

INFORMATION ON THE VALUE OF MULTI-USER TRACKS

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS:

Why are multi user tracks needed?

The **British Horse Society** (BHS), together with the membership of its Affiliated Riding Clubs and Bridleway Groups, is the largest and most influential equestrian charity in the UK. The BHS represents the interests of the 4.3 million people in the UK who ride or who drive horse-drawn vehicles working for safer on- and off-road riding and carriage driving through an improved public rights of way network, and seeks to create new opportunities of lawful off-road riding and carriage driving, and safer use of our roads by all road users. It works in partnership with other user groups including Sustrans, local and central government, to make rights of way and other access areas useful and open to all, and our roads safer for all users.

As the BHS records: 'Horse riders in England currently only have access to 22 percent of public rights of way and horse-drawn vehicle drivers only five percent and those in Wales only have access to 21 percent of public rights of way and horse-drawn vehicle drivers only six percent. Many rights of way are now disconnected from each other because the roads that should connect them are no longer safe for equestrians to use due to the speed and volume of motorised traffic on them, leaving many equestrians without a safe local route to use.

Who are the riders?

According to the General Household Survey:

- Horse riding is a minority sport with an adult participation rate of 1% for regular riders and 3% for occasional riders
- 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 significant core of disabled people whose participation rate and frequency of participation is equal to that of the population as a whole.

The General Household Survey (GHS) is a continuous survey which has been running since 1971 and is based each year on a sample of the general population resident in private, that is, non-institutional, households in Great Britain. Since 1971, the GHS has included questions on population and fertility, family and household information, housing, health employment and education. In so doing, it provides a unique opportunity to examine the inter-relationship between these important areas of social policy and to monitor changes in their associations over time. The survey is widely used by central government as a source of background information for decisions on resource allocation, in developing household projection techniques and national population projections. It is also widely used by a wide range of health professionals, and by researchers and secondary analysis with an interest in social policy and demographic issues.

There are 1.41 million adults who take part in horse riding at least once per year of whom 972,900 (69%) are women and 437,100 (31%) are men. Statistics from the British Horse Society show that the society has over 70,000 members through Great Britain and approximately 90% of these are women.

According to **Sport England** "There continues to be an upwards trend in once a week participation among people with a long term limiting disability, illness or infirmity, this group now representing 12% of all "once a week" horseriders." (*Sport England funding announcement press release 17th December 2012*)

Again, Sport England states "We want to see more people riding in the countryside, on bridlepaths, in urban areas, riding schools, clubs, colleges and livery yards. In doing so we will pay particular attention to young people between the ages of 14-25 as well as those with disabilities and those with a prodigious talent."

Concerns that are raised re multi-user tracks:

Are multi-use tracks safe?

What is the Government's view?

"Unless there are good and specific reasons not to expressly allow horse riders to use such routes, local authorities should take steps to accommodate them. Local authorities should be making the most of their off-road networks through integration of use. Multi-user routes have been shown to be readily adopted and well appreciated by local people. Where they are done well they bolster community cohesion and create a better understanding between users.

Horse riders are particularly vulnerable road users, and cycle routes can provide appropriate and important opportunities to avoid busy roads. There is potential for conflict in any situation where people share a public space, but the possibility of conflict is not reason enough to disregard ridden access; actual conflict could be resolved and any misplaced concerns reduced over time."

Richard Benyon MP, Minister for Natural Environment and Fisheries:

(Letter dated 14th June 2011, in response to Anne Main MP, circulated to all Local Access Forums and County Councils.)

The Countryside Agency used a research team comprising Professor David Uzzell, Rachel Leach, and Laura Hunt of Surrey University's Department of Psychology, along with Dr Neil Ravenscroft and Gill Rogers of Brighton University's Chelsea School to investigate the issue. Full details of the methodology and outcomes can be found in its research notes '*How people interact on off-road routes: Phase II*' (CRN 69). Overall 3,175 observations of route users were made, recording 4,973 people, drawing on 168 hours of video recordings. Very few respondents had any personal experience of accidents or other incidents.

The summary concludes:

'For cyclists, pedestrians, horse riders and others, shared use routes are an increasingly important resource, providing sustainable transport links and car-free travel to and from the wider countryside.

