

Nationwide plans announced to design safer streets as 9 in 10 women report feeling unsafe walking at night

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New government guidance will be issued to councils to help them consider how to make their streets safer for women and girls.

- new practical guidance and training will help councils revamp streets to make them safer for women and girls
- Active Travel England's project will support the government's Safer Streets mission and ambition to halve violence against women and girls within a decade
- new polling by YouGov has found that 9 in 10 women have reported feeling unsafe walking after dark, and 1 in 3 young women are put off walking locally due to personal safety fears

New government guidance will be issued to councils nationwide to help them consider how to make their streets safer for women and girls, Active Travel England (ATE) has today announced.

New polling by YouGov released today (25 March 2026) has found that almost 9 in 10 (88%) women have felt unsafe while walking at night, while 7 in 10 (71%) have changed their route to avoid walking in the dark during winter or darker months.

Inadequate lighting, poorly maintained routes, personal safety fears and antisocial behaviour were identified as key barriers, with the majority of respondents saying they would feel safer walking in their neighbourhoods if key issues were addressed. This was echoed in Liverpool on the evening of 24 March where Local Transport Minister, Lilian Greenwood, walked on several streets with a group of women and girls to talk about what they need to feel safer.

New government guidance will be published in 2026 alongside training sessions in the spring, outlining how local authorities can design their streets to be safer for women and girls.

The guidance will introduce how looking at active travel through the lens of gender can help create safer and more inclusive places, including explaining the importance of implementing better-designed street lighting and improved visibility, as well as established walking routes along roads that are generally busy and overlooked by other people and CCTV.

Local Transport Minister, Lilian Greenwood said:

No one should worry about getting to their destination safely after dark, and these stats show just how much work there is to be done.

This programme is turning conversations into real change by working directly with the councils who design our streets to ensure women and girls in our communities feel safe to walk, wheel and cycle whenever they want to.

Minister for Safeguarding and Violence Against Women and Girls, Jess Phillips, said:

Violence against women and girls is a national emergency, and this government will halve it in a decade. Women and girls deserve to feel safe simply going about their lives, whether that is walking down the street, travelling, or using public spaces after dark.

I welcome this work to design streets that make women feel safer, shifting responsibility away from women and onto the spaces and behaviours that put them at risk.

National Active Travel Commissioner, Chris Boardman said:

That almost 9 out of 10 women say they feel unsafe walking after dark is an appalling finding we should be ashamed of. For too long, we have designed streets that don't work for women and girls. We want to help councils remove the barriers that are stopping women and girls from choosing to walk and wheel - whether that's by providing better lighting, surface crossings over underpasses, CCTV or simply by listening to and acting on lived experiences.

It's a terrible thing that women and girls don't feel they have the same freedoms to simply walk in their neighbourhood as men and boys. Everyone should feel safe getting around, and our job is to help make that happen.

North East Mayor Kim McGuinness said:

There needs to be a radical change in how we design and think about public spaces and public transport with funding to match, and that has been a priority for me from day one as Mayor. In the North East we're already backing that with action, listening to women's lived experiences and investing millions in better lit bus stops and stations, safer waiting areas and public spaces that feel welcoming, not intimidating. Women should not have to plan their journeys around fear and spaces they need to avoid. Safety must be built into how our streets and transport networks are designed, and this guidance is an important first step.

Chief Executive of Living Streets, Catherine Woodhead said:

Like many women and girls, I have felt fearful when moving through public spaces my whole life, due to experience. The safety of women and girls on our streets must not be ignored in our community and transport planning and policy. When it is, it leads to women and girls missing out on everything from education and exercise, to leisure and accessing work. Living Streets wants neighbourhoods where every woman and girl can walk or wheel wherever they want, whenever they want - free from harassment, fear and exclusion. Achieving this requires not only behaviour change among those who perpetrate harassment but also creating streets that actively prioritise the needs of women and girls.

Towns and cities across the country have already taken steps to improve street safety for women and girls.

This includes Nottinghamshire County Council's Safer Streets scheme in Worksop, which delivered

27 new CCTV cameras in locations where women flagged feeling unsafe, 200 streetlight upgrades in key hotspots, and training for taxi drivers on addressing misogynistic behaviour.

Milton Keynes City Council has delivered bystander champion training for male staff in the night-time economy and has created a designated safe route through to the rail station with improved visibility.

In Liverpool, Merseyside Police has launched 'Halo Points' across the city centre. These are well-lit, highly visible points linked directly to emergency services and CCTV.

In the North East, Mayor Kim McGuinness has announced £7.1 million of funding to deliver new and upgraded bus shelters and stops. Planned works include new shelters, better seating and clearer timetable information, with over 170 stops to receive new lighting.

In Leicester and Greater Manchester, underpasses have been removed and replaced with on-street crossings. In Leicester, the underpass of Strassbourg Drive was filled in, with a street level crossing helping people feel safer on their journeys to schools and workplaces in the area. A large underpass on Mancunian Way in Manchester was replaced with street level pedestrian crossings in 2020.

ATE's guidance will also refer to interventions that have been put in place worldwide. This includes Amsterdam, The Netherlands, where the council has set out proposals to cover a range of ways to better consider the needs of young women, including evaluating the design of places at dusk and in darkness.

In Vigo, Spain, there has been success introducing night bus request stops, which allow women and girls to ask bus drivers to stop anywhere along the route at night, rather than just at official stops. This reduces the distance women walk alone from a bus stop to home.

Halving violence against women and girls within a decade is a core ambition of this government – and action is already underway.

The Department for Transport has outlined its nine commitments in the cross-government Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) strategy to drive change across the transport network: including improved CCTV connectivity at train stations, mandatory training for bus drivers on how to recognise and respond to VAWG as well as anti-social behaviour, and a new strategic VAWG package for Roads Policing.

Local authorities will be able to draw on their allocation of Active Travel England's £626 million funding pot to address street safety issues, including improvements that make walking safer and more appealing for women and girls.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/nationwide-plans-announced-to-design-safer-streets-as-9-in-10-women-report-feeling-unsafe-walking-at-night>