

Application of PERS to Evaluate Walkability in State of Qatar

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ABSTRACT

Well-designed pedestrian facilities are essential to promote walking among residents. These facilities also act as safe space for use of cycling and other personal mobility vehicles. In 2018, Ministry of Transport developed a system to assess the pedestrian environment, called Pedestrian Environment Review System (PERS). The PERS system is intended to assess, in a consistent systematic way, the quality of the pedestrian environment. This paper applies the guidelines of this manual to assess the walkability in Doha City. A total of ten links and ten crossings were included in this study. On-street evaluation was completed for each selected element and relevant scores for each parameter was assigned. The links assessment demonstrated that, overall, there were some issues highlighted by the PERS Audit in the studied areas such as poor curb ramp design, placement of obstruction on the pavement, lack of tactile information, conflict between pedestrian and vehicles at side-entry intersections, unavailability of wayfinding materials, etc. The overall pedestrian environment in the wider area assessed was generally positive, adequately maintained and of an appropriate quality. The provision of poor-quality crossings was identified as a negative feature of the studied areas. The issues were related to the infrastructure itself. Recommendations are made based on findings to improve the walkability of pedestrian network in State of Qatar.

Keywords: PERS, Qatar, Walkability, Crossing, Road facilities.

1 INTRODUCTION

Walking is an essential element of a conventional traffic system for communities. The walkability of road facilities captures the attention of transportation professionals in urban planning. Walking is widely recognised for its' health promotion of individuals in terms of reducing chronic diseases and decreasing traffic congestions (Makhlouf et al., 2023). One of the key elements to stimulate the activity of walking is to provide walkable built environment. Specialists and scholars have studied the relationship between the walking environment and the prevalence of the walking activity in communities (LIANG et al., 2022). Several methods have been established to evaluate the walkability of street facilities such as Geographic Information System (GIS), surveys, deep learning, simulations and analysing data records (Li et al., 2023).

State of Qatar has introduced new system, known as Pedestrian Environment Review System (PERS), for assessing pedestrian facilities across the street network. This study was undertaken to determine the status of existing facilities by applying this new assessment system. This study describes detailed findings of the field audit conducted on ten links and ten crossings in Doha city. This audit was undertaken as a part of the 2nd national action plan 2018–2022, Action No. 260:

Analyzing local pedestrian behavior to update the guidelines of the design and control of pedestrian facilities. A link is defined as an infrastructure that connects two intersections. While crossings are the segments that allow pedestrian to pass/cross a road section. The audit allows for the identification and assessment of problems related to pedestrians in street facilities that lead to prioritizing resources allocation for rehabilitation efficiently and effectively. This audit was carried out in compliance with the Pedestrian Environment Review System developed by the Ministry of Transport and Communications guidelines (MOTC, 2018). The PERS Audit relies on a consistent systematic way to assess the quality of the pedestrian environment.

2 METHODOLOGY

PERS audit comprises of three main stages. First is the selection of study locations that is links and crossings. Second is the assessment based on predefined criterion. Finally, third stage is reporting the findings and presenting them for decision making and records.

2.1 Stage 1: Identification of Links and Crossings

The links and crossings were chosen in different zones/municipalities such as Al Markhiya, Al Gharaffa, Al Najma, etc. to assure the diversification of the locations with different built environments. The variation of suburb types was considered in which some locations were in residential, commercial, industrial, and diplomatic land uses. Moreover, these areas were free of roadworks to ensure a valid audit. The links that were selected for the assessment are summarised in Table 1 below. Furthermore, the identified crossings are shown in Figure 1.

