



How walkable is your town?



About Age Friendly Ireland

Age Friendly Ireland is the home of Ireland's Age Friendly Cities and Counties Programme. The Age Friendly Cities and Counties Programme aims to make Ireland a truly great place in which to grow old. The Programme is built on the recognition of the valuable role that older people can and should play in shaping their communities for the better. The voice of the older person is at the heart of the Programme.



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How walkable is your town?

A report by Age Friendly Ireland and the Centre for Excellence in Universal Design at the National Disability Authority on the results of Walkability Audits in 2014.

March 2015

Age Friendly Ireland and the Centre for Excellence in Universal Design at the National Disability Authority would like to thank all those who organised and participated in the walkability audits in the towns.

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Foreword from Age Friendly Ireland



The design of a community's built environment can often become the determining factor between a healthy and active lifestyle or one characterised by limited mobility and high levels of social isolation. Physical changes that often accompany ageing, such as poorer eye sight, hearing and reduced mobility can pose risks for older people when they are out and about in their community. In areas where the built environment is adapted, such as through the provision of safe footpaths, older people can be supported to be more physically active and to make more regular use of the public spaces, services and facilities provided.

Town structures should cater for all people; Age Friendly Ireland believes that if you design for older people you will, in the main, design for all and it has pioneered the walkability audit tool to capture the experiences of people using their own towns. This year, collaboration with the Centre for Excellence in Universal Design at the National Disability Authority has led to an even greater understanding of how towns cater to a range of people with differing abilities. People with visual impairments, mobility issues, young children, as well as older people participated in the towns based walkability audits.

Consultation is at the heart of the Age Friendly Programme and listening to the 'voice' of older people is key to the programme's success. Throughout this report, through direct quotations, the 'voice' of the participants is heard and through this a greater understanding of the issues facing people can be found.

The information generated has been very useful in informing the town planners' understanding of what works well and also in surfacing the issues and barriers that people face in their towns. The audits also provided a valuable learning experience for participants. Seeing their towns from other people's perspectives, for example for people with mobility or seeing difficulties, led to an increased general consciousness of the different issues facing people. Many worthwhile changes have been identified in the participating towns and examples of some of the actions resulting from the walkability audits are outlined in the conclusions section of this report.

The walkability audit is a practical, low cost method of engaging local people with their town structures. It can provide very useful information on where changes can be made to increase a town's accessibility. Age Friendly Ireland was very pleased to have had this opportunity to work with the Centre for Excellence in Universal Design at the National Disability Authority. Next steps will include the sharing of the audit results with local authority staff, Chief Executives, planners, engineers and other key stakeholders involved in the age friendly programme development process. This audit process will also further inform the ongoing development and enhancement of the walkability audit tool and

associated guidelines. We will look forward to making these tools and guidelines available to local authorities, community groups and other relevant bodies who may be conducting audits in their local areas across 2015. It is through this kind of collaborative working and planning that we will be better placed to meet the challenges that <http://universaldesign.ie/UniversalDesign/Site-Logo.png> lie ahead in a positive way that will improve the lives of our older citizens in the future. I would like to wish all of the programme partners continued success in the future.

**Brendan Kenny, Chair, Age Friendly Ireland and
Deputy Chief Executive, Dublin City Council**



Foreword from the National Disability Authority



Good design of roads and streets in our towns and cities is key to ensuring that people can get out and about in their local area and participate in all their community has to offer. The National Disability Authority has therefore been pleased to work in collaboration through our Centre for Excellence in Universal Design with Age Friendly Ireland on Walkability Audits, to inform the development of an effective audit tool for Irish roads and streets.

We have approached this work jointly to show how a Universal Design approach in walkability audits of roads and streets can guide good practice. Ireland is unique in having a statutory Centre for Excellence in

Universal Design to promote universal design of the environment as well as places, buildings, services, products, information and communication technologies available within it to ensure that can be accessed, understood and used to the greatest extent possible by all people regardless of their age, size, ability or disability. In summary, everyone benefits from good design.

The walkability audits in eight Irish towns and urban centres in 2014, which are the focus of this report, demonstrate the benefit of a focus on universal design, in auditing how easy it is to get around with ease and find your way using roads and streets in urban centres. This recognises the importance of understanding the diversity of the population but also of visitors to an urban area in ensuring good design.

We welcome the commitment by the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport and the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government to ensure that quality audits are undertaken. Arising from this commitment in the Design Manual for Urban Roads and Streets, the Centre for Excellence in Universal Design is working in consultation with the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport to develop a quality audit tool for Irish roads and streets, using a Universal Design approach.

The information collected in these Walkability audits will be used to inform the development of this quality audit, providing valuable evidence of the features of roads and streets that can prevent people with a wide range of abilities from easily accessing local amenities, shops and services in their community. This evidence is strengthened by the diversity of people who participated in the audits, which included parents with young children in buggies, older people, wheelchair users and people with hearing and vision difficulties. We also welcome the identification and implementation of improvements to the environment at local level, facilitated by the Age Friendly Towns programme. We look forward to further opportunities to work in partnership with Age Friendly Ireland.

Siobhan Barron, Director, National Disability Authority



Executive Summary

How walkable is your town?

This report contains analysis of the walkability audits carried out as part of the 2014 Age Friendly Town Programme which ran in eight Irish towns and urban centres. The objective of this programme is to significantly improve the quality of life of older adults living in the areas and to engage them in shaping and enhancing their own communities. The programme is part of Ireland's national Age Friendly Cities and Counties programme (AFCC), which is itself part of a worldwide initiative, coordinated by the World Health Organisation (WHO), to make sure that as we age, we can all:

- have a real say in what happens in our own lives and what happens in the areas where we live
- enjoy good health, excellent services and a safe and inclusive environment
- engage and participate fully in everything that is going on in our communities, cities and counties

Consultation with the people who live in, and use the services of the towns is central to the Age Friendly Town Programme. One strand of this consultation involves groups of people, facilitated by an Age Friendly town planner, walking¹ the streets of the town to understand how easy and accessible the town is for people to get around in. This year Age Friendly Ireland partnered with the Centre of Excellence in Universal Design (CEUD) at the National Disability Authority to share knowledge and expertise to improve the walkability audit tool and ensure that the experiences of people of different ages, sizes and abilities were reflected.

The CEUD intends to use the data collected and experience gained from the process to inform the development of a national audit tool for roads and streets, using a universal design approach. The Age Friendly Towns programme will use the data collected in each of the towns to make targeted improvements in each of the individual areas.

What was discovered from the walkability audits in 2014 was that people were for the most part happy with the structures of their towns. On the whole the towns provided pleasant environments to walk in and the majority of people said they were able to access parks. Over three quarters (75%) of participants on the audits said that they were able to easily reach the shops and services they needed. In general there were footpaths available in most areas and dropped kerbs too. There was also adequate parking, especially accessible parking, near to where people wanted to go and people felt safe walking in the day.

However people were not as happy with how the physical infrastructure of the towns was being cared for, nor with the behaviour of others in the towns. People thought the footpaths weren't being properly maintained and repaired and, while there were dropped kerbs and ramps, these were sometimes badly designed and couldn't be used easily. Obstacles like overgrown hedges, bins or post boxes on footpaths all made it more difficult for people to get around. People wanted more pedestrian crossings. Where there were already crossings, there needed to be simple design changes made, such as changing the timing of traffic lights so that people could cross the roads safely.

¹ Some people were wheelchair users.

The Walkability audits highlighted how the behaviour of people using the towns can really impact on how walkable the towns are. Drivers parking their cars on footpaths, blocking dropped kerbs or parking in accessible parking spaces all have a negative impact on people's ability to get around safely. Other behavioural issues that arose were things like dog owners not cleaning up after their dogs, or hedges and shrubbery not being properly cut back.

Wheelchair users were happy with the level of accessible parking available in the towns, whilst ambulant people with reduced mobility were not as happy. Wheelchair users and people with visual impairments were the most likely to be unhappy with the footpaths and crossings in their towns. People with visual difficulties found the lack of consistency with audible cues at traffic lights and the lack of clear colour contrast between roads and footpaths difficult.

The following is a summary breakdown, in more detail of the results and key issues emerging from the walkability audits. It is important to note that the analysis carried out was on audits of eight different towns around Ireland, therefore the variability in the results reflects the environments in the different towns, rather than disagreement between people in the same town.

Footpaths

The majority of people agreed that there were footpaths available (81%) on the routes taken and that they were continuous (63%). The problems which emerged were that the available footpaths were not in good repair (68%) and that they were not ramped or easy to negotiate (53%).

Some key issues with the footpaths were:

- Many of the footpath surfaces were uneven and in a bad state of repair (over 70% said they were bad)
- Footpaths were very often just too narrow.
- Footpaths were not sufficiently ramped, and where ramped, sometimes the ramps were too steep and difficult for wheelchair users to negotiate.

Crossing Points

The majority of people were not happy with pedestrian crossing points in the towns audited.

- Only 33% of people agreed that crossing points were safe and easy to use. One complaint was a lack of clear road markings to delineate the crossing points. In general people thought there were just not enough crossings to help them get to where they needed to go safely; shops, churches, community centres or hospitals.

The majority did agree with the following:

- Crossings had dropped kerbs (70%) which gave level access.
- 65% said drivers were good at yielding to pedestrians at crossing points.



Parking

- Over 60% of people were happy that there were accessible parking spaces available close to amenities in the towns audited.
- People would like more spaces to be made available close to amenities, such as chemists, Garda stations and other government buildings.
- There were also suggestions that it would be good to have more on-street parking, especially for older people.

Aesthetics

Overall people were happy with the general environment of the streets and towns audited.

- Over 70% of participants on the walkability audits thought that the streets they walked provided a pleasant environment.
- More than 60% were happy with the signage available in the towns, though even more signs could be provided for public buildings and local amenities.
- However, 85% of people thought there were problems with obstacles on the paths they walked, whether they were utility poles, bins, signs or shrubbery.
- Many people complained that dog owners were not cleaning up after their dogs.

Public Spaces and Buildings

A positive finding from the walkability audits was that over 75% of people thought facilities, such as banks, shops, post offices, churches and libraries were easily reached. However, improvements need to be made to make these key facilities more accessible.

