



20x20 Vision for walking in 2040 from Rowena Macaulay - Transcript

I am Rowena Macaulay, speaking from Colchester in Essex, UK

I'm founder of Walk Colchester, a local umbrella organisation responsible for various projects and initiatives in support of walking and the better design of the walking environment.

Most recently I've been working on...

The Colchester Orbital project, a collaborative project, originating in the community, now also supported by Colchester Borough Council as part of the Better Colchester initiative.

The Orbital is a 14-mile walking route around the town, connecting some of our most important green spaces, diverse terrain and biodiversity. In December 2020, we are just about to launch an online interactive map of the Orbital, which represents the most recent phase of works.

My vision for our walking world in 2040 is...

One in which we genuinely begin to reimagine our landscape through the act of walking, as if the rhetoric that says walking is the primary form of transport genuinely held weight, and really did play out in practice in the way that we design in support of walking.

Here are some thoughts on how we might begin towards that goal.

Firstly, we have to be able to - and prepared to - imagine the seemingly impossible (that is, a world in which cars no longer invariably dominate); to take this possibility seriously.

We have to be able to think about walking in ways that escape the primacy of cars. But how do we do this, when faced with over a century of economic and social development premised on their increasing pervasiveness? When the very character of our towns is largely written in the instantly recognisable shape of their individual road networks?

I believe we can begin this process through the vehicle of mapping. We can use mapping proactively to begin to RE-map our towns through the lens of walking.



Mapping is such a powerful tool to collaborate around – readily available, free to participate in and therefore highly democratic (just like walking in fact). It allows us to revise priorities and set new parameters; to draw things differently and therefore to literally begin to see things differently.

Thirdly, as part of such re-mapping, we need to recognise – as equally important – all of the different kinds of walkable paths that exist in urban and urban fringe settings, many of which (alleys for example) are commonly not represented on any maps, but which together offer a rich network of walking possibilities, and the beginnings of a new shape for our towns.

Fourthly, we have to recognise the importance of walking for leisure, and to invest in it.

The vast majority of walking is done for leisure purposes, yet most infrastructure funding aimed at walking, is spent on roadside improvements. We know though how vitally important leisure walking is for physical and mental health, and likewise direct access to green space which walking more than any other form of transport facilitates. So, we have pressing reason to invest in the kind of paths that we typically use when walking for leisure, and in walking connectivity between urban and rural or other green spaces.

We can't continue to treat such paths and routes as not quite as important as the ones we take when walking to the station in the morning, along pavements. I believe to do so is short-sighted and, ultimately, not equally transformative.

Finally, we need to recognise the moment we're in.

This year, on account of the coronavirus pandemic, we have more incentive than in any year previously, in our lifetimes, to radically rethink how we move around in physical space. There is money about, quite a lot of it, exactly for this purpose, for rethinking walking and cycling, at a time when money is scarcer than ever for almost everything else.

Because of Covid-19, the seemingly impossible is being challenged – and a world in which we might actually begin to reverse our way out of car dependency is just a little bit more conceivable.



It's not just that we have greater shared cause to think about the health and well-being virtues of walking.

It's that the very ways in which we work have been thrown up into the air, and - whether through choice or necessity - working from home has become a viable sustainable option in many scenarios not previously contemplated. A result of this shift in consciousness, is that THE principal argument for car ownership, the one that for so many people has seemed so impossible to get beyond, has begun to unravel a bit.

Maybe our walking world in 2040 really can be - for many more of us at least - one in which our basic daily needs, including work, can be met within walking distance of home? There are not many positives to come out of the pandemic but I really hope in 2040 we can look back and say this was one.