Link No.	Link Name	Location
1	AL JASSASIYA ST.	25.331308, 51.493410 to 25.331336, 51.485633
2	BU SILLA ST.	25.345254, 51.446185 to 25.342906, 51.439620
3	NAJMA ST.	25.239566, 51.547007 to 25.244890, 51.542866
4	AL MANSOURA ST.	25.270430, 51.543155 to 25.269530, 51.536206
5	AL WAAB ST.	25.255587, 51.440250 to 25.252200, 51.431266
6	DIPLOMATIC ST.	25.326298, 51.529497 to 25.330548, 51.529540
7	MARBELLA ST.	25.367013, 51.549213 to 25.366615, 51.552624
8	AL KAHRABA ST.	25.288319, 51.525248 to 25.285469, 51.524755
9	AL DIFAAF ST.	25.282472, 51.502765 to 25.282427, 51.500949
10	URWA BIN MASOUD ST	25.305333, 51.485285 to 25.305328, 51.483689

Table 1	Links	Name	and	Location
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Figure 1: Location Map of Crossings

2.2 Stage 2: On-street Evaluation

Once the abovementioned step has been completed, the on-street evaluation took place in late December 2020. For each review framework, manual entry of records through visual evaluation is reported in a review form on site. Each framework consists of several parameters where reviewer scores and comment on each parameter for each link and crossing. Each parameter is scored in a scale with a range from -3 to +3, where +3 represent the highest score and -3 represent the lowest. A parameter with a score of +3 reflects an excellent practice. Whereas 0 is an average score of the best and worst practices. While N is used when the parameter is considered irrelevant. The score reflects the level of service to the user ascribed by comments made to support each score and highlight key issues. The score is assigned based on the checklist factors identified for each parameter. The evaluation parameters for links and crossings are shown in Table 2. A sample of assessment for link and crossing assessment for each site is provided in Appendix B.

Link Audit Parameters	Crossing Audit Parameters
Effective width	Crossing provision
Curb ramps / Dropped Kerbs	Deviation from desire line
Gradient	Performance
Obstructions	Crossing Capacity
Permeability	Delay
Legibility	Legibility
Lighting	Legibility for sensory impaired people
Tactile Information	Curb ramps / Dropped Kerbs
Colour contrast	Gradient
Personal security	Obstructions
Surface quality	Surface quality
User conflict	Maintenance
Quality of environment	-
Maintenance	-

Table 2 Links and Crossings Audit Parameters

3 FINDINGS FROM FIELD AUDIT

3.1 Links

The effective width of the links, presence of obstructions, and road gradient are parameters used to rate the walkability of links. Most of the links had a sufficient effective width with obstructions in some cases, nevertheless. For example, lighting columns were installed in the middle of the sidewalk, which may cause issues for handicap users with wheelchairs. Some links perform very well in terms of effective width such as Al Kahraba St. in Msheireb Downtown Doha. Furthermore, most of the links scored 0 in gradient parameter since Qatar land is almost flat. The presence of curb ramps at side-entries and intersections was considered in the evaluation for providing accessibility. Links are are classified into two categories, with curb ramps and without curb ramps. Links without curb ramps were also divided into two types, either complete absence of curb ramps or presence of speed humps instead to compensate the function of curb ramps while crossings in some cases. For links with curb ramps, some curb ramps were meeting the design requirements, while others did not meet the minimum requirements. Another accessibility parameter that was considered is the presence of tactile information for people suffering from visual impairment. All links lack tactile information except for Al Kahraba St. in Msheireb Downtown Doha due to the recent development of these areas. Traffic volume/speed and pedestrian fences are factors used to rate the permeability parameter. Half of the links scores well in the permeability criteria due to the observed low traffic volume/speed without pedestrian barriers along the median. While other links perform poorly due to the parked vehicles along the links, wide links with high vehicle speeds, and/or high traffic volumes. User conflict is a parameter used to check if there is an adequate space provision for each road user. There is a conflict between pedestrians and vehicles at side-entry intersections and between pedestrians and cyclists on the sidewalk in most of the links. Except for some parts of Al Waab, Najma, and Al Kahraba streets as there is a separation between different users eliminating conflicting movements, thusly.

Legibility can be defined as the clearness of wayfinding instructions reflected by signage, information boards, markings, etc. It was found that some links suffers from poor legibility due to lack of information, improper placement of signs, and/or absence of landmarks. Whereas several links showed convenient wayfinding features that assist pedestrians/walkers in their journey. Additionally, two problems in some links presented with regards to lighting, poor old yellow lights and absence of lights on the sides of the roads. This may affect the visual contrast of the pedestrian during the journey. All these factors play a major role in the personal security of the pedestrian. Furthermore, several links had CCTV units and security guards as well as appearing aesthetically. All these factors contribute to the personal safety and security.

