

Ways Through the Countryside

Sustrans
ROUTES FOR PEOPLE
INFORMATION SHEET FF27

The National Cycle Network and Public Rights of Way

INTRODUCTION

This information sheet addresses the limited number of situations where, the only viable option is to direct the National Cycle Network along an existing public footpath or bridleway.

It does not cover issues relating to public bridleways that are not on the National Cycle Network. It considers the physical treatment needed to make the finished path suitable for regular use by bicycles, while not destroying its appeal to existing legitimate users such as walkers and horse-riders. At the same time the needs of disabled people are taken into account in accordance with Sustrans policy, set out in two information sheets: Shared Use Routes (FF04)¹ and Disabled People and the National Cycle Network (FF05)².

The convenience of all users, especially those using wheelchairs and special wheelchair-bicycle combinations, is considered in connection with the removal of access barriers as described in Sustrans' information sheets: Removing Barriers on the National Cycle Network (FF09)⁷ and Access Controls (FF22)³. Guidance on the legal aspects of rights of way has been published by the Ramblers' Association (4) and on surfacing widths and gates appropriate to equestrian use by the British Horse Society (5,6). Issues of security on paths are discussed in a separate Sustrans information sheet (8).

NATIONAL CYCLE NETWORK

The National Cycle Network is a Millennium Project to develop a network of 10,000 miles of high

quality cycle routes throughout the United Kingdom. The aim of these routes is to create an environment where cycling is a safe and viable option. It will give everybody the opportunity to take to their bikes in the confidence that there is a safe route to school, to work or for leisure. These routes offer a serious alternative to using the car with its associated damage to the environment and the countryside.

The National Cycle Network is a demonstration project that sets out to be useable by cyclists of any ability and on any bicycle whatever the conditions. It will complement and catalyse the many developing local and regional cycle networks. There is already evidence that, given a safe choice, people will cycle for some of the journeys which were previously car-borne.

Sustrans, with 20 years of practical civil engineering experience in building traffic-free routes, is co-ordinating the development of the National Cycle Network. These traffic-free sections support environmentally sustainable forms of transport and are for use by walkers, by cyclists, by wheelchair users and, often, by horse-riders.

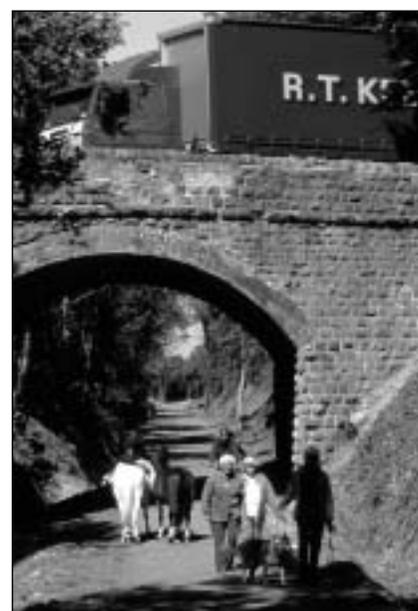
How will the National Cycle Network affect footpaths and bridleways?

Two thirds of the Network will be on quiet minor rural roads and traffic-calmed roads through towns. The remainder will be on routes generally free from motor traffic. Where the Network uses roads, various measures to calm traffic and enhance safety are being introduced which are of significant benefit to walkers, horse riders and cyclists alike. These include reducing the speed and volume of

traffic, and installing additional safe crossings on busier roads. The traffic-free sections comprise a mixture of different types of route as set out in Sustrans Information Sheet FF04 Shared Use Routes (1).

There have been many opportunities to create entirely new sections of route which are of major benefit to walkers, wheelchair users and often to horse riders as well. All of these groups, together with cyclists, have lost ground in recent decades because of the increasing volume and speed of motorised traffic on roads in the countryside.

There are locations where existing footpaths or bridleways have been incorporated as part of the National Cycle Network after consultation. Such proposals have implications for walkers and horse riders who have an existing legal right to use the way in question. These have only been selected when there are no other suitable traffic-free alternatives and all feasible and safe on-road options have been exhausted.