- More effort needs to be made to make buildings more wheelchair accessible.
- Public toilets were not available in most of the towns², but in general people said that businesses were very good at providing access to their toilets, including wheelchair access.

People were happy that they were able to access parks (77%), though some said they would like the parks in their town to cater more for an older population by improving access (for example to get rid of kissing gates) and by providing exercise equipment.

Safety and Comfort

Over 75% of those participating in the audits said they would feel safe walking the route they took on their own.

² There were public toilets in Carlow, Kinsale and Cavan, though some were closed for maintenance.

Contents

Foreword from Age Friendly Ireland	5
Foreword from the National Disability Authority	7
Executive Summary	8

Chapter 1 How Walkable is your town? 15

1.1	Introduction	15
1.2	Background	15
1.3	Sample Description	17
1.4	Methodology	18
1.5	Experiences of the Walkability Audit Co-ordinator	18

Chapter 2 Footpaths 21

2.1	Footpaths - Overall Summary	21
2.2	Are footpaths available on every street?	21
2.3	Are the footpaths continuous?	24
2.4	Are the footpaths in good repair?	24
2.5	Are the footpaths non-slip and well-drained?	26
2.6	Are the footpaths ramped and easy to negotiate?	27
2.7	Are the footpaths well separated from the cycle paths?	29
2.8	Are the footpaths wide and flat?	29

Chapter 3 Crossings 33

3.1	Crossings – Overall Summary	33
3.2	Are crossing points safe and convenient?	33
3.3	Are busy streets equipped with crossings and signals?	36
3.4	Do traffic lights allow enough time for all to cross?	37
3.5	Do pedestrian crossings have adequate audible cues?	38
3.6	Do crossing points have dropped kerbs?	38
3.7	Do drivers yield to pedestrians?	41

Chapter 4 Parking 43

4.1	Parking – Overall Summary	43
4.2	Are parking spaces available close to amenities?	45
4.3	Are accessible parking spaces available?	45
4.4	Are parking meters easy to use?	47
4.5	Are bicycle parking facilities available close to amenities?	47

Chapter 5 Aesthetics Look and Feel 49

5.1	Aesthetics – Overall Summary	49
5.2	Can people find their way around the town?	50
5.3	Are there obstacles blocking the path?	52
5.4	Is the streetscape pleasing?	55
5.5	Are the number of rubbish bins and recycle bins adequate?	55
5.6	Is the area clear of litter, graffiti and dog droppings?	57
5.7	Are there abandoned buildings or sites in this area?	57

Chapter 6 Public Spaces and Buildings 59

6.1	Public Spaces and Buildings - Overall summary	59
6.2	Are facilities easily reached?	59
6.3	Are public parks accessible for exercise and relaxation?	60
6.4	Are public toilets available, accessible and recognisable?	61
6.5	Is public seating adequate with back and arm rests?	62
6.6	Does 'street furniture' obstruct the path?	64
6.7	Are bus / train / luas shelters enclosed and do they have seating?	64
6.8	Safety and Comfort	64

Chapter 7 Conclusion 67

Chapter I How Walkable is your town?

This chapter provides the introduction, background and methodology to the 2014 walkability audit, as well as feedback from the 2014 Age Friendly Town co-ordinator.

1.1 Introduction

Consultation is at the heart of the Age Friendly Programme. Walkability audits are one of the methods used to collect data from people to understand how their town works for them and how it could be improved. The Age Friendly Town's initiative is part of the wider national Age Friendly Cities and Counties programme, which is currently operational in 27 local authorities in Ireland. The programme's vision is to make every city and county in Ireland a great place in which to grow old. The Age Friendly Town programme is an integral part of the WHO's global Age Friendly Cities programme. The towns programme began in 2013 following the pioneering work done in Ardee, County Louth. A network of twenty one towns, villages and neighbourhoods across the country have stepped through the process and introduced local age friendly initiatives between 2013 and 2014. The walkability audit tool has been further developed and guidelines created and these will be available in 2015 to local authorities and community groups who would like to conduct audits in their local areas

The Centre for Excellence in Universal Design (CEUD) at the National Disability Authority is working to produce a national quality audit tool for urban roads and streets using a universal design approach, to ensure that the needs of all people regardless of age, size or ability are taken into account. This work arises from the Design Manual for Urban Roads and Streets which envisages that quality audits will be undertaken during different stages of the design process to demonstrate that appropriate consideration has been given to all of the relevant aspects of a design.

The Design Manual for Urban Roads and Streets is a joint publication launched in 2013 by the Department of Transport, Tourism & Sport and the Department of Environment, Community & Local Government and it aims to put well-designed streets at the heart of sustainable communities. The information collected in the Walkability audits carried out by Age Friendly Ireland will be used to inform the development of the quality audit being developed by the CEUD, in consultation with the Department for Transport, Tourism and Sport. It provides valuable evidence of the features of roads and streets that can prevent people with a wide range of abilities from easily accessing local amenities, shops and services in their community.

1.2 Background

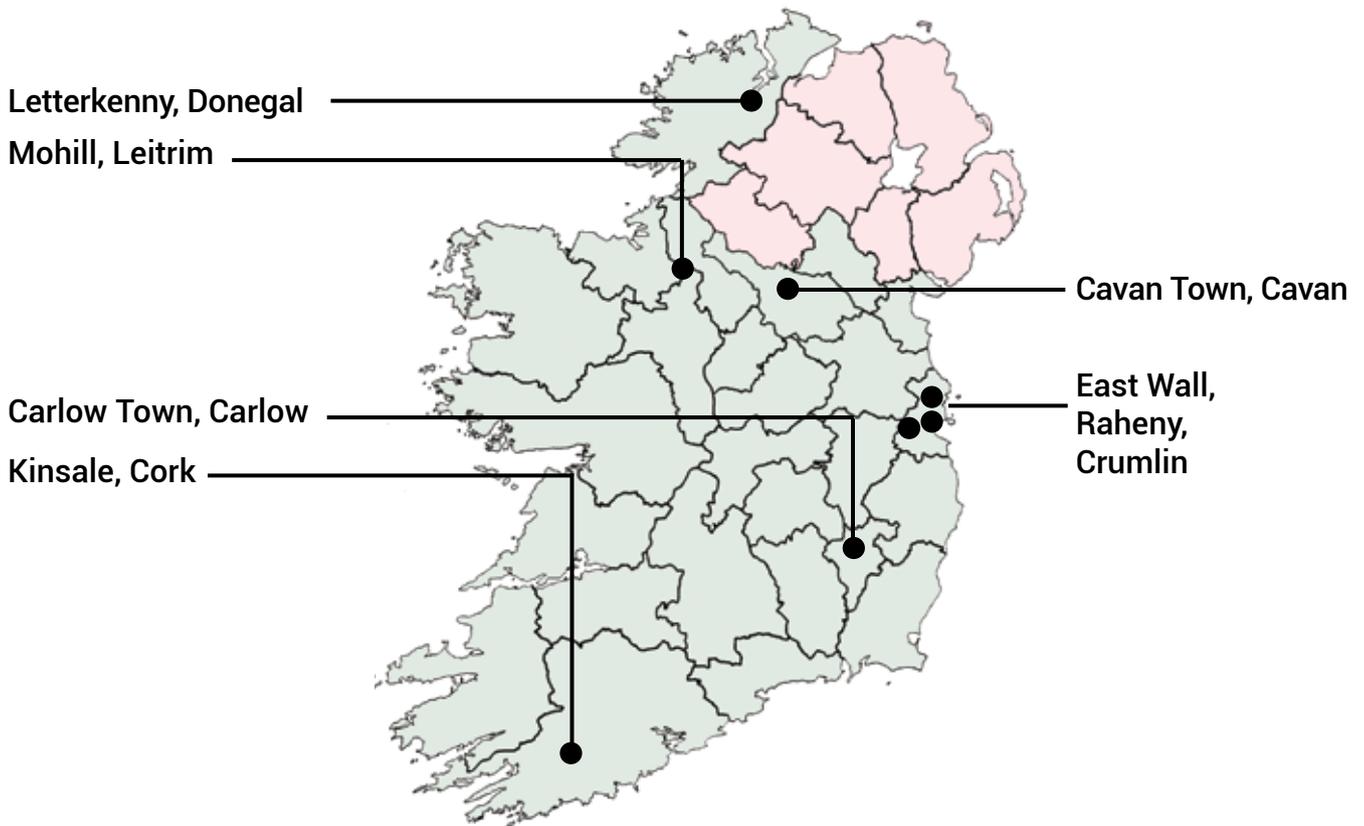
This is the second year that walkability audits have taken place as part of the Age Friendly Town Programme in Ireland. In 2014 the Programme covered eight towns and two service provider areas across four regions. The data contained in this report is from the following towns and suburbs;

- Letterkenny
- Mohill
- Cavan
- Carlow
- Kinsale
- Crumlin

- East Wall
- Raheny

Two service providers; Beaumont Hospital and Dublin Airport, were also part of the 2014 Age Friendly Town Programme. The data from these audits has not been included in this report as the questionnaire was modified to suit the specific requirements of the service providers.

The following map of Ireland shows the spread of the Age Friendly Town programme in 2014.



In 2013 the Irish walkability audit tool was designed following a comprehensive literature review, and based on existing tools internationally. Feedback was received from the Age Friendly Cities around the world, and Irish user groups including NCBI, Arthritis Ireland, Alzheimer's Society of Ireland and the Active Retirement Association. There were ten towns and two cities involved in the 2013 project and walkability audits were conducted by older adults in each of the towns. In 2014 Age Friendly Ireland partnered with the Centre of Excellence in Universal Design (CEUD) at the National Disability Authority. With guidance from the CEUD, the walkability audit was expanded to ensure that the experience of people of different ages, sizes and abilities were reflected, through their participation in the walkability audits.³

The CEUD intends to use the data collected and experience gained from the process to inform the development of a national audit tool for roads and streets, using a universal design approach. The Age Friendly Towns programme will use the data collected in each of the towns to make targeted improvements in each of the individual areas.

³ Universal Design is the design and composition of an environment so that it can be accessed, understood and used to the greatest extent possible by all people regardless of their age, size, ability or disability.

