

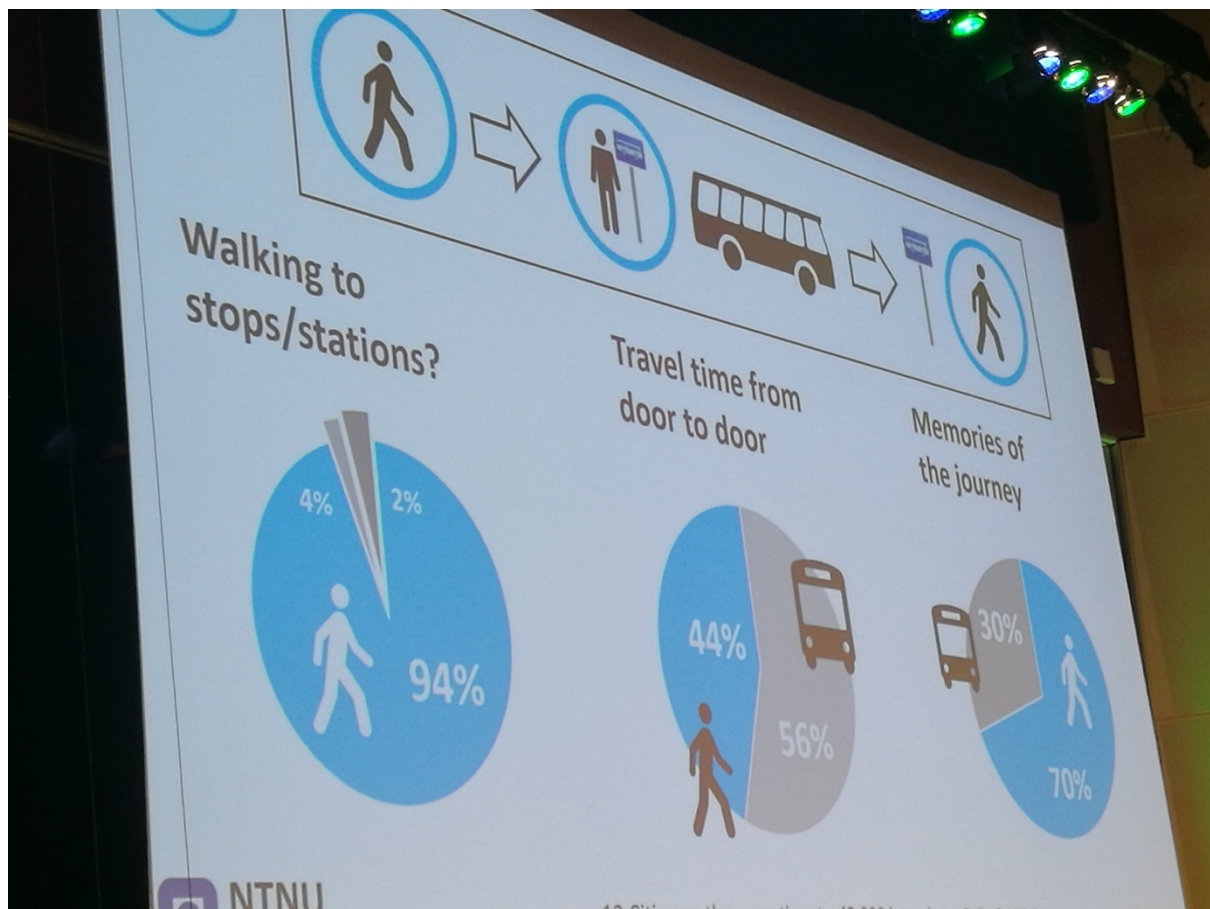
## Walking highlights from Rotterdam and beyond

