

This month, **Colin Davis** looks at walking and the design of more 'comfortable' streets.

Design notes

Streets for All, Living Streets and Mixed Use Streets are some of the publications, organisations and campaigns that describe a growing concern expressed by minister for transport, Derek Twigg, that 'streets are for people, not just traffic'.

Of particular interest are techniques to allow pedestrians to walk in urban streets more comfortably – that is, able to walk directly where they want to go, with as few diversions as possible, and to walk with as little intimidation by traffic as possible.

Take the simple act of crossing a road at a street corner. How often does it feel as if the traffic turning is too fast? And how often is it necessary to take a detour just to cross a road?

Yet, a strict reading of the *Design manual for road and bridges* regarding the radius of kerbs at road junctions appears to deliberately put pedestrians at those disadvantages. Figure 5/2 of Volume 6, Section 2 Part 6, TD42/95 shows a side road entrance to a main road with the large-radius kerb designed to relate to the requirements of the swept path of the rear wheels of a long vehicle. The effect on pedestrians is explained as: 'Pedestrian crossing points should be a minimum of 15m back from the "give way" line.' You get the impression that the person who wrote it had not often walked home with the week's shopping.

Another affect of large radii is that they encourage higher turning speeds which, due to the dramatic improvements in acceleration and road holding of an ordinary family car, are far greater now than when the concepts in the *DMRB* were first considered. These wide arcs also result in areas of tactile paving which is quite oddly shaped, unsightly and probably difficult for people who rely on it to comprehend. In some places, the footway completely disappears.

Fortunately, the *DMRB* applies only to Highway Agency roads and is expected to be modified by highway authorities for their own urban roads. In fact, as the modified diagram shows, the swept path of the rear wheels of turning vehicles need not determine the geometry of the kerb, merely its limits. The actual kerb line can be made much more acceptable to pedestrians. A kerb at right angles to the direction of walking it is more logical and comfortable to use. People should also be allowed to walk directly where they want to go, with as few detours as possible.

Where sharp street corners have existed for decades or even centuries, it is surprising to see how well the drivers of large vehicles actually cope – bus drivers skillfully take buses within inches of the kerb each time.

If drivers were likely to drive over the footway then a carefully-positioned bollard would be sufficient deterrent, set at the edge of the kerb, rather than within the footway, so that the effective footway width for walking is maximised.

Does 'streets are for people' mean that we should reappraise some of our established attitudes to road geometry, and make life for pedestrians a little more comfortable?

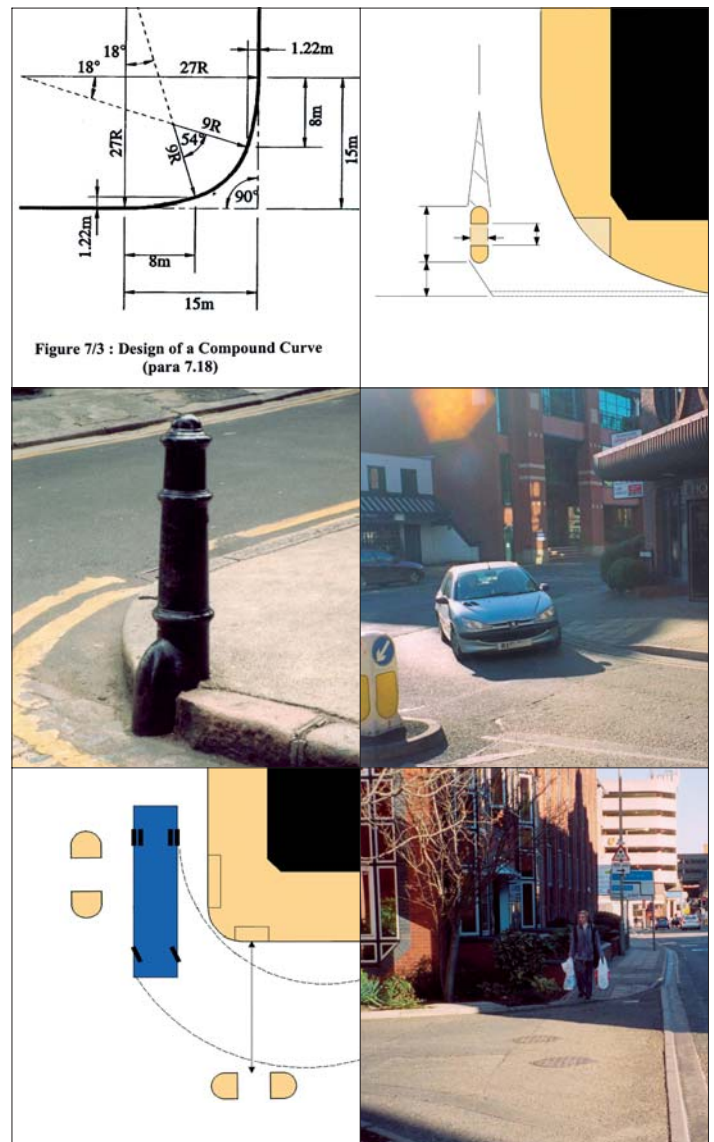


Figure 7/3 : Design of a Compound Curve (para 7.18)

Clockwise from top left: Large radius from *DMRB* TD 42 95; large radius from *DMRB* with buildings and tactile paving; large radius. Car turning at speed; large radius. Walking home with the shopping; sharp corner. Long vehicles turning at sharp corner; and sharp corner. Bollard at corner in historic town centre