

Walkability Assessment:

Three Bridges

Limerick Pedestrian Network

This is the first Walkability Assessment prepared by the Limerick Pedestrian Network. The LPN is a newly formed group of local volunteers. We want to make Limerick better for, and because of, everyday walking.

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AUGUST 17



Introduction

Walkability Assessment & Mapping

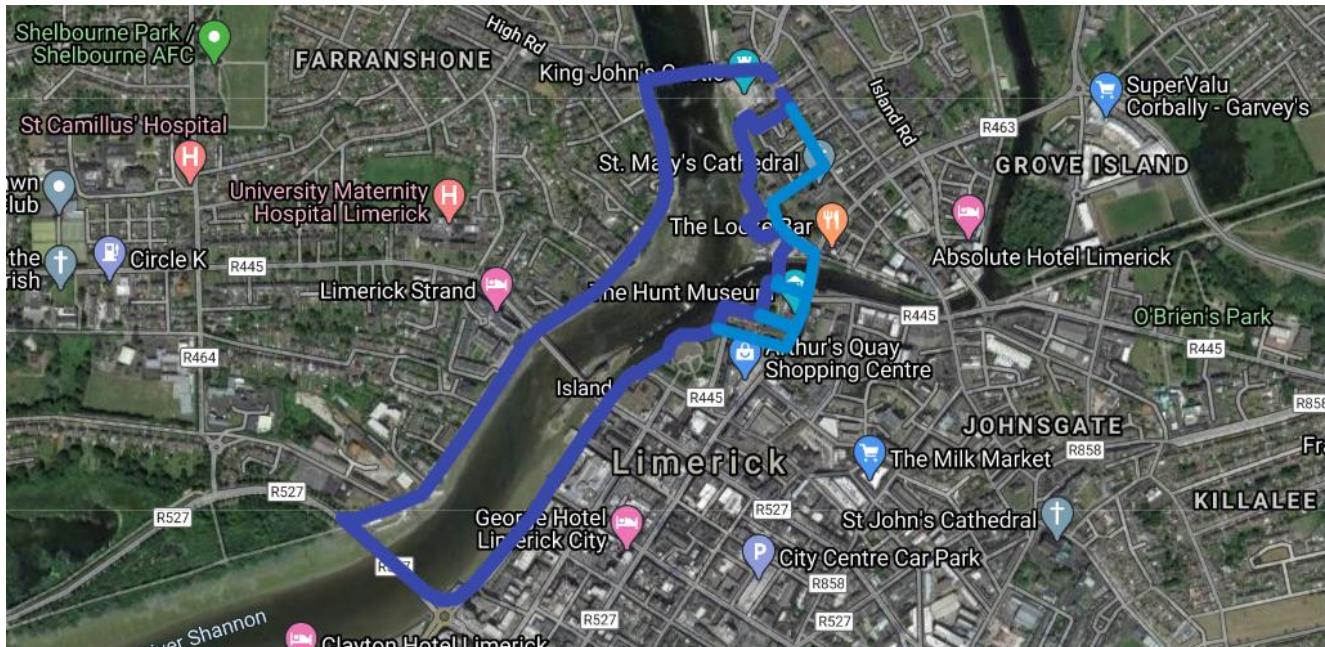
Route:	Three Bridges Walk
Assessment Date(s):	28 June 2020
Observations, mapping & report by:	Seamus Ryan & Aidan Hogan

The route was assessed from a user perspective in order to assess its pedestrian-friendly features, including accessibility, ease, safety, and potential. The assessment involved walking the route, photographing observations, and later mapping and annotating the observations using Google MyMaps.

Route Description

The Three Bridges Walk is a well-known city centre walk for Limerick residents and visitors to the city. It is deservedly one of the jewels in Limerick's tourist crown, as well as being one of the best urban walks in the country.

It is approximately 3km in distance and it follows the banks of the river, crossing the Shannon and Abbey Rivers at Shannon Bridge, Matthew Bridge and Thomond Bridge. The route may be shortened by crossing the river at Sarsfield Bridge and returning to the start point.



The route is predominantly a public amenity walk. Although parts of the route are used for residents and workers to commute to and from the city centre.

Mapping Observations

Approximately 100 observations were recorded and mapped. The Master Map contains all observations. Colour coded markers denote different types of observations e.g. green = positive observations, red = hazards / safety issues.