That they are safe, and are perceived to be safe, is a key factor in their promotion, though there is a view that when different users (e.g. cyclists and walkers) share routes, it leads to conflict. However, this research found that conflict is a rare occurrence. When it occurs, structural issues (e.g. width and maintenance of the route) are important factors. Route owners/managers should be developing within user groups a 'culture of thoughtful and tolerant use'. A Code of Conduct should focus on the rights and responsibilities of all user groups in order to reduce ambiguities concerning issues such as right of way, passing etiquette, the meaning of bells, control of dogs, and the speeds that should be adopted for safety and courtesy. The policing of shared routes would ensure that users know they are actively managed. Shared use routes should have information panels at their access points detailing the Code of Conduct as well as the contact person in the responsible agency for maintaining the route and to whom comments, complaints and reports of conflict should be directed.'

Government-sponsored reports from The University of Surrey (2000 & 2002)

'*How People React on Off Road Routes Phase I and Phase II*' confirm that conflict of any sort is very rare on shared use tracks. Horse riders, joggers and the disabled, all minority users (classed as "others" in the report) are the least likely to be involved in any conflict on non-motorised shared routes.

Suggestions have been made that cycle tracks that are used as commuter routes are unsuitable for horse riders. However, the majority of horse-riders and walkers use busy cycle tracks outside commuting hours and all research shows that common sense prevails and use is self-regulating, i.e. those wishing to use a route for leisure purposes do not use such a route during commuting hours. Research also shows that walkers are at the most, although minimal, risk from speeding cyclists.

What does Sustrans think?

Phil Jones Associates Ltd for Sustrans (*The Merits of Segregated and Non-Segregated Traffic- Free Paths - A Literature-Based Review December 2008, Project Code 553*) noted that: "Our review of the research available has confirmed that the risk of actual conflict on traffic-free paths is generally low"

"Horses automatically have access to all of the Network which is on the public highway, generally quiet roads, restricted byways and bridleways. Of the 965 kilometres of the National Cycle Network (NCN) Sustrans actually owns, there is fewer than 80 kilometres which horses aren't able to use, and that's mostly because the strip of land in our ownership is either too narrow, or because we haven't developed a route on that land yet. Where the NCN runs over land that is not in Sustrans ownership then the landowner determines whether horses can use the path. Where a route follows the course of a bridleway or restricted byway there is a statutory obligation to provide a route that is available for walkers, horses and cyclists to use and in developing the NCN we take this into account."

What is policy in other local authorities?

Bath & North East Somerset Council

Minutes of the Cabinet Meeting of 5th November 2008:

"On Tuesday 20th November 2007 the Enterprise & Economic Development Overview & Scrutiny (O&S) Panel reviewed the outcome of the previous year's trial of shared use on existing cycle tracks. Having announced the trial 'a resounding success', it was recommended that in future multi-use continued on the Chew Valley Lake cycle path and the Colliers Way cycle path. It was also recommended that a further 12 month multi-use trial period should be assigned to the routes of the Norton Radstock Greenway and the Bristol and Bath Railway Path. The further year's trial has now ended and all users have shared these paths without incident."

Councillor Paul Crossley

"The Council's existing policy is of shared access for all non-motorised users on all new cycle paths. This was recommended by the O&S Panel in 2005 and endorsed by the whole Council. The Council's Local Transport Plan Policy encourages shared use of new cycle paths and this is supported by our Rights of Way Improvement Plan."

Councillor Charles Gerrish

Somerset County Council

Rights of Way Improvement Plan(adopted November 2006)

"Policy Statement 4.1: When improving PRoW or creating new PRoW, an inclusive approach will be taken from the outset, that wherever possible, the routes will be accessible to equestrians, cyclists, walkers and those with visual and mobility impairments"(page 29)

What is the British Horse Society's view?

"Multi-user paths represent best value for everyone – users and taxpayers. Research demonstrates that multi-user paths present no unacceptable risk to users. Bridleways of all widths, gradients, sightlines and surfaces have been shared by walkers, horse riders and cyclists since 1968."

“The BHS maintains that horse riders, walkers and cyclists can comfortably pass on a route that has a width of 3m and all can happily coexist on narrower routes with one party giving way to the other as appropriate. Many public bridleways and permissive routes are significantly narrower than 3m, yet reports of it being a problem are very rare; rather it can create a greater feeling of co-operation and tolerance between users.”

