



# Fixing the Link

Making good the walking route  
from station to town centre

## Forward by Jeff Hoogesteger



What does society expect of us as a passenger transport provider? This is a question I frequently ask, not only of myself but also of colleagues in Abellio and its operating companies.

In many ways the answer is simple: we are expected to facilitate. While some customers may use our services for the pleasure of travelling on public transport, the vast majority are on their way to work, visiting friends and family, or enjoying a day out. It is our role to facilitate these activities, and we do it by making the door-to-door journey as seamless and simple as possible.

Several years ago Abellio worked with ATOC, Campaign for Better Transport and other partners to promote the Station Travel Plan concept for railway stations. Station Travel Plans are now embedded in most UK franchises and are a key strategic tool for transport operators to understand and facilitate the door-to-door journey requirements of customers. But are they enough to ensure that we are delivering to our full potential?

The challenge we face as an industry is to ensure that we understand the changing expectations of society and that we continually explore opportunities to innovate and deliver on those expectations. This publication introduces Fixing the Link which, I believe, achieves just that by enhancing the contribution that train companies can make to the economic prosperity of local town centres and high streets.

Fixing the Link is a new planning methodology that goes beyond traditional station travel planning. The concept has its roots in behavioural research which demonstrates that people enjoying a positive arrival experience at their destination are likely to stay longer and spend more money. Working with this research, our parent company Nederlandse Spoorwegen (NS) considered how a rail company could play a meaningful role in giving people that positive arrival experience, thereby contributing to the sustainability of local high streets.

As a result they developed a methodology for measuring and assessing the quality of walking routes between local stations and their adjacent town centres. This methodology became Fixing the Link.

Building on in-depth knowledge of the perceptions of rail passengers, NS has used the methodology to identify and prioritise interventions to improve the walking route, or link, to the local high street. By doing this in partnership with local authorities they have helped identify route enhancements that will have the strongest beneficial impact on the comfort and security of passengers from the moment they leave the train through to the local high street.

This new methodology is at an early stage in the Netherlands and we are eagerly awaiting the first results. However, I already anticipate it becoming a core planning tool for Abellio's businesses, so for this reason we are working with Campaign for Better Transport to develop an understanding of how it might be applied in a UK context.

As this report demonstrates, improving the links between stations and town centres in the UK involves a wide range of organisations and processes. But complexity has never been a barrier to progress in the transport sector and to demonstrate this we have launched pilot schemes with partner authorities on the Abellio Greater Anglia franchise to explore the potential of Fixing the Link. The processes may be complex but in many cases the solutions are simple to identify and easy to apply.

The initial work on these pilot schemes at Ipswich, Colchester and Ely is described in this report and we look forward to developing the work with our local authority partners and organisations such as Campaign for Better Transport.

So going back to my original challenge: what does society expect of us as a business? As I said, the answer isn't difficult. However, I believe the value is in the question. Constantly asking ourselves this question ensures that Abellio Group focuses every day on the changing expectations of society. Fixing the Link is another example of Abellio's response to this question, and I hope that by bringing it to the UK we will encourage all operators to consider the further potential they have for contributing to the economic and social health of the communities we serve.

Jeff Hoogesteger  
Abellio Group  
Chief Executive

## Summary

The growing numbers of people who visit towns by train will stay longer, spend more money and be more likely to return if there is a welcoming, attractive route for the walk from the station to the town centre.

A new method of assessing the route has been developed in the Netherlands by Nederlandse Spoorwegen, the parent company of transport company Abellio, and has now been applied by Abellio to three towns – Ely, Colchester and Ipswich – in its Greater Anglia franchise. The method evaluates the route according to four criteria – liveliness, human scale, legibility and safety and comfort – and a total of twelve characteristics. These allow the strengths and weaknesses of a route to be identified and quantified, and recommendations made for its improvement. Recommendations are based on knowledge of passenger perceptions built through a long history of service provision.

This report explains the application of the method and comments on the conclusions reached. Most striking is that in these three English towns – and perhaps in most – the distance from the station to the town centre is relatively long, the route can be confusing and is likely to cross or be beside busy roads with little or no pedestrian priority even if crossing facilities have been provided. The routes in the three towns suffer from traffic, from long, monotonous blocks, or an absence of the varied mix of activities that make a place lively and ensure there are people around to 'keep an eye' on things.

The Fixing the Link methodology identifies these shortcomings, but also suggests what can be done to overcome them. Some measures, such as improving pedestrian signs and maps or installing benches and plants, can be quite cheap and easy to implement. Others may take longer and require planning for the re-use of buildings or sites to bring more people and more life into areas around the route.

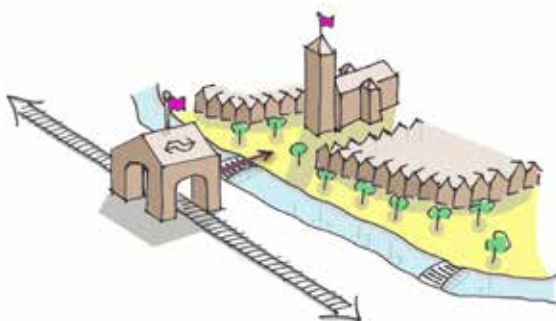
As this report points out, improving the station–town centre link is likely to bring a number of economic and other benefits in addition to better conditions for visitors. For instance it can complement programmes to promote sustainable transport. Improved walking conditions can increase footfall, the takings of local shops and the town centre itself. Spatial and planning changes can help ensure that new, residential and other developments are located within walking and cycling distance of both the station and the town centre which is where Government planning policy proposes that they should be.

Finally, the report recommends various ways that the Fixing the Link process can be included in the programmes and plans of local authorities and train operating companies. Not least, it suggests funding sources that can be tapped to help all this to happen.

## Development of Fixing the Link Methodology

Research carried out in the Netherlands shows that the amount of time and money that visitors spend in a town depends in part on the attractiveness of the entrance to the town and the route between the entrance and the town centre<sup>1</sup>. In the past, the importance of that link has been undervalued by train operators, the rail industry and local planning and transport authorities.

