

Less hell for our leather

A new pedestrian information system that aims to encourage walking and simplify journeys on foot is coming to a pavement near us in 2011. **Chris Kilvington** finds out more.

Legible London is a shared initiative between Transport for London and local boroughs. Set to come to our aid in SW1 this year, it makes use of a range of information sources that help walkers reach destinations quickly and easily. This is definitely not your average set of signs and maps though. Information has been developed to sync with the way we think and act as walkers – how we interact with our surroundings and relate one place to another.

It's a system that was first trialled at the end of 2007 around Bond Street tube station. The prototype was popular with the public so its scope in the West End was extended to other parts of Bond Street and to Oxford Street and Regent Street. Installations were also introduced between Bloomsbury and Covent Garden, around the South Bank and Bankside, and further south in Richmond and Twickenham.

Legible London is designed to help residents and local workers as much as it is tourists; plus, it caters for different types of journey, from the quickest, most efficient routes to more laidback wanders. 3D images of landmark buildings are flagged en-route and information links up with other modes of transport, so when you step off the Tube you can quickly identify your next steps – literally.

Coordinated information is key to the initiative's success, says Legible London. Their research found that one of the biggest barriers to walking around the city was the lack of clear, connected on-street information, resulting in many people falling back on their London Underground map to navigate over-ground. With years of development between Transport for London and boroughs, Legible London will become *the* sign system for the capital, with competing information removed from the streets.

In SW1, a total of 132 installations are planned, with around 30 sites dedicated to the VBID area. VBID is part-financing implementation across the district, paying £100,000 into the scheme. In October, Westminster Council and Legible London ran a workshop with BID members and residents, where discussions focused on the local information that would be of most use to walkers. The team is now out and about pinpointing locations, with foundation plates for signs and maps due to spring up early in the year – look out for the Legible London ‘walking man’ brand.

As well as improving public health, it is hoped that Legible London information will benefit the transport system, economy, tourism and the environment. “Putting one foot in front of the other is the simplest way to move around and experience our great city,” said Mayor Boris Johnson at the initiative’s launch. And, you have to admit he’s right. There can be no better way to see our capital than on foot. Better still, there will no longer be any need to ask a policeman when we find ourselves lost.