



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Engaging visually impaired people in active travel network planning and design

Background

There is an aspiration in Wales to significantly increase the number of people who walk and cycle for everyday journeys. The legislation which supports this, the Active Travel (Wales) Act 2013, places duties on local authorities and the Welsh Government to continuously improve infrastructure and significantly increase levels of walking and cycling.

Increasing levels of walking and cycling, in particular among groups not currently active, has the potential to support most, if not all, of the seven well-being goals. Active travel can bring significant, social, environmental and economic benefits, without any genuine disadvantages and is widely supported.

It is important that a wide range of stakeholders are consulted during the mapping process. The statutory Delivery Guidance and Design Guidance documents look at the requirement to consult widely and at the importance of creating inclusive environments. Please refer to Section: 3.45 of the Active Travel Delivery Guidance regarding consultation and Chapter 4: User Needs of the Active Travel Design Guidance regarding further information on designing an inclusive active travel route.

This case study below shows how local authorities worked with third sector organisations to increase their reach during the public consultation of the Integrated Network Map (INMs).

The Approach

Officers from Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council (RCT) wanted to learn about the most effective/preferred ways that visually impaired people can be consulted as part of the preparation of an Active Travel Integrated Network Map (INM). They asked representatives from Guide Dogs Cymru and RNIB to join a working group; officers from Bridgend County Borough Council and Sustrans Cymru were involved.

Who can help with raising awareness?

- Guide Dogs Cymru and RNIB Cymru are national charities and have links to blind and partially sighted people and networks across Wales. Both are happy to assist you in consultation on your active travel maps.
- Wales Council of the Blind (WCB) is the umbrella organisation for the sight loss sector in Wales, in particular supporting local groups working on behalf of people with sight loss. They produce a fortnightly electronic bulletin and a quarterly magazine for the sector, members and professionals. WCB can send information to the editors of 'talking' magazines about public meetings and open consultations and local authorities can ask them to include information encouraging people with sight loss to give their views on proposed new routes in their areas. Contact details for all three organisations are listed below.
- Access Groups can be a useful way of supporting consultation on the maps though whilst they have a lot of expertise, they may not be aware of concerns specific to people with sight loss such as the location of tactile paving and how to explain the proposed new routes.
- In the absence of a designated Access Officer in a local authority, contact could be made with Rehabilitation Officers in the Social Services Sensory Team to assist in reaching people with sight loss.

Booking an appropriate venue

If you need any support when finding an appropriate venue, the RNIB has some useful documents. See below for links.

Options for communicating the content of the maps

There is a legal duty to present the information in a variety of accessible formats. This makes the communication of consultations challenging but there are a number of ways to make it work.

- Prepare a clear verbal explanation of the proposed routes and any key points of interest or significance, e.g. controlled road crossings, bus stops, shops, rail stations, and key local landmarks;
- Be prepared, if asked, to produce the information in a Braille format which would be appropriate for some visually impaired people.
- Understand that people with sight loss may attend any public consultation and have alternative formats or materials ready to support their involvement;
- Follow a method adopted by Swansea and print and laminate a map and use Wikki Stix and Plasticine to show the outline of the highway network and location of settlements across this network.
- Use large versions of the maps with clearly colour contrasted footways and roads so the routes stand out.
- Arrange site visits with visually impaired people where the routes are most frequently used or where you are unsure of a solution.

Remember, each of these methodologies needs to be accompanied with a full explanation and the most inclusive processes are those where the proposals are clearly explained using different formats to enable the greatest participation.

Issues to consider when designing infrastructure

Visually impaired people can often experience difficulty navigating along a community route such as a foot path if there are no kerb edges to guide them or the colour of the surface makes it difficult to notice any contrasts eg. at steps. It is important that vegetation is cut back and does not encroach over kerb edges onto a community route and that the location of seats signs and bins etc. is carefully considered.

The use of appropriate tactile paving can assist with orientation and is essential to warn of danger such as flights of steps, as well as indicating road crossings. Warning tactile and signage should always be installed to indicate shared routes with cyclists. Painted lines should never be the only delineator on a shared route as those with no sight cannot detect them. The camber of the route is also useful as this helps indicate the centre of the path.

Inconsiderate behaviour of some cyclists travelling along the community routes can impact on the personal safety of visually impaired people. Cyclists are very hard to hear and can approach very quickly without being detected. It is often impossible for a visually impaired person to know where they are to move out of their way, and feelings of intimidation and danger can result in that individual avoiding the route.

Useful links

Active Travel (Wales) Act 2013: <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/anaw/2013/7/contents>

Active Travel Delivery Guidance: <http://gov.wales/docs/det/policy/141105guidanceen.pdf>

Active Travel Design Guidance: <http://gov.wales/docs/det/publications/141209-active-travel-design-guidance.pdf>

Email Welsh Government Active Travel team: active.travel@wales.gsi.gov.uk

Guide Dogs Cymru: <https://www.guidedogs.org.uk/guide-dogs-cymru/>

Email: Andrea.Gordon@guidedogs.org.uk

RNIB Cymru: <http://www.rnib.org.uk/wales-cymru-1>

Telephone - 029 2082 8500

Email: Cymru.mailbox@rnib.org.uk

Wales Council of the Blind: <http://www.wcb-ccd.org.uk/>

Telephone: 029 2047 3954

Email: owen@wcb-ccd.org.uk

Advice when considering a venue: <https://help.rnib.org.uk/help/products-services/accessible-meetings>

Google search to purchase Wikki Stix:

https://www.google.co.uk/?gws_rd=ssl#q=wikki+stix&tbm=shop&spf=544.