The built environment quality of walking facilities varied from one link to another in this study. Multiple locations exhibited issues such as surface defect and/or wet surface associated with dirty presence of garbage. Moreover, another major problem was found that some walking facilities were left without paving. It was apparent from the visual evaluation that inadequate maintenance was done to some links. On the other hand, some links appeared to have perfect surface and environment quality condition. Consequently, it is clear from the abovementioned discussion that there are roads of high quality, medium quality, and others of poor quality.

3.2 Crossings

The crossings evaluation relied on assessing similar criterion of the one done to links. The crossing provision refers to the suitable planning of crossings facilities of pedestrian. This depends on many factors including location, pedestrian volume, road type, traffic speed, and pedestrian type. Crossing provision, deviation from desire line, performance, and crossing capacity determines the functional performance level of the crossing facility in terms of walkability. Most crossings appeared with high quality, serving pedestrians' desire lines, along with having adequate capacity and width at peak hours. These crossings manifested good visibility for pedestrians. However, some flaws were visible in some crossings. For instance, absence of a crossing facility, absence of refuge island, inadequate waiting area were found in some locations. These defect may cause difficulties to the pedestrian while crossing as well as impacting the personal comfort of the individual. In terms of delay, most of the crossings allows adequate time for pedestrians to cross. Nevertheless, the waiting time at some crossings was relatively long unlike the waiting time at crossings at Msheireb and the Pearl areas. Additionally, it was observed that there is a pedestrian phase in Msheireb that allows pedestrians on the four sides of the roads to cross during the complete stop of vehicles due to the red light. In the Pearl, there was no delay since the red light immediately flashes after pressing the push button of crossing.

Crossing legibility evaluation was done based on different conditions from the legibility of links. Legibility parameter for crossings encompasses the clearance of crossing markings, illumination of the crossing area. It was found that some crossings suffer from poor legibility due to the low quality of lightning or markings or absence of crossing markings. Whereas several crossings showed well-lit crossings and clear crossing markings. Only one crossing had very good legibility for sensory impaired users due to the available audible information and tactile warnings provided. Another parameter to check the accessibility of the pedestrians is presence of curb ramps for people suffering from movement impairment. Most crossings have well-designed curb ramps. Though, few crossings did not have curb ramps or having curb ramps that may cause difficulties for handicap users with wheelchair due to its size and/or gradient. The built environment quality of crossing facilities varied from one crossing to another in this study. The crossings appeared to have perfect surface and environment quality condition overall. However, it was noted during the audit that the surfacing of the crossings contains cracks and poor reinstatements in some places which could cause a potential trip hazards to pedestrians. Multiple locations exhibited issues such as high mast light poles and traffic

signal poles reducing the effective width of the crossings and obstructing pedestrians' movement. Moreover, another major problem was found that some push buttons at crossing facilities were not working. This indicates that adequate maintenance was needed at some crossings.

4 CONCLUSION

A total of 20 locations, with 10 links and 10 crossings, were evaluated. The links assessment demonstrates that overall, there were some significant issues highlighted by the PERS audit in the studied areas such as poor curb ramp design, placement of obstructing objects on the pavement, lack of tactile information, clear conflict between pedestrian and vehicles at side-entry intersections, and unavailability of wayfinding materials, specially where retrofitting was done to provide pedestrian facilities. The overall pedestrian environment was generally positive, adequately maintained and of an appropriate quality. Poor-quality crossings were identified in multiple locations of the studied areas. Most of the issues were related to the infrastructure of the crossings. For example, lack of audible information, tactile information, count down signals, rotating cones, insufficient crossing time for elderly pedestrian, inconsistency of curb ramp design, placement of permanent obstructions on the refuge islands, and the deficiency of push buttons. Generally, the newly designed suburbs provided better pedestrian facilities. Based on the results of the PERS audit, the following recommendations can be made:

