the street environment plan is already in place and having a detrimental effect on accessibility that will not be rectified in a timely fashion, if at all.

To ensure effective enforcement for the street environment, the Transport Committee recommended that the DfT introduce new legislation, calling for "cultural transformation that makes a difference to people's experience on the ground. A root and branch change in attitudes and more effective, user-friendly complaints and enforcement processes will all be needed, backed up by real incentives to improve and genuine penalties for failure."

13. What RNIB is doing

Key Principles of Inclusive Design

Standardisation is key to addressing many of the current barriers to inclusive pedestrian journeys. Recognising this, RNIB has developed a growing suite of Key Principles of Inclusive Design, which distils the voices of blind and partially sighted people across the UK into a checklist for decision-makers – with short explanations of why each intervention matters.

These principles have already been embedded by several local authorities to improve street design. Decision-makers must take practical steps to dismantle the barriers identified in this report, which affect more than two million people living in the UK with sight loss.

We recognise the unique position we have as the UK's largest community of blind and partially sighted people. We are committed to turning this insight into meaningful change and helping to remove the barriers that impact on the ability of blind and partially sighted people to navigate streets safely.

What RNIB Scotland is doing

In Scotland, the report "Street Credibility: making Scotland's streets accessible for people with sight loss" references the devolved framework and suggests what can be done to ensure blind and partially sighted people can get around on the same basis as everyone else.[8]

14. Recommendations

For the Secretary of State for Transport and their counterparts in the devolved nations

1. **Legislate and Enforce Pavement Parking Restrictions**
   - Introduce a UK-wide law prohibiting pavement parking, except in areas where it is explicitly permitted by local regulation.
   - Ensure consistent enforcement across all regions, with clear penalties and public reporting mechanisms
2. **Strengthen Regulation and Enforcement of Street Environments**
   - Standardise street environment regulations to ensure consistency in design, maintenance, and enforcement.
   - The upcoming Integrated National Transport Strategy for England should specifically address disabled people's access and inclusion
3. **Improve Complaints and Enforcement Processes**
   - Develop a unified, accessible complaints system for reporting street environment issues, with options for phone, online, and in-person submissions.
   - Ensure timely follow-up and resolution, and clear communication with complainants.
4. **Co-Develop Inclusive Pavement Design Guidance for Local Authorities**
   - Collaborate with disabled people and street design professionals to update and implement inclusive design standards.
   - Mandate training for all street designers on the barriers faced by blind and partially sighted people, and the tools and safety features they use to navigate the built environment.
5. **Design Safe Continuous Footways**
   - Require physical features such as narrowed entrances, kerb build-outs, and steep ramps to slow vehicles and prevent two-way traffic on continuous footways.
   - Install blister tactile paving at all crossings where vehicles travel faster than walking speed, ensuring visibility and detectability.
6. **Introduce a National Law Against Inaccessible Shared Use Designs**
   - Introduce legislation prohibiting shared use areas without detectable kerbs and accessible signalised crossings.
7. **Enhance Crossing Safety Over Cycleways**
   - Mandate audible and/or tactile beacons at all formal pedestrian crossings over cycleways to beacons to indicate to blind and partially sighted people when it is safe to cross.
8. **Update Cycle Infrastructure Design Standards**
   - Revise LTN 1/20 and related guidance to require full separation between pedestrians and all types of vehicles, including cycles, e-bikes, and e-scooters. Pavements and pedestrian areas should be preserved for pedestrian use only.

9. **Detectable Kerbs Between Pedestrian and Vehicle Areas**
   - Require kerbs with a minimum 60mm upstand, high tonal contrast, and tactile detectability to separate pedestrian zones from vehicle routes
10. **Enforce Pavement Licences Effectively**
    - Ensure local authorities actively monitor and enforce pavement licences. Revoke licences where businesses breach conditions, obstruct access, or fail to maintain safe pedestrian routes.

For regional mayors in England

1. **Prioritise the accessibility of the built environment in regional frameworks for streets and public spaces.**
2. **Where powers are devolved and hire schemes exist, regulate hire bikes and e-scooters:**
   - Provide physical infrastructure for docking.
   - Enforce fines for poor riding and parking.
   - Develop a charter for delivery couriers on e-bikes.

For local authorities

1. **Reduce Pavement Parking**
   - Introduce and enforce Traffic Regulation Orders against pavement parking.
   - Fully enforce existing pavement parking restrictions consistently.
2. **Resource Adequate Maintenance of Pavements:**
   - Monitor and fix broken or poor-quality surfaces in a timely fashion
   - Trim greenery in public areas to prevent obstacles to pavement use or lines of sight.
   - Enforce the proper maintenance of greenery on private land.
   - Ensure sufficient drainage and fix blockages.
   - In icy weather, clear and grit pavements prioritising high-footfall areas and routes to essential services.
   - Resource adequate enforcement of licenses for pavement dining and A-boards policies.
   - Ensure refuse workers have training and sufficient time to place bins out of pedestrians' path especially in narrow or high-use areas.
3. **Road Crossing Safety**
   - Introduce 20mph speed limits in residential areas.
   - Install signalised pedestrian crossings on roads with higher speed limits or heavy traffic.
4. **Regulate Food Delivery Courier Cyclists**
   - Develop and adopt a local version of the Greater Manchester Food Delivery Charter, including safety standards for riding and equipment.
   - Collaborate with delivery companies on training and enforcement.

5. **Enforce Fines for Pavement Riding**

- Issue fixed penalty notices to cyclists and e-scooter users riding on pavements, in line with the Road Traffic Act 1988 and local bylaws.

6. **Ensure Accessibility During Roadworks**

- Require accessible signage and notifications for all planned works affecting pavements, using the Street Manager system.
- Train site workers in sight loss awareness, including safe equipment placement and guiding techniques.
- Ensure a safe pedestrian footway is available around the work site: unobstructed, stable, and wide enough for a person walking with a guide dog to safely navigate it.
- Ensure accessible directions are provided for avoiding the site: where it is, how to safely avoid it, when it's safe to return to the original pavement route.
- Use foam padding in contrasting colours on scaffolding and temporary structures to prevent injury and aid navigation.

For street planners, designers and engineers

Get in touch with **campaigns@rnib.org.uk** to discuss training, resources and immersive experiences, including our Key Principles of Inclusive Street Design.

15. References

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