

Parking Standards for New Developments: Walking Distances Review February 2026

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Introduction

This paper explores the walking distance criteria for car free development in the current Parking Standards for New Development (2022) and considers, through a review of various sources of research, whether there is suitable justification for this criteria to be revised in the proposed updates to the parking standards in the context of both car free development and the new proposals for Car Light development.

Implementing ‘Decide & Provide’: Requirements for Transport Assessments (3.3 Proximity and Connectivity Metrics for New Developments) states that “To identify multi-modal trip rates for the ‘do-minimum’ scenario for proposed residential development, an assessment is required of which services are accessible within a round trip of 20-minutes’ walk (i.e. 10 minutes each way) based on walking routes and not as the crow flies.”. ¹ This distance is reiterated in the Parking Standards for New Developments in reference to one of the four criteria needed for a car free (and now Car Light) development.² The LTCP also includes this distance as part of Policy 13’s Liveable Neighbourhoods.³

¹ Oxfordshire County Council. Implementing ‘Decide & Provide’: Requirements for Transport Assessments: [Annex 1 OCC Implementing Decide and Provide updated final draft Dec 25.pdf](#)

² Oxfordshire County Council. Parking Standards for New Developments: <https://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/sites/default/files/file/roads-and-transport-policies-and-plans/PARKINGS.PDF>

³ Oxfordshire County Council. Local Transport and Connectivity Plan 2022 – 2050: <https://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/sites/default/files/file/roads-and-transport-connecting-oxfordshire/LocalTransportandConnectivityPlan.pdf>

The services identified in the Decide and Provide document as being within a 20-minute walk are:

- Primary School
- Secondary School
- Supermarket or local grocery shop (selling fresh food)
- Healthcare provision (e.g. GP surgery or pharmacy)
- Significant area of employment (such as town centre, science park, business park, industrial estate or other employment sites of a similar scale, e.g. major hospital, university etc)

The criteria for a car free development also includes a 400m direct walking distance to frequent (15-20 minutes) public transport services.

The 20-minute walking distance referenced in Implementing Decide and Provide, OCC's Parking Standards and the LTCP all take a 20-minute return journey to equate to an 800-metre distance (from the centre of the site). This must be based on available walking routes as opposed to a radius.⁴

However, since the adoption of these standards, OCC officers have observed that these current stipulations are potentially overly restrictive, resulting in few locations being considered appropriate for car-free development. As such, this report explores the available research on how far people are likely to walk to different services, so that these thresholds may be revised whilst ensuring that car-free (and Car Light) development is only required when there are reasonable alternatives available to using a car.

The Implementing Decide and Provide document references the Town and Country Planning Association's (TCPA) (2021) paper on 20-minute neighbourhoods. This in turn references the Victoria State Government's strategies and initiatives page on 20-minute neighbourhoods.⁵ However, the original research behind the Australian 20-minute neighbourhoods strategy does not provide specific evidence to justify the 800m distance used.

There is no common definition for the concept of 20-minute neighbourhoods with branding and implementation varying from place to place.⁶ Several definitions are used in the UK:

- Sustrans (now Walk Wheel Cycle Trust)⁷: 'the concept of having all your basic needs – shops, health centres, work hubs, places to socialise – within a 20-minute walk, cycle or wheel is core to creating liveable cities and towns for

⁴ See Notation 1

⁵ Victoria State Government. 20-minute neighbourhoods research and resources. <https://www.planning.vic.gov.au/guides-and-resources/strategies-and-initiatives/20-minute-neighbourhoods/20-minute-neighbourhood-research-and-resources>

⁶ O' Gorman and Dillon-Robinson, 2021. 20 Minute Neighbourhoods in a Scottish Context. <https://www.climateexchange.org.uk/publications/20-minute-neighbourhoods-in-a-scottish-context/>

⁷ Sustrans., 2020. What is a 20-minute neighbourhood. <https://www.sustrans.org.uk/our-blog/get-active/what-is-a-20-minute-neighbourhood/>

everyone. More importantly, 20-minute neighbourhoods are key to creating communities.’

- TCPA⁸: ‘places in which most of people's daily needs can be met within a short walk or cycle.’
- RTPI⁹: ‘one where people have access to the facilities and services, they need within walking distance’

Most notable 20-minute neighbourhoods include Portland (Portland Plan)¹⁰ and Melbourne (Plan Melbourne, 2017-2050)¹¹ as of 2020, 33 cities worldwide have adopted the concept.¹²

Not all available research/definitions ties in 20-minute neighbourhoods with the 800m walking distance. Furthermore, 20-minute neighbourhoods include more than simply services being within a 20-minute return walk. Although walkability is a key component of 20-minute neighbourhoods these ‘liveable communities’ also include a wider range of features (see Figure 1). An important objective of the 20-minute neighbourhood concept is to better align spatial and urban planning with transport planning (transport infrastructure), to make it easier for people to walk, cycle and use public transport.¹³