1.3 Sample Description

In 2014 eight towns participated in the Age Friendly Towns Programme. Table 1.1 provides a list of these towns and the number of participants and walkability audit questionnaires completed for each of the towns.

Table 1.1 No. of questionnaires and participants in each town

Town	No. of Participants in Walkability Audit	No. of Completed Questionnaires
Letterkenny	9	6
Crumlin	17	16
Carlow	28	10
East Wall	10	9
Kinsale	6	5
Raheny	20	12
Mohill	18	6
Cavan	12	11
Total	120	75

Source: Age Friendly Ireland Town Programme - Walkability Audits 2014

Universal design places human diversity at the heart of the design process so that buildings and environments can be designed to meet the needs of all users. One of the objectives of the 2014 programme was to include people with a range of different abilities in the audit. Table 1.2 provides a breakdown of those participating in the walkability audits.

Table 1.2 Participants by Ability

Range of Abilities	Number	% (total = 75)
Wheelchair user	12	16.0%
Person with visual difficulties	10	13.3%
Person with hearing loss	7	9.3%
An older person	45	60%
Person with reduced mobility	20	26.7%
Person with buggy/stroller	8	10.7%
Person with young child/toddler	2	2.7%
Carer/Personal Assistant	4	5.3%

Source: Age Friendly Town Programme - Walkability Audits 2014

Note: Some participants specified their range of abilities under more than one of the categories listed in Table 1.2, for example an older person with visual difficulties.

1.4 Methodology

Recruitment of participants

Participants were recruited by the Age Friendly Town planners in each of the towns. Active Retirement groups in the towns were contacted to help with recruiting participants. In Dublin the Irish Wheelchair Association provided help with recruiting participants with a range of abilities. There was a minimum target of four people representing the range of abilities on each of the audits.

Conducting the Walkability Audits

The Age Friendly town planner and the Age Friendly representatives in the relevant local authorities selected appropriate routes for the audits. The routes were chosen because they contained key amenities and services that older people would tend to walk to, such as the post office, bank, credit union or shops.

In each town there were at least two routes identified and in some cases four to five routes. The map below, prepared by an Age Friendly town planner, is an example of a route walked in Cavan town. This route was chosen as it had been identified by the National Road Safety Authority's statistics as one with a high level of road traffic accidents. The route began at the town's GAA pitch, passing by the local Intreo office (formerly Social Welfare offices) and finished at the stop for Bus Eireann.



Each audit began with a meeting between the participants and the Age Friendly town planner and co-ordinator. At these, the planner explained what the walkability audit was and how it would be conducted. The planned routes were described and then, depending on the overall number and range of abilities, the participants were divided into smaller groups and assigned routes, with a planner heading each of the groups. The audit itself took between 45 and 60 minutes in each town. During the audit the planner, co-ordinator and local authority staff took facilitator notes of comments and at the end the participants returned to the offices and, over a cup of tea, completed the individual walkability questionnaires. From beginning to end, the process took approximately two hours.

Analysis

The information from the individual questionnaires was entered on Survey Monkey by the walkability co-ordinator. The quantitative data was analysed using a mixture of SPSS and Excel and qualitative data was analysed by an examination of emerging themes from the comments sections of the questionnaires.

1.5 Experiences of the Walkability Audit Co-ordinator

Supported by the CEUD, a walkability audit co-ordinator was appointed in 2014 to facilitate

consistent application of the audit tool across all the audit sites. This role also involved liaising with seven planners, coordinating with steering committees, defining routes and co-ordinating data recording at the events. The co-ordinator appointed was Shane Winters, and captured below are some of his general thoughts about the experience.

Experience of people with a range of ages, sizes and abilities⁴

This year, the Age Friendly Town Programme, in consultation with the Centre of Excellence for Universal Design, tried to capture the experiences of people of different ages, sizes and abilities on the walkability audits. The validity of the data from the walkability audits has been strengthened by this. The information collected from the participants of various abilities has been very useful for the planners' understanding of the issues and barriers that people face in their towns.

An enjoyable experience for participants

The walkability co-ordinator thought that the walkability audits were an enjoyable and informative experience for the vast majority of participants. People liked being consulted and having their voices heard. The audits were also an educational experience for many of the participants as they found it interesting to see the towns they lived in from other people's perspectives, for example for people with mobility or visual difficulties. This increased consciousness of the issues facing people of different abilities in the towns, will, it is hoped, spread in the individual areas through participants' involvement in other groups in the town.

What was a surprise?

How people's lives can be affected by pedestrian crossings at traffic lights! For example, in Raheny there is very little time given for people to cross at the lights, and people on the audit spoke of how such a simple thing impacts on their lives. People said the sound of cars revving can be very threatening and some people felt too scared to go out in their town alone. Additionally overgrown trees and hedges in private and public properties were a consistent issue for people with and without visual difficulties.

The colour of a footpath

A woman in Cavan with visual difficulties spoke of the difficulty of differentiating between footpaths and roads at pedestrian crossings and just the general difficulty of walking for her because of the lack of a contrast in colours between the two, which are normally grey. From experience she has learned to listen to the noise of car engines as signals for her to cross. Visual contrasts between road and footpath would help her to distinguish between the two, and cross the road safely.

In the following report chapters two to six contain detailed results from the audits under the different areas covered by the walkability questionnaire; footpaths, crossing points, parking, aesthetics, public spaces and buildings and safety and comfort. The conclusion can be found in chapter seven.

⁴ People with a range of differing abilities took part in the audit; wheelchair users, people with visual difficulties, people with hearing loss, older people, ambulant people with reduced mobility and people with buggy/strollers, people with young children.

Chapter 2 Footpaths

2.1 Footpaths - Overall Summary

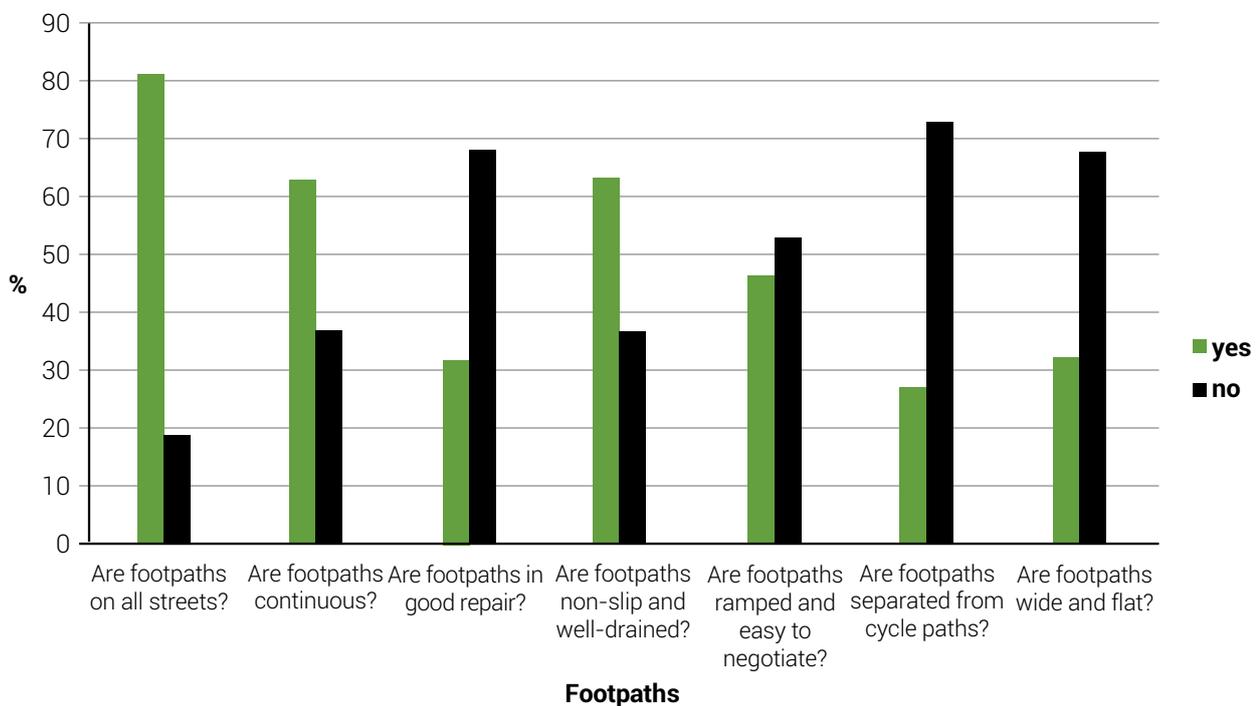
The majority of people participating in the walkability audits thought:

- that footpaths were available on most of the routes they took
- that footpaths were continuous, well drained and not slippery

However many participants thought that the footpaths were not always of good standard or design. Overall, in all the towns there were more people who thought that the footpaths were in bad repair than good repair. Many of the footpaths were found not to be wide enough or appropriately separated from cycle paths. Slightly more people thought the footpaths weren't ramped or easy to negotiate than thought they were.

Figure 2.1 provides an overall picture of the percentage of respondents agreeing or disagreeing with the questions relating to footpaths in the walkability audits. This is then followed by a more detailed breakdown of responses for each of the individual questions.

Figure 2.1 Percentage of respondents agreeing/disagreeing with questions about footpaths.



2.2 Are footpaths available on every street?

Overall people were happy with the availability of footpaths on the routes they took. 81% (n=61) of people responded yes and 19% (n=14) said there were not continuous footpaths available on every street.

2.2.1 Issues around availability of footpaths.

On the whole availability of footpaths was not an issue as there were four fifths (81%) of participants agreeing that there were footpaths available on the routes taken for the walkability audits. Results from the audit did highlight individual problematic areas, for example in one town a participant noted that bus stops and shops were not accessible due to a lack of footpaths. Participants did point out other problems that they found with the footpaths.

Issue 1 Uneven surface on footpaths

Uneven surfaces pose difficulties for users. Footpaths were described as being lumpy and uneven with cracks, potholes and manholes causing problems. Uneven surfaces due to tree roots caused one of the participant's husbands to fall.

“Areas not level where stick would hit higher points of footpath. Examples on Farnham street.”

“Some of the footpaths along the way were uneven and had potholes”.

“High Street problematic, Main Street good apart from high kerbs.”

