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# Prostitution and Kerb Crawling: Road Management Interventions



Solving the problem

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## Summary

Kerb crawling causes problems for local residents by leading to:

- unwanted propositioning of local residents.
- increased volume of traffic and traffic congestion, which result in reduced road safety
- unacceptable noise levels
- links with the sale and misuse of drugs

Road management interventions, usually in conjunction with intensive policing, have significantly reduced the level of prostitution and kerb crawling in some neighbourhoods. They work by making it difficult for kerb crawlers and cruisers to access streets where prostitutes are soliciting.

Road management interventions need to ensure problems are not simply moved from one area into another. They may be more effective if combined with other schemes, eg. helping prostitutes to overcome drug/alcohol dependency or to exit the profession.

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*Road management schemes aim to make it difficult for kerb crawlers and cruisers to access street prostitutes by closing through roads or making streets one-way.*

## Outline of the solution

Prostitution can be a major issue for Neighbourhood Renewal areas, partly to do with kerb crawling, or 'cruising', where people drive around the area looking at the prostitutes but do not actually buy sexual services from them. Kerb crawling and cruising cause concern for communities because they can:

- lead to harassment and intimidation of local people. This includes unwanted propositioning of women and schoolchildren
- result in a non-stop flow of traffic and noise during the day and night
- cause road safety problems for local residents, including children
- lead to slow moving traffic and traffic congestion

To help overcome these problems, road management interventions have been designed and implemented in several 'red light' districts and other residential areas. They aim to make it difficult for kerb crawlers and cruisers to access street prostitutes. Road management schemes, aimed at controlling the flow of traffic within an area, can use a single approach or a combination of approaches, for example:

- closing through roads at one end to form a series of cul-de-sacs
- making some roads into one-way systems, which prevent drivers from circling a particular group of roads
- putting up road barriers operated by a key or card
- installing road bumps (sleeping policemen) to deter traffic circulation in the area.

Road management schemes usually involve partnership working between the police, the local authority and local residents' associations. Because their main function is restricting vehicular access into an area, funding is usually via the local authority. Local authorities may consider adopting or putting in place such measures in response to Section 17 of the Crime & Disorder Act, which requires them to take appropriate steps to reduce crime and disorder across their range of functions.

*All of the successful road management schemes were part of a package of interventions and were combined with intensive forms of policing and/or other local authority action. The road management aspect was usually the final element of the intervention package.*

## What worked where?

Most types of interventions require a multi-agency approach involving police, local authority and local residents. Many interventions start with requests from local residents to take action. Examples of successful interventions include Toxteth, Finsbury Park, Streatham, Luton, Balsall Heath and Southampton.

- an early example of a road closure system took place in Toxteth, Liverpool in the 1970s. This area comprised several roads of terraced housing arranged in rows with main roads at either end, with a regular stream of kerb crawlers. Police and the local authority transport department devised a scheme where most of the affected roads were closed at alternate ends to create a series of cul-de-sacs. This was very successful in almost eliminating prostitution and kerb crawling in the area. It also had the added benefit that community spirit was improved, non-local vehicles became easily identified by local residents and there was a significant reduction in all crimes in the area.
- in Streatham, police targeted prostitutes and kerb crawlers before the road management scheme was brought in. There was a significant increase in the number of prostitutes arrested and the number of kerb crawlers cautioned or prosecuted. From late 1989, when the road conversions were made, the number of arrests and cautions for both prostitutes and kerb crawlers fell dramatically
- in Finsbury Park, police efforts were also directed towards arresting pimps and local landlords known to provide accommodation for the purpose of prostitution. As a result, the number of prostitutes charged with soliciting almost quadrupled, suspected kerb-crawlers received a formal or informal caution and a number of pimps and brothel keepers were arrested. Consequently, the level of prostitution became manageable and the road management scheme was successfully implemented
- in Southampton, the local authority served planning enforcement orders on property owners whose premises were being used for prostitution. The area became part of a Housing Action Scheme and the traffic management element was implemented.

All areas, except Streatham, had a well-established problem with prostitution. Road management approaches have been shown to be effective in tackling kerb crawling problems in a range of settings,

	<p>including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• a residential terraced housing area</li> <li>• a run down inner city area with a transient population from a variety of ethnic backgrounds</li> <li>• a mainly white middle class area with a largely older, settled population, most property was pre-war semi-detached houses</li> <li>• a deprived inner city area with a mixture of owner-occupier and council-owned terraced housing blocks of high-rise flats, and more recently, Housing Association semi-detached family homes</li> <li>• an area where prostitutes tried to attract clients by posing in the front windows of their properties.</li> </ul> <p>All of the road management schemes described above were part of a package of interventions and were combined with intensive forms of policing and/or other local authority action. The road management aspect was usually the final element of the intervention package. This combination of different approaches was fundamental to the success of the interventions against prostitution.</p> <p>Any change in road layouts affect vehicle access for local residents. Therefore schemes must consider residents' access to other main roads in the area. In some cases, the width of a road may make it impractical for conversion to a cul-de-sac. Converting to a one-way road may be more suitable.</p>
<p><i>Success depends on delivering a package of interventions and the order in which each element of the package is implemented is important.</i></p>	<p><b>What explains what works?</b></p> <p>The successes were based on a multi-agency approach and the delivery of a package of interventions.</p> <p>Care needs to be taken to avoid simply displacing the problem from one area into another. For example, in areas where many prostitutes are addicted to drugs and/or alcohol, interventions aimed at stopping them from working are likely to result in them moving to other areas unless additional schemes, eg. drug rehabilitation and exit projects are run at the same time.</p> <p>In Streatham road changes were effective in moving the problem out of a residential area but displaced it to the local shopping centres. This appeared to be more acceptable to local residents. By comparison, the Finsbury Park intervention saw very little displacement into its own area, particularly among the largest groups</p>

