

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

### Introduction

This report was commissioned by Devon County Council in September 2003 to complement the authority's response to the need for all Local Highway Authorities to prepare a Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP) by 2007. The aim of this research was to produce an objective review of multi-use routes to enable policy for such routes within Devon:

- to be based upon the best information available;
- to be applied consistently throughout the county;
- to be a function of system and structure rather than personality; and
- to be transparent for those who wish to query the policy and the way in which it is implemented.

### Literature Review

There are two areas of literature reviewed to set the context for this study. First, the literature relating to 'conflict' and second the literature relating to demand and usage. The key points from the conflict literature are detailed below.

### Conflict Literature

- There are two types of conflict, namely 'actual conflict' and 'perceived conflict' both of which have precise definitions and meanings.
- There is very little evidence from actual users of multi-use routes of the existence of actual and perceived conflict on such routes. There are two main explanations for this assertion. First, multi-use routes are used less than is imagined, thereby limiting the opportunities for conflict. Second, the vast majority of users on multi-use routes are considerate towards others.
- Inconsiderate behaviour seems to be the principal cause of conflict rather than environmental factors such as path width and surface condition. Research has shown that conflict has a psychological dimension that is a function of people's values, attributions and prior experiences. It is possible for one user group to be in conflict with another even though they are using segregated paths, that is, in these instances psychological factors are more significant than environmental factors.
- Users deal with conflict in any combination of three ways: emotional responses such as a feeling of anger or annoyance; behavioural modifications such as being more alert or avoiding secluded areas; and avoidance such as rescheduling usage to off-peak times or avoiding a route altogether.
- Managers use a variety of techniques to try and control conflict such as segregation, influencing and modifying user behaviour, public consultation, and conflict resolution procedures.
- Managers cannot eliminate conflict although there are some interventions which may help to reduce conflict. Some conflicts do not need management intervention and can be dealt with via users' own coping mechanisms.
- There is no universally applicable formula that can be applied to the management of multi-use routes which will eliminate conflict. Public consultation and

involvement plus the use of local solutions to local problems appear to be the most appropriate techniques to minimise conflict from both a process and an outcome perspective.

## Demand Literature

The key points relating to the demand for walking are outlined below.

- Walking is by far the most popular sporting / recreational activity in the UK with a four weekly participation rate of 44.5% and an annual participation rate of 68.2%.
- Walking is one of only a few activities which has shown any sign of growth in participation between 1987 and 1996.
- The vast majority of walking occasions are made by the near 45% of adults who take a walk or hike of 2 miles or more at least once every four weeks.
- Compared with other sports walking is relatively ageless and classless.
- Walkers use a variety of access resources but make greatest use of footpaths.
- Walking is popular amongst young people (aged 5-15) with an annual participation rate of 55%, furthermore 22% of young people go walking on at least 10 occasions per year.
- Adults with a Limiting Long-Standing Illness (LLSI) have marginally higher participation rates in walking than the population as a whole.
- Adults from all ethnic minority groups have lower participation rates in walking than the population as a whole.

The key points relating to the demand for cycling are outlined below.

- Cycling is the fifth most popular sporting / recreational activity in the UK with a four weekly participation rate of 11.0% and an annual participation rate of 21.4%.
- The number of adults taking part in cycling increased between 1987 and 1996 (8% to 11%) but the frequency of participation has fallen (10 times per 4 weeks to 8).
- More than 90% of cycling occasions are made by the 11% of adults who cycle at least once every 4 weeks.
- Participation in cycling is skewed towards men compared with women; young people and young families compared with people aged 45+; and higher socio-economic groups compared with lower socio-economic groups.
- For the average cyclist, main roads appear to be the access resource of choice (56%) followed by cycle tracks (49%). A significant number of cyclists (38%) admit to exceeding their rights by cycling on footpaths.
- Cycling is more popular amongst young people aged 6-16 than walking, both in the annual (75% v 55%) and the frequent participation rates (49% v 22%).
- Adults with a Limiting Long-Standing Illness (LLSI) and young people with a disability have significantly lower participation rates in cycling than the population as a whole.
- Adults from all ethnic minority groups (except Black 'Other') have lower participation rates in cycling than the population as a whole.

The key points relating to the demand for horse riding are outlined below.

