

UNDERPASSES – THE LIVING STREETS VIEW

Personal security is a major factor in the decision to walk or not. Actual levels of personal security and perceptions of personal security are not the same thing – both are important, but the perception of how safe somewhere feels is probably more important. People don't look up crime statistics for their local underpasses before walking through them. The decision on where and whether to walk is primarily based on how safe people feel. Underpasses are widely seen as dangerous places – particularly by women, older people and disabled people.

In her paper *Walking, Communications and Practice*, delivered to the Walk 21 conference, Sonja Forward states that “most underpasses are safe for pedestrians, but that does not mean that they feel safe. Some pedestrians would rather cross a busy street than using an underpass, particularly at night and in isolated places”. This is confirmed by the Wrekin Transport Partnership community consultation during 2000, which found that underpasses are very unpopular with nine out of ten people generally preferring to cross the road itself rather than use an underpass.

Subways and footbridges are widely regarded as unsafe places. Crossings at street level are obvious solutions, but may inconvenience motor traffic. Their introduction is a political and financial issue, not a technical one. Crossings at street level are also better for mobility impaired people and are more convenient for everyone. It is for this reason that Living Streets agrees with the Scottish Executive paper *Women and Transport: Moving Forward* (www.scotland.gov.uk/cru/kd01/blue/transport) that underpasses should only be considered as a last resort after all other options have been fully considered. If no other option is feasible, underpasses should be clean, well lit and be monitored by CCTV. We would also recommend that they should be the subject of a consumer review in the form of a Community Street Audit.