

LOCAL ACCESS FORUM: 13 DECEMBER 2011

MULTI-USE PATHS

1. **PURPOSE OF REPORT**

To consult the forum regarding the conversion of cycle tracks to multi-use paths to allow horse riding. Report prepared by Sara Church.

2. **SUPPORTING INFORMATION**

2.1 **Why Horse Riders should be allowed Access to cycle tracks and the NCN in RBWM**

Everyone should be able to access the countryside, whether they cycle, walk, are disabled or ride a horse. The current system has allowed walkers, cyclist and riders to co-exist on bridleways for many years with out issue. Since 1968 cyclists have been allowed access to bridleways but horses are sometimes refused access to cycle tracks and the National Cycle Network, even though Sustrans who implements the NCN has no objections in principle to their use of the network. A recent letter from Martin Brunt, Sustran's NCN development manager, to Richard Benyon MP confirms this.

Horse riders are one of the most vulnerable users on the road. Like cyclists, horse riders travel slowly in comparison to vehicles and so vehicles are a hazard to them. Due to the fragmentation of the bridleway network, riders are forced to use roads that have become heavily congested and dangerously fast. Even rural roads have often become 'urban rat runs'. Most riders would not use the road network at all preferring to ride on safe traffic free routes like the cycle tracks and the National Cycle Network. These routes also allow riders to socially interact with other users in a stress free environment. They allow them to cover far greater distances all of which benefits the health of the horse and the rider. Horses allow children, disabled people and those with minor disabilities, such as the elderly full access to the countryside in a safe enviroment, something they could not achieve otherwise. From a personal point of view I find it very frustrating that we are not allowed on the cycle tracks. My husband loves to accompany me and my horse on a ride, and whilst not a horse rider, he rides his bicycle alongside my horse.

Amputee Soldier



The Church Family



In my local area of Eton and Eton Wick, which is covered by RBWM, horse riders only have a total of 3.5 km of bridleways to use. Compare this with the number of horses living in Eton and Eton Wick, approximately 70 horse and ponies. In this area we also had a wide grass verge along the Eton Wick Road. This verge was a safe haven for riders on a part of the Eton Wick Road which is very dangerous and is often the site for the mobile speed detector camera. Unfortunately it is now a cycle track with pedestrian/cycle only signs. RBWM Milestone and PROW Improvement plan states it would like to see the use of grass verges for horse riding in the borough yet it takes away this one and forces the riders back onto the road.

My area has the beautiful Jubilee River with its network of cycle tracks. Access for horse riders to these would be of tremendous benefit to the local riders. In fact a number of riders already use and enjoy the tracks with no reported conflicts or damage to the surface. In fact riders tell me that other users they have met on the routes have been courteous and often stop for a chat. Full use of this route would enable the 3 neighbouring ROW teams (RBWM, South Bucks and Slough Borough) to promote a circular riding route of approximately 8 miles for local riders. This is an objective in the RBWM Milestones statement and PROW improvement plan.

The Department for Transport already have plans and dimensions for the 'multi-user route' sign. It is only that the councils do not apply correct definition to many paths which causes confusion, exclusion and potential conflict.

The Trails Trust has already created 80 'multi-user' paths and also has published a book which explains how user groups and local government can help. The Trails Trust, is a charity that creates access to the countryside for all, horse riders, cyclists, walkers and carriage drivers.

Minley Multi-User Path sign



2.2 Why do we need more safe off road riding?

There has been ever increasing volumes of traffic on our roads both rural and urban. This seriously compromises the safety of walkers, cyclists and horse riders. Horses and their riders are one of the most vulnerable users on the road. Horses are powerful animals but travel slowly and cars can be a hazard to them when a car is travelling much faster. Accurate statistics for road accidents involving horses are not available, but the British Horse Society estimates that there are 3,000 such accidents each year, about half of which occur on minor roads. (ROSPA April 2011)

2.3 How much conflict is there between users on off road routes in practise?

Conflict between users on routes is very rare. A government sponsored report from the University of Surrey (User interaction on multi use paths' 2000 & 2002) showed horse riders, joggers and the disabled were least likely to be involved in any conflict on non motorised shared routes. Conflict is a perceived fear that is based on false perception and prejudice. We have been sharing bridleways with cyclists since 1968 with no problems. Responsible users respect each other and look out for each other.