The research prompted Nederlandse Spoorwegen (Dutch Railways) to develop a method of appraising the quality of the link for pedestrians between the station and the town centre. This Fixing the Link methodology evaluates the route according to four criteria: liveliness, human scale, legibility, and safety and comfort<sup>2</sup>. It has been applied to sixteen Dutch towns and in each case a number of recommendations have been made for the improvement of the link.

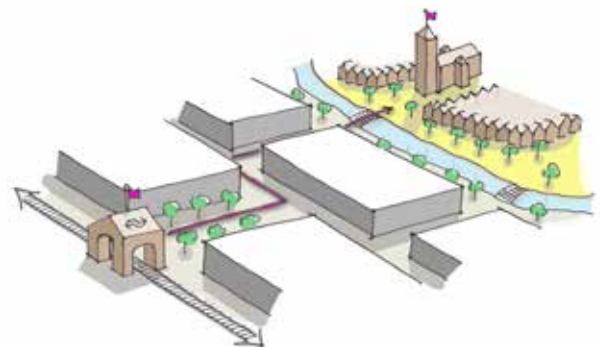


Ideally the station is close to the town centre and the route between the two is clear and straight-forward

The appraisal methodology has now been applied by Abellio to three English towns served by Abellio's Greater Anglia network – Ely, Colchester and Ipswich, which are roughly the same size as the Dutch towns. This initial appraisal was conducted in order to understand the practicalities of applying the methodology in a UK context, and the findings were very high level. Abellio is now working in close partnership to develop the findings further and apply them in the context of UK planning frameworks. This report comments on that first appraisal and discusses the issues that it has raised for both train operators and local authorities.

We have visited all three towns and are confident that the initial findings from the application of the Fixing the Link methodology will still be at least broadly valid when the second appraisal is complete.

Discussions with the local authorities have shown that they are aware of and are sympathetic to many, if not all, of the issues raised in this report.



Often in English towns the station is a long way from the centre, the walking route is complicated and crosses busy roads

## The UK Context

Many railway stations in the UK have poor links to the town centres of the communities they serve. This is often a legacy of the nineteenth century when the fundamental concern of railway builders was to minimise the costs of railway construction rather than to serve wider public interests. Stations were not necessarily built in town centres but in more economic locations further away.

Developments since then have not helped, with responsibility for town centre links split between railway and local authority. For some decades transport and spatial planning was more concerned to provide for access by car than by public transport and this also has left its mark on the pattern and type of developments in towns as elsewhere. Developments since rail privatisation have not helped either, with train operating companies' role focused on the short-term details of their franchise agreement and with rail infrastructure responsibilities passing to Network Rail.

Although there is good evidence that having a station provides strong economic benefits for a town, research also suggests that poor quality stations and links mean that many towns are missing out on the potential benefits from their station. Improving stations and their links to towns, and thus the "arrival experience" of travellers, could boost spending in town centres by up to twice as much compared to those arriving in a poor quality environment.<sup>1</sup>

Improving the links between stations and town centres in the UK involves a wide range of bodies with a range of processes potentially helping such initiatives.

## The management of stations

The standard arrangement for station management on the railways since privatisation is that the stations themselves are owned by Network Rail with the management of most being the responsibility of train operating companies which operate services under franchise. There have been concerns that franchisees have little incentive to invest their own money in station improvements due to the short nature of franchise terms (mostly around seven to 15 years) which is significantly less than the time needed for any return. Most investment has tended to come from government funds although train operating companies can and do implement smaller scale improvements and better maintenance and upkeep.

The Abellio Greater Anglia franchise, including the stations covered by this report, has a new and different arrangement – it has 99 year leases on its stations and much of the renewal and development responsibility that Network Rail has elsewhere. The Government has been moving to this new approach with the aim of giving franchisees incentives to invest in stations, with the residual value of any investment paid for at the conclusion of the franchise. This approach seeks to ensure that train operating companies can get a return on any investment they put in and have more flexibility over their relationship with Network Rail. It is being applied to new franchises as they are let. This arrangement is likely to give train operators more freedom and incentive to promote Fixing the Link style projects.

Train company responsibilities, formally at least, end at the boundary of the station. However the Association of Train Operating Companies (ATOC) and others have been supportive of Station Travel Plans which encourage access to stations by sustainable travel modes (walking, cycling and public transport) by providing an arena for train companies, local authorities, bus operators and other interested groups to work together to tackle issues which straddle formal boundaries. These have had some success.<sup>3</sup>

Station Travel Plans have focused mainly on cycling and bus access and less on pedestrian improvements. Most physical changes have been in the immediate vicinity of stations, for instance more cycle parking or improvements to bus stops. The Abellio Fixing the Link report on Ely, Colchester and Ipswich shows that distances between stations and town centres can be longer in the UK than in the Netherlands. Improving these links may therefore need more involvement and commitment from local authorities than Station Travel Plans, and may be more reliant on longer-term funding and planning processes.

### Government structure

Transport and spatial planning are treated separately in local government with distinct processes and often different tiers of authorities responsible for them. Transport authorities tend to be higher tier, larger entities: counties in more rural areas and integrated transport authorities covering the larger conurbations like Greater Manchester, Merseyside or West Midlands. Planning authorities are usually lower tier district authorities. There are however some areas with unitary councils that combine planning and transport functions. These cover cities such as Nottingham and Bristol, large rural areas like Wiltshire and Cornwall and smaller rural areas like Rutland. Even in these, though, planning and transport functions are often in separate departments.

