Barriers Strategy

Paths for Everyone

01 February 2022

Sustrans is the charity making it easier for people to walk and cycle.

We connect people and places, create liveable neighbourhoods, transform the school run and deliver a happier, healthier commute.

Join us on our journey.

Registered Charity No. 326550 (England and Wales) SC039263 (Scotland).

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Introduction

A new vision for the Network

In 2018, we presented a new vision for the National Cycle Network in our Paths for Everyone review, published in collaboration with diverse partners and stakeholders.

The vision is for a safer, more accessible Network of traffic-free paths, loved and cared for by the communities they serve.

A key part of this vision is the recommendation that, by 2040, we have:

'Removed or redesigned all 16,000 barriers on the Network to make it accessible to everyone, with no barriers in place for continuous travel'

These 16,000 physical barriers and restrictions were recorded during a full audit of the Network carried out in 2015/16; they are mostly located on the traffic free sections, with an average of three barriers or restrictions on every mile.

Barriers include restrictions such as steps, stairs, gradients, speed bumps, headroom obstructions, as well as access controls.

Inequality of access

We know[1] that these barriers and restrictions are preventing many people from accessing and enjoying the Network, in particular those using adaptive cycles, wheelchairs, hand-cycles, mobility scooters, tandems, trikes, cargo bikes, running frames, buggies and horse riders.

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[1] Wheels for Wellbeing - Assessing the needs and experiences of Disabled cyclists 2018 annual survey - https://wheelsforwellbeing.org.uk/campaigning/infrastructure-for-all/

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Such equipment is very often being used as an aid to mobility, helping people with disabilities, older people and young families to get active, explore their local area and move around without a car.

There is also increasing evidence that cargo cycles and e-bikes can be an effective fossil fuel free solution for last-mile logistics and urban delivery services, but many of these cycles are similarly unable to access the National Cycle Network paths.

Photo 1: Members of the Chester adaptive cycling group unable to get through a restrictive barrier on National Route 5   *© Sustrans 2019*

Obsolete and ineffective restrictions

A more detailed analysis of the access control barriers shows that many are in a poor state of repair and are often serving no useful purpose at all, simply being circumnavigated by most users

The barriers are often perceived as needed to prevent anti-social behavior and motorbikes from accessing the routes, but evidence of their effectiveness at achieving this is very limited.

Motorbikes are usually able to go around, under, through or over the restrictions or access the routes at other points.

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A huge challenge

Our ambition is challenging, both due to the number of barriers to be addressed, as well as the difficulties of balancing equality of access with prevention of crime and anti-social behavior.

In some places, new barriers are still being specified, designed and installed.

However the potential impact is great – to create an inclusive, welcoming Network that everyone can use and enjoy, whatever their means of non-motorised transport.

To achieve this, we need to **remove or redesign an average 800 barriers per year,** although many of us would like to see progress happen more quickly.

In the three years since publication of our Paths for Everyone Review, **Sustrans, together with our partners, has removed or redesigned more than 350 barriers.**

Photo 2: Restrictive chicane replaced by a single bollard on National Route 15 in Grantham, Lincolnshire © Sustrans 2019

Working together to deliver change

To achieve the scale of change we want to see, and to ensure that the change sustains, a strategic approach is required with close co-operation, buy-in and support from a wide range of partners, stakeholders and users.

Barriers Strategy
01/02/2022

The problems we need to solve

There are a number of important issues that we need to address in order to deliver the Paths for Everyone barrier removal and redesign ambition:

1   **We don't have enough information on the barriers to be able to effectively prioritise our efforts or promote our routes**

We audited the entire Network in 2015/16 and so have a good idea where most of the barriers are located and the barrier type, but we don't have the detail on how restrictive each of the barriers is. This makes it difficult to assess where we should be focusing attention and where we can have maximum impact.

It is also difficult for us to provide sufficient information to people using non-standard cycles and other mobility aids to help them to use the Network with confidence.

2   **There is an overriding culture of concern regarding motorbike use that drives barrier installation and retention**

Barriers are still seen by many stakeholders as necessary to prevent motorbikes accessing walking and cycling routes.

Local residents often fear illegal motorbike use, and are supported by the police and local councillors, meaning prevention of crime often overrides concerns about equality of access.

These concerns are legitimate in some places, with some routes in both urban and rural areas having a history of crime, anti-social behaviour and motorbike use on and around the paths, but unfounded in others.

In certain areas the popularity of routes deters and prevents misuse, though this takes time to achieve.

Without the reassurance that law enforcement agencies can deal with anti-social behaviour and crime involving motorbikes, communities and local politicians will find it difficult to support the widespread removal and redesign of access control barriers.