For ease of reading, the master map has been broken down as follows, with each sub-map grouping observations together by category - **CLICK ON THE LINKS BELOW TO VIEW MAPS:**

MASTER MAP

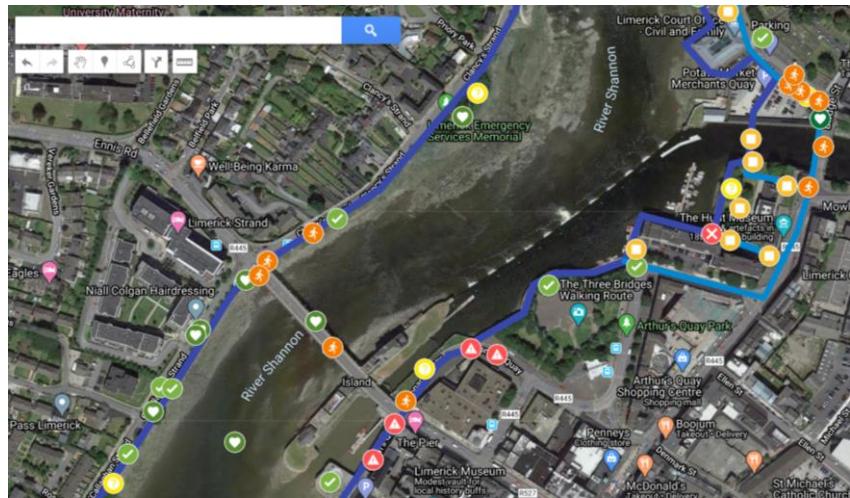
Positive Observations

Riverside Walk - Access Issues

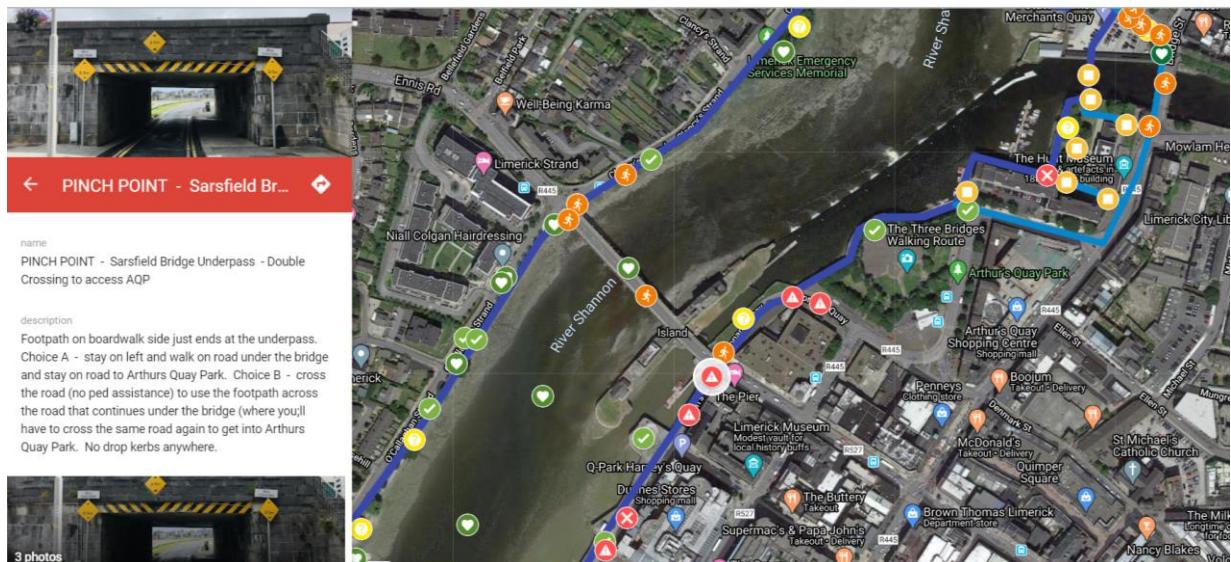
#WeNeedSpace

Hazards / Safety Issues

Overview / Summary Map



While the remainder of this report will highlight the key themes and issues identified during the assessment, the reader is encouraged to use the online map resources above to view individual observations. Each observation is accompanied by one or more photographs and a few lines describing the observation. Example below.



Findings

Overview of Findings

Overall, the Three Bridges route displays predominantly positive features from a pedestrian perspective. It shows the overwhelmingly positive results of investment, development, and maintenance of public amenities. While the three bridges walk is probably the finest example of pedestrian infrastructure in the city centre, there are a number of areas where improvements can be made to enhance pedestrian experience.