In particular, the BHS argues for the inclusion of equestrians on cycle routes as:

- Equestrians are vulnerable road users and every available opportunity should be taken to provide safer off-road access for them just as it is for walkers and cyclists
- Providing routes that cater for all non-motorised vulnerable road users represents best value
- Equestrians, walkers and cyclists coexist very well on bridleways, restricted byways and byways in England and Wales, and on routes in Scotland. There is therefore no cogent reason why this should not happen on cycle tracks
- The lack of a 3m width should not automatically mean that equestrians should not be provided, for on a cycle route. There are many bridleways that are less than 3m and they are shared by riders, cyclists and walkers without problems
- Surfacing should not normally be a reason for not providing for use by all non-motorised users
- All local authorities should implement a general presumption to permit equestrians to use cycle routes along with walkers and cyclists
- Equestrians tend to avoid times when a cycle route is busy.

British Horse Society: especially Note on Cycle Routes issued 12th October 2011

How will such developments contribute to local or national policy?

They will increase the opportunities for healthy exercise, especially by women and girls, and help meet Gloucestershire's commitments to a healthy population engaged in sport and to equality of opportunity and access.

Devon County Council recognised this characteristic:

“Devon County Council should acknowledge that there is a very important equity dimension to horse riding which is often overlooked. Unlike walking and cycling which are both dominated by male adults, horse riding is unique in that the majority of its participants are women and children.”

(Devon County Council commissioned research 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 by 2007. The aim of this research was to produce an objective review of multi-use routes to inform the county policy. A report by Simon Shibli, Keith Harrison, Maxine Barlow and Craig Mulder was accordingly published in May 2004. In July 2005 Devon then published “*Improving Devon's Environment - Rights of Way Improvement Plan 2005*”.)

What are the health benefits?

British Horse Society: The health benefits of horse riding in the UK were investigated by the *University of Brighton and Plumpton College* for the *British Horse Society* in *The Health Benefits of Horse Riding in the UK (2011)*.

Sport England UK have adopted a threshold value for the contribution of sport to meeting Government guidelines on the recommended intensity and frequency of exercise that is likely to achieve physical health benefits. The threshold value measures the degree to which an individual participates in sport of moderate intensity activity for at least 30 minutes or more, three times a week. The research, therefore, assessed whether horse riding can be classified as a moderate intensity exercise and examined the frequency with which individuals take part

The research also examined the psychological and social benefits of horse riding. Reliable existing evidence indicates that physical exercise produces well-being benefits linked to social interactions and changes in mood, anxiety, self esteem and other personal emotions.

Two scientific exercise testing trials were undertaken to analyse the physical exercise intensity of recreational horse riding using validated scientific measurements of energy expended and current definitions of what constitutes moderate intensity exercise in terms of energy expenditure measured in metabolic equivalents (METs).

The first trial involved 17 participants cycling in a laboratory to assess their aerobic fitness levels. Measurements were also taken of their descriptive anthropometric characteristics.

In the second trial the same 17 participants rode a horse for 45 minutes at the Plumpton College equestrian centre following a protocol that replicated the pattern of a typical riding lesson.

A questionnaire survey was undertaken of 1,248 horse riders. The quantitative and qualitative data gathered by the questionnaire allowed an analysis of the respondents' self reported measures of exercise intensity and frequency, and their perceptions of the social and psychological benefits of horse riding.

Briefly, the findings were that:

- i) Horse riding and activities associated with horse riding, such as mucking out, expend sufficient energy to be classed as moderate intensity exercise.
- ii) Regular periods of trotting in a riding session may enhance the energy expended and associated health benefits.
- iii) More than two thirds (68 percent) of questionnaire respondents participate in horse riding and associated activities for 30 minutes or more at least three times a week.
- iv) Sport England estimate that such a level of sporting activity will help an individual achieve or exceed the government's recommended minimum level of physical activity.
- v) A range of evidence indicates the vast majority (90 percent plus) of horse riders are female and more than a third (37 percent) of the female riders who took part in the survey were above 45 years of age. Horse riding is especially well placed to play a valuable role in initiatives to encourage increased physical activity amongst women of all ages.

vi) Amongst the horse riders who took part in the survey, 39 percent had taken no other form of physical activity in the last four weeks. This highlights the importance of riding to these people, who might otherwise be sedentary.

vii) Horse riders with a long-standing illness or disability who took part in the survey are able to undertake horse riding and associated activities at the same self-reported level of frequency and physical intensity as those without such an illness or disability.

In more detail, it explained: "The scientific trials indicated general horse riding energy expenditure was equivalent to 3.7 METs and trotting equated to approximately 5.0 METs. These levels are clearly within the moderate intensity exercise band recommended by the UK's ABC of Physical Activity for Health guidelines that considers moderate intensity to be typically characterized as between three-six METs. The national compendium of physical activities categorises energy expenditures for different recreational physical activities and reports levels of four METs for general horse riding and 6.5 METs for trotting, which are similar to those obtained in the scientific trials.