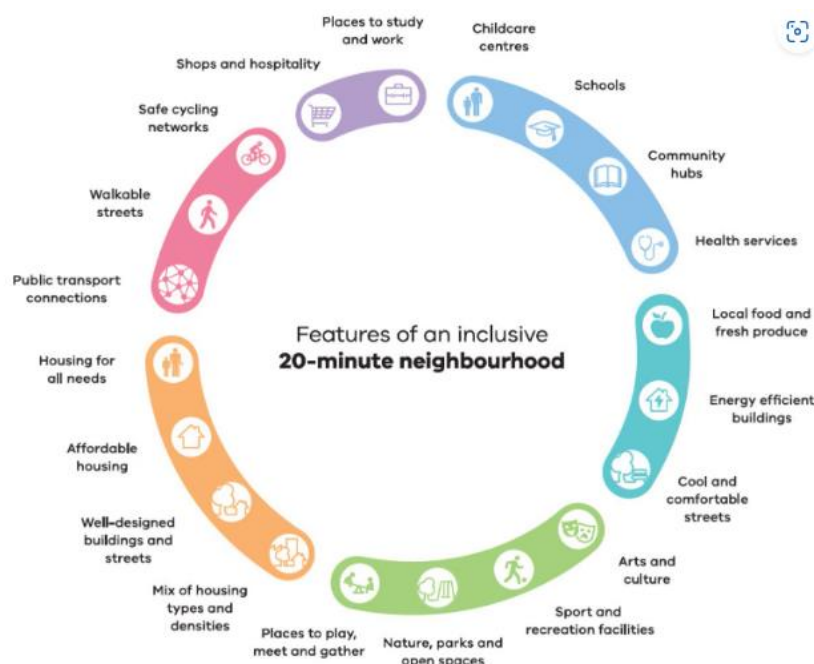


Figure 1 Features of a 20-Minute Neighbourhood (Source: Victoria State Government)

⁸ TCPA., The 20-minute neighbourhood. <https://www.tcpa.org.uk/collection/the-20-minute-neighbourhood/>

⁹ Nick Wright and RTPI., 2021. 20-minute neighbourhoods and local place plans – new tools for a healthier, greener Scotland. <https://www.rtpi.org.uk/blog/2021/january/20-minute-neighbourhoods-local-place-plans-new-tools-for-a-healthier-greener-scotland/>

¹⁰ The Portland Plan. 2012. Portland Government. <https://www.portland.gov/bps/planning/about-bps/portland-plan>

¹¹ Figure 1. Plan Melbourne. 2017-2050. Victoria State Government.

<https://www.planning.vic.gov.au/guides-and-resources/strategies-and-initiatives/plan-melbourne>

¹² Husam, AW., Cooper, I. 2023 Unpacking the concept of 20-minute neighbourhoods. Open House International. <https://discovery.dundee.ac.uk/en/publications/unpacking-the-concept-of-20-minute-neighbourhoods-disentangling-d/>

¹³ See Notation 7

Other documents that use the 20-minute/800m distance include:

- The National Design Guide, Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government, 2021¹⁴
- Chartered Institution Highways and Transportation, Planning for Walking, 2015¹⁵

Overview: How far do people walk?

'How far do people walk?', a paper presented at the PTRC Transport Practitioners' Meeting in 2015¹⁶, analysed the National Travel Survey (NTS) to obtain average and 85th percentile for journeys where walking is the main mode of travel and where walking is the first stage of a public transport trip. The distances are shown in Figure 2 below. The paper states that (p.2):

When assessing the accessibility of a new development on foot we suggest that the 85th percentile distance should be used to estimate the distance up to which people are prepared to walk. For new bus stops and railway stations, we suggest that the average walking distance is used for planning purposes.

	Mean (m)	85 th Percentile (m)
Walk – As main mode of travel		
UK (Excluding London)	1,150	1,950
London	1,000	1,600
Walk to a Bus Stop		
UK (Excluding London)	580	800
London	490	800
Walk to a Railway Station		
UK (Excluding London)	1,010	1,610
London	740	1,290

Figure 2 Walk as Main Mode of Travel Mean (m) and 85th Percentile (m) to Public Transport (Source: Wakenshaw and Bunn, 2015)

The destination of the walking journey is a determining factor in how far people will walk.¹⁷ Associations between destinations and walking have been reported in many countries (including the United Kingdom)¹⁸ on a number of indicators including: the

¹⁴ The National Design Guide, Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government, 2021. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-design-guide>

¹⁵ Chartered Institution Highways and Transportation, Planning for Walking, 2015. https://www.ciht.org.uk/media/4465/planning_for_walking_-_long_-_april_2015.pdf

¹⁶ Figure 2. Wakenshaw, G and Bunn, N., 2015. How far do people walk?. Presented at the PTRC Transport Practitioners Meetings. https://new.sthelens.gov.uk/media/331745/cd-2229-wyg_how-far-do-people-walk.pdf

¹⁷ King, T, Bentley, R, Thornton, L and Kavanagh, AM.,2015. Does the presence and mix of destinations influence walking and physical activity. International Journal of Behavioural Nutrition (12) 115. <https://ijbnpa.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12966-015-0279-0>

¹⁸ See Notation 17

presence of destinations within walking distance of home¹⁹, proximity to destinations²⁰, and density of destinations.²¹ Increased accessibility to destinations is known to have positive associations with walking behaviours.²² Other researchers have observed that walking is more likely to be influenced by the type and mix of destinations than simply the presence of destinations.²³

Walking journeys can also form part of multi modal journeys/ trip chaining which can impact how far people are willing to walk to access certain services. Research into walking distances is based on self-reported distance, tracked distance, or modelling.