People of all ages use and enjoy traffic-free paths for walking and cycling. (Cossington Bawdrip in Somerset)

PUBLIC FOOTPATHS

Unsurfaced rural footpaths will make up approximately 1%, or 80 miles nationwide, of the total Network, and a further 2% will be on surfaced routes with footpath status. Public footpaths are defined as highways over which there is a right of way by foot and with an invalid carriage only, so cycling is not allowed by right on footpaths. In many instances a permissive agreement may be sought from the landowner to allow cycle access. Such agreements do not change the legal status of the public footpath and consultation should take place beforehand with interested parties. If the footpath is to be converted to a cycle track, the Cycle Tracks Act 1984 must be used by the local highway authority. Any conversion of a path over agricultural land requires the consent of the landowner.

There are two anomalies in the Act, one "perceptual", the other technical. The term cycle track sounds to some like the creation of a "race track" with the exclusion of pedestrians. This is not the case. The Act is normally used to convert a footpath into a cycle track over which pedestrians have a right of way. However, Sustrans prefers to use the term shared use (or multi-use) path, as this more accurately

describes the type of facility created, for use by pedestrians, cyclists and wheelchair users.

More problematic is the fact that conversion to a cycle track will mean following a legal procedure which may result in the removal of a footpath from the definitive rights of way map. In due course this means that the path may not be depicted on Ordnance Survey maps as the Ordnance Survey obtains information about the existence of public rights of way from definitive maps. This is an unacceptable anomaly and Sustrans supports the need to change the law and record all such cycle tracks on definitive maps. There is currently an agreement with Ordnance Survey whereby Sustrans, after consultation with Local Authorities and the CTC (Cyclists Touring Club), gathers information on all traffic-free cycle paths or National Cycle Network routes and passes it on to Ordnance Survey for inclusion on their 1:50,000 Landranger series maps.

In the meantime there are three possible ways around this:

- Create a new permissive path for cyclists parallel to the footpath (this may require a dividing strip) thereby retaining the footpath and avoiding using the Cycle Tracks Act altogether.

- Divide the footpath in half longitudinally, where width permits, and use the Cycle Tracks Act to convert one half to a cycle track while the remainder stays as a footpath. This will rarely be possible because footpaths will generally be too narrow.
- Convert the footpath to a public bridleway (the preferred method subject to width), which will still require a legal procedure, but which would extend the rights of access to horse riders, and which would maintain the right of way on the definitive map. This is only really possible if the path is wide enough, or could be widened, as shared use with horses can render a narrow path impassable to walkers and cyclists.

Careful examination of each local situation is necessary. Consultation and site meetings with landowners, the local authority and others, such as the Ramblers Association and groups representing those with disabilities, to examine the options and to discuss problems should ensure that the issues can be understood by everyone and agreement can be reached.

The choice of surfacing for each path should be made in the context of the local area and its use. An urban footpath may already be tarmacked, so widening with tarmac would be appropriate. In a rural area, in some instances, we would seek to use a hard wearing stone dust surface although Sustrans' preference is for sealed surfaces as the long term maintenance costs are much reduced. Surface dressing with locally sourced stone chippings ensures that the path will quickly blend in with the surroundings. These well-drained, hard surfaces also have benefits for less hardy walkers, those with buggies and wheelchair users.



River Blackcart Path near Glasgow.

PUBLIC BRIDLEWAYS

Public bridleways are defined in statute as highways over which there is a right of way on foot, on horseback or leading a horse, with an invalid carriage or on a bicycle. Under the Countryside Act 1968 (section 30) bicyclists (but not unicyclists or tricyclists) have a right to use bridleways provided they give way to walkers and horse riders.

Bridleways will make up approximately 140 miles (1.5%) nationwide (of which half were previously surfaced), of the whole Network. In total, there are about 18,000 miles of bridleway in England alone. In addition there are other non-statutory permissive paths where agreement for access by horse riders, cyclists and walkers has been reached with the landowner. To date, through the creation of the National Cycle Network, over 90 miles of new permissive paths for horseriders, walkers and cyclists have already been created.



Cuckoo trail in Hailsham. Parallel cycle and horsepaths.

Much of what follows applies just as much to those permissive paths as to public bridleways.

Bridleways are sometimes rendered impassable for pedestrians, cyclists and horse riders by the movement of farm vehicles and livestock, by forestry operations, by poor drainage or by lack of maintenance.