Issue 2 Cars parking on footpaths

Though the vast majority of respondents (81%) were happy that there were footpaths available, an analysis of the comments points to a common issue of cars parking on footpaths and blocking the way.

“Most footpaths have cars parked on the pathway making it impossible for wheelchair users”.

“Outside Parish Hall...a big white van blocking the path. I rang the owner, they moved it to the other side again blocking so I rang again telling them I was going to the Garda station.”

“Hyde Street, only one side is accessible to wheelchairs due to parked cars.”

Image 2.1 A wheelchair user forced to use the roadway due to the footpath being blocked by a parked car on the footpath.



Issue 3 Footpaths are too narrow

Cars parking on the footpaths caused difficulties for pedestrians and complaints that the footpaths were too narrow; however there was also a general issue raised with the width of footpaths. Universal Design Guidelines⁵ recommend that paths should be sufficiently wide to allow people to pass each other with ease. This however was not found to be the case on many of the routes.

“Footpaths leading from Market Square to Pearse Street are quite narrow and not capable of two way traffic.”

“Not wide enough, very narrow steps from public buildings and signage restrict access to footpath.”

Other issues highlighted by participants were; dealing with steep inclines, not being able to see the difference between the footpath and the road, loose cobbles and no appropriate dished pavements.

2.3 Are the footpaths continuous?

Out of 73 respondents, 63% (n=46) said that the footpaths were continuous and 37% (n=27) said that the footpaths were not continuous.

2.3.1 Issues around footpaths being continuous.

63% (n=46) of participants said that the footpaths were continuous. Some of the issues that were highlighted by those on the walkability audit were things such as;

- where the road narrowed the footpath disappeared
- little consistency with dished or dipped pavements
- there were breaks on footpaths caused by previous repair work.

2.4 Are the footpaths in good repair?

There were 75 respondents to this question, 68% (n=51) did not think the footpaths were in good repair, while 32% (n=24) said the footpaths were in good repair.

2.4.1 Issues about footpaths being in good repair.

Nearly 70% of respondents thought the footpaths were in bad repair. The comments to this question reflect mixed assessments about the state of the footpaths. Some were happy with the general quality of the footpaths in their town.

“In certain areas good, Main Street not bad, High Road appalling.”

“Surface paving is fairly good but some fractures are visible.”

But not all footpaths were in good repair and some of these were pointed out by participants in the walkability audit.

“Look at area outside the garage and the opening to the car (church) park. Very, very bad holes and breaks.”

“In front of the hospital is very poor and just after the primary school got very thin and not easily walked.”

Image 2.2 An example of a car parked on a broken and uneven footpath surface.



2.5 Are the footpaths non-slip and well-drained?

There were 72 respondents who replied to this question.

- 59.7% (n= 43) said that the footpaths were non-slip and were well-drained
- 34.7% (n=25) said that there were problems with the footpaths being slippery or badly drained
- 5.6% (n=4) said that the question was not applicable as the weather was dry

2.5.1 Issues around footpaths being non-slip and well-drained

Only three of the 75 people carrying out the walkability audits said that the weather was wet on the day. Therefore, it is likely that issues in relation to slippery footpaths and rain water pooling on footpaths were not fully captured. One participant said they would like to do the walkability audit again in Autumn, when there would be leaves on the footpath. Some of the issues highlighted were that footpaths can be slippery in wet weather due to drain covers or slippery white markings on the side of the road. Other causes of slippery footpaths mentioned were litter and dog fouling. Drainage was in general not given as a cause of complaint, though one or two streets were mentioned as suffering from blocked drains when there was heavy rainfall. One issue mentioned by participants in this section was the difficulty in Winter of managing to walk up steep or hilly areas. Additional railings and gritting were suggested for dealing with this.

2.6 Are the footpaths ramped and easy to negotiate?

There were 72 responses to this question. Just over half, (54%, n=38) said that the footpaths were not ramped or easy to negotiate. While there were 46% (n=33) of people who thought the footpaths were ramped and easy to negotiate. The positive comments are reflected in the following responses:

“ Wider and less severe, good in most area.”

“ Ramps are well done.”

“Mostly good but at Watermill Road there is a bad slope which is dangerous for falling.”

But there were over half of the participants who said there were difficulties. The main issues highlighted are listed below.

Issue 1 Steepness of dropped kerbs from footpath to road

A wheelchair user in Crumlin, could not cross the road as the decline was too steep from the path onto the road. Another participant said;

“While there were some ramps some were too steep and some were not wide enough.”

Issue 2 Not appropriately ramped

Some respondents thought there were not enough ramps, or those that were available, were not positioned in the right place.

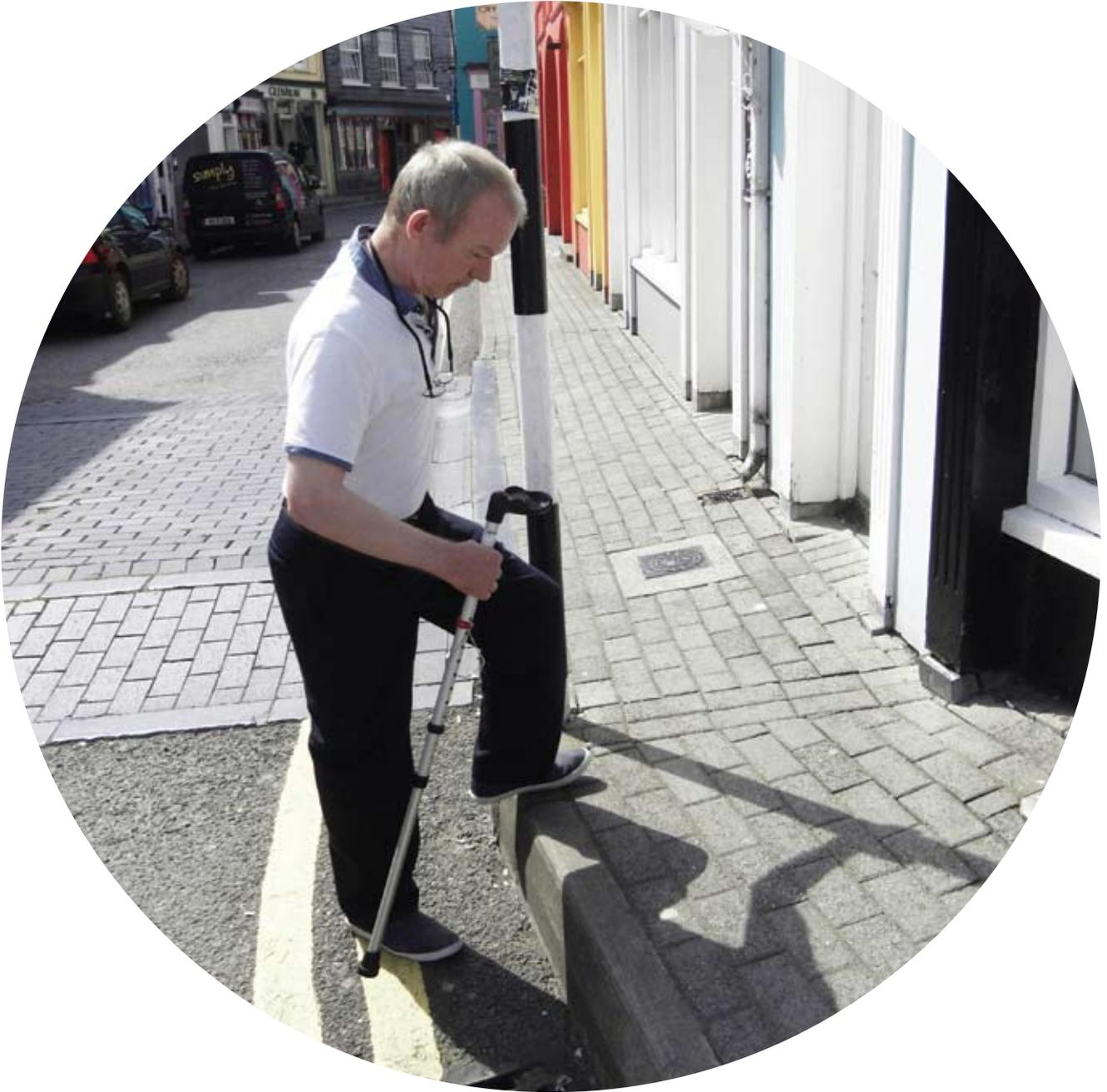
“ Not many ramps where needed”.

“ Need wider ramps.”

“Currently no ramps installed and footpaths are difficult to negotiate due to lack of width and space.”

“Ramps are too narrow and no ramps are located mid-street to get across safely.”

Image 2.3 High kerbing in a town forcing an older adult with mobility issues to pull himself onto the footpath with the assistance of a road sign.



Issue 3 Cars blocking the ramps and making paths difficult to negotiate

There was an issue in one of the towns with cars blocking the ramps.

2.7 Are the footpaths well separated from the cycle paths?

There were 74 respondents to this question. There were 27% (n=20) of participants who thought that the footpaths were well separated from the cycle paths and 26% (n=19) who thought they were not. However most of the routes audited had no cycle paths and therefore 47% (n=35) said the question was not applicable.

2.7.1 Issues to do with cycle paths.

Most of the routes walked in the towns had no cycle routes. The main issue commented on by participants in the walkability audits was the general difficulty of sharing footpaths with cyclists.

“Some paths are now shared with cyclists, all paths should be one or the other – Neill Blaney road.”

“Very dangerous on Main Street and Manor House as students and young people are cycling on the footpath in rows of three. Incidents of knocking down pedestrians.”

“No cycle paths and this can be a problem for older people using the footpaths.”

2.8 Are the footpaths wide and flat?

There were 74 respondents to this question. There were 68% (n=50) who did not think the footpaths were wide enough or flat enough.

Image 2.4 An example of a post box in a rural town, making an already narrow footpath, even more difficult to negotiate.



2.8.1 Issues about footpaths being wide and flat.

Some of the problems with the width and surfaces of the footpaths highlighted by participants have already been reported in this section. The width of the footpaths, was the main concern. In all towns participants complained that the footpaths were often too narrow and sometimes dangerous for pedestrians to use and in some, impossible for wheelchair users to use. The narrowness of footpaths is compounded by cars parking on the paths or street furniture such as letter boxes or restaurant signage blocking the routes.