This mix has been made more complex in the last few years. Integrated Transport Authorities are now often being replaced by combined authorities where the transport function is one within a range of powers (as in Greater Manchester where the old passenger transport executive – the delivery arm of the integrated transport authority – has been replaced by Transport for Greater Manchester which reports to a committee of the Greater Manchester Combined Authorities). Upper tier local authorities (i.e. counties, unitary authorities and metropolitan districts) are also now supposed to work together alongside business in Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs). These vary in size, some covering just one local authority but others covering four or five. LEP boundaries do not necessarily reflect functional areas (for instance travel to work areas) and in some cases have overlapping boundaries.



Colchester town centre

## Colchester: an illustrative example

It may help to understand the transport planning, government and funding framework by looking at one of the three towns where it is now proposed that the methodology be used to address the link between station and town centre, Colchester for example. The local authority for the town is Colchester Borough Council and, as Colchester is not a unitary authority (typically a large town where the council is responsible for all services), the town is one of twelve district or borough councils which together make up Essex County Council to which there are separate elections.

Colchester Borough Council produces the Colchester Development Plan which sets out the policies for the type and location of development that can take place in Colchester. The current Development Plan emphasises town centre regeneration and also includes policies relating to transport (including for walking, cycling, public transport, promoting rail travel and access to stations) and other policy areas such as housing, retail or commercial development. Guided by the Colchester Development Plan, the Borough Council makes decisions on planning applications.

Strategic planning and transport issues relating to the whole county of Essex are the responsibility of Essex County Council. These should be derived from the Essex Local Transport Plan which in turn links to the Greater Essex Integrated County Strategy on the one hand and the local borough development frameworks or plans on the other. The Integrated County Strategy, the local development plans and individual planning decisions should all be consistent with national planning policy as expressed in the National Planning Policy Framework. Essex is part of the South East LEP which also covers East Sussex and Kent.

## Funding for local transport schemes

Funding for improvement of the links between stations and towns could come from a number of sources such as transport funding, developer contributions or other funding available to local authorities. Spatial plans can help release funding by setting the context for improvements and by creating or directing development and investment opportunities and decisions.

Transport funding for local capital spending has traditionally come from two main sources – local major scheme funding for schemes over £5 million and integrated transport block funding for schemes under £5 million. Integrated transport block funding goes to transport authorities (counties, unitaries and integrated transport authorities or combined authorities) based on a formula. The future arrangements for local major scheme funding are less clear. Funding will now go to “local transport bodies”, which are joint organisations of LEPs and local authorities and have the same boundaries as LEPs. Funding has so far been allocated to these bodies on a formula based on population; in future, transport funding will be included within the Government’s new “Local Growth Fund” and will be allocated at least partly on the basis of bids to this fund linked to the economic strategies being produced by LEPs.

Some local authority major scheme funding has been won, in Ipswich and Worcester for example, for schemes to improve the public realm as part of wider initiatives.

How Fixing the Link projects can be funded is considered in more detail in the Template Action Plan section below.

## Improving stations

More people are now travelling by train than at any time since the Second World War. The railway station is becoming an increasingly important means of access to the town centre. A National Stations Improvement Programme has existed for five years (Colchester has benefited from it) and £100 million has been available from the National Station Improvement Fund over the last two years. Resources have also been allocated through station travel plans to improve entry and departure from stations, whether on foot, by bicycle, bus or car, and thus to encourage travel by rail. Station Travel Plans have been produced for numerous towns including the three that are the subject of this report – Ely, Colchester and Ipswich. Improvements have been made at these stations and there are more to come.



Although in theory station travel plans have applied beyond the station boundary, in practice improvements beyond the station boundary (for example new cycle lanes or bus lanes) have been harder to implement because they have a higher capital cost and are more complex. The focus of the current project is on walking facilities and the pedestrian route to the town centre. Abellio's Fixing the Link methodology offers the opportunity for train operators and local authorities to expand the Station Travel Plan concept beyond its natural boundaries to incorporate the needs of pedestrians right up to the point of arrival in local high streets and town centres.

### Current improvement schemes for Ely, Colchester and Ipswich

The efforts that are being made to promote the health and well-being of the town centre and the town centre economy partly rely on attracting visitors to the town's amenities to spend time, and money, in its various facilities. The more attractive and interesting a town centre the longer visitors will stay and the more they will spend.

While in the past the links between station and town centre have been neglected, more recently local authorities have started co-ordinating plans for their improvement. For example:

The Ely Station Gateway Masterplan of 2012 acknowledges that

"Pedestrian access between the gateway site and the city centre is currently very poor as the site is surrounded by heavy traffic and lacks pedestrian friendly routes."

The Masterplan describes the station site as comprising "a superstore, a polluting busy road and industrial sheds". The station is "isolated from the city, cut off by heavy traffic and with car parking that dominates the view on arrival" and "The site requires radical changes to become integrated into the existing valuable historic built environment."<sup>4</sup>

The need for improvements of Colchester station and its connection to the town centre is recognised

by Colchester Borough Council in The North Station Master Plan.

"The North Station area is recognised as a key Urban Gateway to the town in Colchester's Core Strategy. The location benefits from high levels of accessibility and presents opportunities for redevelopment and improvement. However, it is recognised that the area currently suffers from high levels of traffic congestion, conflicting use of space and a poor urban environment."<sup>5</sup>

Ipswich does not have a station master plan but does have a forward looking transport strategy and has already made pedestrian improvements on the route to the town centre including removing pedestrian underpasses at a roundabout on Princes Street. It has recently received £22 million in Government funding for a transport project to change travel behaviour and improve facilities for walking, cycling and bus travel including those on the station–town centre route.<sup>6</sup>



Traffic has priority on pedestrian crossings along the routes.

## Applying the Fixing the Link methodology

This section outlines the application by Abellio of the Fixing the Link methodology to the three towns.

In the Fixing the Link methodology, each of the four criteria (liveliness, human scale, legibility, and safety and comfort) is made up of three characteristics and each station-town centre link is therefore assessed for a total of 12 characteristics. For some of these characteristics, the presence or absence of certain features is noted and translated into a numerical value for the purposes of contributing to the overall score. For others a numerical value is given or measured and translated into another value for the same scoring purpose.