Positive Observations	Areas for Improvement
Wide footpaths and boardwalks with adequate space to cater for pedestrian volumes	Excessively long wait time for pedestrian crossing at Sarsfield Bridge
Resting areas with seating, greenery, pleasant views provide areas for pedestrians to catch their breath and take in the breathtaking views	Lack of space allocation for pedestrians at pinch points e.g. the bridges, Potato Market
Low traffic volume / speed on the quays, with traffic calming measures designed into the street layout	Lack of pedestrian priority at crossing points
Connection to the river maintained with access to old slipways and quay steps retained	Shared Space on Howleys Quay is not a safe space for pedestrians
Connection to history maintained via sculptures, information boards, original features of docks	100m section from Sarsfield Bridge underpass to Arthur's Quay Park is a break in the chain of the route and represents a safety risk
For the most part, ramp access provided for wheelchair / buggy / mobility aid users	Opening times of the many gates providing access to 'Riverside Walk' not signposted and unreliable
Riverside Walk is a fantastic section of the walk as it is entirely separated from traffic	Number of areas where disabled access is not provided for wheelchair / buggy / mobility scooter users
Raised pedestrian crossings on O' Callaghan Strand	Unsafe zebra crossing at Thomond Bridge
Physical protection from illegal footpath parking	Street clutter restricting pedestrian space (already limited) even further e.g. poles situated in footpath

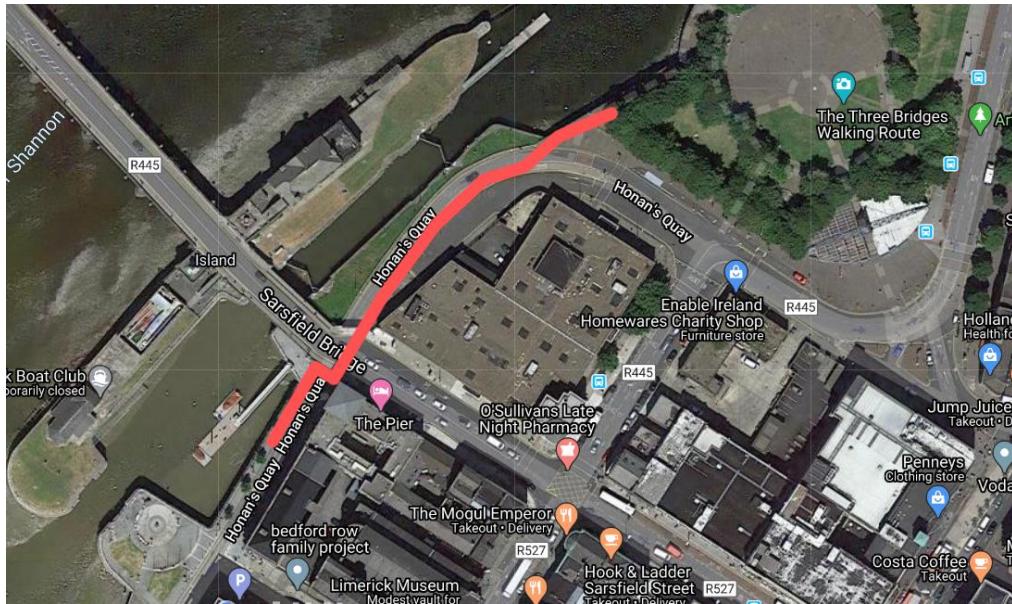
Recommendations

This table provides a summary of the key recommendations. Further detail on each recommendation and the associated observations can be found in the pages that follow.

RECOMMENDATION 1: <i>Provide Safe & Continuous Pedestrian Route between Sarsfield Bridge & Arthurs Quay Park</i>	1A - Fix the pedestrian lights 1B - Two raised pedestrian crossings 1C - 100m of new footpath on both sides of road 1D - Realign carriageway (chicane) 1E - As alternative to 1A – 1D, remove through-traffic from South Quays to create pedestrian zone. See Recommendation 3 for more detail
RECOMMENDATION 2: <i>Improve Pedestrian Space Allocation & Safety on the (4) Bridges</i>	2A - All 4 Bridges - widen the footpaths 2B - Thomond Bridge - Improve safety of existing zebra crossing on bridge 2C - Thomond Bridge - new zebra crossing on Clancy Strand arm of junction with bridge 2D - Matthew Bridge - remove pinch point 2E - Sarsfield Bridge - provide shorter pedestrian wait time at the lights
RECOMMENDATION 3: <i>Reshape 'Shared Space' on South Quays as Pedestrian Space</i>	3A - Pedestrianise a section of the South Quays , creating a people friendly space. Access to Q-Park Harveys Quay maintained via Bedford Row.
RECOMMENDATION 4: <i>Improve Pedestrian Space at Potato Market / Merchants Quay</i>	4A - Short-term - Improve existing pedestrian space i.e. widen footpaths, remove obstructions 4B - Long-term - repurpose area as a pedestrian and tourist friendly public plaza
RECOMMENDATION 5: <i>Deliver Consistent Riverside Walk Opening Times</i>	5A - Agree and publish opening times for the Riverside Walk and provide information signage 5B - Provide general signage for Three Bridges Walk, including detours 5C - Address the accessibility issues on the route

1. Provide Safe & Continuous Pedestrian Route between Sarsfield Bridge & Arthurs Quay Park

This 100 – 200m stretch between Sarsfield Bridge and Arthur’s Quay Park is the weakest link in the Three Bridges chain. The continuity of the walk is interrupted, requiring the pedestrian to execute two unassisted road crossings in order to continue on the Three Bridges route.