Much of the academic research on walking speed is concerned with health and health conditions.²⁴ These studies may use observed, non-naturalistic walking such as treadmill walking. Furthermore, depending on sample size and purpose of study research may exclude children, those accompanying them, as well as people using walking aids. As shown in one frequently cited paper on average walking speed in 31 countries.²⁵

Research into walking distances also uses self-reported and tracked distances. The National Travel Survey (NTS) is a household survey of personal travel by residents in England with data collected through interviews and a 7-day travel diary.²⁶ The latest available NTS data is taken from 2024 with the below findings:

- 29% of trips were made by walking representing 4% of total distance travelled in 2024
- Walking trips averaged to 18 minutes per trip
- Where more than one transport mode is used within trips, 60% of these trips began with walking in 2024, and 64% of public transport trips using more than one mode started with walking
- Nearly all walks recorded in the NTS were under 5 miles in 2024 (99.8%)
- Most trips to and from school for trip length of under 1 mile were made by walking (83% for children aged 5 to 10 and 92% for children aged 11 to 16)
- Average walking distance travelled was the highest on record since 2002 with 230 miles per person

¹⁹ McCormack, G, Giles-Corti, B and Bulsara, M. 2008. The relationship between destination proximity, destination mix and physical activity behaviours. *Preventative Medicine* 46 (1).

<https://linkinghub.elsevier.com/retrieve/pii/S0091743507000436>

²⁰ Handy, S, Cao, X and Mokhtarian, P. 2007. Self-selection in the relationship between the built environment and walking: Empirical evidence from Northern California. *Journal of American Planning Association*. 72. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/01944360608976724>

²¹ <https://doi.org/10.4278%2F0890-1171-18.1.74>

²² Vernez, A., 2006. Operational Definitions of Walkable Neighbourhood: Theoretical and Empirical Insights. *Human Kinetics Journals*. 3.

<https://journals.humankinetics.com/view/journals/jpah/3/s1/article-pS99.xml>

²³ Cerin, E., 2007. Destinations that matter: Associations with walking transport. *Health and Place*. 13 (3). <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S1353829206000761?via%3Dihub>

²⁴ Living Street (Scotland), 2023. 20 Minute Neighbourhoods A Community Perspective.

<https://www.livingstreets.org.uk/media/ghkbr3zy/20-minute-neighbourhoods.pdf>

²⁵ Levine, R. V., & Norenzayan, A. (1999). The pace of life in 31 countries. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 30(2), 178–205. <https://psycnet.apa.org/record/1999-10414-003>

²⁶ Department for Transport., 2024. NTS 2024: National Travel Survey 2024.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/national-travel-survey-2024>

- In 2024, females of all ages made more walking trips on average and walked a greater distance than males, with the age group 30 to 39 making the most walking trips with 355 trips per person
- The most common purpose for walking trips in 2024 was just walk (32%). This was followed by education or escort education (18%), shopping (18%) and leisure (16%)
- Despite an increase in the average number of walking trips compared to 2019, and noticeable changes in the proportions in the previous five years, the most common walking trip purposes were the same in 2024 and 2019

Academic research specifically looking at average walking distances is surprisingly sparse however the available studies have found different distances depending on services or destinations being accessed. GIS analysis into walking frequency and physical activity in 50 urban areas in metropolitan Melbourne used seven types of destinations within three network buffer zones (400m, 800m, and 1200m). Finding that²⁷:

- At 1200m all destination types were positively associated with walking frequency, and physical activity sufficiency
- For the 800m buffer: all destinations except transport stops and sports facilities were significantly associated with physical activity, while all except sports facilities were associated with walking frequency.
- At 400m, café/takeaway food stores and transport stops were associated with walking frequency and physical activity sufficiency, and sports facilities were also associated with walking frequency.
- Strongest associations for both outcomes were observed for community resources and small food stores at both 800 m and 1200 m.

The Department for Transport publishes journey time statistics from where people live to key local services in England.²⁸ These statistics are designed to represent ‘idealised’ (or realistic) journeys which are completed at the following times:

- A Tuesday in the second week October of the year to which they relate
- During the ‘morning’ peak between 7am to 10am

Across a range of 8 key local services in England, the average minimum journey times to access the services from where people live are:

- 10 minutes by car
- 16 minutes by cycle
- 18 minutes by public transport or walking
- 28 minutes by walking only

For those key services which are ‘delivered’ from the largest number of locations, journey times on average are shorter. Small employment centres (100 to 499 jobs), primary schools, and food stores have the shortest journey times, whereas the longest

²⁷ See Notation 17

²⁸ Figure 3,4, 6 Department for Transport., 2021. Journey Time Statistics, England: 2019.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/journey-time-statistics-england-2019/journey-time-statistics-england-2019>

average journey times are observed for hospitals and for large employment centres. In locations where there are the largest numbers of services, the variation between journey times by mode tend to be smaller. However, where there are fewer services available, there is a greater variation between modes, highlighting the relative travel time advantage of car travel to these locations.

