

My name is Mrs Jill Allen-King O.B.E. I was partially sighted for the first 24 years of my life, and I have been totally blind for the past 50 years. I am just one of the millions of blind and partially sighted people living in Europe. In addition there are thousands of people who are deaf and blind. For all of us traveling is very stressful and it will depend on if we have had mobility training either with a white cane or a guide dog or how we cope. The majority of older people will not have had mobility training and have to cope as best they can. Even a short walk to the shops can be a nightmare for them.

I never went out for the first seven years I was blind unless I had a sighted person with me. This was because of all the obstacles on the pavements. Obstacles such as overhanging branches, A-boards, shop displays, cars parked on the pavement, cyclists and many other obstructions. To cross any road we have to stop at the kerb or crossing and listen for the traffic so that we know when it is safe to cross. When we have mobility training we are trained to cross with the sound of the traffic. For those of us who are getting older, I am now 73 years old, we cannot walk as fast as we use to so it takes longer to cross a road. For those of us whose hearing is limited it means the sound of the traffic has to be louder than for the normal hearing person.

With the introduction of the electric vehicle which means we cannot hear the approaching vehicle there have already been near misses. Only last week a friend who is totally blind and has good hearing had his shopping trolley hit by such a vehicle. This is a blind person who was born blind and has travelled independently with a white stick all his life. This was the third experience he has had with an electric vehicle.

Over the past 10 years, the environment has become much more dangerous for blind and partially sighted people to move around in our towns and streets. Many roads have no pavements or safe places to walk, so listening for traffic is more important than ever. Bicycles often have to swerve out of our way, as we cannot hear them at all. Many blind people are hit by cyclists, so just imagine if it is a car or bus. The injuries will be far more serious.

Blind people must be allowed to travel as safely as they can, crossing roads in their own communities or when traveling to other countries for holidays or business. We must be allowed to hear the traffic otherwise we will be killed. All vehicles whether it is a private car or a public vehicle must be fitted with sounds that we can hear all the time. Sighted people can see the car or bus approaching, blind people cannot see so have to listen, and if you cannot hear then just imagine what will happen.

Blind people need to travel to work, to school, to the shops and should not be denied the right to walk safely because of silent cars. Sighted people can see the vehicle even at night they can see the lights of the car, and yet we cannot even see a light. Crossing roads is much more dangerous when the weather is bad. In wind we cannot hear traffic in rain and snow it is extremely difficult to hear traffic.

We already have all these situations to cope with and certainly do not want silent traffic.