

Land Reform Review Group

Call for Evidence

January 2012

About Sustrans

Sustrans makes smarter travel choices possible, desirable and inevitable. We're a leading UK charity enabling people to travel by foot, bike or public transport for more of the journeys we make every day. We work with families, communities, policy-makers and partner organisations so that people are able to choose healthier, cleaner and cheaper journeys, with better places and spaces to move through and live in.

It's time we all began making smarter travel choices. Make your move and support Sustrans today.
www.sustrans.org.uk

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1 Background information

Sustrans welcomes the opportunity to provide written evidence to the Land Reform Review Group. Sustrans is a leading UK charity enabling people to travel by foot, bicycle or public transport for more of the journeys we make everyday. We work with families, communities, policy-makers and partner organisations so that people are able to choose healthier, cleaner and cheaper journeys, with better place and spaces to move through and live in.

2 Sustrans' vision for the National Cycle Network in Scotland

A key aspect of Sustrans' work is the National Cycle Network (hereafter referred to as 'the Network'). The Network consists of a planned, mapped and signed series of quiet rural roads, traffic calmed urban streets and traffic-free paths (see adjacent map). In Scotland, the network currently extends to just under 2,000 miles and in 2011 carried 35 million trips, contributing an estimated £100 million to the Scottish economy through construction, maintenance and spending by users and over £65 million in health benefits.

The Network is maintained by a partnership of different bodies including Local Authorities, National Parks, Scottish Canals, Forestry Commission Scotland and Sustrans. Sustrans owns/leases over 300 miles of paths.

Sustrans' land holdings are managed by three estate staff together with a network of over 400 Volunteers, comprising members of the public who donate their time to supporting the charity.

Sustrans and the Scottish Government, through its delivery agency Transport Scotland, are committed to extending the Network to realise the vision set out in the National Cycling Action Plan for 10% of all trips to be by bicycle by 2020.



3 Barriers to achieving this vision

Extension of the Network is often a complex process given that cycle routes are linear in nature and therefore pass through a large number of landholdings.

In general, Local Authorities develop short sections, also called 'Community Links', of the Network themselves with Sustrans providing funding via Transport Scotland. More complex sections of the Network are usually progressed by Sustrans leading a partnership of different bodies with Sustrans leading land negotiations, proposing designs and seeking design approval from the relevant authorities.

Problems can arise when land owners/managers fail to agree to the construction of a new section of the Network or simply refuse to discuss the potential for the network to cross their land. Indeed, a lack of cooperation by just one land owner/manager can lead to an entire route being diverted on a more circuitous and usually obscure route. This can hinder the pace of development, stop local people connecting easily to the Network and result in unnecessary increased costs to Sustrans and therefore to Scotland plc.

4 Why should this situation be changed?

Sustrans considers that further development of the Network in Scotland would bring a wide array of benefits as outlined below.

A sustainable Scotland: In order for Scotland to have a truly sustainable transport network, it is essential that viable alternatives to private car usage are provided. At present half of all journeys undertaken in Scotland are less than 2 miles long, yet the car is used for 64% of all journeys. Therefore, it is clear that there is significant potential for more journeys to be made by bicycle in Scotland and that a comprehensive, dedicated cycle network throughout the country would help to achieve this aim.

Health benefits: 63% of Scottish adults and 29% of children do not meet the minimum recommended levels of physical activity. Consequently, levels of adult and childhood obesity are increasing. In 2008, 26.8% of adults in Scotland were obese and 65.1% were overweight; for children the corresponding rates were 15.1% and 31.7%. Being obese or overweight can increase the risk of developing a range of serious diseases, such as type 2 diabetes, hypertension, heart disease and some cancers. In 2010, NHS Scotland estimated that obesity cost its services £450 million a year. NHS Scotland has predicted that by 2030 adult obesity in Scotland could reach over 40%. This poses a serious threat to the NHS in terms of costs. By making simple lifestyle changes, such as cycling to work instead of driving the car, people can increase their levels of physical activity and enjoy the many health benefits. Sustrans considers that it is important to spend more on prevention, therefore leading to the need for less to be spent on treatment of the effects of obesity in years to come. Further extension of the Network would help in achieving this aim by providing people with safe cycle routes which would encourage them to cycle more frequently. Using the World Health Organisation's Health Economic Assessment Tool (HEAT) for cycling and walking, it is estimated that the Network currently contributes £65 million in annual health benefits to Scotland.