- Removal/relocation of obstructions that reduces pedestrian space.
- Improve existing curb ramps at side roads to be flushed and aligned.
- Installing correct new curb ramps and tactile paving.
- Provide wayfinding materials such as finger posts or maps.
- Installing new traffic signals with adequate facilities such as push button, audible information, countdown, and rotating cones to facilitate normal and sensory impaired pedestrians' movement.
- Increase the pedestrian phase to provide sufficient time for elderly and mobility impaired pedestrians to cross safely.
- Installing pedestrian signs at a suitable distance before the crossing points.

It should be noted that the PERS is an advanced system, expecting very high standards of walkability infrastructure. The newly developed suburbs have higher scores while older suburbs have lower scores. Hence, significant improvements are expected to achieve these standards for the entire network of Doha city.

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PERS [Softw	are]					
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	Adequate capacity	1	1	1	not providedet	
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	Consistency	1	1	1		
2	Frequency of dropped kerbs	+	1	1	at every side-entry intersection	
10	Severity	+	1	1		
	Steps/ramps	1	1	1		
Condition	Rest points	1	X	1/		
Gradient	Undulations	1	1			
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	Tactile warnings	-	-4			
	Sight line reduction	-	1			
	Frequency of crossing points	-	1			
	Parked cars/physical barriers		1			1
Permeability	Traffic flow		1	+2		
intracting	Dropped kerbs		1			
	Pedestrian barriers		1			
	Sightlines	1				
	Signage provision	V	_			
	Signage clarity	1				
Legibility	Information boards		1	-1		
in Bround	Distances given on signs		1	1		
	Sightlines	1				
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	Perceived/ sense of crime			1				
	Activity on the street	1	1					
Personal	Lighting	V	1					
Security	Police presence	T		∇	+1			
	CCTV			1				
	Visual appeal			1				
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	Sense of place		1		1 I			

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	Suitable for pedestrian type	12		1		
Crossing	Suitable for pedestrian volume	D		1 -		
Provision	Suitable for type of road	1		+3		
	Traffic speeds	ŕ		1		
	Traffic volumes	t		1		
	Deviations					
2 8 8	Serve likely desire lines	17	F	1		
Deviation	At grade/ by level change	F		+2		
from the	Pedestrian priority	17	HK-	+-		
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	Barriers causing deviation	r				
	Crossing operational	12			and an output the	and for mormal
	Safety/protection of pedestrians	17			* the time is en and relatively fas * the location , vis crossing morkings	bugn for the
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371 o -	Peak hour performance		7		provided sufficien	thy
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Capacity	Waiting areas/ widths	V				
	Refuge capacity	1				
	Width for wheelchair users	1				
	Crossing stages				when the button is pres.	sed, all the four
	Effect of crossing type		\wedge		traffic lights will !	
D	Traffic flow	V		*3	there induced man	
Delay	Pedestrian phase	1				
	Waiting time		1	Č –		
	Crossing time	1				
	Surface Type continuity	1			* Clearly marked cross	ing.
	Obvious where to cross	1				
S 1.0	Driver stop line in place	1		x2	* surrace quality 1	9000
Legibility	Delineation for pedestrians	1		2.020	* Clearly marked cross * surface quality is * well lit	
	Positioning of infrastructure	1			en et et en	
	Lighting	1				

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rossing Ass	esment Form	_				Page 2 of 3	
Parameter	Checklist Factors	Checklist		Score	Comment Section	Comment Section	
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people	Appropriate Tactile information	4					
	Colour contrast			-			
	Suitable locations	K	\square				
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Dropped kerbs	Level dropped/flush	K		לא			
2210222000	Gradient of drop		4				
0	Provision	K					
	Profile	K		-			
	Crossing at grade	-	4				
	Crossfall evident	1	4				
Gradient	Impedience to access		4	1			
	Camber		4	1			
	Severity of gradient on approach	-	4				
	Severity of gradient on exit		4				
	Obstructions on approach				* bollards can be	considered as obstruc	
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	Tactile warnings	4	LL,				
	Sight line reduction		V				
	Permanent obstructions						
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Surface	Consistency	1		x3	Surface is smoo	th and consistent	
quality	Quality of reinstatements		4				
	Drainage		1				
	Slippery surfaces		V				
	Cleanliness	1					
	State of repair		\wedge				
	Littering		V	+3			
Maintenance	Evidence of neglect		V	42			
	Impact of seasonal foliage		V				
	Graffiti/stickers/ chewing gum		V				
	Evidence of debris		V				