Without proper management of the path, horses can also severely damage surfaces, making cycling and walking difficult.

All legitimate users should be able to use National Cycle Network routes comfortably in any weather

conditions, and Sustrans can legitimately allocate Millennium Commission funds towards this goal. However, this should not preclude the use of bridleways by any one group, when alterations to suit another group are carried out.

Our preferred way of achieving use for all is to have a bridleway at least 4 metres, but preferably 5 metres, wide. This would be surfaced to create two paths, each a minimum of 2 metres wide, with a sealed surface for cyclists, wheelchairs, buggy pushers, young children and less hardy walkers, and an equally wide engineered grass surface for horses and more experienced ramblers (see boxes 1 and 2).

The decision on the actual surface should be based on local circumstances, expected use and treatments already in use locally. It should be noted that maintenance of bridleways should not result in a less commodious facility for any of the legitimate users. Legal truncation of the bridleway width may be necessary but bridleways often have a defined width in the definitive map statement so legal procedures must be followed if the width is to be reduced.

The Good Cycling Code

General

Be courteous!

Always cycle with respect for others, whether other cyclists, pedestrians, people in wheelchairs, horse-riders or drivers and acknowledge those who give way to you.

Shared Use

Give way to pedestrians, leaving them plenty of room.

Keep to your side of any dividing line. Be prepared to slow down or stop if necessary.

Don't expect to cycle at high speeds.

Be careful at junctions, bends and entrances. Remember that many people are hard of hearing or visually impaired. Don't assume they can see or hear you.

Carry a bell and use it. Don't surprise people.

Where there are wheelchair users and horse-riders, please give away.

On Roads

Always follow the Highway Code.

Be seen - most accidents to cyclists happen at junctions.

Fit and use lights in poor visibility.

Consider wearing a helmet and conspicuous clothing.

Keep your bike roadworthy. Pavements are for pedestrians - don't cycle on them except where designated.

Use the bell - not all pedestrians can see you.

In Country Areas

Follow the Country Code.

Respect other land management activities such as farming or forestry and take litter home.

Cycle within your capabilities.

Match your speed to the surface and your skills.

Where a surface has to be shared because of width restrictions (less than 4 metres), a fibre reinforced surface dressing should be used. The use of this sort of surface has been agreed with the British Horse Society (BHS) where no alternative grass surface is possible. Where gradients are involved consideration needs to be given to the adhesion qualities and to whether any special treatment is required. Whilst dust surfaced paths, shared with horses, have proved very satisfactory in some locations, they can deteriorate rapidly and a poor surface, badly maintained, is known to discourage pedestrians and cyclists. This deterioration may be localised because of overhanging trees or it may be down to the indifferent quality of local materials. It makes no environmental sense to transport good quality stone dust over large distances.

In all cases, stone paths need more regular maintenance than a harder sealed surface. Sustrans prefers sealed surfaces in order to reduce further maintenance costs, especially where the same path is shared by all user groups, but appreciates that this is not equally commodious to all users.

Where a field edge bridleway or footpath is engineered for use within the National Cycle Network, a hedge or fencing may be required along each side, converting it into a lane separate from agricultural fields. This should protect the route from encroachment by agricultural vehicles, prevents path users from straying off the route and result in less need for maintenance. Hedges will need regular maintenance and fences should not contain barbed wire.

It is acknowledged that certain surfaces are not the preferred choice of all of users and compromises will have to be reached. A tarmac surface will preclude horses from anything but walking, whilst a stone/dust surface may be damaged by trotting or cantering horses making it difficult for wheeled users, especially wheelchairs. Alternatively a wood-chip surface would be unsuitable for cyclists.

Where a bridleway is proposed to be incorporated in the National Cycle Network, it must be signed as such to remind cyclists of their legal requirement to give way to horses. The British Horse Society should be consulted in advance where any such incorporation is planned.

If there are proposals to surface existing grass verges beside roads, consideration must be given to existing or future use by horse-riders. Where this is expected, sufficient space should be left for the movement of horses, and they should not be squeezed onto a narrow verge between the traffic and a cycle/walking surface, but should be on the hedge side of the cycle path.