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3   **The impact of decisions around barrier removal and redesign is not widely understood or well evidenced**

Physical barriers are often seen as the simplest, quickest and easiest response to the perceived problem of motorbike use and are frequently installed by default.

These decisions are often made without a reasonable assessment of the need for the barrier, their effectiveness in preventing crime and the potential discrimination against those with protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010.

However most of the arguments used currently are anecdotal and subjective.

The individuals and groups making the decisions do not have access to well-documented or evidence based information on the actual impact of removing or redesigning barriers.

4   **The understanding of the law in relation to interplay between the prevention of crime and equality obligations is poor**

Landowners, and other service providers, have to balance their duty of care to protect users of the routes from harm with their duty to make reasonable adjustments to avoid discrimination.

Most are understandably concerned about a member of the public being hurt or injured by illegal motorbikes, and until recently, have not faced many legal challenges on equality grounds.

However the law is based on decision makers 'acting reasonably' and demonstrating how their decisions and actions are properly considered and based on documented evidence.

There are few high quality, comprehensive tools (such as Equality Impact Assessments) for making decisions relating to barriers on cycling and walking infrastructure.

5   **There is a lack of clarity around accessible design solutions and products**

There are places where some type of barrier or restriction is needed to ensure safety, for example by preventing motor vehicles or farm animals from accessing or blocking the Network.

Sustrans provides guidance on access to routes within its traffic free routes and greenways design guide but there is still a lack of clarity and consensus regarding what constitutes an accessible solution in such situations.

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There are also products on the market that inappropriately claim to be compatible with disability access, but do not meet the needs of many legitimate users.

6 There is likely to be a shortage of funding for the scale of barrier removal or redesign required to realise the ambition

We have funding from national Government departments in Scotland and England for pioneer barrier removal schemes.

However the magnitude (see cost section) of the programme means that this is not a viable long-term solution for the entire Network.

We expect that removing barriers is likely to be a low priority for individual land owners and local authorities struggling under multiple financial pressures, especially if there is resistance from local residents and the perceived risk of removing or redesigning barriers is high.

Due to issues 2 to 5, land owners in some areas have refused to remove barriers even where central government funding is available to do so.
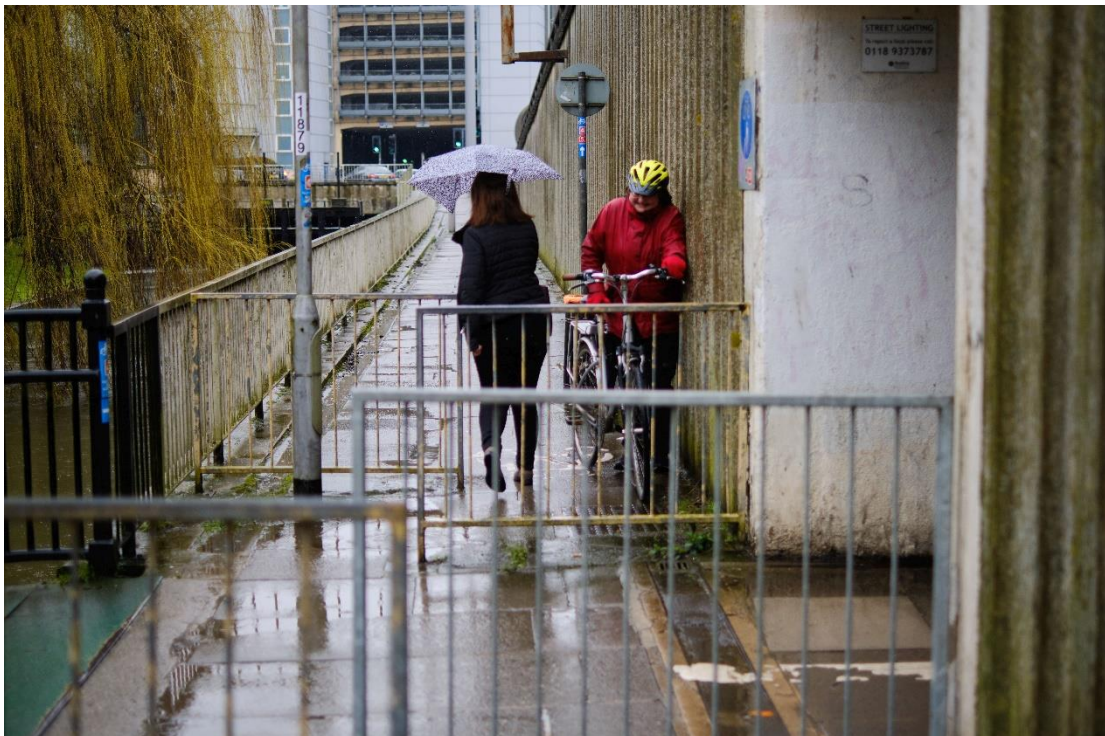
Photo 3: A tight chicane creates a pinch point on National Route 4 in Reading, Berkshire
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The principles that guide us

1   **Our starting point is a presumption that the entire network will be made fully accessible to all legitimate users[2].**

All access points to, and features on, the National Cycle Network, will be designed using the 'least restrictive' principle.