Celia Wade-Brown Nov 2019

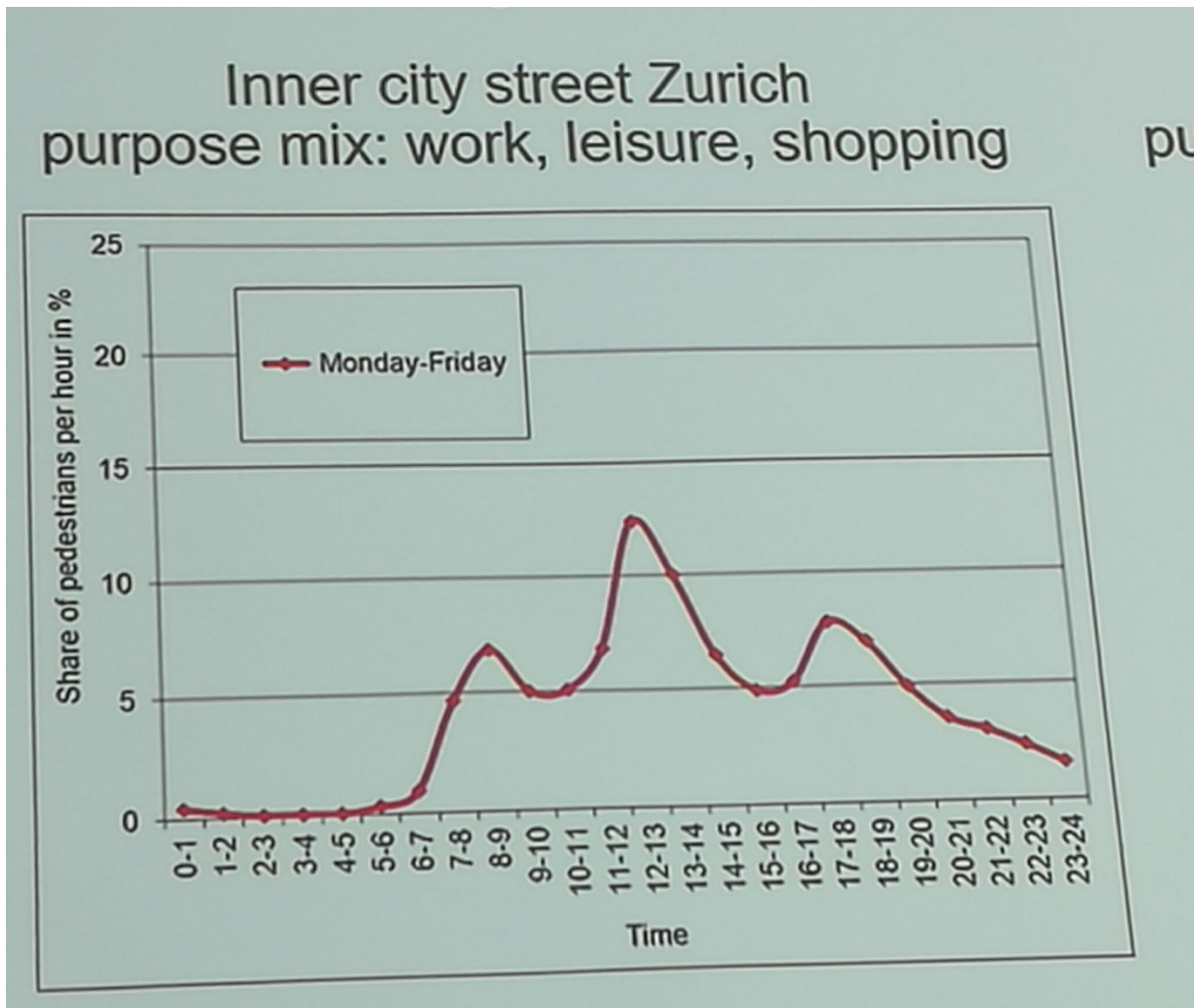
When I tell people I'm going to a walking conference, some wag says "oh, haha, will you walk there?" Surely they don't expect a farmer to drive a tractor to an agricultural conference – or maybe they do. I suspect it's because they don't take walking that seriously or understand that there are real global experts and researchers who can share the latest knowledge about the first mode of transport. Anyway, deciding to fly internationally is a big decision in these days of the Anthropocene Era. I offset my flights, at radiative forcing levels, with [Ekos](#) and felt better.

There were inspiring presentations from people who've been talking walking for decades and interesting perspectives from people I'd never heard of before. I'm delighted that NZTA's Gerry Dance and ViaStrada's John Lieswyn attended too. Walking is being taken seriously by more and more organisations: there were speakers from WHO and the Asian Development Bank as well as the more usual landscape architects, lighting consultants, city planners and transport officials from ministries and cities. We were warmly welcomed by Vice Mayor Judith Bokhove. It was a pleasure to be on a panel about leadership and city shaping with her and former Vice Mayor of Vienna, Maria Vassilikou.