OBSERVATIONS:

Absence of Safe Crossing Point (1) - There is no footpath under Sarsfield Bridge on the river side so pedestrians must (and we have observed pedestrians doing so) cross the road without any way of stopping traffic. Likewise there are no drop kerbs to facilitate wheelchair users.



Clear Priority for Motor Traffic - Approaching the Sarsfield Bright underpass, there is clear priority for cars. Arrows painted on the road encourage motorists to go faster, which they do. All the 'caution' signage is aimed at protecting the bridge and vehicles. There is no signage or visual signals to warn drivers of damaging pedestrians. While the relatively narrow carriageway width acts to slow speed slightly, cars get a straight and unobstructed path under the bridge, whereas pedestrians must cross the road with no drop kerbs or zebra crossing to help.



Absence of Footpath on River Side - There is room on the left here for a pedestrian pathway on the river side to provide a continuous and safe link from the quays to Arthur's Quay Park. Installing a pathway here would very much alleviate the current problem where pedestrians have to negotiate a narrow path before looping back into the park.



Absence of Safe Crossing Point (2) - Away from the traffic lights, the beginning of the path on the Arthur's Quay Park side offers a dropped kerb but there is no corresponding dropped kerb on the other side of the street.



Defective Pedestrian Signals - The traffic lights across Honan's Quay to Arthur's Quay Park are confusing and dangerous for the pedestrian. As half of the road has been blocked off for years as part of the old Dunnes site, a pedestrian coming from the quays finds themselves on the centre median, where there is no pedestrian crossing button. To access the button, they have to cross half of the street, press the button, and then return to the centre median. Neither pedestrian crossing button appears to be working to summon a green man. Fault verified numerous times, waiting for 10 minutes each time with no success.



RECOMMENDATIONS:

- In the immediate term, **fix the pedestrian lights** between Honan's Quay and Arthur's Quay
- Provision of two **raised pedestrian crossings** (one quayside and one between Honan's Quay and Arthur's Quay Park)
- Provision of c. **100m of new footpath** on both sides between Sarsfield Bridge and Arthurs Quay Park.
- Slight **realignment (chicane) of the road** approaching Sarsfield Bridge to reduce the speed of motor traffic travelling under the bridge
- While the above recommendations assume the retention of the existing road use and are 'incremental' in nature, Limerick Pedestrian Network recommends a more fundamental change to the road use in this area, namely **removing through-traffic from the South Quays** to provide a truly pedestrian priority zone. See Recommendation no. 3 for further detail.

2. Improve Pedestrian Space Allocation & Safety on the (4) Bridges

Limerick's main bridges carry high volumes of pedestrian traffic by recreational walkers and people travelling in and out of the city to work or shop. None of the bridges offer enough space (all with 1.8m footpaths at best, sometimes less) for pedestrians, especially in a COVID-19 environment.

Sarsfield Bridge, Thomond Bridge, Matthew Bridge, Shannon Bridge allocate c. 30% of space to pedestrians. This is not enough and it's not safe enough with almost all pedestrian crossings on the bridges creating further pinch points.

OBSERVATIONS:

Shannon Bridge

- **Poor Space Allocation** - 3 lanes of traffic (at least 8m) for motor traffic compared with 1.8m footpaths for pedestrians. Note that there is not enough room to paint the 2m COVID social distancing arrows *across* the footpath width!
- **Pinch Points Along Bridge** - Note that concrete encasements of light poles further reduce the effective width of the footpaths to 1.55m.
- **Pinch Points at Ends of Bridge** - The zebra crossings encircling the Shannon Bridge roundabout are needed and welcome, though the paths leading to some of them could benefit from more space for pedestrians.
- **Improvements after introduction of the cycle lane** - As this report was underway, a two-way cycle lane was added to the Shannon Bridge. Although it does not add any space for pedestrians, the new lanes separate the pedestrian from motor traffic and make a dramatic improvement in the pedestrian experience on the bridge. We advocate for the retention of the lane.





Sarsfield Bridge

- **Poor Space Allocation** - 2-3 lanes (c. 7m) allocated for motor traffic, with 1.8m wide footpaths.
- **Pinch Point at Crossing Point** - the pedestrian crossing at Sarsfield Bridge and Clancy's Strand is a pinch point for pedestrians, partly due to the relative narrowness of the path on Sarsfield Bridge and partly due to the curved path at the junction to facilitate motor traffic turning the corner. There isn't enough room to pass when anyone is waiting for the green man.
- **Excessive Wait Time** - The waiting time to cross is excessive and unduly favours motor traffic to the detriment of pedestrians.