Service	Car	Cycle	Public Transport or walking	Walking	
Employment (100 to 499 jobs)		7	9	9	11
Employment (500 to 4999 jobs)		8	10	11	15
Employment (5000 or more jobs)		16	30	31	58
Primary School		7	9	9	9
Secondary School		10	14	18	26
Further Education		11	17	21	34
GP		8	11	13	18
Hospital		20	37	41	75
Food Store		7	9	9	11
Town Centres		11	17	20	37

Figure 3 Average Minimum Travel Time (Minutes) to Nearest Service by Key Service and Mode of Transport, England 2019. (Source: Department for Transport, 2019)

Urban areas typically have lower minimum travel times across all services and modes of transport. Furthermore, urban areas have lower variation across the 4 modes, with the average minimum travel time to key services ranging between 9 and 22 minutes, compared to between 14 and 55 minutes in rural areas. Figure 4 suggests a relative journey time advantage of travel by car in rural areas, and also that the comparative difference between urban and rural average minimum journey times to all key services is lowest for car journeys.

Area	Car	Cycle	Public transport or walking	Walking
Urban	9	13	15	22
Rural	14	27	30	55

Figure 4 Average Minimum Travel Time, minutes, to all key services, by urban and rural area and mode of transport, England, 2019. (Source: Department for Transport, 2019)

Health, fitness and disability also impact how far people are willing or able to walk to access services or for leisure.²⁹ Martin et al (1988) estimated that 6.2 million adults could not walk 400 yards without a rest, and 3.4 million could not walk 200 yards without stopping or severe discomfort.³⁰

²⁹ Activity Alliance.,2018. The Activity Trap: Disabled People's Fear of Being Active. https://www.activityalliance.org.uk/assets/000/002/433/Activity_Alliance_-_The_Activity_Trap_full_report_Accessible_PDF_FINAL_original.pdf

³⁰ Martin, Jean, Howard Meltzer and David Elliott. 2015. The prevalence of disability among adults, OPCS surveys of disability in Great Britain, Report 1, Office of Population Censuses and Surveys, HMSO London. In https://www.ciht.org.uk/media/4465/planning_for_walking_-_long_-_april_2015.pdf

As shown above, walking distances vary depending on the type of service being accessed as well as other factors such as health and disability. The destination (service) of the walking journey impacts how far people walk with longer journeys occurring for larger employers and railway stations. Researchers have observed that walking is more likely to be influenced by the type and mix of destinations than simply the presence of destinations.

Primary and Secondary Schools

Policy:

The Department for Education provides statutory guidance for local authorities on travel to school for children of a compulsory school age. The most recent guidance from 2024 states that the statutory walking distance for children under eight is 2 miles from the child's home and for over eight, 3 miles.³¹ These statutory walking distances are used to determine whether a child is eligible for free school travel although there is no expectation that a child could or should walk to school if they live within the statutory distance.³² The walking route must be measured by the "nearest available route" from where their home property meets the highway to the nearest school gate.³³

Research:

Taking a five-year average from 2018-2024 (i.e. excluding 2020 and 2021 due to Covid-related impacts), The NTS found that where the trip length was under a mile that 82% of primary school students and 91% of secondary school students travelled to school by non-car modes (walking). Where the trip length was one to two miles, 24% of primary school students and 71% of secondary school students travelled to school by non-car modes (walking, cycling, and bus).

The 2024 National Travel Survey³⁴ found for children aged 5 to 10:

- 51% of trips to and from school were made by walking in 2024, 43% were by car and 2% by local bus
- Most trips of less than a mile to and from school were made by walking (83%) and the car is used most often for longer trips to and from school, with 73% for trip length 1 to 2 miles, 83% for trip length 2 to under 5 miles and 69% for trip length 5 miles and over in 2024

For children ages 11 to 16:

³¹ Department for Education. 2014. Travel to School for Children of Compulsory School Age. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/659d7ebb0dd0a200138b612a/Travel_to_school_for_children_of_compulsory_school_age.pdf

³² See Notation 31

³³ Road Safety GB., 2021. Assessment of Walking Routes to School. <https://roadsafetygb.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/RSGB-WRTS-04.21.pdf>

³⁴ Department for Transport., 2024. NTS 2024: National Travel Survey 2024 Travel to and from School. <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/national-travel-survey-2024/nts-2024-travel-to-and-from-school>

- 92% trips to and from school for trip length of under 1 mile were made by walking
- 37% of trips to and from school were made by walking, 30% by car and 18% by local bus
- For children aged 11 to 16, the bus is used most often for longer trip lengths, with 42% of trips to and from school by bus for trip lengths 2 to under 5 miles and 58% for trip lengths 5 miles and over

On average English primary school children ages 5-10 live 1.6 miles from school on average compared to 3.7 miles for 11-16 years old.³⁵ However, the main reason given in the 2024 NTS for not walking to school more often was that the school was too far away.³⁶ Research into commuting to school in the United Kingdom has found that distance from home to school is the most significant individual level factor associated with being driven to school.³⁷ Distance being a strong predictor of motorised travel to school is confirmed by findings from international studies on travel to school in the U.S.³⁸ and Sweden³⁹.

Supermarket or local grocery shop (selling fresh food) and Healthcare provision

Research into how far people walk to supermarkets and GP surgeries (or other healthcare provision, such as a pharmacy) is sparse compared to other services.