	<p>of prostitutes who were either temporary or part-time prostitutes or 'away day' prostitutes who travelled to the area on a daily basis to work.</p> <p>The order in which each element of a package of measures is implemented is important. If the road management element precedes the policing aspect, there is a danger that the problem may increase and traffic management schemes by themselves may attract rather than deter these types of problems. For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• closing a road off may make kerb crawlers feel less exposed to the police and other observers</li> <li>• making a street one-way might make it easier for cruisers and kerb crawlers to drive through and around an area</li> <li>• erecting bollards in a street may simply provided the prostitutes with somewhere to 'perch' while negotiating with clients.</li> </ul> <p>Therefore, this type of intervention needs to consist of a co-ordinated effort between the agencies involved. In Streatham, for example, the road management scheme was introduced following a period of intense policing that reduced street prostitution to more manageable levels.</p> <p>Not all road management interventions are 'universally' successful. Although a project in Bristol was successful in reducing the level of street prostitution and kerb crawling, an unexpected downside was that other crimes increased. By removing the prostitutes and kerb crawlers, the level of natural surveillance was also reduced.</p>
	<h2 style="margin: 0;">Checklist</h2> <p>Questions to raise before deciding what type of road management intervention would be most suitable in your Neighbourhood Renewal area are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• is prostitution and particularly kerb crawling a problem in your area?</li> <li>• what is known about the scale and nature of this problem? Have you checked other potential sources of information, for example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- local research and surveys</li> <li>- Community Safety Audit</li> <li>- community surveys and consultation exercises</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• what is the specific nature of the problem, ie. who is involved? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- where do the prostitutes, kerb crawlers and other come from?</li> <li>- where is it happening?</li> <li>- what is the impact on the local neighbourhood and community?</li> </ul> </li> <li>• what is the cause of the problem in your neighbourhood?</li> <li>• have you contacted other agencies for support and guidance in tackling this problem? For example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Regional Government Office</li> <li>- Local Crime &amp; Disorder Reduction Partnership (CDRP)</li> <li>- Local Community Safety Team</li> <li>- Health Authority</li> <li>- Police</li> <li>- Social Services</li> <li>- Voluntary sector organisations</li> </ul> </li> <li>• what impact do you want to achieve by this intervention?</li> <li>• dense road systems with easy access to thoroughfares are more likely to be a venue for prostitutes, therefore what is the physical layout of road systems in the area where the prostitutes are working?</li> <li>• does the road layout lend itself to prostitution and kerb crawling?</li> <li>• is the road layout part of the local problem in relation to prostitution and kerb crawling?</li> <li>• could some streets be made one-way or changed into cul-de-sacs without detriment to local residents and local businesses? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• how practical is it to change road layouts or designs?</li> <li>• what would be the impact of road changes to local residents?</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• have local people been fully consulted?</li> <li>• would changing road layout/design have any other positive or negative impacts on the area? For example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◇ improving road safety and/or reducing speeding</li> <li>◇ causing problems in accessing local businesses</li> </ul> </li> <li>• given the exact nature of your local problem with prostitution and kerb crawling, would this type of intervention help tackle it?</li> <li>• would this intervention conflict with any other on-going or planned activity in the area? For example health and drugs outreach work</li> <li>• what needs to be in place for this intervention to work? For example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- targeted policing (remember the research shows this needs to be undertaken before any road changes are implemented)</li> <li>- exit strategies for prostitutes</li> <li>- drug outreach work and drug rehabilitation projects</li> </ul> </li> <li>• What resources will be needed? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- cost of planning and carrying out the road changes</li> <li>- any other costs of related activity, eg. targeted policing</li> </ul> </li> <li>• who needs to be involved to address the problem? For example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- police</li> <li>- local authority road, highways and planning departments</li> </ul> </li> <li>• finally, are there any other interventions that would be more effective and/or cost effective than this in tackling the problem?</li> </ul>
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## Want to know more?

### Contacts

Name	Tel.	Email
Home Office:		<a href="http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk">http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk</a>

### References

Blackman, D (2001). Balsall Heath. *Urban Environment Today* Issue 7:10-11

Girvan, W (1996). How traffic calming can help keep criminals at bay. *Urban Street Environment*, 24: 25-27

Matthews, R (1993). Kerb-crawling, prostitution and multi-agency policing. *Crime Prevention Unit Series Paper No. 43*. London: Home Office Police Department

### Further Reading

Matthews, R (1997). 'Developing more effective strategies for curbing prostitution'. In R.V. Clarke (Ed.) *Situational Crime Prevention* (2nd ed), New York: Harrow & Henson Publishers (Ch 3: 74-82)

#### Other websites:

Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment:

<http://www.cabe.org.uk>

Department of Transport: <http://www.dft.gov.uk/>

Home Office Research Development & Statistics Directorate (RDS)

Publications: <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pubsintro1.html>

The Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO)

<http://www.acpo.police.uk>

The Institution of Civil Engineers: <http://www.ice.org.uk>