This will include designing for full access for getting onto and off the Network, as well as travelling along it.

The principle will apply to structural restrictions such as steps, stairs, gradients, speed bumps, headroom obstructions, as well as access controls.

This will require us to take a very firm line on accessibility and insist that all National Cycle Network routes are fully accessible to all legitimate users.

However we accept that some routes will have in built physical constraints that mean they are not fully accessible for some users – canal towpaths for example, where full width may not be available, or steep slopes may be present.

There may also be sections where there is a proven, evidenced history of anti-social behaviour that may require physical barriers and access controls that prevent, or deter, such behaviour - in particular illegal motorbike use.

In all cases full information and barrier-free alternative routes should be provided, both on route planning tools (i.e. maps, guides and websites) as well as on the ground to ensure that we are not discriminating against any user groups.

2   **We will make sure that all activity is in line with current Government guidance.**

The most recent Department for Transport guidance for England, the Welsh Active Travel Act Design Guidance, Cycling by Design, Scotland and the London Cycling Design Standards all strongly reinforce and support the creation of accessible infrastructure and advise against the use of barriers.

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[2] Making the whole of the National Cycle Network fully accessible is, along with improving safety, one of the two main priorities for the future of the Network as outlined in the 2018 Paths for Everyone Report.

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For example the Department for Transport Gear Change/LTN1/20 documents, released in July 2020, include the following statements:

+ Cycle infrastructure should be accessible to everyone from 8 to 80 and beyond: it should be planned and designed for everyone.

+ Access control measures, such as chicane barriers and dismount signs, should not be used.

Our approach will be to bring the entire Network up to the standards recommended in these guidance documents.

3 **We will use our role as custodians of the Network to help all parties work collaboratively to find solutions:**

+ We will share all of our information on Network barriers and any design guidance we develop.

+ We will identify, and add to, the best available evidence in relation to anti-social behavior and the impact of barrier removal.

+ We will provide templates, examples and case studies to help with the decision making and risk assessment processes.

+ We will build on the collaborative Paths for Everyone ethos, working closely and transparently with user groups, partners, stakeholders and landowners.

+ We will work with others to influence policy at a senior level and raise the profile of the discrimination caused by restrictive barriers.

+ We will enable and empower our volunteers and community groups to become champions for positive change relating to accessibility on the Network.

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The activity we will undertake

Get our own house in order

1. Remove or redesign the 700 barriers on our own land as a top priority, setting a strong precedent for full accessibility.[3]

2. Use our land as the focal point for the creation of longer fully accessible 'corridors' and end-to-end routes that enable useful journeys.

3. Concentrate on making the most popular traffic-free routes fully accessible, building on high profile examples such as National Route 754 along the Forth, Clyde and Union Canals in central Scotland, where we have removed 99 restrictive barriers.

4. Maintain an up to date inventory of the status of all barriers[4] and the accessibility of all routes on the Network, and make this information publicly available via an accessibility map.

Prioritise work with proactive partners

5. Work with willing and co-operative local authority partners and other key landowning agencies to prioritise accessibility on maximum impact routes and develop exemplars.

6. Seek and secure dedicated long-term funding for barrier removal and redesign and prioritise its use for maximum impact.

7. Where possible, work with targeted communities to maximise the impact of our work in priority cities and towns.

8. Identify and develop fully accessible urban – rural connector routes to help the most deprived groups access greenspace (e.g. Leeds-Liverpool canal, Lea Valley Trail, Spen Valley Greenway).

Enable good decision making and design

9. Signpost to the latest design guidance and Government best practice, and feed this through into product design and training.

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[3] We have committed to making 80% of Sustrans owned sections 'Very Good' by 2025 and this will include no barriers to continuous travel (PfE-02-Y5).

[4] We are already in the process of auditing the Network to capture accurate information on the location and dimensions of all barriers.

10 Undertake research on the impact of barrier removal, on the ability for under-represented groups to use the Network and collate evidence on changes to levels of anti-social behavior and motorbike abuse where barriers are removed.

11 Share information and techniques to enable 'reasonable' evidence based decision making on barriers, including clarifying legal obligations and providing Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) templates and case studies of successful interventions.

12 Develop a mechanism for removing or reclassifying routes that do not meet Government best practice guidance and the National Cycle Network quality standards.