The National Travel Survey (2023) found that shopping is the most common reason for travelling but accounts for a smaller share of distance travelled.⁴⁰ Forming 19% of trips but only 11% of total distance travelled in 2015.⁴¹ Research has shown that personal and environmental characteristics impact perception of distance to common destinations.⁴² One of these destinations is retail with only one third of respondents correctly estimating the amount of time it would take to walk from home to their nearest retail destinations.⁴³ The National Travel Survey has consistently found that the

³⁵ Department for Transport., 2013. National Travel Survey: 2013.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/national-travel-survey-2013>

³⁶ Department for Transport., 2024. NTS 2024: National Travel Survey 2024 Travel to and from School. <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/national-travel-survey-2024/nts-2024-travel-to-and-from-school>

³⁷ Easton, S and Ferrari, Ed., 2015. Children's travel to school – the interaction of individual neighbourhood and school factors. Transport Policy. 44.

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0967070X15300196#bib21>

³⁸ McDonald, N.C., 2008. Children's mode choice for the school trip: The role of distance and school location in walking to school. Transport Policy. 35. <https://www.scopus.com/record/display.uri?eid=2-s2.0-36448934484&origin=inward&txGid=030ba2a948d9a6faad803c9cc4a9e0ee>

³⁹ Johansson, k., 2012. Active commuting to and from school among Swedish children - A national and regional study. European Journal of Public Health. 22 (2).

<https://www.scopus.com/record/display.uri?eid=2-s2.0-84859786625&origin=inward&txGid=dcc65c5ae34d433c928f561bd9f51285>

⁴⁰ Department for Transport. 2023. NTS 2023: Trips by purpose, age, mode and sex.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/national-travel-survey-2023/nts-2023-trips-by-purpose-age-mode-and-sex>

⁴¹ Department for Transport., 2023. NTS 2023: Trips by purpose, age, mode and sex.

<https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a829db5e5274a2e8ab58747/why-people-travel-shopping-2015.pdf>

⁴² Horning, J, El- Geneidy, A and Krizek, K. 2007. Perceptions of Walking Distance to Neighbourhood Retail and Other Public Services. https://tram.mcgill.ca/Research/Publications/distance_perception.pdf

⁴³ See Notation 42

majority of shopping trips are made by car with 20% of all car trips made in 2023 being shopping.⁴⁴

The type and price of food shops within walking distance is an important element to consider when looking at walking distances to services. Research has found that more than a million UK residents live in 'food deserts' defined as neighbourhoods where residents have limited access to affordable and nutritious food this is due to a variety of factors including poverty, and poor public transport.⁴⁵

One in ten deprived areas in the UK are food deserts, these include deprived inner-city areas with no large supermarkets leaving residents to shop in smaller convenience stores where food prices are higher and the selection of healthy fresh food may be more limited.⁴⁶ This combination can lead to individuals paying a "poverty premium for groceries"⁴⁷. Therefore, when looking at walking distances to supermarkets and local grocery shops it is important to consider what the shop sells and the price of fresh food. A lack of accessible public transport routes can limit residents to smaller expensive shops with food deserts most disproportionality affected as they cannot afford or are physically unable to travel to large cheaper supermarkets.⁴⁸

The first study in the UK to investigate proximity to primary care by walking found that 85% of the population is estimated to live within a 20-minute walk of a GP premises.⁴⁹ This reduced to 81% in the most affluent areas and increased to 98% in the most deprived areas. A large reduction was seen in rural areas with only 19% of the population in these areas living within a 20-minute walking distance. Needing to travel greater distances to services is common in rural areas making walking a less attractive option. The Statistical Digest of Rural England (2022) indicates that for those living in rural areas the minimum travel time to access GP services is 42 minutes if the journey is made by walking only compared to 13 minutes in urban areas.⁵⁰

⁴⁴ Department for Transport.2023. NTS 2023: Car availability and trends in car trips. <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/national-travel-survey-2023/nts-2023-car-availability-and-trends-in-car-trips>

⁴⁵ Butler, P., 2018. More than a million UK residents live in food deserts. The Guardian. <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2018/oct/12/more-than-a-million-uk-residents-live-in-food-deserts-says-study>

⁴⁶ GMPA., 2018. Food Deserts in the UK. <https://www.resolvepoverty.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Food-deserts-in-the-UK.pdf>

⁴⁷ See Notation 46

⁴⁸ Social Market Foundation., 2019. What are the barriers to eating healthily in the UK?. <https://www.smf.co.uk/publications/barriers-eating-healthily-uk/>