ACCESS CONTROLS

Access controls may be needed to stop unwanted motorised traffic and Sustrans promotes the use of bollards rather than barriers as the preferred method. Bollards, which can consist of conventional bollards, boulders or similar solid obstructions, provide the least difficulty for wheelchair users, horse riders and all types of cyclists (eg those using disabled cycles, recumbents, tandems, tricycles and trailers).

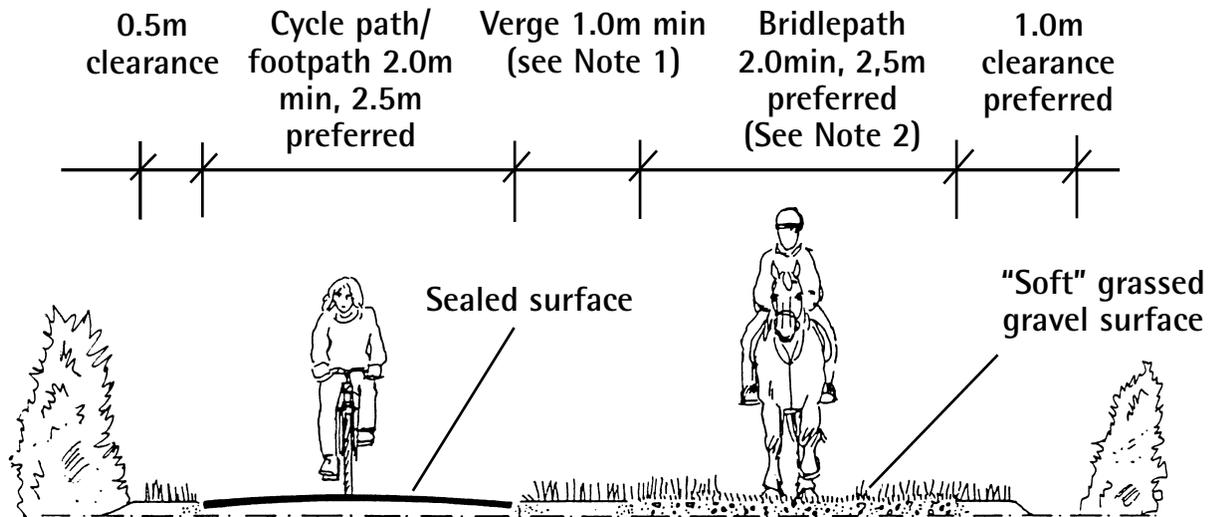
Sustrans has a policy of removing as many barriers as possible on existing paths. It is often found that, as a route becomes more popular, the very presence of increasing numbers of people means that it becomes self-policing and barriers can be removed or by-passed as the threat of illegal use diminishes.

Where barriers against livestock are required, Sustrans prefers to use cattle grids with an overall width of 1.2 metres. These should be located as far as possible from bridle gates, with the catch at the end away from the grid, and have wing fences on either side to prevent horses stepping into them by accident. They should also be fitted with proper drainage and ramps to allow any trapped small animals to escape. Cattle grids are not allowed on existing footpaths and bridleways, but may be located on adjacent private land. Bridle gates should be positioned so that there is sufficient manoeuvring space to enable a rider to open the gate from the saddle and this should be further facilitated by providing a well hung gate with a safety hook-and-eye catch on the top bar. Overhanging branches may need to be trimmed. Where possible, when bridle gates are fitted, mounting blocks should be provided.



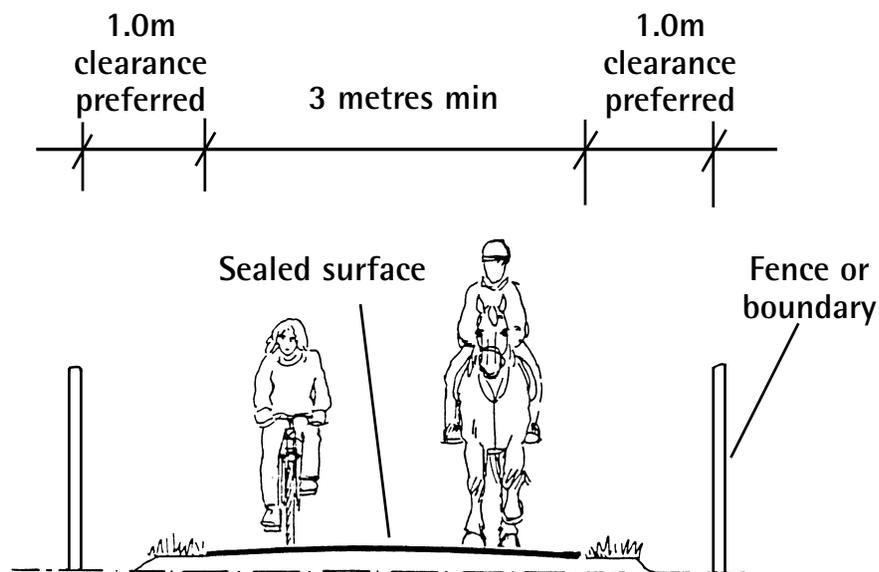
Horse stile on the path along the line of the old Derby Canal