Matthew Bridge

- **Poor Space Allocation** - 2-3 lanes (c. 7m) allocated for motor traffic, with 1.8m wide footpaths by comparison.



- **Pinch Points at Ends of Bridge** - At the Hunt Museum side of the bridge, the footpath narrows further at the corner of a building, with the effective width at this point reduced yet further with the placement of a bollard within the already narrow footpath space. This presents a safety issue as pedestrians must step out into traffic to pass one another. Note how the pinch point is created as a result of requiring enough road space for four lanes of traffic on Rutland Street.



Thomond Bridge

- **Poor Space Allocation** - Two lanes (c. 6m) allocated for motor traffic, with 1.8m wide footpaths by comparison on the bridge that leads to our city's historic medieval quarter and our best known landmark, King John's Castle.



- **Pedestrian Crossings on North Side Require Attention**

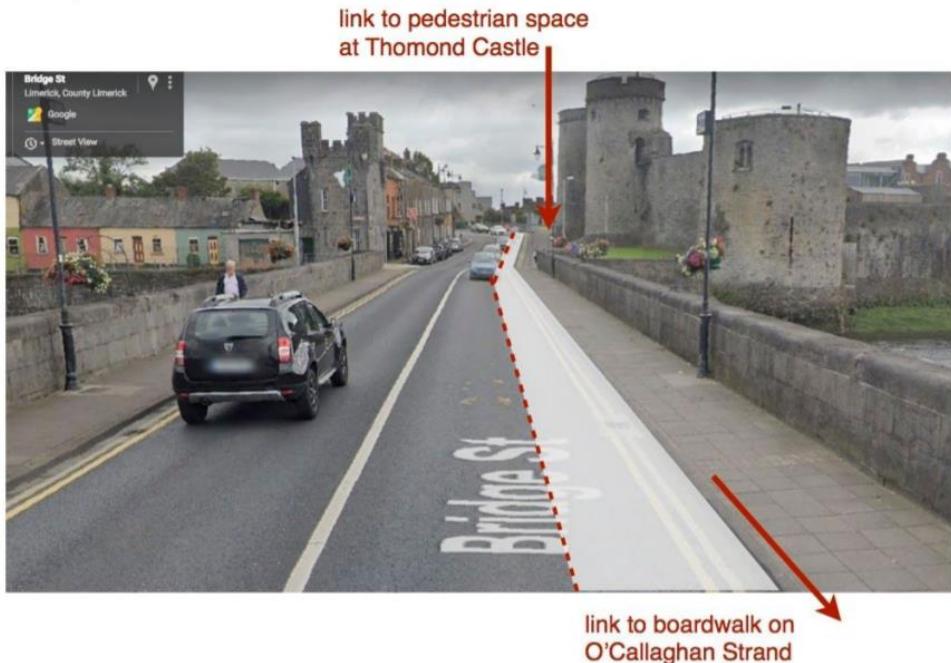
- **Unsafe Crossing** - Pedestrian experience of using the zebra crossing on the bridge itself at its junction with Clancy Strand suggests that this is not a safe crossing. In particular, cars approach from the Thomondgate side at speed and may not always have visibility of an awaiting pedestrian.
- **Poorly Located Crossing** - While there is a zebra crossing on the Clancy Strand arm of the junction, it is located 40m away from the bridge, meaning that many pedestrians will choose to cross unaided at the junction rather than opt for the 80m detour to use the crossing.



RECOMMENDATIONS:

- **All 4 Bridges - Narrower carriageways and wider footpaths on all 4 bridges**, with the wider footpaths provided on the side with heaviest footfall i.e. the side used by those walking the three bridges route. See example below for Thomond Bridge

Proposed reduction in carriageway width to Thomond Bridge
To support a reduction in speed and improved public realm by widening the footpath to south side