The higher the overall score, the better the station-town centre link in that town is considered to be; the same applies to the score for each criterion and each characteristic. By giving each characteristic an individual score, Fixing the Link can assist in the prioritisation of interventions so that those which will have the strongest positive impact on the perception of passengers leaving a station can be implemented first.

In the table opposite, the characteristics are explained and the score for each town can be compared.

The marks awarded for each of the twelve characteristics, as well as the overall mark, contribute to a brief analysis of each town, describing the quality of the station-town centre link and its main advantages and disadvantages.



Pedestrians have been given priority at this Dutch station.

|  | Ely         | Colchester  | Ipswich     |
|--|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| <b>Liveliness</b> - <i>A lively scene with people on the street, attracted by a variety of uses and places to sit down and watch or be watched</i>                                       |             |             |             |
| 1a. the number of uses according to the presence of residences, offices, shops, leisure (including bars and restaurants) or educational facilities                                       | 2.33        | 2.60        | 2.33        |
| 1b. the hours of use measured by the presence of residences, offices and shops, restaurants and bars   | 3.00        | 2.60        | 3.17        |
| 1c. the amount of surveillance according to the presence of terraces, benches and shops or functions outside office hours  | 2.00        | 2.00        | 1.33        |
| <b>TOTAL (maximum 15)</b>  | <b>7.33</b> | <b>7.20</b> | <b>6.83</b> |
| <b>Human scale</b> - <i>A physical setting that matches human scale and walking speed</i>  |             |             |             |
| 2a. permeability, measured by the width of blocks on each part of the route  | 3.67        | 3.75        | 4.25        |
| 2b. fine grain or otherwise indicated by the number of buildings per block – the more buildings, the more uses and human the scale   | 4.00        | 3.00        | 3.00        |
| 2c. walkability, indicated purely by the length of the route   | 1.00        | 1.00        | 1.00        |
| <b>TOTAL (maximum 15)</b>  | <b>8.67</b> | <b>7.75</b> | <b>8.25</b> |
| <b>Legibility</b> - <i>The ease with which people can orientate themselves and see the route into town</i>   |             |             |             |
| 3a. orientation - whether it is easy to see which way to go from the station   | 3.00        | 1.00        | 5.00        |
| 3b. linearity of paths - how many changes of direction on the route  | 1.00        | 3.00        | -           |
| 3c. the presence and clarity of maps and signage   | 4.20        | 4.00        | 2.71        |
| <b>TOTAL (maximum 15)</b>  | <b>8.20</b> | <b>8.40</b> | <b>7.71</b> |
| <b>Safety and Comfort</b> - <i>Pedestrians must have priority and the route should feel safe, protected from traffic, well maintained and overseen</i>                                   |             |             |             |
| 4a. pedestrian priority, measured according to: how ordered the station forecourt, whether a ring road must be crossed and the number of roads to be crossed without pedestrian priority | -           | -           | 1.00        |
| 4b. eyes on the street- this is almost the same as 1c and uses the same score but with an element added for presence of dwellings  | 2.67        | 3.00        | 2.00        |
| 4c. maintenance including cleanliness and provision of planting, art etc   | 3.00        | 4.00        | 2.00        |
| <b>TOTAL (maximum 15)</b>  | <b>5.67</b> | <b>5.00</b> | <b>5.00</b> |
| <b>OVERALL SCORE (as a percentage of the possible combined total for all four criteria)</b>  | <b>25%</b>  | <b>26%</b>  | <b>21%</b>  |

Somewhat summarised, the three English towns have been analysed in the Fixing the Link exercise on the following pages.

## Ely

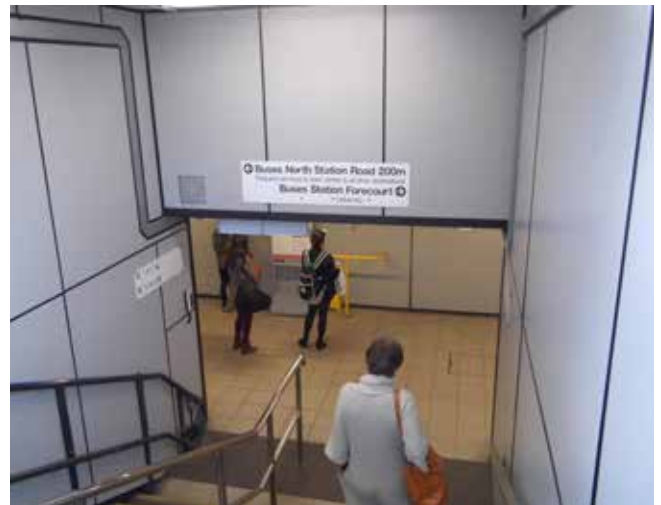
The route to the town centre is made confusing by a disorganised station car park. The adjoining Tesco, while lively for long hours, is not of human scale. A safe and comfortable route along the river and through a park to the town centre is suggested on an information panel at the station. However, signs on the route direct pedestrians along a narrow heavily trafficked road, which crosses other roads without pedestrian priority, and which is largely residential in character and lacks the variety of uses that contribute to liveliness.

## Colchester

The score on legibility is poor. Within the station there are no signs indicating which of the two exits is best for the town centre and information outside the station is also hard to find. The station exit to the south does not feel like the route to the town centre and when leaving from the north the information is located too far from the exit. The signs for the rest of the walking route are good when the main road is reached. But the route is too long (affecting the score on human scale) and most people are likely to take the bus. There is economic activity and a good mix of functions (liveliness) but many are car related and there are many roads and roundabouts to cross, though they are well kept and provided with benches, flowers and pedestrian walkways (safety and comfort).

## Ipswich

Though the route from the station to the town centre is obvious, the start could be more welcoming (safety and comfort). There is a long, wide bridge to cross followed by large buildings, often vacant (affecting the score on both human scale and liveliness), and many roads, including ring roads, to cross without pedestrian priority (safety and comfort). There is a mix of functions on the route but some buildings



No clear indication of the walking route into town can be seen at Colchester station

are vacant and there is limited evening activity (liveliness). Though well provided with maps and signs, the route is long with many changes of direction (legibility).