Shared Cycle Track/Footpath with Separate Bridlepath



Note: 1. Central verge should be omitted if minimum width cannot be achieved.
 2. The bridlepath should be at least as wide as the cycle path.

Shared Cycle Track/Footpath and Bridlepath



Engineered grass surface for horses

Grassed gravel (from BHS specification on surfacing). This is a Swiss technique and has rarely been used in Britain. If necessary a geotextile fabric can be used as a sub-base. The base course is aggregate (size not provided) 150mm deep covered with a further 150mm of aggregate and top-soil mixed at the rate of 75:25. The surface is then

seeded at the rate of 30gms/m² or 300kg/ha with British Seed Houses mix A14 as follows:

- 55% Meteor perennial ryegrass
- 30% Boreal strong creeping red fescue
- 10% Julia smooth-stalked meadow grass
- 5% Highland browntop bent

For best results the grass should be allowed to mature before a new route is opened to the public. If this treatment is for existing bridleways then a temporary alternative may be required to allow the grass to become established.



Access track on Marlborough Downs

BYWAYS AND OTHER TRACKS

Current legislation allows access for motor vehicles over Byways Open to All Traffic (BOATS) and some Roads Used as Public Paths (RUPPS) where vehicular rights exist. This can lead to problems with offroading four wheel drive enthusiasts especially where they seek to re-open paths previously abandoned by motor vehicles. Sustrans believes that Byways, RUPPS, many other country tracks and indeed some minor roads should be closed to all motorised traffic (with the exception of legitimate residential, business or farm access). Such proposals would benefit walkers, horse riders, horse drawn carriages and cyclists alike.

CONSULTATION

Sustrans actively consults with organisations representing different user groups. We are in regular discussions with the Ramblers' Association and the British Horse Society at a national level to ensure that their interests are recognised and, where possible, catered for on traffic-free paths. In addition, many local representatives have already been in contact with Sustrans' regional staff to discuss solutions to local situations

and such consultation is encouraged in all cases.

Sustrans believes that walkers, horse-riders and cyclists have much in common, and that by working together we will be able to create new opportunities for non-motorised transport and leisure in both urban and rural areas.

ADDRESSES:

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The Ramblers Association
1-5 Wandsworth Road
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NE3 5YT

CTC
Cotterell House
69 Meadow
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Surrey GU7 3HS

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Room 914 Tollgate House
Houlton Street
BS2 9DJ.

References

1. **Shared Use Routes.** *Free Information Sheet FF04.* Sustrans, 1999.
2. **Disabled People and the National Cycle Network.** *Free Information Sheet FF05.* Sustrans, 1998.
3. **Access Controls.** *Free Information Sheet FF22.* Sustrans 1998.
4. **"Rights of Way: a Guide to Law and Practice".** *Out of print but copies may be available from public libraries.* Riddell, John and Trevelyn, John, 1992.
5. **Bridleway Gates: A Guide to Good Practice.** *The British Horse Society, 1996.*
6. **A Guide to the Surfacing of Bridleways and horse tracks.** *The British Horse Society, 1995.*
7. **Removing Barriers on the National Cycle Network** *Free Information Sheet FF09*
8. **Designing for Security on the National Cycle Network** *Free Information Sheet FF21.*

Sustrans
ROUTES FOR PEOPLE

For further copies of this or other factsheets please call
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(Monday - Friday 8.30am - 5.30pm
Saturdays 9.00am - 1.00pm
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