“Along Tullow Street very narrow and restaurants have noticeboards outside their premises.”

“At the post office the letterbox is in the way and there is very little footpath.”

“Farnham Street is pretty good. Bridge Street is not wide enough with cars and taxis using it also. Abbey Street the main problem is parking on footpaths and there is no enforcement. This minimises space.”

“Cars parking on the footpath is a huge problem for wheelchair users and people with limited mobility using aids to walk.”

Chapter 3 Crossings

3.1 Crossings – Overall Summary

The majority of people thought that:

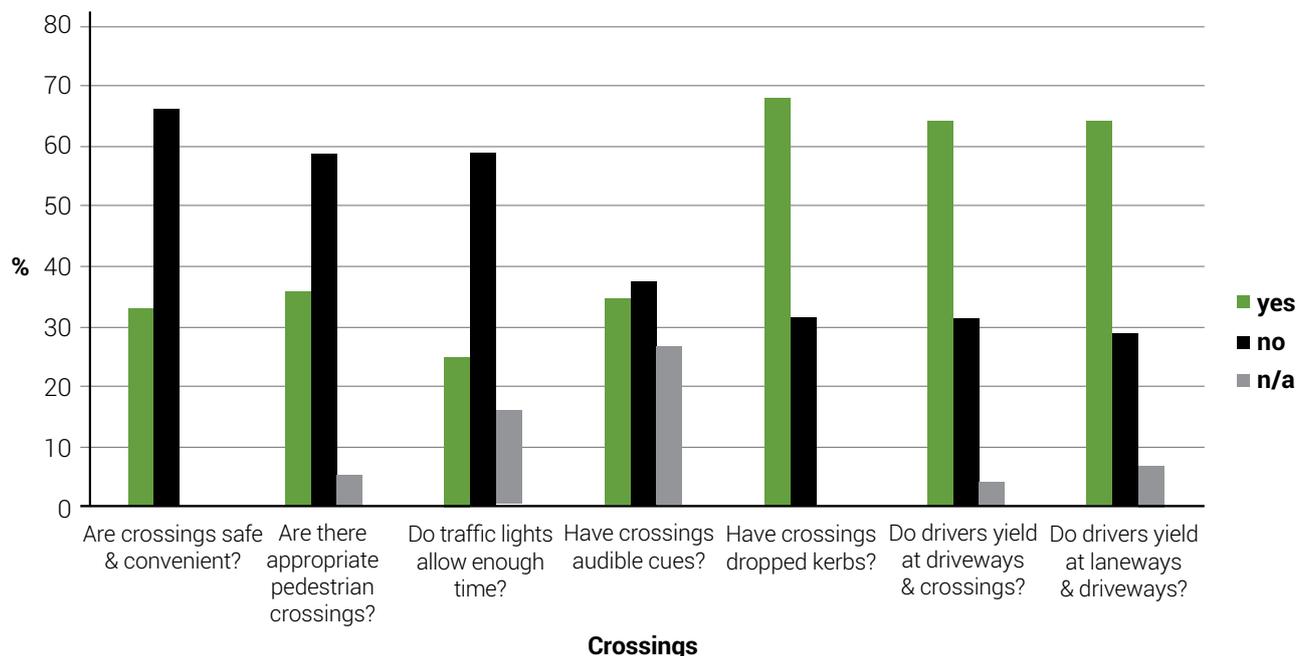
- pedestrian crossing points were not safe and convenient to use
- there were not enough appropriate crossings at busy streets
- that traffic lights did not allow enough time for people to cross the streets

The majority of people were happy that:

- pedestrian crossings were equipped with dropped kerbs
- in general drivers yielded to pedestrians at crossings

The chart in figure 3.1 presents the answers to questions relating to pedestrian crossings.

Figure 3.1 Percentage of respondents agreeing/disagreeing with questions about crossings.



3.2 Are crossing points safe and convenient?

Overall the majority of people did not think that the crossing points were safe and convenient to use. There were 66.7% (n=50) who said the crossing points were not safe and convenient and 33.3% (n=25) of people who thought that they were.

Image 3.1 An example of a zebra crossing with dished kerb and tactile paving.



3.2.1: Issues with crossings being safe and convenient.

Issue 1: Design

The most common complaint about crossings by those participating in the walkability audits concerned the poor design of crossings. One problem was the lack of clear road markings to delineate the crossing points.

“The pedestrian crossings were not “marked” as a crossing, quite confusing to both walkers and motorists.”

“Near St. Leo's School and O'Brien Road, crossing points are not marked and plant pot an obstruction.”

The second most common problem with design was a lack of dished kerbing at crossings:

“Main Street has an island in the middle of a crossing and no lowered kerb on one side.”

“Coming down from Tullow Street on museum side when leaving footpath near cathedral the footpaths around are too high to regain access.”

Image 3.2 A picture of the main street in a town with no pedestrian crossings in place.



Issue 2: Not enough pedestrian crossings

After design, the next most common issue was the general lack of pedestrian crossings, especially near shops, churches and bus stations.

Issue 3: Not enough time to cross

The third big issue emerging from the walkability audits to do with crossing safety was the lack of time being allowed by traffic light signals to cross safely.

3.3 Are busy streets equipped with crossings and signals?

Nearly 60% of people (n=43) answering this question were not happy that the busy streets in the towns had appropriate pedestrian crossings and signals. This question was similar to the last question and the issues highlighted in the comments on the surveys are again the same. The main complaint in all areas was the lack of crossings to where people wanted to go. People asked for crossings to shops, such as opticians, churches and schools. Where there were crossings, there were complaints that the time allocated to cross was not sufficient.

Image 3.3 A wide junction with traffic islands but no pedestrian crossing.



3.4 Do traffic lights allow enough time for all to cross?

There were 59% (n=43) of people who thought that the traffic lights did not allow enough time for slow-moving pedestrians to cross the street and 25% (n=18) who thought that there was enough time allowed, while 16% (n=12) walked routes which had no traffic lights.

3.4.1: Issues with timing of pedestrian crossings and signals.

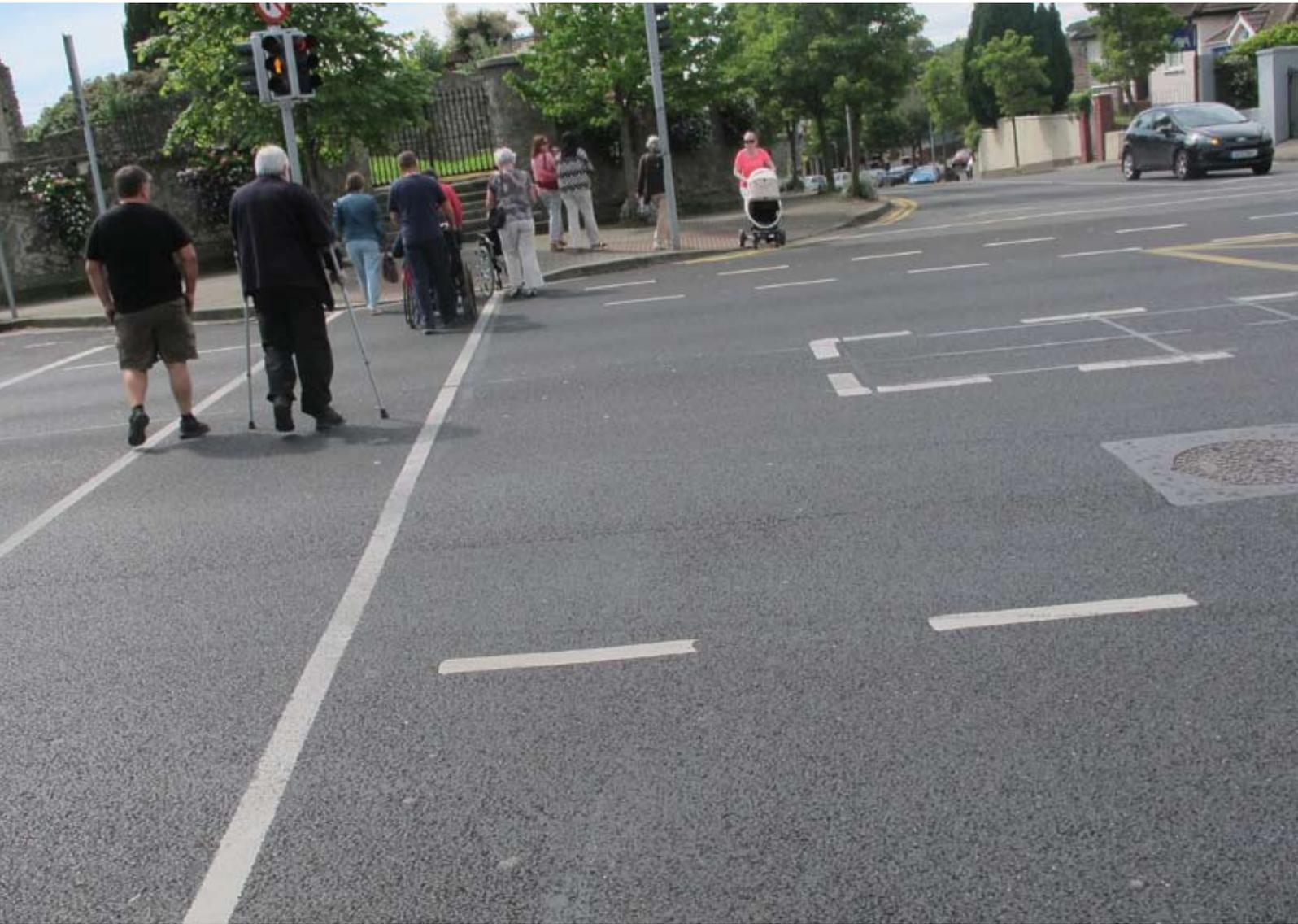
The majority of comments reflect dissatisfaction with the time allowed for people to cross the roads safely:

“Hospital lights, by the time we reached centre the green man flashed and the signal stopped.”

“We did four tests and the yellow light was on before the halfway stage in every case.”

“I can walk only as fast as I can. Drivers would be slow to use the horn. Longer times given to green and yellow lights is needed. Can be nervous for older people crossing.”