## The challenges faced by the English towns

Abellio's application of the Fixing the Link methodology has resulted in lower scores for the English towns than for those in the Netherlands – an average of 24 per cent against an average of 34 per cent. The appraisal methodology was developed to assist in identifying and correcting shortcomings in the link in Dutch towns and it is implicit therefore that shortcomings exist and that the links in the Dutch towns can be improved. The Dutch towns are not presented as models to be emulated. However the Dutch scores are widely spread out, from 14 to 71 per cent. Three towns, Maastricht, Hertogenbosch and Leiden, score significantly more than average and may perhaps be considered exemplary. Nevertheless it may be helpful to compare the scores for the English towns on each criterion against the average scores for the Dutch towns and to identify areas where the English towns score badly.

|                    | Average score of Dutch towns | Average score of English towns | Ely  | Colchester | Ipswich |
|--------------------|------------------------------|--------------------------------|------|------------|---------|
| Liveliness         | 8.11                         | 7.12                           | 7.33 | 7.20       | 6.83    |
| Human Scale        | 9.26                         | 8.22                           | 8.67 | 7.75       | 8.25    |
| Legibility         | 8.81                         | 8.10                           | 8.20 | 8.40       | 7.71    |
| Safety and Comfort | 8.87                         | 5.89                           | 5.67 | 7.00       | 5.00    |
| Overall Score      | 34%                          | 24%                            | 25%  | 21%        | 26%     |

The English towns fare less well than the average for the Dutch on all four criteria - only on legibility do they achieve anywhere near the same level. The English standards for liveliness and human scale are both lower (particularly in Ipswich's case for liveliness) and the standard for safety and comfort substantially so: Ely is judged to be around 36 per cent less safe and comfortable than the Dutch average and Ipswich more than 40 per cent. (We shall come back to the validity of these scores below.)

### Recommendations for the three towns following the initial Fixing the Link analysis

Abellio's first application of the Fixing the Link methodology has made a number of simple recommendations to improve the station-town centre route for each of the three towns. As stated, the methodology is currently being applied in greater detail in partnership with the local authorities, but the initial recommendations are as follows.

#### Ely

Signs should be altered to be consistent with the information panel at the station and direct the walking route along the riverfront park. The station car park could be moved, perhaps to the west, to enhance orientation when arriving at the station, create space for facilities, and allow improvement in the station forecourt, possibly including planted areas, to raise its quality to match areas around the Cathedral and riverfront. Pedestrians would benefit from priority when crossing Station Road and a wider pavement on Station Road.

#### Colchester

Improve orientation and signing on the northern station forecourt to make clear the way to the town centre. For people visiting the castle park of Colchester, a dedicated route could be signed and bannered.

Use the area between train station and town centre to densify urban development in addition to planned expansion north of the station, sacrificing large open spaces. At present the route between station and town centre is long and lacks urban features. However the quality of life in Colchester and the direct connection to Liverpool Street make it an ideal location for high quality housing for London commuters. Residents of developments between station and town centre would be within walking distance of both. This would encourage expansion of local businesses (shops, offices and restaurants).

#### Ipswich

"Citydress" the bridge (with banners announcing events or flowers for example) to enhance the experience of entering a city and improve the comfort level. Solve the vacancy problems around Ipswich Town Stadium by attracting functions that can use the large stadium car park when not in use for the stadium. Priority for pedestrians would be a welcome addition to cross the busy roads.

## Commentary on the application of the methodology

The application of the Fixing the Link methodology to Ely, Colchester and Ipswich has identified issues which arise both in English and in Dutch towns, and others which only arise or are more pronounced in an English context.

### Improving the pedestrian provision

A number of shortcomings in the quality of the pedestrian route in each of the three towns are straightforward and may be fairly easily addressed. Some may be tackled in the process of implementing Station Travel Plans. The measures required may be part of the means employed to improve arrival and departure on foot, by bicycle or bus from stations. This applies for instance to the absence of signs showing the best pedestrian route from the platform to the town centre at Colchester station or clarifying the route through the station forecourt at Ely.

A number of other necessary improvements may be made quickly and with modest budgets. For example, to improve maps and the signage of the route to the town centre beyond the station boundary, as is required at Ely where the signposted route via the river bank breaks down due to the absence of a couple of inexpensive direction signs. Some parts of the routes would also benefit from additional maintenance or provision of such facilities as seating, plants or artworks.

### The length of the link

Though the English towns generally do worse than the Dutch on each criterion, the most notable difference - partly accounting for other poor scores - is that the link is almost twice as long for the English as for the Dutch towns. The Dutch stations are on average 497 metres from the town centres compared to 950 metres for the English, according to the measurements given in the Fixing the Link appraisals.

### Traffic issues

A particularly important consequence of the relatively long distance from station to town centre, as the Fixing the Link appraisal recognises, is a greater likelihood that the walking route will be along, and may also cross, busy roads with high traffic levels, lacking pedestrian priority and crossing places. Thus the link in Ely has to cross the A142, in Colchester both the A134 and the A133 and in Ipswich both the A137 (twice) and the A1022. At each crossing place on the A roads, and some others, there are 'pelican' traffic lights with pedestrian crossing times but traffic, not pedestrians, has priority. In each town a number of more minor roads, or junctions, must also be crossed where there is neither pedestrian priority nor crossing facility. This accounts for the fact that neither Ely nor Colchester scores anything at all for pedestrian priority and Ipswich only one point (which arguably it does not merit as the link has to make three crossings of A roads without pedestrian priority).