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	an again and	The second second
Crossing /	Assesment	rorm

Comments:

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Quick Wins (Maintence Recommendations)

Cleaning	and Repairs	Surface Quality
	Remove litter and gum stains from the crossing	Highlight crossing area and markings
	Remove graffiti from infrastructure at the crossing	Resurface crossing at sections with ponding
	Clear foliage and overhanging branches at crossing	Resurface crossing on carriageway with trip hazards
	Clear blocked drains/gutters to reduce ponding	Resurface crossing waiting areas with trip hazards
Signals		Dropped kerbs and tactile paving
orguais	Repair rotating cone on crossing signals	Improve existing dropped kerbs so that they are flushed and aligned
	Replace control button at crossing signals	Install new dropped kerbs that are flush and aligned
	Repair 'wait' illumniation bulb in control box	improve existing tactile paving so that it has correct colour and layout
	Re-align the green man to be visible to pedestrians	install new tactile paving with correct colour and layout
	Repaire broken bulbs in the green/red man signal head	

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				Link Aud	it Paramet	ers				
	Link 1	Link 2	Link 3	Link 4	Link 5	Link 6	Link 7	Link 8	Link 9	Link 10
Effective width	-1	+1	+3	-3	0	0	-3	+2	0	+2
Dropped Kerbs	-3	-3	+2	-1	-3	+3	-3	-1	-2	-3
Gradient	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
Obstructions	0	+1	+3	-2	-1	-3	0	+2	0	+2
Permeability	+2	+1	-3	-2	-2	+1	-2	+3	+1	+2
Legibility	-1	0	-1	0	-1	-3	0	+3	0	0
Lighting	+3	N	N	N	+2	N	N	N	N	N
Tactile Information	-3	-3	-3	-3	-3	-3	-3	+2	-3	-3
Colour contrast	N	N	N	N	Ν	N	N	N	N	N
Personal security	+1	+1	+1	-2	+2	+2	+2	+3	+1	-1
Surface quality	0	+2	+3	-1	-1	-1	+3	+3	0	-3
User conflict	0	0	+2	0	0	0	+1	0	+3	-3
Quality of environment	+2	0	+3	-3	-1	0	+3	+3	-1	-1
Maintenance	+2	+2	+3	-1	-3	-1	+3	N	+1	-3
			0	Crossing Au	ıdit Param	eters				
	Site 1	Site 2	Site 3	Site 4	Site 5	Site 6	Site 7	Site 8	Site 9	Site 10
Crossing provision	+3	+3	0	-1	-1	+3	+2	+3	+3	-3
Deviation from desire line	+3	+3	0	0	+2	+2	+3	+2	+2	+1
Performance	+3	+3	-1	0	+3	+3	+3	+3	+3	-3
Crossing Capacity	+1	-3	0	0	+2	+3	+3	+2	+2	-3
Delay	+3	+1	+2			+3	Ν	-1	-1	N
Legibility	+3	+2	0	0	+2	+2	+2	+2	+2	-3
Legibility for sensory impaired people	-3	-3	-3	-3	-3	+3	-3	-3	-3	-3
Curb ramps / Dropped Kerbs	+3	+3	-3	-1	+3	+3	+3	+2	+3	-3
Gradient	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
Obstructions	+3	+2	+2	0	+3	+3	+3	+1	+1	-3
Surface quality	+3 +3	+2	+2 -2	-1	+3	+3 +3	+3	+2	+2	-2 -2

Table 3 Scores for Links and Crossings Audit Parameters for Selected Sites