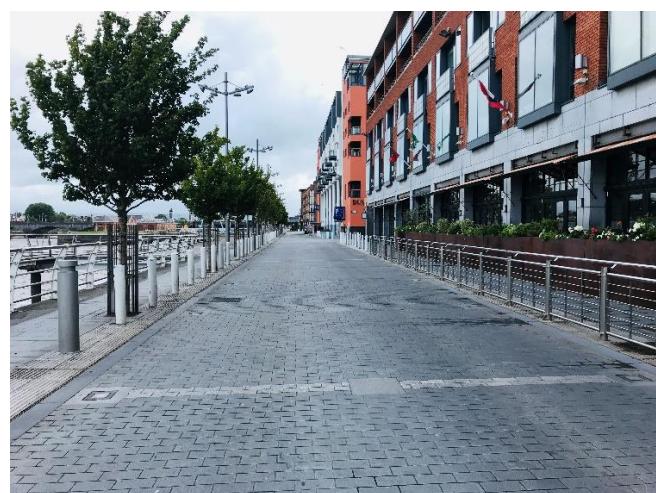
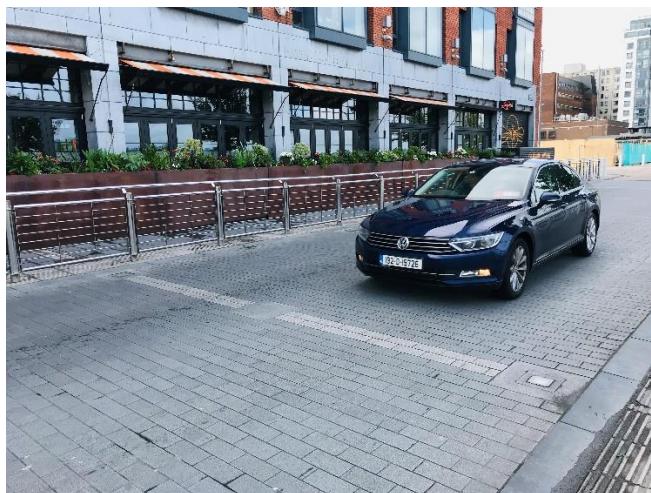
- **Thomond Bridge - Improved safety measures** at the zebra crossing on the Thomond Bridge arm of the junction with Clancy Strand.
- **Thomond Bridge - Provision of a zebra crossing** at on the Clancy Strand arm of the junction with Thomond Bridge
- **Matthew Bridge - Realignment of the Rutland Street carriageway** to remove the right turn lane, thus addressing the pinch point at the bridge and providing a pedestrian area in front of the Hunt Museum deserving of one of Limerick' main attractions.
- **Sarsfield Bridge - Shorter pedestrian wait time** at the lights to give increased pedestrian priority.

3. Reshape ‘Shared Space’ on South Quays as Pedestrian Space

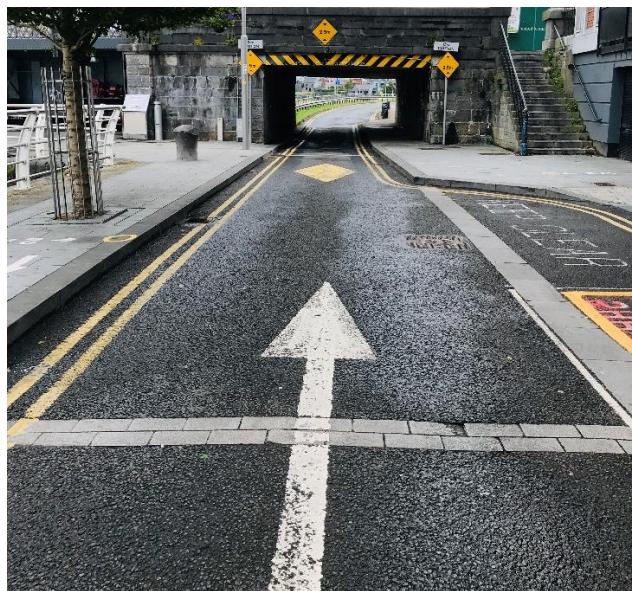
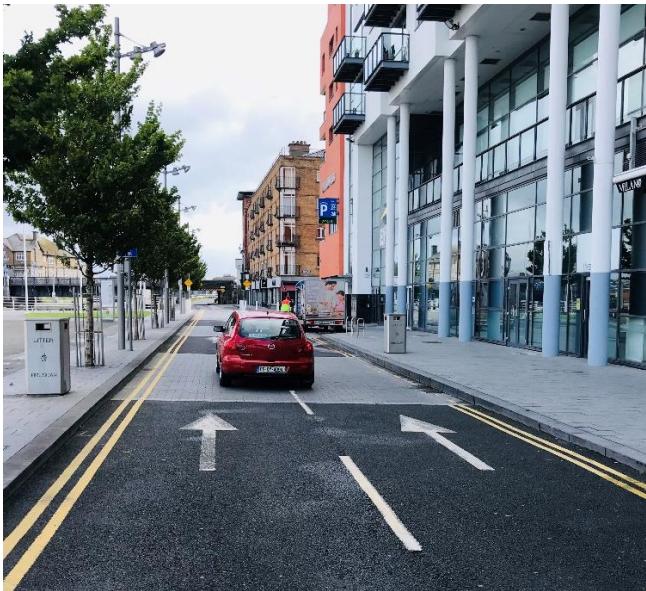
The design intention to create a ‘shared space’ on the south quays has not been realised in practice. The reality is that motor traffic has clear priority. This creates a safety issue for pedestrians and means that the potential of the south quays as a truly people-friendly space has been substantially squandered to date. While the temporary allocation of pedestrian space as part of the Covid Mobility Plan has been welcome, its ad-hoc nature fails to make the best of this area.