There are differences between England and the Netherlands in what is understood by pedestrian priority. Traffic lights which change to a pedestrian crossing signal some time after the pedestrian has pressed a button on the control panel are



The walking route from Colchester station takes pedestrians onto busy roads

not considered to offer pedestrian priority in the Netherlands or by those who carried out the Fixing the Link assessment. This reflects a broader difference in attitude between the two countries in the provision that should be made on the roads, as well as the legal position, in relation to motorists and more vulnerable road users. However, practice within the UK also varies. There is a wide difference in traffic light timing – some respond quickly when a pedestrian presses the button, others only after a long delay.

In each of the three English towns a large part of the pedestrian route to the town centre is on A roads and others which carry a high volume of traffic. This is clearly also an important factor in determining the 'safety and comfort' of the link and will need to be addressed, but there is no category in the assessment methodology that measures it. In applying the methodology, it might therefore be helpful to use other means of measuring pedestrian safety such as road casualty statistics.

A related issue is that in Ipswich and to a lesser extent in Colchester much of the route to the town centre is lined by substantial, single use developments, often designed for access by car, which present a long, monotonous and unattractive face to the road, provide no supervision or liveliness at the roadside and have a large area of car parking, in some cases between the footpath and the development itself. These contribute to poor scores for human scale because the long block length reduces permeability and the variety of fine grained human scale uses that is possible.

In each of the three towns the quality of the pedestrian route is also compromised, to different degrees and in different ways, by parking or access issues for motor vehicles at the stations. This is most acute perhaps at Ely where the pedestrian emerges from the station into a car park, partly attached to the station and partly belonging to the neighbouring Tesco, which dominates the surrounding area. In Colchester pedestrians emerging on the north side of the station (sometimes due to the poor signing already mentioned) find themselves on a station forecourt that also provides access to a 1473 space station



It is not clear that pedestrians need to go under the bridge to find the route to the town centre

car park. In Ipswich, the beginning of the walking route to the town centre is dominated in the station forecourt by a limited amount of car parking, followed by two lanes of bus stops and terminus and then, immediately, by the three lanes of the busy B1075; at none of these does the pedestrian have any priority.

Local authorities might wish to improve the link between station and town centre as part of a package of measures to reduce traffic, make better provision for alternatives to the car and allow an improvement in environmental quality of the town centre that could be expected to have benefits for the town centre economy. Such an approach would complement other policies, for example to promote active travel or address air quality problems.

### **Spatial and development issues**

The Fixing the Link analysis recommends that planning and land use powers are used to improve the quality of the station-town centre link, at least in the case of Colchester where it suggests that development between the station and town centre should be intensified. There is a strong argument that this applies in all three cases.

A willingness to use broader planning and land-use powers to improve the quality of the station-town centre link could operate perhaps at two levels:

1. Seeking to secure a change of use or complete redevelopment of buildings or individual sites on the station-town centre route, in order to bring buildings back into active use and to improve the contribution they make to such factors as liveliness, human scale and safety and comfort
2. The more wholesale redevelopment of sites, or areas, probably for residential and mixed uses, in order to increase urban intensification around the station and between the station and the town centre, while making use of existing infrastructure and securing environmental improvements. This approach, sometimes known as transit oriented development, has been followed in the Netherlands and elsewhere and by Dutch Railways itself, for instance at 's-Hertogenbosch, where a large area immediately to the west of the station now accommodates mixed residential and commercial developments.

This is the opportunity that offers the greatest medium to long term benefits that could come out of the Fixing the Link analysis. It also presents an opportunity to tackle some of the more intractable issues that the analysis raises such as the lack of human scale or liveliness of some routes, while at the same time helping to provide sites for housing development, give an impetus to the town centre economy and increase the customer catchment of the rail network.

Moreover it is already to some extent the subject of local authority deliberations in all three towns now being considered. Sites adjoining or near the railway station, also within walking and cycling distance of the town centre are, or may become, available in all three towns though it would clearly be necessary to relocate some employment uses. Sites close to the station or directly affecting the station-town centre route include for example:



The entrance to part of the 1473 space car park, outside Colchester station

#### In Ely

- A large site immediately adjoining the station, currently occupied by surface car parking, superstore buildings and a petrol station
- The station overflow car park (surface parking)
- A large site opposite the station, between the A142 and the river, occupied by an engineering firm, and various sites opposite the superstore and north of the A142 occupied by a concrete plant, a second hand car dealer and other industrial buildings

#### In Colchester

- The car park for 1473 vehicles immediately abutting the station
- A large area of surface car parking between a DIY store and the pavement on the station-town centre link and the DIY store itself
- Various other buildings with car related uses including tyre and exhaust replacement centres that line sections of the route to the town centre, affecting its liveliness, human scale and safety and comfort while doing little to enhance the quality of the local environment



### In Ipswich

- Surface car parking on the west side of Princes Street (the 'link') immediately after the bridge
- A long single storey shed currently housing a car hire and a car repair centre and associated parking
- Numerous vacant commercial and office buildings on Princes Street, lacking human scale and detracting from the liveliness of the route

This would involve finding new, or amended, uses for underused buildings or sites currently occupied by large single use but often vacant buildings. Some buildings could be renovated and make a much greater contribution to the quality of the surrounding area, for example the Grade 2 listed Victorian Malthouse on Princes Street in Ipswich. Finding a better use for such buildings and sites could address low scores achieved by Ipswich, for instance, for human scale and liveliness. Wider and larger objectives could also be achieved: many more dwellings and other uses could be accommodated within easy walking or cycling distance of both the town centre and the station. Such development would make use of existing transport and other infrastructure, and would require little new infrastructure.

Some issues of this kind are already being considered. In Ely, Tesco has plans to move from beside the station to a site further west releasing its current site for redevelopment for residential and other purposes which could enjoy access to both station and town centre without the need to use a car. In North Colchester a new development of 1600 homes is planned which would be within walking distance of the station (through rather far for walking to the town centre).