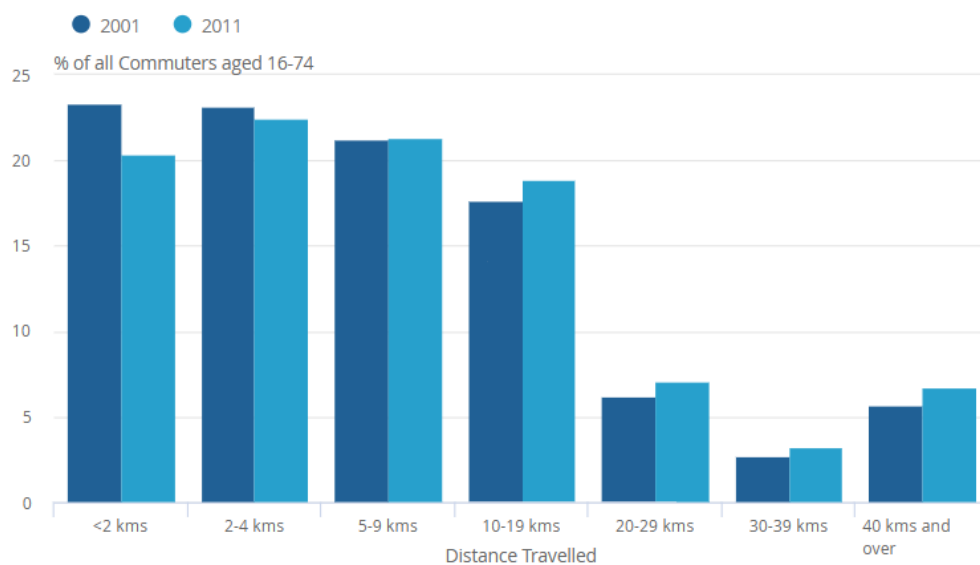
⁴⁹ Todd, A, Copeland, A. 2015. Access all areas? An area – level analysis of accessibility to general practice and community pharmacy services in England by urbanity and social deprivation. National Library of Medicine. 8 (5). <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/25956762/>

⁵⁰ Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs., 2013. Statistical Digest of Rural England. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/630620558fa8f5536c077dcc/07_Statistical_Digest_of_Rural_England_2022_August_edition.pdf

Significant area of employment (such as town centre, science park, business park, industrial estate or other employment sites of a similar scale, e.g. major hospital, university etc)

Commuting was the second most common trip purpose recorded in the NTS of 2024 with 111 trips per person.⁵¹ The longest distance travelled on average was also for commuting purposes with 1,007 miles per person recorded in 2024.⁵²

In the 2011 census 9.8% of respondents aged 16 years and over in employment travelled to work by walking with 2.8% travelling by cycling.⁵³ 20% of usual residents aged 16 years and over in employment travelled less than 2km to a workplace with 23% traveling between 2 and 4km.⁵⁴ Please note that the 2011 census has been used as a reference due to the issues resulting from the 2021 census having been conducted during the Covid-related lockdown (see [here](#) for more details).



Source: Census - Office for National Statistics

Figure 5 Commuting Distances Travelled, UK, 2001 and 2011 Census. (Source: Office for National Statistics, 2011)

⁵¹ Department for Transport., 2024. NTS 2024: National Travel Survey 2024. <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/national-travel-survey-2024>

⁵² See Notation 51

⁵³ Office for National Statistics. The National Archives. 2011 (Archived in 2016). 2011 Census Analysis - Method of Travel to Work in England and Wales Report. <https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/ukgwa/20160105224318/http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/census/2011-census-analysis/method-of-travel-to-work-in-england-and-wales/art-method-of-travel-to-work.html#tab-Commuting-by-all-other-modes-of-transport>

⁵⁴ Figure 5. Office for National Statistics. 2011. Commuting to work, Changes to Travel to Work Areas: 2001 to 2011 <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/articles/commutingtoworkchangestotraveltoworkareas/2001to2011#:~:text=An%20illustration%20of%20the%20increase,from%2032.3%25%20to%2035.8%25.>

Research has found that most people in England could not get to work without motorised modes of transport.⁵⁵ Modelling the capacity of individuals to complete their journeys using factors such as bicycle availability and levels of active travel found that only 44% of people in England were capable of getting to work by walking or cycling.⁵⁶ In contrast, the 2019 Department for Transport accessibility journey time statistics states that the average minimum journey to employment by walking is:⁵⁷

- 11 Minutes for Employment 100-499 jobs
- 15 Minutes for Employment 500-4999 jobs
- 58 Minutes for Employment 5000 or more jobs

Smaller employment centres have shorter walking journey times whereas hospitals and large employment centres have the lowest average journey times. This is due to the number of these services available to be included in the accessibility study with 17,457 small employment centres and 843 large employment centres. Figure 6 shows the percentage of service users able to access employment within given times by walking. 83% to 70% can access smaller and medium employment centres by walking for 15 minutes falling to only 13% for large employees and only 3% for hospitals.

Public Transport Services

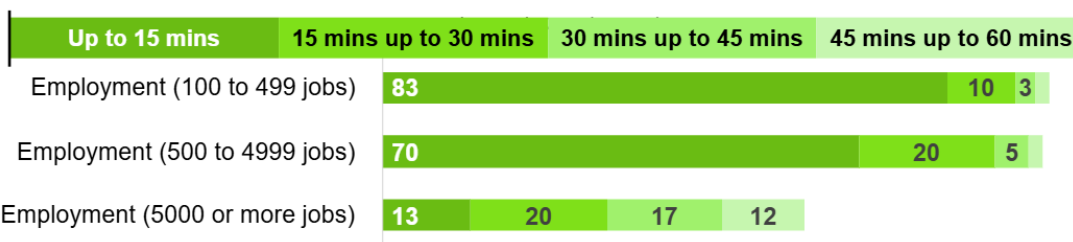


Figure 6 Percentage of service users able to access each key service within given times, by walking, England, 2019 (Source: Department for Transport, 2019)

The power of destination affecting walking distances is particularly evident in acceptable walking distances to public transport. For bus stops in residential areas 400m has often been regarded as a cut-off and in town centres 200m.⁵⁸ Whereas people will walk up to 800m to get to a railway station. This is reflective of the perceived quality and importance of rail services.⁵⁹