Helge Hillnhütter from Norway enlightened us with research showing how much difference the street environment makes to the perceptions of public transport passengers when they are walking to or from their stop or station.



Swiss transport advice noted that only measuring peak hour transport users can downplay the number of pedestrians using a street.

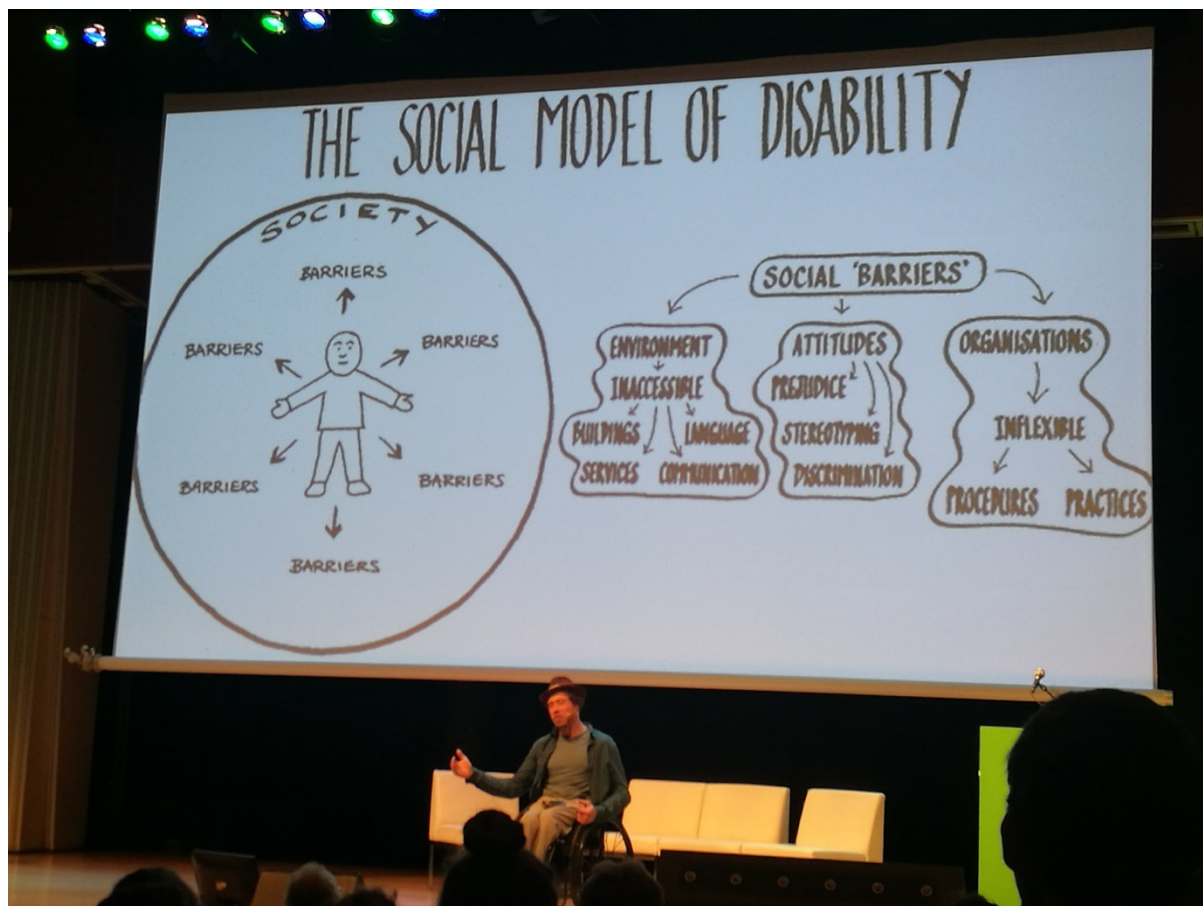


Lots of people were talking about strategies to encourage walking to school. One of the most effective interventions was to close adjacent streets to cars for the time around the beginning and end of the school day. This is much cheaper than putting in infrastructure that might only be used for an hour a day.