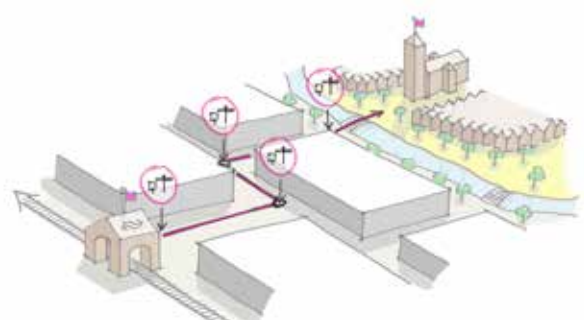
## How the Fixing the Link approach can benefit places

### Encouraging active travel

Improving the quality of the pedestrian route between the station and the town centre can complement other measures to promote sustainable modes. It can benefit those who already travel regularly to the station on foot or by bicycle as well as visitors who travel to the town on an occasional or one-off basis. Modal shift can bring obvious environmental improvements but can also help to restore and enhance the historic fabric of towns, which is often the main attraction for visitors.

### Better quality of life

Pedestrian improvements on these routes have the potential to improve the quality of life of those living on or near the routes as well as those who use them for travel purposes. They can serve to increase positive feelings about local places and, when the improvements include measures to introduce a wider mix of uses visited by more people at more hours of the day and evening, can increase feelings of oversight and supervision. This helps to relieve the fear of crime and anti-social behaviour, which damages the lives of residents and can deter travel on foot and by bicycle and public transport.



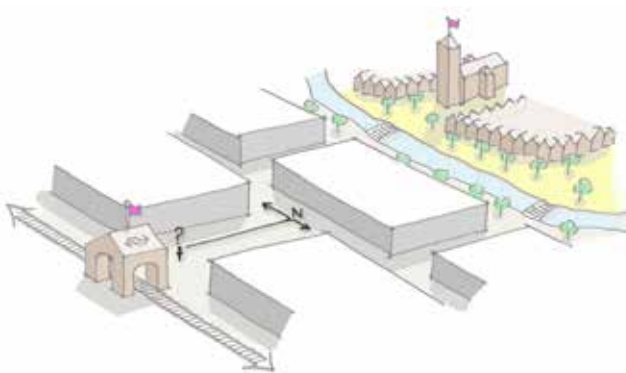
Signs can be quickly and cheaply installed.

### A more attractive environment

One of the starting points for the analysis on which the Fixing the Link methodology was based is research focusing on three towns in the Netherlands, Delft, Amersfoort and Leiden which shows how the attractiveness of the entrance to a town or city influences the amount of time visitors will stay and the amount of money they will spend. Walking is the most important means of transport for those arriving at a public transport transfer point such as a railway station, but for some time the flow of vehicles has been the central design issue for the public transport transfer point and its surroundings; pedestrian issues have been neglected. Research shows that better results are obtained when the pedestrian is used as the starting point for design.<sup>7</sup>

### Boosting business

A large body of English research has also accumulated showing that high quality public realm, particularly associated with schemes to give greater priority to pedestrians, improves the retail performance of locations. The most recent is a report published this year by Living Streets, which reviews some of this evidence and concludes that improved walking conditions can increase footfall and the takings of shops by 40 per cent.<sup>8</sup> A review of the literature by Transport for London found that pedestrian schemes have a positive impact on a town centre's vitality and viability.<sup>9</sup> Similarly, CABE found that "in London an achievable improvement in street design quality can add an average of 5.2 per cent to residential prices on the case study high streets and an average of 4.9 per cent to retail rents."<sup>10</sup>



Pedestrians need good signs when the route is not obvious.

## Repairing damage caused by heavy traffic

By contrast poor quality public realm and heavy motor traffic are associated with poor retail performance. For instance, surveys of Leicester in the early 1990s found that there was a statistically significant correlation between streets with high motorised traffic and high numbers of vacant shops.<sup>11</sup> Areas with poor or derelict shops visible to passing traffic can contribute to the stigma faced by deprived areas and contribute to a cycle of decay.<sup>12</sup>

## Locating development to maximise sustainable transport

A further significant range of benefits can be captured when land use planning changes are made to the areas around the station and between the two poles of the station and town centre. Areas within walking distance of the station and town centre are ideal locations for residential and other developments which generate movement. This approach is entirely consistent with the new National Planning Policy Framework, one of whose core planning principles is that planning should 'actively manage patterns of growth to make the fullest possible use of public transport, walking and cycling, and focus significant development in locations which are or can be made sustainable'.<sup>13</sup>

That approach will also enable the re-use of redundant sites and buildings, provide capacity for new housing, allow more permeability and human scale in the streetscape and help to introduce a wider range of uses, frequented at more hours of the day and contributing to greater liveliness. There are potential economic benefits also from increasing the customer catchment for the town centre and existing businesses, creating opportunities for new businesses and employment and enlarging the customer base for public transport and other services. At the same time as bringing walking and public realm improvements in its wake, that approach could help the town develop a reputation for environmental quality and innovative urban design that would enhance the attraction for visitors.



A straight forward walking route with clear signage and pedestrian priority is seen here in Amersfoort

## Template action plan to implement the approach

Fixing the Link programmes will have to work at several levels. Some measures will fall within the remit of the Station Travel Plan and would be largely the responsibility of the train operator. Beyond the station boundary (although the train operator will continue to have an interest) others will be mainly the responsibility of the district or borough council and some the responsibility of the County Council or Combined Authority. Some will be shared between these.

We suggest that Fixing the Link plans be set out in a way that reflects these interests and responsibilities.

### Station Gateway Masterplans

Two of the three towns, Ely and Colchester, already have station masterplans while Ipswich has a Major Transport Plan. Each town should have a station masterplan and these should be updated to contain a comprehensive record of the measures and projects included in plans to improve the station–town centre link. They could then become the subject of funding applications (see below).

The various measures in masterplans could be apportioned between the following:

- **Station Travel Plans**  
Some necessary measures within the station boundaries have not been included in previous STPs or have not yet been carried out. STPs will need to be revised and extended. Some measures, such as additional signing, can be quickly and inexpensively implemented, others, such as moving station parking or reorganising station forecourts, will be more substantial.