Horse riders cannot be banned from cycle tracks from a safety point of view, because they already legally share bridleways without reports of conflict. Horses are big animals and can appear intimidating due to their size. However, 75% of horse riders are female and 50% under 25 years of age showing that horses are easily handled. Walkers and cyclists are more likely to be injured by a dog than a horse. There are large numbers of well documented attacks by dogs on people. If horses are banned from cycle tracks on this issue then it can be argued that dogs should be banned also but there appears to be no move to do this.

2.4 Are paths wide enough?

Since 1968, cyclists have had access to all the bridleways in the country, whether they are just wide enough for a horse to pass or whether they are as wide as a single carriageway. Many also have blind bends and are quite undulating with a varied surface. Thus, the width of path should not be classed as an issue to ban horses from cycle tracks. Sustrans guidance on path width is 2.5metres to 3metres or more when available and Department for Transport guidelines are 2metres to 3metres on multi

user paths. The Jubilee River paths have sufficient path width plus wide grass verges that are suitable for horse use.

2.5 Are path surfaces suitable?

Inclusion for horse riders on hard surface cycle tracks should not be refused due to damage they may cause to the surface. Horses do not cause damage to such tracks. Sustrans own figures show the numbers of horse riders using such routes are far lower than cyclists and walkers, they represent only 1-2% of users on cycle paths. Jubilee River path upgraded from cycle track to bridle path shows no extra wear on it and this is regularly used by the local riders.



Cyclists have been here

and here

Gravel path shows no signs of wear due to horses

2.6 Are horse droppings a problem?

Unlike dogs, horses are not taken out with the sole reason of relieving themselves. Horses routinely defecate 8 times a day, i.e. once every 3 hours. Therefore the frequency of droppings from horses is minimal. The horses diet consists of grass, wheat, barley etc, which are all environmentally acceptable ingredients with little odour. In 2006 Dr. Jane Greatorex, Department of Medicine, University of Cambridge USA, reviewed the risk of zoonoses following exposure to horse manure on public rights of way.

The conclusion was "Horse manure is a solid waste excluded from federal EPA solid waste regulation because it neither contains significant amounts of hazardous chemicals, nor it exhibits hazardous characteristics. The chemical constituents of horse manure are not toxic to humans. Horse guts do not contain significant levels of the two waterborne pathogens of greatest concern to human health risk, neither do they contain significant amounts of the bacteria E. coli 0157: H7 or Salmonella

Dog-walkers are not banned from using cycle tracks despite problems with dog-fouling. Although it is practically difficult for horse riders to pick up droppings as dog walkers are asked to do. Riders can be asked to dismount and move any dropping into the side with their boot. BHS Scotland has a 'dung guidance' advice note.

2.7 How can horse riding help?

During this current economic downturn, by increasing the amount of off road riding in our local area available to horse riders you will be increasing the economic prosperity. Horse riders, move to areas with safe off road riding routes. The cost of livery, shoeing, feeding, clothing, saddlery, veterinary and event costs add up per horse. As well as the diversification opportunities for farmers and local business, the British Horse Society states that per horse an owner's annual average spend will be £2166.00. For the 70 horses kept in Eton, Eton Wick this amounts to a minimum of £151,620.00 per annum.

2.8 Bridleway or cycle track?

Footpaths, bridleways, byways (restricted byway), are all shown on the definitive map unlike cycle tracks. All routes enjoyed by the public need to be recorded for future generations. By allowing horse riders onto cycle tracks they can be upgraded to bridleways, where appropriate, and therefore recorded on the definitive map.