Planning for Public Transport in New Development (The Institution of Highways and Transportation 1999) advises that “New developments should be located so that public transport trips involving a walking distance of less than 400m from the nearest bus

⁵⁵ University of Leeds., 2015. Study finds only 44% of people in England capable of getting to work by walking or cycling. <https://www.leeds.ac.uk/news/article/3746/>

⁵⁶ See Notation 55

⁵⁷ See Notation 28

⁵⁸ Department for Infrastructure.,2000 (updated 2019). Creating Places: Achieving Quality in Residential Environments. <https://www.infrastructure-ni.gov.uk/publications/creating-places-achieving-quality-residential-environments>

⁵⁹ CIHT., 2015. Planning for Walking. https://www.ciht.org.uk/media/4465/planning_for_walking_-_long_-_april_2015.pdf

stop or 800m from the nearest railway station”⁶⁰ advice which was then widely adopted by Local Authorities. ⁶¹ Multiple planning and policy documents adopt the 400m walking distance to a bus stop and 800m distance to a railway station however the reason why is not clear. ⁶²

How far do people walk? An analysis of the National Travel Survey found that: ⁶³

- Buses are mainly used for the purpose of commuting, followed by leisure and shopping purposes
- The average walking distances to a bus stop for commuting, education and leisure are similar at just over 600m. However, people do not walk as far if on a shopping journey (500m). The 85th percentile for each journey purpose is similar, at 800m, apart from leisure at 1,290m.
- Walking to a railway station is undertaken predominantly for commuting (50%) and leisure (22.3%), these together accounting for over two-thirds of the sample.
- The average walking distances to a rail station for commuting and for leisure are very similar at just over 1,000m, whilst the 85th percentile level is 1,610m.
- The analysis clearly demonstrated that average walking distances to a bus stop exceeds the 400m and to a railway station exceed 800m which has been the distances recommended for use in IHT (1999).

International studies have also found that certain factors such as frequency of bus service and walking route related attributes contribute to the maximum distance travellers are willing to walk. ⁶⁴ ⁶⁵ 40% of all public transport journeys in the UK start with a (registered) walking trip. ⁶⁶

Summary of Walking Distances

The 20-minute 800m return journey distance cited in Implementing ‘Decide & Provide’: Requirements for Transport Assessments is based on the distances given in the Town and Country Planning Association’s (TCPA) (2021) paper on 20-minute neighbourhoods. This in turn references the Victoria State Government’s strategies and initiatives page on 20-minute neighbourhoods. However, it is difficult to find the

⁶⁰ The Institution of Highways and Transportation., 1999. Guidelines for Planning for Public Transport in Developments.

https://programmeofficers.co.uk/Wirral/CoreDocuments/CD3/CD03.16_CIHT%20guidelines%20for%20planning%20for%20public%20transport%20in%20development%201999.pdf

⁶¹ See Notation 16

⁶² See Notation 16

⁶³ See Notation 16

⁶⁴ Van Der Waerden,P, Van Der Waerden, J and Burger,M. 2024. Exploring the role of public transport service and walking route related factors to identify maximum walking distances to bus stops in the Netherlands. Journal of Public Transportation. 26.

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1077291X2400016X>

⁶⁵ Gao, J, Kamphius, C, Helbich, M and Ettema,D. 2020. What is ‘neighbourhood walkability’? How the built environment differently correlates with walking for different purposes and with walking on weekdays and weekends. Journal of Transport Geography. 88.

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0966692320302556>

⁶⁶ Basheet, M and Van Der Waerden, P., 2019. Multi-stage trips: An exploration of factors affecting mode combination choice of travellers in England. Transport Policy.81.

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0967070X18308515>

source of the original research behind the Australian 20-minute neighbourhoods strategy citing an 800m distance.

However, there is a wide range of national and international academic and quantitative research on walking distances. From an initial review this research does suggest that walking distances to certain services could be/should be extended.

Primary and Secondary School

- Statutory guidance for local authorities states that the statutory walking distance for children under eight is 2 miles from the child's home and for over eight, 3 miles.
- Taking a five-year average from 2018-2024 (i.e. excluding 2020 and 2021 due to Covid-related impacts), the NTS found that where the trip length was under a mile that 82% of primary school students and 91% of secondary school students travelled to school by non-car modes (walking). Where the trip length was one to two miles, 24% of primary school students and 71% of secondary school students travelled to school by non-car modes (walking, cycling, and bus).
- This suggests that the walking distance for school travel could be increased to 1 mile (or 1.6km) for primary schools and to 2 miles (or 3.2km) for secondary schools.

Supermarket or local grocery shop (selling fresh food) and Healthcare provision (GP Surgery or pharmacy)

- Research into how far people walk to supermarkets and GP surgeries is sparse compared to other services.
- The National Travel Survey has consistently found that the majority of shopping trips are made by car with 20% of all car trips made in 2023 being shopping.
- The first (and only?) study in the UK to investigate proximity to primary care by walking found that 85% of the population is estimated to live within a 20-minute walk of a GP premises. However, there were large variations for rural areas.
- There does not appear to be the research necessary to comment definitively on whether an 800m distance could be increased for supermarket or local grocery shops. Travel by car to shops would likely take into account the size and location of the shop being accessed e.g., out of town retail location versus local convenience store but data is not available at this level.
- As most within urban areas live a 20-minute walk from a local GP service it would appear the 800m/20 minute would apply here. Especially considering distance being a barrier to accessing medical services.