Image 3.4 Pedestrians in an urban centre only half way across the road and traffic light already amber.



3.5 Do pedestrian crossings have adequate audible cues?

There were 35% (n=25) of people who were satisfied with the audible cues and slightly more, 38% (n=27), who were not happy that the pedestrian crossings had audible cues. There were 27% (n=19) who said this question was not applicable..

In one town the sound of the crossing signal could not be heard over the traffic noise and there was a request for the sound to be higher and continuous. In another town there was a complaint that the bleep stopped at the amber lighting and that it should be extended until the red light comes on and also that the bleep should be consistent as otherwise people get confused.

3.6 Do crossing points have dropped kerbs?

Towns were well equipped with dropped kerbs at crossing points. Nearly 70% (n=48) of people said that there were dropped kerbs at crossing points.

3.6.1: Issues with dropped kerbs

Though the majority of participants agreed that there were dropped kerbs, not all were happy with their availability. There were ten comments which reflected a lack of satisfaction with the number of dropped kerbs.

Another issue was that there were flaws with some of the dropped kerbs. These were things like;

- a lack of consistency with the placement of kerbs
- roads sinking, so despite dropped kerbs, the footpath was not flush with the road
- dished paving was sometimes slippery

Image 3.6 Dropped kerbs not flush enough with the road causing difficulties for a woman with a rollator.



3.7 Do drivers yield to pedestrians?

There were 65% (n=46) of people who said that drivers did yield to pedestrians, while 31% (n=22) did not think drivers yielded, and the rest said the question was not applicable.

In general people commented that stopping was at the discretion of the driver and, though most do stop, pedestrians can never be sure. In areas where cars are moving at higher speeds the drivers are less likely to stop and, sometimes they just don't see the pedestrians because of high walls or hidden entrances. In one town with narrow streets, there seemed to be a greater likelihood of drivers stopping as they have to drive more slowly and are more vigilant.

"They do stop, but pedestrians are never sure. Hard to judge where there are two lanes and two drivers."

"Because the streetscapes are narrow it makes drivers slow down."

"Rarely, but sometimes drivers will yield, but the vast majority of the time they won't."

"Drivers do yield at laneways mainly due to the fact that the street is narrow and is not capable of supporting two-way traffic so cars go slowly."

Image 3.7 A dangerous corner in a rural town with no pedestrian crossing and a building blocking motorists' vision.



Chapter 4 Parking

4.1 Parking – Overall Summary

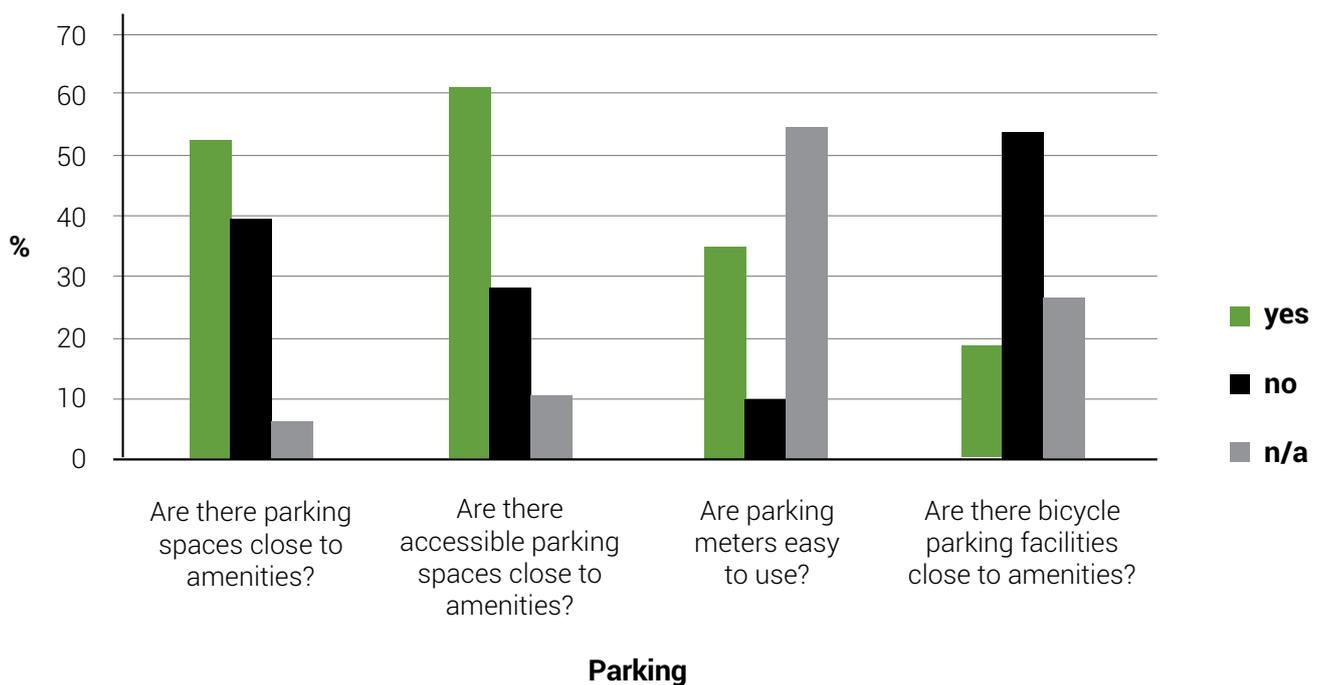
The majority of people were happy;

- with the availability of parking spaces
- with the availability of accessible parking spaces
- that parking meters were easy to use

However only 13 (18%) thought that there were bicycle parking facilities available close to amenities.

Figure 4.1 provides a picture of overall agreement and disagreement on the questions related to parking in the towns.

Figure 4.1 Percentage of respondents agreeing/disagreeing with questions about parking



4.2 Are parking spaces available close to amenities?

When people were asked if parking spaces were available close to where they needed to go, there were 53% (n=38) who thought there were and 40% (n=29) who said there weren't. For 7% (n=5) this question was not applicable.

4.2.1 Areas identified as needing more parking spaces

Though over 50% were happy with parking spaces being available, the comments for this question do identify common areas where more spaces could be provided. Government buildings, such as a revenue office or Garda stations were mentioned as needing more parking. More parking near chemists, banks and post offices was also identified as being required.

Issue: Parking being taken up by workers

One issue that arose was that the parking near shops and other services was often taken up by workers parking for longer periods. There was a request that workers park in local car parks and free up the on-street parking. There was also a request for older people to be allocated spaces.

"While there is some on-street parking these spaces are filled by business owners and none are available for older adults."

"There is a major issue with parking in the town. Car spaces are being taken up by mobile people."

"The town centre needs priority designated parking spaces for older adults."

4.3 Are accessible parking spaces available?

The majority of people were happy with the availability and location of accessible parking spaces. 61% (n=41) of people were happy with the availability of accessible spaces close to where they needed to go.

4.3.1 Issues with accessible parking spaces

Issue 1 Poor Design

In one town the wheelchair space was inaccessible. While in another the parking space was in the wrong place.

“ Garda station is very inaccessible for parking for wheelchair user as it’s close to the wall and only two spaces to park for the public, all the rest for the Garda.”

“Disability space is in the wrong space outside ‘Shop X’. You have to block entrance to the park in order to use disabled space.”

Issue 2 Not enough spaces

Another issue was that there were none or not enough accessible parking spaces available in many areas.

“No accessible spaces near amenities that are visible.”

“Bridge Street has no accessible parking spaces available, only within the car park.”

“On-street parking only, but no wheelchair or disabled parking available.”

Issue 3 Spaces being taken up by non-badge holders.

The next image tells the story of a non-badge holder car parked in a wheelchair accessible parking space.

Image 4.1 Designated on-street accessible parking occupied by a car without the necessary blue badge.



4.4 Are parking meters easy to use?

- 35% (n=25) said they were easy to operate
- 10% (n=7) said they were not easy to operate
- 55% (n=39) said the question was not applicable

4.4.1 Issues with parking meters

The one issue that came through from the comments was that two wheelchair users mentioned that the position of the meters was too high for them to operate.

4.5 Are bicycle parking facilities available close to amenities?

There were more than half (54%, n=38) of the participants who answered that there were no bicycle parking facilities and just a fifth (n=13) who said that there were parking facilities near to where people needed to go. However for 27% (n=19) this question was not applicable. From an analysis of the comments the majority were to do with the lack of parking facilities seen in many of the towns. More facilities were asked for near shops and schools, but on the whole this was not a burning issue for participants judging by the number of comments to this question.

Chapter 5 Aesthetics Look and Feel

5.1 Aesthetics – Overall Summary

People were asked about the aesthetics of the routes they walked. Were signs easy to use, were public building entrances visible, were there obstacles on the routes, how pleasant was the environment?