OBSERVATIONS:

- ***“The key condition for the design of any shared surface is that drivers, upon entering the street, recognise that they are in a shared space”*** (Government of Ireland’s Design Manual for Urban Roads and Streets, page 108). Unfortunately, both the design and layout of the space and the level of signage here fails to adequately inform motorists they are in a shared space. Most motorists aren’t aware of this and, as a result, many of them drive at high speeds along the quays.
- **Wide, straight carriageways** encourage higher traffic speeds than can be considered compatible with a ‘shared space’.
- **Absence of traffic calming measures** - This contrasts notably with O’ Callaghan Strand (not designated as a ‘shared space’) where the traffic-calming measures provided have resulted in lower traffic speeds and a more comfortable and safe pedestrian experience



- **Design & Layout Informs Motorist Behaviour** - Motorists cannot be faulted for treating this as a ‘road’ rather than a ‘shared space’. The images below show how the clear visual signals provided by the design and layout of the space inform the motorist that they are on a road like any other and that they have priority in this space over other road users.



- **Ineffective Signage** - While signage indicating the shared zone is provided at a number of entry points to the zone, it appears largely ineffective relative to more intuitive signals provided to the motorist by the design and layout of the area as highlighted above.



- **Abundance of Carpark Signage** - We observed that there appear to be more signs for carparks than for shared zones in the area between Shannon Bridge and Sarsfield Bridge.



- **Warning Signage Protects Bridge Structure & Machinery Rather Than People** - We also observed that there are more 'caution' signs on and approaching the Sarsfield Bridge underpass than on the entire 450m section from here to Shannon Bridge. It is notable that these signs seek to protect concrete structures and steel machinery rather than pedestrians using the space.



- **Road Creates Barrier Between River and Restaurants** - As well as the safety issues highlighted above, the motor traffic serves to disconnect what is a very attractive and pleasant riverside space from the restaurants and bars situated in the ground floor units on the quays. We feel this is a missed opportunity to create a more social and bustling space with outdoor dining, markets etc.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- **Pedestrianise a Portion of the South Quays**, namely the area from Lower Cecil Street through to Arthur's Quay Park (qualified below), creating a people friendly space suitable for outdoor dining at the existing restaurants and could facilitate mobile traders, markets, and events.
 - Access to Q-Park Harveys Quay would be maintained via Bedford Row (converted to a two-way street to facilitate connection to Henry Street). This would require a c. 40m section of the quays at the junction with Bedford Row to be retained for vehicular use.

4. Improve Pedestrian Space at Potato Market / Merchants Quay

Very little space is provided in this area for pedestrians, and that which is provided is cluttered with poles and other infrastructure, including encroachment by parked cars. More generally, the function of the space as a road and car park underutilizes what could be repurposed as a fantastic public plaza.

OBSERVATIONS:

- **Allocation of Pedestrian Space is Abysmal** - There is an abundance of space in this area but only a tiny fraction is allocated for pedestrians.
- **Pedestrian Space is Cluttered and Restricted** - What little space that is allocated for pedestrian use is cluttered with signage and infrastructure for the benefit of motorists.
 - Poles located in footpath:



- Noses / tails of parked cars encroach on footpath space:



- EV charging terminal located in footpath:



- **Overall Space is Underutilised** - The area (bounded by the Potato Market, the old Courthouse, City Hall and St Mary's Cathedral) is used as a car / coach park when it could be a public plaza serving as a hub for the Three Bridges Walk and linking to the Medieval Quarter and other tourist attractions in the city.



RECOMMENDATIONS:

- **Short-term: Improve Existing Footpaths**
 - Increase footpath widths
 - Relocate poles from footpath space
 - Relocate EV charging terminal from footpath
 - Install measures to prevent encroachment of parked cars on footpath
- **Long Term: Repurpose Area as a Public Plaza**
 - Repurpose the entire area into a public plaza

5. Deliver Consistent Riverside Walk Opening Times

The 'Riverside Walk' is the section of the Three Bridges Walk between Arthur's Quay Park and King John's Castle. It is the safest section of the walk insofar as it is completely separated from motor traffic. It is also arguably the most scenic portion of the walk with great views of King John's Castle, the Curragower Falls and the city itself.