- **Local Development Frameworks and Supplementary Planning Documents**  
These are produced by the local planning authority, in this case the district or borough councils for Ely, Colchester and Ipswich. Again these could cover relatively minor expenditure, for example on signage, maps and benches, the installation of pedestrian priority at minor road junctions and more substantial public realm improvements schemes. Proposals for the re-use or redevelopment of sites and buildings may need to be included in local development frameworks.
- **Local Transport Plans**  
These plans are the remit of the county councils, Integrated Transport Authorities etc and will need to cover measures affecting the major 'A' road network as well development proposals with significant transport impacts.

It may be possible to test even quite major schemes on a temporary, trial basis. A major re-allocation of road space in Times Square, New York, was tried on an experimental basis using temporary materials before being more permanently installed. Sustrans has developed a low-cost approach to introducing Home Zones which maximises local participation and the use of local resources.<sup>14</sup>

### Local rail strategies and devolution

In many parts of the country, local authorities have developed rail strategies setting out their ambitions for the local rail network. In the area covered by this report, the local authorities, in partnership with several other local organisations and representatives, have come together to produce a "rail prospectus for East Anglia".<sup>15</sup> In other parts of the country, groupings of local authorities have come together to propose that they should take over the franchising of parts of the rail network.<sup>16</sup> These rail strategies and, where appropriate, the devolution of franchises have the potential for integrating railways more closely with local planning and improving links between stations and town centres.

## Funding Fixing the Link projects

The plans and frameworks mentioned above are not spending plans and need to be funded. Funding could be available from a variety of sources.

- Transport capital funding: until recently local authorities were able to bid for capital funding for major transport schemes (£5m+) from the Department for Transport. As we noted above, funding is now being routed through “Local Transport Bodies”, joint boards of local authorities and Local Enterprise Partnerships. In future, transport funding will be routed through the Local Growth Fund, for which LEPs will bid. We have surveyed the priorities chosen by Local Transport Bodies<sup>17</sup> and have found some example of projects in this area. For example, Southampton has proposed funding a £9m scheme which focuses on improving links to the railway station. Gloucestershire has also prioritised works at Cheltenham station.
- Semi-localised business rates: business rates are a national standard tax given to central Government. However some local authorities have negotiated to retain the extra business rates gained from improvements like these, so there is a clear income stream
- TIF financing: Tax Incremental Financing is a variation on business rates retention, but instead is based on future increases in council tax and business rate income
- Developer contributions: there is a well-established system for developers to contribute to various local infrastructure measures, including transport through “section 106” funding and now also through Community Infrastructure Levies (CIL); these should be based on an infrastructure plan for the area
- City deals: as part of the Government’s approach to localism, cities are able to bid for funding and powers in a number of areas, including transport
- NSIP: National Stations Improvement Programme has funded major station improvements including to the areas around rail stations. Further funding for this is likely to be allocated in the next railway “control period” from 2014-19
- LSTF: the Local Sustainable Transport Fund, set up in 2011, has so far funded a wide range of sustainable transport initiatives including improvements at and around stations and also to public spaces. It has been allocated further funding in 2015-6, some of which will form part of the local growth fund (see above)
- Cycle funding: there has been funding for cycle-rail integration projects which could be used for Fixing the Link work

## Conclusions and recommendations

Recent debate on town centres has focused on parking and access by car. However, good access by public transport, by bicycle and on foot is of at least equal importance. This places a premium on the quality of the route between the station and town centre. Fixing the Link methodology offers a way for local authorities and train operators to assess the quality of the link and come up with perception based measures to improve it over the short and the longer term. It should be possible to enhance the legibility and the safety and comfort of a link in the shorter term, though the creation of a more human scale may be a longer term project.

The Fixing the Link process should be embedded in national and local policy in the following ways.

- The value of the station–town centre link should be reflected in Planning Practice Guidance which is being updated to support effective planning and ensure the translation of the National Planning Policy Framework into local development plans, proposals and decisions
- The Department for Transport, in considering rail franchise specifications, should recognise the importance of links, and ensure that franchisees have incentives to make long-term investments and improvements; these should be related to local authority Station Master Plans
- The local authorities drawing up local and regional rail strategies and bids to take over franchising of local rail services should include the enhancement of station-town centre links as an important part of their proposals.
- Local authorities should provide a spatial planning context for improvements of the station–town centre link through Station Master Plans which should be reflected in the Local Development Plan and have the status of Supplementary Planning Documents. Over time this will help promote increased liveliness and human scale development by increasing the mixture of uses and ensuring that development is not reliant on access by car
- The four criteria in the Fixing the Link methodology should be applied to the assessment of any development proposals on the station–town centre route
- Local highway authorities should ensure that pedestrian priority issues are included in street audits and should provide or adjust pedestrian crossings accordingly
- Local Economic Partnerships should recognise the value of good station–town centre links and include these in their economic strategies and Local Growth Fund bids
- Train operating companies should extend station travel plans to include programmes to upgrade the quality of the town centre link
- The Fixing the Link methodology itself needs to be adjusted to allow it to take proper account of the impact of traffic volumes on the pedestrian route and recommend measures such as changes in road design or the provision of alternative routes

The Fixing the Link methodology is a very useful way of thinking about the quality of the route from the station to the town centre and could be a valuable tool in helping to improve the health of town centre economies. It also has a wider role in promoting development that is well-located in relation to town centres and public transport hubs and which therefore allows, in the words of the National Planning Policy Framework, 'the fullest possible use' to be made 'of public transport, walking and cycling, and focus[es] significant development in locations which are or can be made sustainable'.

The methodology needs to take account of the longer distances between station and town centre often found in English towns, assess the impact of high traffic volumes on pedestrian routes and suggest the means of reducing them. This will be essential to the safety and comfort of the link and, ultimately, to ensuring that the Fixing the Link approach contributes to the prosperity of local town centres and high streets.

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