The majority of people were happy:

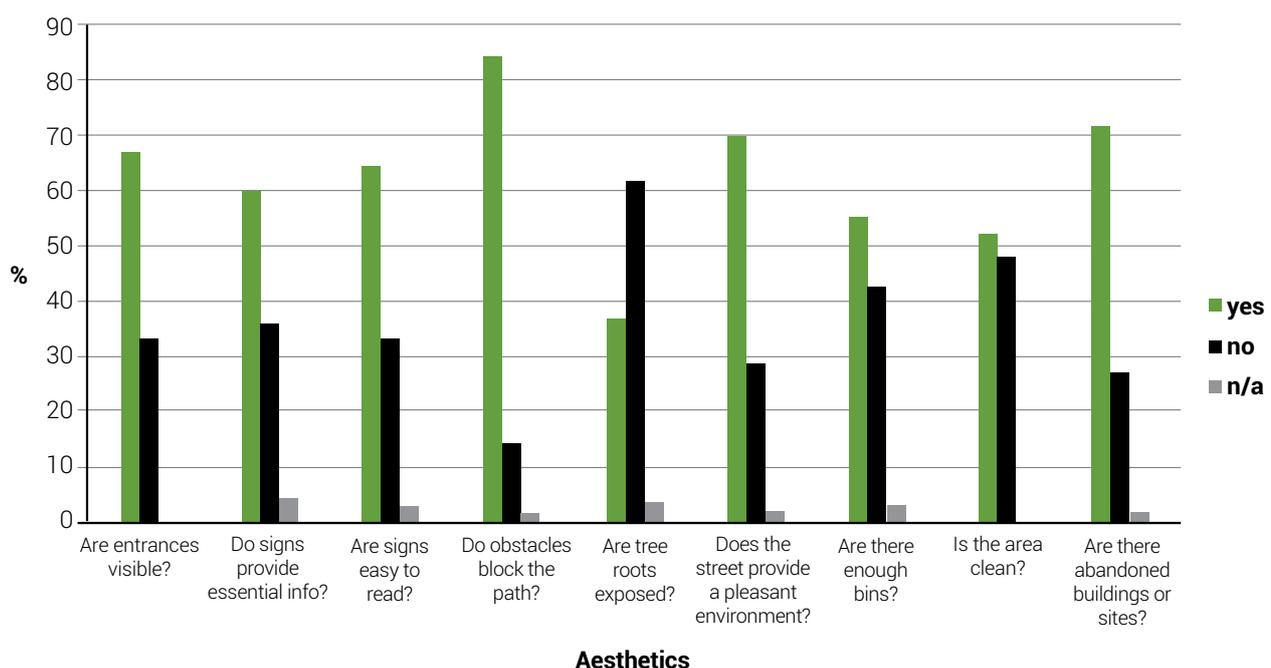
- that the streets they walked provided a pleasant environment (70%)
- with the signage of the street environment
- that the signs were easy to read and provided clear information
- that entrances were easy to find

But there were problems navigating the footpaths:

- there were 84% of people who thought footpaths were being blocked by street furniture or overgrown shrubbery
- litter, graffiti and dog droppings were still an issue for many of the participants of this survey

The chart in figure 5.1 shows the level of agreement and disagreement for each of these questions.

Figure 5.1 Percentage of respondents agreeing/disagreeing with questions about environmental aesthetics



5.2 Can people find their way around the town?

There were three questions in the audit relating to finding ones way around the town. People were asked was it easy to find public buildings, was there sufficient signage which provided essential information and were people able to read the signs.

- there were 67% of people who thought entrances to buildings were clearly visible
- 60% of people thought that the signs gave essential information
- 64% of people thought that signposts were clear, visible and easy to read

On the whole the majority were happy with the signage, but there were clear issues that came through from the comments.

Issue 1 Accessibility

Though these questions were not specifically about physically accessing buildings there were some issues raised in the comments which referred to problems that people encountered when carrying out the audits.

Access for wheelchairs was an issue, with both public and commercial buildings not always catering for wheelchair users. There were issues such as narrow entrances or ramps which were too steep. At one Garda station the ramp was too steep, while at other stations there were no ramps at all.

Issue 2 Not enough signposts

There was a lack of signage noted by some of the participants of the audit on the routes they walked.

“ A marked lack of signage for Garda station, hospital, swimming pool, credit union, county museum and famine graveyard.”

“More signage at the hospital, library sign is in the wrong direction, sign for the recycling centre, no signs for the community centre and for the car park.”

“Signs are not sufficient in showing where the local amenities and attractions are, such as the Sean O’Casey centre, Post Office and a sign to let people know they are in East Wall.”

Issue 3 Signs were sometimes not clear enough

Writing on signs was sometimes too small and not clearly visible. The following comments reflect difficulties participants had reading signs on the walkability audit routes taken.

“Signs need to have colour contrast in larger font.”

“Public signs to have bigger wording as it's too small presently.”

“Some of the signs on Market Lane have poor legibility and need bigger wording.”

“Can't see them and they need to be bigger. Even information on buses needs to be lower in order to see them.”

Image 5.1 A poorly maintained street sign.



5.3 Are there obstacles blocking the path?

There were two specific questions in the walkability questionnaire specifically concerned with understanding if there were physical obstacles blocking footpaths and making it more difficult for people to navigate the routes they walked.

There was a very clear response to the question, concerning obstacles such as utility poles, signs, bins, shrubbery or overhead obstacles blocking the footpath. 85% (n=60) of people thought that there were obstacles blocking the footpaths when they were carrying out the walkability audits.

Far fewer people thought that tree roots were a tripping hazard.

- only 36% (n=26) of people thought that roots of trees caused a problem

Issue 1 Overgrown shrubbery & hedges

This was the number one issue mentioned in all of the towns that were audited. There was a general request for shrubbery and trees to be cut back.

“On the road up to the Fire Station the hedge is too big and needs to be cleared of briars. Joanne scraped her face on numerous occasions, the path is also narrow.”

Image 5.2 Another overgrown hedge causing problems for pedestrians.



Image 5.3 Overgrown hedge causing obstacle for pedestrians.



Issue 2 Rubbish bins an obstacle

The main obstacle after shrubbery and hedges that was pointed out by people on the audits were rubbish bins.

“Bins are littered in some areas and take up a lot of space.”

“Public bins block the footpath.”

Image 5.4 Bins and planting on a town footpath causing major obstacles for pedestrians.



Image 5.5 Wheelie bins and planters blocking the footpath.



In general the roots of trees did not cause many problems with the footpaths, though isolated trees were pointed out in the particular towns.

5.4 Is the streetscape pleasing?

On the whole people carrying out the audits were happy with the street environment. There were 70% (n=49) of people who agreed that the street provided a pleasant visual environment.

5.5 Are the number of rubbish bins and recycle bins adequate?

There were 55% (n=39) of participants in the audits who thought that the number of bins on the street were adequate. The two main issues about bins was a need in all towns for more bins and then, in at least two of the towns, there was an issue that the bins were not emptied often enough.

“This is a serious problem. There are no bins on Bunting Park and the dog poo is everywhere.”

“Rubbish bins at Shamrock Square consist of two plastic buckets, one of

which is broken."

In East Wall there was a complaint by two individuals that the recycling bins were too far away for seniors and disabled people to access easily.



Image 5.6 Dumping of rubbish in an urban park.

5.6 Is the area clear of litter, graffiti and dog droppings?

There was an almost equal split between the overall numbers in the towns agreeing and disagreeing that the area they walked was clean. 52% (n=38) said that the area was clean and 48% (n=35) disagreed. Again this question is linked to the previous question about there being adequate bins in the towns audited.

Issue Dog fouling

The main issue that was brought up in all towns was the issue of dog fouling. Some towns mentioned that more dog litter bins might help alleviate the problem. Below is an example of some of the comments on this issue.

“Dog fouling problem, smell comes on wheelchair into house.”

“Dog droppings is a big issue as most owners don't care about dog droppings.”

“Dog droppings is still an issue even though they are giving the bags for free as part of the Tidy Towns.”

“Dog fouling everywhere. Necessary to have more litter bins available.”

5.7 Are there abandoned buildings or sites in this area?

Abandoned buildings and sites were present in most areas. There were 72% (n=53) of people who said they saw these on the routes they walked.

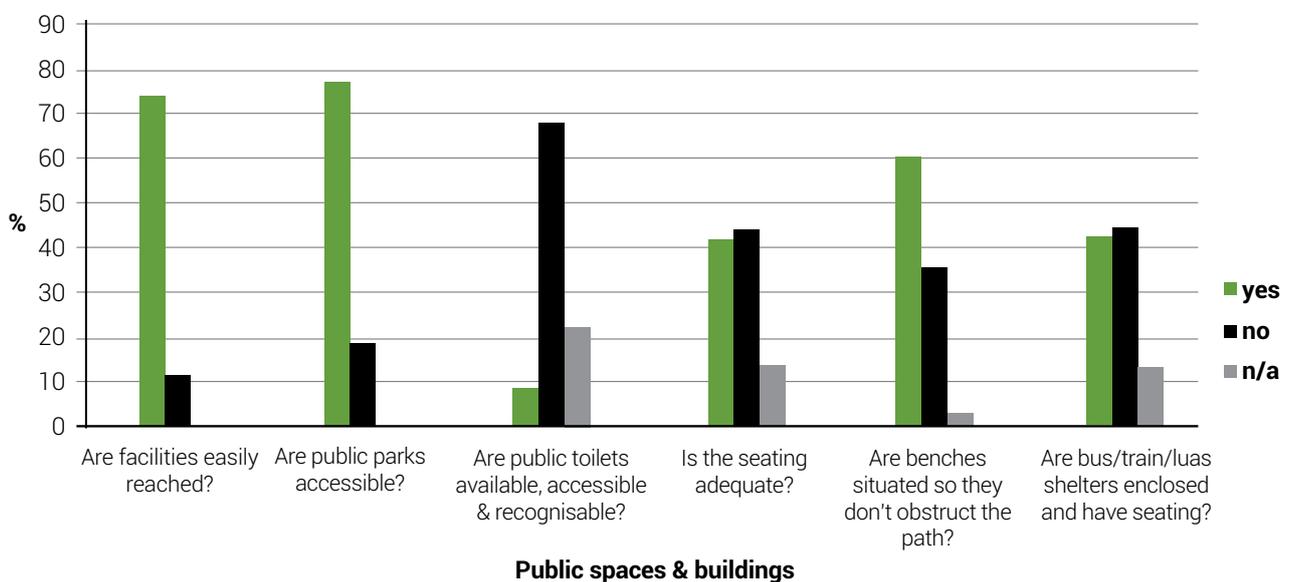
Chapter 6 Public Spaces and Buildings

6.1 Public Spaces and Buildings - Overall summary

The walkability audit wanted to find out how people felt about using public spaces and buildings. It asked whether people were able to get to key services and public buildings such as banks, shops, and churches and also if there were amenities such as parks which people could use. Benches, public toilets and public transport stops were all asked about.

- 75% of participants said they were able to reach the facilities and services they needed easily
- 77% said that there were public parks available to them
- only 8% said that there were public toilets available that were accessible
- 42% said that public seating was adequate
- 43% said that that there was seating and shelter at public transport stops
- 37% thought that 'street furniture' blocked the footpaths

Figure 6.1 Percentage of respondents agreeing/disagreeing with questions about public spaces and buildings.



6.2 Are facilities easily reached?

There was a high level of agreement that facilities such as shops, banks, post offices, churches and libraries were easily reached. Three quarters of respondents (75%) said that they were able to reach facilities easily.