However, access to the area is by way of as many as 12 gates, the opening /closing times of which are a mystery to the average punter. It is not uncommon to proceed through a number of open gates before encountering a locked gate, at which point the walker must retrace their steps.

Clarity and consistency of opening times of this section of the walk is required to maximise the benefit of what is a fantastic resource in the heart of our city.

OBSERVATIONS:

- **Uncertain Opening Times** - There are as many as 12 access points (gates) to the Riverside Walk, but no information signs on the gates stating opening and closing times, as you would see in public parks
- Neither does there appear to be coordination of the opening and closing of the various gates. This results in people either avoiding the route (taking a detour) or having to retrace their steps when they encounter a locked gate.
- Many people local to Limerick are at least aware that the gates are closed at variable times but, without information signs, it is ridiculously confusing for tourists intent on taking Limerick's flagship walk. We have all met tourists turning back from a locked gate assuming their walk is over



- **Access for All** - There are a number of points where the Riverside Walk (and by extension the Three Bridges Walk) is inaccessible to wheelchair users.
- Two such areas are a) at the back of Sarsfield House, and b) at the Widows' Alms Houses (see below).



- **General Signage for Riverside Walk & Three Bridges Walk** - One of the oddities of the Three Bridges Walk, compared to similar walks in other cities, is that informational and directional signage on the walk itself is almost non-existent.
 - There's excellent information available on Limerick Council's webpage and there are some remaining orphaned signs from when the walk was launched as a Slí na Sláinte some years back but signage is sporadic and difficult to find. It's almost as though we're trying to keep it a secret from outsiders.
 - Somewhat ironically, there are a good number of signs signalling the Riverside Walk but, as mentioned in previous observations, they often point at locked gates with little in the way of explanation. In contrast, those sections of the Three Bridges Walk that are permanently open appear to have no signage whatsoever.



RECOMMENDATIONS:

- **Agree Riverside Walk Opening Times & Provide Information Signage**
 - We suggest that information signs be placed at each access point to advise the public of the opening times, as is common in public parks around the city and county.
 - We understand that the various gates are the responsibility of different local groups / bodies (e.g. Hunt Museum, Milk Market Trustees etc.). We suggest that Limerick Council lead a coordination exercise to agree a fixed (with seasonal variation) schedule of opening times for the entire route.
 - Once agreed, it is important that Limerick Council maintains regular dialogue with the various groups so that consistency of opening hours is maintained in practice (and amended over time if required)
- **Provide General Signage for Three Bridges Walk:**
 - As an extension of the above recommendation, we suggest that directional arrows be placed around the route to give tourists confidence that they are following the correct route.
 - Signage denoting an 'alternative' route should be provided to direct the public when the Riverside Walk gates are closed.
- **Address the Wheelchair Accessibility Issues**
 - Consider options to facilitate wheelchair access at the points highlighted.
 - In the interim, place signage at access points to the Riverside Walk advising the public that sections of the walk ahead are inaccessible to wheelchair users and advising an alternative route

Conclusions

We are very proud of the Three Bridges Walk, of the many ways it showcases the best of Limerick city. This auditing project has been an attempt by the Limerick Pedestrian Network to engage deeply with the route, bringing to bear our knowledge of best practice pedestrian infrastructure with the aim of driving immediate and lasting improvement for all who walk the Bridges. We are determined to highlight the tremendous potential of the route and to advocate for its development as the primary walking amenity in Limerick city.

The Assessment Identified Mostly Positive Features

The Three Bridges Walk is overwhelmingly positive from a walkability perspective and LPN would like to see the positive features identified here implemented more generally across the city and county.

The Assessment Also Identified a Substantial Number of Negative Features

Despite the many positives, the assessment also identified a substantial number of that need to be addressed. Given that the Three Bridges Walk has benefited from the aforementioned careful and deliberate investment and design, it is noted that the likely balance of positive vs. negative pedestrian features on other walking routes across the city will be less flattering.

The Three Bridges Walk Can Be an Exemplar for Walkability in Limerick

The positive features of the Three Bridges Walk can be used as an exemplar which highlights what is possible when pedestrian needs are prioritised.

Likewise, by rectifying the negative issues highlighted in this report, the Three Bridges Walk can also be an exemplar in highlighting how existing challenges can be addressed effectively to provide even better pedestrian infrastructure across the city and county.

Intentional Planning, Design & Investment Pays Off

Thoughtful and considered vision, planning and design (along with the associated investment) has resulted in a city centre walking route where pedestrians have been put to the forefront along this route. This proves that walkable routes can be provided (and co-exist with the provision of effective public and private motor traffic routes). Limerick Pedestrian Network would like to work together with Limerick Council to deliver improvements to the walkability of our city and county.

Contact: pedestrianLK@gmail.com