Tourism benefits: The development of a comprehensive network of cycle routes would be a major tourist attraction for Scotland. Many people already visit Scotland to take in the spectacular scenery by bicycle and this number would undoubtedly increase if more dedicated routes were constructed. It is especially important for Scotland to further develop its tourism sector in the current economic climate in order to build resilience against any further economic downturns. Sustrans estimates that the Network currently contributes £100 million to the Scottish economy each year and with its continued development this figure should increase further in the future.

Job creation: Significant employment opportunities would arise from the construction of the NCN. Evidence indicates that cycling construction projects directly benefit small-medium sized local businesses in Scotland. For example, small civil engineering contractors and DLOs throughout Scotland benefited from a £40 million spend via the Sustrans and Cycling, Walking and Safer Streets (CWSS) funding mechanism. Many of these contractors developed new skills and small farmers benefited from increased spending on maintenance of the Network in remote areas. Therefore, further extension of the Network would bring employment benefits across Scotland for local firms.

Revitalising communities: Sustrans considers that extending cycle routes throughout Scotland would help link the places people live in with the places that they want to get to. This would help to increase their sense of place and belonging to a community. People would be encouraged to cycle more for everyday journeys as they would be better connected with local services, workplaces and schools.

Greenhouse gas emissions reductions: After power generation, road transport is the second largest single source of CO₂ in Scotland. Total transport emissions in 2010, including international aviation and shipping, amounted to 13.2 MtCO₂e. The majority of this was from road transport (9.4 MtCO₂e). Therefore, it is clear that Scotland must take action to reduce emissions from transport and Sustrans proposes that an effective way to do this is to replace short journeys ordinarily made by car with

walking and cycling. Extending and maintaining the National Cycle Network is a key way to encourage people to change their travel preferences and help reduce emissions.

5 How to remove the barriers

One of the main barriers to continued development of cycle routes throughout rural Scotland in particular, but also in urban areas too, is opposition by certain land owners/managers. Such opposition can be suggested in terms of protecting privacy or concerns over security, but may often be a simple refusal to discuss any change to land use.

It is particularly awkward when Sustrans finds itself drawn into ancient grudges, misunderstandings and ill-feelings between neighbours, often villagers and land owners/managers. This can lead to a land owner/manager denying their neighbours access to a path purely on the basis of personal rather than practical reasons. This can happen despite, or in spite, of Sustrans presenting plans, being willing to negotiate and recompense land owners/managers with money or accommodation works.

It can be the case that along one section of a proposed path Sustrans encounters a land owner/manager who is happy to accommodate a path that they clearly view as a 'good thing', another that wants to negotiate a fiscal return, which of course is their right and which we are happy to do, and another that refuses to entertain any notion of any kind of development on their land, irrespective of its merits, or local or national significance.

Whilst it is the case that compulsory purchase orders are used for road construction, it is seldom the case that they are used for cycle and walking paths. This is generally because under the compulsory purchase power legislation it is always the case that an alternative to such a path can be found, however circuitous, remote from local housing, hilly or costly it may be. Sustrans considers that if a development is of significant public interest, both locally and nationally, it should be possible to override individual property rights where privacy, security or economic rights are not pressing, just as is the case for road developments, and that path construction should be allowed to proceed.

Obviously, in the first instance, and as is the case at the moment, every effort would be made to buy or lease the required land by agreement. However, if this cannot be achieved in a reasonable timeframe or at a reasonable cost, we consider that compulsory purchase powers should kick in and that they should be able to be exercised with the same vigour as with road building. Without the power to issue compulsory purchase orders, Sustrans is basically operating at the whim of land owners/managers, hoping to win their good will. If a land owner/manager refuses to cooperate with Sustrans on developing the Network, they can effectively stop a route from proceeding through its preferred location. Much time and effort goes into the preparation of plans for potential cycle routes and it causes significant frustration when they are blocked by one party, even though in many cases the plans have widespread local public support.

By changing the legislation around compulsory purchase powers, to make path building on a par with road building in terms of setting a direct and convenient route, this situation could be avoided in the future.

6 Conclusion

In conclusion, Sustrans trusts that the members of the Land Reform Review Group will take into consideration the points outlined in this response. We consider that by changing the legislation around compulsory purchase orders, it will be possible to further extend the NCN in Scotland and the public will be able to reap the benefits of doing so.