Significant area of employment (such as town centre, science park, business park, industrial estate or other employment sites of a similar scale, e.g. major hospital, university etc)

Walking distance to employment varies depending on the size of the site. Larger employment sites with 5000 or more jobs have a high average walking distance at 58 minutes whereas smaller employment sites with 100-499 jobs have a much lower time at 11 minutes. 83% to 70% can access smaller and medium employment centres by

walking for 15 minutes falling to only 13% for large employees and only 3% for hospitals.

The various statistics regarding employment size would suggest that different walking distances could be employed based on size of the employment site.

Public Transport Services

Analysis of travel behaviour has shown that that average walking distances to a bus stop exceed the 400m and to a railway station exceed 800m which has been the distances recommended for use in IHT (1999). The perceived quality of the services as well as other factors affecting the walking route related attributes do impact how far people are willing to walk to access public transport. Investigation into the frequency and type of public transport as well as the walking route one might take from the new development to the various public transport stops would be needed.

Conclusion

This initial review of walking distances to certain services has found that for some services (based on the available research) it would seem that the 800m / 20-minute distance included in Implementing Decide and Provide and the Parking Standards guidance could be increased.

However, the quality and accessibility of the walking routes is crucial to how far people feel they can walk. There is also likely to be gender and age factors involved in walking distances which need to be considered. Although sources of data such as the NTS are useful they may be affected by local variation.

The walking distance criteria for car free development in the adopted standards are as follows:

Car free (adopted standards)	
Destination	Walking distance
Primary school	800m
Secondary school	800m
Supermarket or local grocery shop (selling fresh food)	800m
GP surgery	800m
Employment (such as town centre, science park, business park, industrial estate or other employment sites of a similar scale, e.g. major hospital, university etc)	800m
Public transport (15 - 30-minute frequency)	400m

Based on the research cited in this paper, it is proposed that the criteria for when a development should be car-free is changed to the following:

Car free	
Destination	Walking distance
Primary school	1,600m
Secondary school	3,200m
Supermarket or local grocery shop (selling fresh food)	800m
Healthcare provision (GP surgery or pharmacy)	1,600m
Significant area of employment (such as town centre, science park, business park, industrial estate or other employment sites of a similar scale, e.g. major hospital, university etc)	3,200m
Bus stop (served by 2 buses per hour)	600m
Train station (served by 2 trains per hour)	1000m

The rationale for these revisions is as follows:

Primary school (1,600m)

A five-year average of data from 2018-2024 (excluding 2020 and 2021) from the DfT National Travel Survey shows that 82% of primary school students travel to school by non-car modes where the journey is under a mile.

Secondary school (3,200m)

A five-year average of data from 2018-2024 (excluding 2020 and 2021) from the DfT National Travel Survey shows that 91% of secondary school students travel to school by non-car modes where the journey is under a mile and 71% where the journey is one to two miles.

Healthcare provision (GP surgery or pharmacy) (1,600m)

Unlike access to food, education, and work, access to healthcare is less likely to be a daily requirement, so it is deemed appropriate to extend this distance. Furthermore, in a car free area, people will still have very good access to public transport.

Significant area of employment (3,200m)

As most secondary school students walk/bus/cycle up to 2 miles (3,200m) to school, most adults can be expected to travel the same distance to work without a car.

Bus stop (served by 2 buses per hour) (600m)

Analysis of DfT NTS data (WYG, 2015) shows that in the South East region the mean average walking distance to a bus stop is 580m.

Train station (served by 2 trains per hour) (1,000m)

Analysis of DfT NTS data (WYG, 2015) shows that in the South East region the mean average walking distance to a train station is 1,020m.

Based on the research cited in this paper, it is proposed that the criteria for when a development should be car-lite is the following:

Car Light	
Destination	Walking distance
Primary school	1,600m
Secondary school	3,200m
Supermarket or local grocery shop (selling fresh food)	1,600m
Healthcare provision (GP surgery or pharmacy)	3,200m
Significant area of employment (such as town centre, science park, business park, industrial estate or other employment sites of a similar scale, e.g. major hospital, university etc)	3,200m
Bus stop (served by 2 buses per hour)	800m
Train station (served by 2 trains per hour)	1,600m

The rationale for the differences between car free and Car Light is as follows:

Supermarket or local grocery shop (selling fresh food) (1,600m)

As the majority of school students (both primary and secondary) travel to school by non-car modes where the journey is less than a mile, most adults can be expected to travel the same distance to a supermarket or local grocery shop. Furthermore, in a Car Light area, people will still have very good access to public transport.

Healthcare provision (GP surgery or pharmacy) (3,200m)

Unlike access to food, education, and work, access to healthcare is less likely to be a daily requirement. Furthermore, in a Car Light area, people will still have very good access to public transport.

Bus stop (served by 2 buses per hour) (800m)

Analysis of DfT NTS data (WYG, 2015) shows that in the South East region the 85th percentile walking distance to a bus stop is 800m.

Train station (served by 2 trains per hour) (1600m)

Analysis of DfT NTS data (WYG, 2015) shows that in the South East region the 85th percentile walking distance to a train station is 1,610m.