Only one respondent mentioned public transport, and this was in a positive way, saying that the number 83 bus was very useful for getting into town.

Issue 1 Not wheelchair accessible

As already seen in a previous question wheelchair accessibility was an issue in nearly all the towns. In nearly all cases steps were the main problem, but also in some cases steep ramps were brought up as an issue.

“Struggle to get to key amenities with steps and ineffective ramps.”

“Garda station, shops at Old County Road have steps.”

Issue 2 Not enough parking

Parking was mentioned as a problem for accessing services in two of the towns, with a lack of parking near to key services such as the post office, library and pharmacy mentioned.

Issue 3 Key services too far away/difficult to get to

There were two towns where key services, such as banking, were just too far away for people to get to easily.

6.3 Are public parks accessible for exercise and relaxation?

There was a high level of agreement with this question with over three quarters (77%, n=54) of the people completing the audit saying that the parks were accessible.

However there were some comments which mentioned difficulties getting to the parks. In one town getting to the park was difficult due to a dangerous road lay-out and also the park was slightly outside the town so it was difficult for people with mobility issues to reach. In another town the difficulty was actually getting into the park:

“Sundrive not accessible, have to go all around to get in and watch a match, it is impossible to see my grandson.”

“Kissing gates and wheelchair not able to get by.”

Another issue raised in at least two of the towns was that the playgrounds were too far away. Older people often act as child minders for their grandchildren and therefore accessibility and distance to playgrounds should be considered for this group.

“Would be nice to have a playground nearer the village, other than at St. Anne's park.”

While some people commented on the fact that the parks did not always cater for an older population. Some asked for more seating, exercise equipment and better maintenance of the parks.

“Parks are geared towards the younger generation.”

“No exercise equipment in our parks. Just look at the equipment supplied by South Dublin County Council.”

Fairview Park was mentioned as being a great resource to residents.

“Fairview Park is easy to access and there are three playgrounds for young and old to exercise at.”

6.4 Are public toilets available, accessible and recognisable?

There was an overwhelming negative response to this. Only six people (8%) answered yes to this question, while 68% (n=49) of people answered no and 24% (n=17) said the question was not applicable, presumably because there were no public toilets. The comments reflect the lack of public toilets in many of the towns surveyed.

One town had a toilet but it was closed for maintenance and in another town with a toilet it was in a park and was sometimes vandalised.

“Not in the town centre but it is located down by the pier and not accessible for older adults who have reduced mobility.”

What is apparent in the comments is that, on the whole, businesses are good at allowing people use their toilets and, in many cases cater for those with disabilities too.

“Public toilet open certain times of the year. Businesses are generally good to cater for disabled provision and use.”

Image 6.1 A good example of well-positioned seating in Dublin which is set back from the line of movement and therefore not an obstruction.



6.5 Is public seating adequate with back and arm rests?

There was a more balanced response to this question. Just under half, 42% (n=30), answered yes and 44% (n=32) answered no and there were ten people (14%) who said this question was not applicable as there were no public seats on their routes.

The main issue coming through from the comments to this question is that there is in general not enough seating. In one town there is no seating at all and it was conjectured that this was because of anti-social behaviour, while in others with seating, more needed to be made available on the main shopping streets.

“Seating is a major problem. I know that as a person with epilepsy who needs to rest often.”

Image 6.2 An example of seating provided on one of the audit routes.



6.6 Does 'street furniture' obstruct the path?

There were 37% (n=26) of respondents who thought that 'street furniture' did obstruct the paths, while over 60% were happy that the 'street furniture' did not obstruct paths.

6.7 Are bus/train/luas shelters enclosed and do they have seating?

There was almost an equal divide in response to this question, 43% (n=30) answered yes, 44% (n=31) answered no, while 13% (n=9) said that the question was not applicable. Where seating and shelter were provided people were happy, however in many areas there was no shelter or seating provided.

"No bus shelters to go towards town in Crumlin at all."

"Only some have shelters and seating."

"But problem with visibility to bus coming with poster advertising blocking view."

"Need for shelter and seating at bus stops. Men's shed could help construct this."

6.8 Safety and Comfort

People were asked whether they would feel safe if they were out walking the route on their own and also if the area was well lit. In general people would feel safe. Three quarters, or 75% (n=53), of respondents said they would feel safe walking the routes they took on their own and four fifths (81%, n=56) said that the area was well lit. However the question did not specify the time of day. An analysis of the comments to this section revealed that more people, than is seen in the overall response rate, would not feel safe going out alone in the dark.

"Not at night, I wouldn't go out at night on my own, I don't feel safe."

"Afraid if alone. I got car jacked in the car park in Crumlin with a gun."

Secondly there were issues with the lighting not being good enough in certain areas for people at night.

“Parking area around town hall unsafe due to lighting.”

“At night there are dark lanes near the DART station.”

An interesting finding was that those people who were not happy to go out alone during the day were frightened of falling, because of:

- poor quality footpaths
- narrow streetscapes
- worries about traffic

Chapter 7 Conclusion

The 2014 Walkability Audit was carried out in eight Irish towns. This report has analysed the information provided by the people who took part in these surveys and we are grateful to them for their contribution. The individual comments included in this report provide an insight into what people had to say about the routes they walked.

This year the validity of the data has been strengthened by the inclusion of data from people with a range of ages, sizes and abilities.

It is important to note that this report is an amalgamation of the data from the eight towns and, therefore, it provides more general trends and views. The data for each of the specific towns contributed to the individual town plans by each of the Age Friendly Planners. The following contains the key overall results.

On the positive side:

- towns are providing a pleasant environment for participants
- people are able to easily access the shops and services they need
- there are structures in place in the towns which make them more walkable, such as continuous footpaths and dropped kerbs
- people are able to access parks
- the majority of people are happy with parking facilities, especially accessible spaces
- people feel safe in their towns

What could be improved?

- footpaths are not always well-designed or properly maintained. There were issues with footpaths being badly repaired, uneven, not properly ramped and sometimes just too narrow
- there were too many obstacles on some paths for people to negotiate; such as overgrown shrubbery, postboxes, planters and signage
- there either weren't enough pedestrian crossings, or where there were crossings, they weren't always adequate; not allowing enough time for slow-moving pedestrians to cross or not clearly delineated from the road
- greater wheelchair access to some buildings

The behaviour of some town users could be improved.

- on the audits there were numerous examples of cars parking on footpaths or non-badge holders parking in accessible parking spaces
- householders should be more aware of how overgrown shrubbery can cause problems for people using the towns
- more drivers could yield to pedestrians
- more dog owners need to clean up after their dogs.

What next?

The Centre for Excellence in Universal Design is working to produce a national quality audit tool for urban roads and streets using a universal design approach, to ensure that the needs of all people regardless of age, size or ability are taken into account. This is in response to the Design Manual for Urban Roads and Streets⁶, which envisages that quality audits will be undertaken during different stages of the design process to demonstrate that appropriate consideration has been given to all of the relevant aspects of a design. The information collected in these Walkability audits will be used to inform the development of this quality audit, providing valuable evidence of the features of roads and streets that can prevent people with a wide range of abilities from easily accessing and using local amenities, shops and services in their community.

Strategic plans for the individual towns have been developed by the local Age Friendly Alliances. These plans are based on the consultations carried out in the towns. The walkability audit was one of the consultation strands which were used by the town planners to understand the needs in the local areas.

Currently actions are being developed and implemented. The following lists are an example of some of the projects, which have begun in the individual towns as a direct result of the 2014 Walkability Audit. As can be seen from this sample immediate improvements are already underway in towns and suburbs across the country as a direct result of the 2014 walkability audits.

⁶ The Design Manual for Urban Roads and Streets is a joint publication launched in 2013 by the Department of Transport, Tourism & Sport and the Department of Environment, Community & Local Government. Its aim is to put well-designed streets at the heart of sustainable communities.

Footpaths – Some actions

Carlow Council and Dublin Bus are investigating improving the gradient and surface of the footpaths along Tullow Street and Dublin road and introducing seating and bus shelters.

In Mohill loose paving on footpaths has been highlighted to the Council.

Open drains in Cavan have been made secure and covered.

Shop owners in Cavan have been approached about obstacles placed outside their premises which inhibit pedestrian movement. They have agreed to remove some of the obstacles.

Crossings - Some actions

In Cavan the audit highlighted difficulties for pedestrians crossing at certain junctions in the town. The Age Friendly Steering group are now investigating future County Council plans for crossings and traffic calming at Traen Mor, which may have a knock on effect on the speed of traffic.

In Raheny the time allowed by traffic signals for pedestrians to cross on the Howth Road is to be increased in Spring 2015 to allow pedestrians to cross more safely.

In Carlow Age Friendly Parking areas are being piloted.

Aesthetics – Look and Feel – Some actions

In Raheny the Garda station was difficult to access. The existing ramp is being made more accessible and an accessible car parking space is being installed.

Mohill is investigating where it would make sense to provide free dog poop bags in the town.

The Steering Group in Mohill are exploring the option of students in transition year running a "Keep Mohill Tidy" project as part of the transition year programme.

In East Wall, in conjunction with Nascadh Community Development Project, the Men's Shed and Dublin City Council, the local community cleared a large abandoned strip of land of all rubble. It was then cleaned up and landscaped.

Public Spaces & Buildings – Some actions

In Mohill the County Council and the Town planner are working together to identify walking routes and potential green spaces in the town.

In East Wall a new green space was created. East Wall had no green space or parkland and the only green space available for community enjoyment was on Church property. The local parish priest agreed to the development of a very large green space on the church grounds to be turned into a civic community park and garden with raised flower beds designed to take into account the needs of older persons.

The Steering Group in Crumlin are investigating the possibility of another tone zone area, possibly covered, in an area identified by older persons.

In Crumlin new public seating has already been installed.

In Cavan more businesses are being encouraged to become age friendly, especially restaurants and cafes.

The public toilets were reopened in Cavan town.

Age Friendly Ireland now plan to communicate the results of these audits to local authority staff, to chief executives, planners, engineers and those involved in the age friendly process. Also, based on the experiences of these audits the walkability audit tool has been further developed, along with guidelines for its use. The audit tool will be available during 2015 for local authorities and also community groups interested in conducting walkability audits in their areas.

Watercolor painting by Gheorghe Tofan.