## SCHOOLSTREETS

- WHAT:
  - STREET IN FRONT OF A SCHOOL
  - ONLY FOR PEDESTRIANS, BICYCLES AND EMERGENCY VEHICLES
  - ABOUT 30 MINUTES
  - AT THE START AND AT THE END OF A SCHOOLDAY
- NEEDS:
  - VISIBLE SIGNS
  - GOOD COMMUNICATION





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ometimes individual experiences were the most memorable. Mari Sanders, filmmaker, presented some extraordinary video footage showing accessibility, and its lack, in some European cities. He also made it plain that it's the city environment that makes him disabled. I'd love to have Mari visit New Zealand in his wheelchair and engage audiences here too. [Mari's video](#)

**International Federation of Pedestrians** is an alliance of pedestrian advocacy groups around the world. We meet during the annual Walk21 conference, many by Skype. The leadership is global with a Dutch president, a Portuguese Secretary, an Australian Vice-President and a Treasurer from Aotearoa New Zealand, the wonderful Andy Smith. Some groups are huge like Como Anda – 196 organisations working for slower speeds and attractive streets in Brazil. America Walks attended – bringing together many city and state organisations. In Portugal, ACAM works with their Ministry of Education to create Road Safety and Active Travel resources for schools. We had a new member for Poland – one of the worst countries for pedestrian deaths with cars accelerating at zebra crossings if a pedestrian is approaching. Vision Zero was a common thread among advocates. Victoria Walks from Australia prefers to talk about transport leadership than advocacy.

**Rotterdam** was interesting as a place to walk – great downtown near the central station with generous delineated space for different modes. It got tougher as you move into the suburbs. That train station is a marvellous piece of architecture. In New Zealand we could learn about having cafes, shoe repair shops, florists and other retail right in the concourse. I was surprised there weren't apartments above, which would pretty much pay for a decent enclosed and sheltered waiting area but the design, almost as iconic as Bilbao's Guggenheim, showed that the City of Rotterdam thought a station was sufficiently important to be an architectural statement in its own right. There were plenty of tidy bike parks but as ever, people on foot are the lifeblood of public transport. Tactile guidance for the blind, lifts for the less mobile and clear information made it very welcoming. The City says "Over the

*last ten years the City has transformed the centre into a City Lounge - encouraging people to meet, stay and enjoy Rotterdam - by reallocating road and parking space, slowing traffic speeds and investing in quality public space at an impressive scale. The results are transformative, well worth seeing, and have delivered measurable increases in footfall, dwell time, happiness and health.”* I love the emphasis on dwell time not just a utilitarian model of A to B as fast as possible. Taking time to pause by choice rather than waiting ages at an inhospitable crossing at traffic lights, is fundamental to making people welcome in cities. It means art, seats, trees, shelter and variety on the ground floor of buildings. Vice-Mayor Judith Bokhove was a lively and positive force for a more sustainable city and it was a pleasure to be on a panel with her and the former vice-Mayor of Vienna, Maria Vassilikou, taking about city leadership and walking.

Inside Rotterdam Central Station



Central Rotterdam with space for light rail, walkers, cyclists, a few private cars and lots of trees.



Suburban Rotterdam shares everywhere else's problems with the footpath invaded by skips and parked vehicles.



While I decided to travel to Europe, I made the most of the trip by adding in family catch-ups, a walking holiday, interviews and a second conference.

First I went on a Local Roots Food and Arts Tour in Sacramento – which involved walking from café to café and looking at the street murals. It was a great place to walk with no e-scooters allowed on the footpaths but a fair few on the low-speed downtown streets. I did find North American drivers very courteous to people on foot. Sacramento was designed on a grid and with a high point of 253m, it's very easy walking.



In the UK the first ten days was focussed on catching up with family and friends in London, Southampton and Totnes. London is a terrific place to walk and the tube meshes well with walking. With a big wheeled suitcase I found several tube stations had lots of steps or their lifts weren't working (when I could find them) so it's trickier for wheel-chair users than you might expect. I also made good use of the bus network now they have contactless card access and "next stop" displays inside. So nice to see dogs allowed on public transport and

I'm sure that extends dog walking journeys. I used the parks as routes whenever I could: St James, Hyde Park, Regent's Park all offered attractive "long-cuts". Wouldn't it be nice if Googlemaps offered an option for "up to 20% longer but greener" for its walking choices, not just varying walking speeds? St James has over 600 species resident, making a great contribution to biophilic capital. London has officially become the world's first National Park City <http://www.nationalparkcity.london/>



Pictures of St James Park





Living Streets UK's work and personnel are inspirational – as well as being the source of the name for Living Streets Aotearoa. I interviewed Jenni Wiggle and that's a whole new topic. So is Nature in Cities, the subject of the second conference. More perhaps in our next edition!