- Horse riding is a minority sport with an adult participation rate of 1% for regular riders and 3% for occasional riders (GHS). Other surveys employing alternative methodologies provide estimates of 5% of households having at least one person who has taken part in horse riding in the last year and 4.5% of the population aged 5 and over having taken part in horse riding in the last year.
- The demand statistics for horse riding are much lower than those for walking (45% and 68%) and cycling (11% and 21%) and confirm that in relative terms horse riding is a minority sport.
- The minority of regular riders account for the vast majority of riding occasions. Furthermore, the 21% of horse riders who own a horse account for a disproportionately high level of riding days.
- Participation in horse riding is dominated by women whose 4 weekly participation rate is nearly 4 times that of men. This finding is replicated when comparing girls with boys.
- Horse riding is relatively ageless and classless.
- Horse owners are a minority of the horse riding population but account for a disproportionately high number of riding occasions.
- There is a core of disabled people whose participation rate and frequency of participation is equal to that of the population as a whole.
- People from ethnic minority groups participate in horse riding less than the population as a whole and there is very limited evidence to support the case for latent demand amongst such groups.

The demand data above for walking, cycling and horse riding is the demand by Devon residents only. In reality, total demand in Devon is likely to be higher than that of Devon residents only and can be expressed as:

	Demand by Devon residents as computed using national data sets
less	Demand expressed by Devon residents elsewhere
plus	Demand by visitors to Devon expressed in Devon
equals	Total demand expressed in Devon

## Methodology

A variety of techniques was used to collect the data including surveys of 264 actual trail users, 1,194 adult members of the public via a citizens' panel survey, a survey of managers of other trails in Britain, and consultation, site visits and observation. The net result of the various methods is that the results are informed by a number of different but complementary lines of enquiry.

## Trail Users' Survey

A total of 264 trail users was interviewed on the Tarka Trail and the Granite Way during the October 2003 half term week and the first weekend in January 2004. The interviews were conducted in a variety of locations over 11 interviewer days. The main points from the users' survey are detailed below.

- Use of the Tarka Trail and the Granite Way is predominantly for recreational use rather than utility use. A maximum of 4% of journeys had a utility element to them.

- The users of the trail confirm earlier assertions that within individual user groups there are different user segments. In the case of this research we found recreational cyclists, utility cyclists and cyclists who 'walk' dogs. Amongst walkers there are dog walkers, walkers without dogs and mixed groups such as adults who are walking whilst accompanying children on bicycles or pedal toys.
- The balance of opinion concerning multi-use is that there is a net agreement of +41% to the statement that walkers, cyclists and horse riders should be allowed to use the same tracks. Furthermore, there is a net disagreement of -22% to the statement that it is unsafe for walkers, cyclists and horse riders to use the same tracks.
- In the case of walking and cycling there is -81% net disagreement to the statement that walking and cycling on the same tracks is incompatible. In the case of cycling and horse riding there is -21% net disagreement to the statement that cycling and horse riding on the same tracks is incompatible.
- The balance of opinion concerning horse riding and wheelchair use on the same tracks shows a net disagreement of -4% to the statement that horse riding and using a wheelchair on the same tracks is incompatible.
- Tarka Trail users and Granite Way users show some statistically significant differences in the strength (but not direction) of their attitudes towards multi-use. There is no obvious explanation for this unexpected finding but factors such as location, condition, width, levels of usage and history are possible factors.
- Levels of experiencing hostility and aggression are low with only 13% of respondents stating that they had ever experienced hostility and aggression whilst using the trail on which they were interviewed. Visitors to Devon report lower levels of experiencing hostility or aggression (6%) than local residents (15%). This difference can be explained by the fact that local residents have been using the trails for longer than visitors.
- The incidence of experiencing hostility or aggression on the trails varies significantly by user group. Cyclists (5%) are the least likely to have experienced hostility or aggression and walkers (16%) are the most likely.. Within walkers dog walkers (21%) are more likely to have experienced hostility and aggression than walkers without dogs (12%).
- Qualitative comments received about the possibility of horses being allowed to use either of the trails reflects the broad tolerance revealed by the quantitative questions concerning multi-use.
- The composition of the users interviewed was 80% Devon residents and 20% visitors. In the visitor sample (53 respondents), 7 groups stated that the main purpose of their visit was to use a particular trail. It is likely that for most visitors to Devon their use of a trail is one of a series of motivations for a visit to the county. It would therefore be an over statement of the evidence to attribute the expenditure of visitors solely to the trails on which they were interviewed.