What we will stop doing

1 **STOP** allowing new barriers to be installed on sections of route on land that we own or control.

2 **STOP** addressing barriers on a one-by-one basis, but instead look for route, corridor and area-wide approaches.

3 **STOP** restricting access to the best and most popular routes.

4 **STOP** promoting sections of Network that are inaccessible, especially where they include obsolete, ineffective and unnecessary barriers.

Photo 4: Restrictive barriers are inconvenient to all, but impossible for many.
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Who we need to work with

Land owners

Including Canal and Rivers Trust, Scottish Canals, National Trust, National Trust for Scotland, Network Rail, Forestry England, Forestry and Land Scotland, National Resources Wales, Forest Service Northern Ireland, etc.

Local authority representatives at different levels – officers, executive, elected members, Highways Authorities and Planning Departments.

+ **Focus on** understanding and meeting Equality Act 2010 and Public Sector Equality Duty obligations and evidencing decisions made.

Police and law enforcement agencies

Police Crime Prevention Initiatives, Designing Out Crime Officers, off-road and community policing units, local beat officers.

+ **Focus on** - alternative prevention of crime and anti-social behavior policies, identifying resources for focused intensive policing of routes, supporting community initiatives to monitor routes and report crime, provision of alternative venues for motorbikes, use of CCTV as a deterrent and monitoring tool.

Sustrans volunteers

Sustrans volunteers act as key enablers in driving, delivering and sustaining change within their communities[5].

Many will be involved in collecting up-to-date information regarding barriers and restrictions on the Network.

+ **Focus on** – keeping volunteers informed and involved, as well as providing them with a suite of resources so they can support and mobilise accessibility improvements on their local sections of Network.

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[5] Sustrans Volunteer Strategy

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User groups

Including Wheels for Wellbeing, Transport for All, Beyond the Bicycle, Disabled Ramblers, Cycling Projects, British Horse Society, Mobility Access Committee Scotland, RNIB and local accessibility and adaptive cycling groups.

We have an existing **UK working group** including some of these stakeholders, and together we have already made significant progress on highlighting the need for barrier removal and identifying solutions.

+ **Focus on** – building an alliance focused on improving access to routes, continuing to work closely together to deliver real change. ensuring designs and actions really do meet the needs of all users

Photo 5: Working together is vital to ensure different user needs are considered and respected ©2019, British Horse Society, all rights reserved

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Local residents and community groups

+ **Focus on** – developing effective consultation tools and techniques to work with and involve those local residents and communities most likely to be impacted by the changes.

Designers and manufacturers

The people designing routes and the companies developing and supplying materials and products for use in the public domain.

+ **Focus on** – developing new approaches to route design including routes that are overlooked by adjacent housing/businesses, have good street lighting, clear access/egress points and sealed surfacing less conducive to motorbikes.

    Addressing issues such as user safety when routes join or cross roads and livestock control.

    Work with barrier manufacturers to design and market Equality Act 2010 and Government best practice design compliant access control solutions.

Government departments

Department for Transport (in particular Active Travel England), Transport Scotland, Transport for Wales and Transport Northern Ireland.

+ **Focus on** – advocating for policy changes and enforcement of government guidelines via funding provision and other mechanisms.

    Highlighting the role of cycling and walking in helping to meet national and local climate change and air quality targets

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Cost

We are using early schemes to build our understanding of the cost of removing and redesigning barriers and other restrictions.

We know that costs differ hugely depending upon the location (many are remote or in terrain that is difficult to access), what needs to be removed, the complexity of any replacement feature and the level of consultation, engagement and monitoring required.

Capital costs will range from the very low cost (removing a portion of an obsolete gate on land that we own) to the very expensive (replacing a narrow bridge with an accessible substitute on a hard-to-reach disused railway line).

For each barrier or restriction we need to include the design work, preparing access to the location, removal of the existing barrier or restriction, installation of a replacement, making good of surfaces and approaches, and updating the signage.

Photo 6: Narrow bridge is replaced by a wide, accessible alternative on National Route 2 at Marsh Mills, Devon © Sustrans 2020

In many cases, especially areas that have a history of illegal motorbike use and anti-social behaviour, we will also need to factor in the cost of consulting with local residents, the police, local authorities, user groups and others to ensure that the solutions we are proposing are appropriate and have community support.

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Experience to date suggests that the design and physical works average at approx. £2,000 per barrier/restriction.

However we need to allocate up to **£5,000 per barrier (in total)** to allow for staff time/revenue to carry out the required community consultation as well as monitoring and evaluation tasks.

Allowing for £5,000 for each of the 16,000 barriers on the Network results in a programme of work with a value of approximately **£80 million** over 20 years.

Photo 7: Accessible infrastructure can be enjoyed by everyone - Cycling Without Age
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