#### Citizens' Panel Survey

- The Citizens' Panel survey of 1,194 adults in Devon is not wholly representative of the population of the county. It is over representative of men and under representative of women. The age profile is under representative of young adults (16-34) and over representative of older adults (35+). It would not be prudent to generalise these findings to the adult population of Devon as a whole.

- Participation rates in walking, cycling and horse riding within the sample are significantly higher than for the population as a whole. It would be dangerous to generalise the sample findings to the adult population of Devon. However, it would be prudent to conclude that participation rates in Devon are at least equal to national averages.
- There is a considerable participation overlap between different activities. For example, 81% of the sample have been for a walk or hike of 2 miles or more in the last year and of these 37% have also been cycling in the last year.
- The opinions of the general public are significantly different to those of the people interviewed on the Tarka Trail and Granite Way. For most questions the net agreement and disagreement scores are low compared with those found amongst actual users. The only exception to this point is views on the compatibility of horse riding and wheelchair use on the same tracks. Actual users tend to disagree (-1% net agreement) that horse riding and wheelchair use on the same tracks is incompatible, whereas the general public agree with the statement (+39% net agreement).
- There are significant differences in attitude toward multi-use amongst the general public when looking at the responses by user type. Cyclists appear to be noticeably more tolerant towards the sharing of tracks than other user groups.
- The incidence of ever experiencing conflict, hostility or aggression when using off-road tracks is confirmed as being low with only 20% of the sample having had such an experience. The incidence of experiencing conflict, hostility or aggression varies significantly by user group with horse riders (36%) and wheelchair users (32%) being the most affected groups.

#### Survey of Trail Managers

In addition to surveying users and the public a sample of managers of multi-use trails throughout Britain were interviewed to establish their views on the incidence of conflict and how such conflict (if it existed) might be managed. The main findings are outlined below.

- Most complaints are about conditions created or left by some users, rather than as a result of direct confrontation with other users.
- Conflict in the form of confrontations arises as result of tensions between people (for example refusing to give way) rather than as a result of physical aspects of a trail.
- Trail managers report that problems are 'more perceived than actual'.
- The scale of conflict is small and is not seen to be a major problem for trail managers.
- Most users are 'sensible' or are 'reasonable about giving way'.
- The critical design issue appears to be one of available width. The wider the path, the easier it is to cater for the passage of different user groups and to ascribe 'appropriateness' to use of the trail by horse riders.
- A well-managed, information-driven trail appears to reduce problems between cyclists and horse riders.

These findings are highly consistent with findings elsewhere that conflict on trails is low and the most common form of conflict is perceived rather than actual conflict.

## Additional Information

The final section of the results presents the findings of the consultation, site visits and other methods. The key findings from this part of the research are detailed below.

- Central government policy towards the equine industry and equestrians is positive. This is driven by a number of factors including a realisation of the value of the equine industry in the aftermath of the 2001 Foot and Mouth Disease outbreak. Central government has also made recent pronouncements on its desire to see improved access for equestrians.
- Devon County Council's policy towards equestrians was formulated in 2000 and predates FMD (2001) and the government pronouncements of 2002 and 2003. DCC has been opposed to equestrians sharing tracks with other users on the grounds of 'potential conflict'. There is a lack of clarity within the authority regarding policy towards multi-use, perhaps best illustrated by staff within the same directorate having differing views on the subject.
- Representative groups such as the Ramblers' Association, Cyclists' Touring Club and the British Horse Society are representatives for their particular user groups, but are not representative of them. The views and policies of these bodies are not necessarily those of all walkers, cyclists and equestrians. In all cases representative bodies represent only a tiny minority of all participants.
- Two national initiatives, the National Cycle Network and the National Bridleroute Network have conflicting views on multi-use. The NCN is accommodating towards horses subject to certain criteria such as providing a link to currently unconnected bridleways, whereas the NBN is explicitly inclusive of walkers, cyclists and horse riders.

## Recommendations

The report concludes by making nine recommendations which should be read in conjunction with the research from which they have been derived. However, the key recommendation upon which all of the other recommendations depend is that Devon County Council should take the opportunity to formulate a clear and evidence based policy towards horse riding and equestrian use of multi-use routes. There has been no update of the authority's position towards horse riding since the outbreak of Foot and Mouth Disease in 2001 and the authority has not yet responded to the central government pronouncements of 2002 and 2003 concerning ROWIPs and improved access for equestrians. Furthermore, there is the possibility that Devon County Council's existing equestrian policies were based on flawed data collected by the BHS in 1997/8.