The compendium also reports that the energy expenditure for saddling and grooming was 3.5 METs which is in the moderate intensity band

More than two thirds (68 percent) of questionnaire respondents achieved the government guidelines for exercise intensity and frequency (30 minutes for three times a week or more at moderate intensity) from horse riding and associated activities alone. Of these respondents 69 percent achieved this level of intensity and frequency through horse riding and the other 21 percent did so through associated activities such as mucking out and grooming.

Women have been identified in government studies as a social group with relatively low levels of participation in physical activity. Some 93 percent of questionnaire respondents were women and 49 percent of female respondents were aged 45 or above. These are comparable figures to a major Sport England survey which found that 90 percent of those participating in equestrianism are women and 37 percent of the female participants in equestrianism are aged 45 or above. The gender and age profile of equestrianism is not matched by any other sport in the UK.

Thirty nine percent of questionnaire respondents indicated that horse riding was the only form of physical activity in which they had participated during the last four weeks. These respondents, if they did not ride, would be sedentary people unless they changed their exercise habits, thus stressing the importance of horse riding for these individuals.

Qualitative data obtained in the questionnaire suggests that for some respondents with long-standing illnesses or disability, horse riding had actually improved their physical or mental condition."

The National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) issued Public Health Guidance 8 in January 2008 to "offer the first national evidence-based recommendations on how to improve the physical environment to encourage physical activity."

Two of its recommendations are relevant to the consideration of multi-user tracks and bridleways:

"Recommendation 3:

Who should take action?

- Planning and transport agencies, including regional and local authorities.

What action should they take?

- Plan and provide a comprehensive network of routes for walking, cycling and using other modes of transport involving physical activity. These routes should offer everyone (including people whose mobility is impaired) convenient, safe and attractive access to workplaces, homes, schools and other public facilities. (The latter includes shops, play and green areas and social destinations.) They should be built and maintained to a high standard.

Public open spaces

Recommendation 4

Who should take action?

- Designers and managers of public open spaces, paths and rights of way (including coastal, forest and riverside paths and canal towpaths).
- Planning and transport agencies including regional and local authorities.

What action should they take?

- Ensure public open spaces and public paths can be reached on foot, by bicycle and using other modes of transport involving physical activity. They should also be accessible by public transport.
- Ensure public open spaces and public paths are maintained to a high standard. They should be safe, attractive and welcoming to everyone.”

What are the psychological and social benefits?

The BHS leaflet summarising the health benefits of riding in the UK concluded:

- Horse riding stimulates mainly positive psychological feelings.
- Horse riders are strongly motivated to take part in riding by the sense of well-being they gain from interacting with horses. This important positive psychological interaction with an animal occurs in a very few sports.
- Being outdoors and in contact with nature is an important motivation for the vast majority of horse riders.
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In more detail, it explained: “More than 80 percent of questionnaire respondents reported that horse riding made them feel ‘quite a lot’ or ‘extremely’ cheerful, relaxed, happy or active. Qualitative data suggests that horse riding can play a role in managing negative feelings relating to anxiety and depression. The experience of these psychological benefits amongst questionnaire respondents was not influenced by the frequency of participation in horse riding and most psychological benefits were experienced by riders who did not participate regularly.

Asked to rate different motivations for going horse riding 82 percent of questionnaire respondents rated the motivation of ‘interaction with horses’ as either ‘very important’ or ‘extremely important’. No other motivation received such a high importance rating. Existing evidence suggests that companion animals can provide owners with certain psychological benefits. These findings suggest that the interaction with horses may be very positive psychologically for horse riders.

More than 80 percent of questionnaire respondents rated the motivations ‘contact with nature’ and ‘scenery and views’ ‘important’, ‘very important’ or ‘extremely important’. Some personal development motivations identified as important by respondents included ‘escape’, ‘develop skills’, ‘challenge myself’, ‘experience excitement’, ‘to be physically active’ and ‘to relax’. Participation in horse riding provides a range of psychological and social benefits, some of which are particular to

the interaction with animals and nature and therefore would not be gained from other forms of sporting activity.”

At the University of Essex, researchers J. Pretty, J. Peacock, R. Hine, M. Sellens, N. South & M. Griffin of the Departments of Biological Sciences and Sociology produced a report: ***Green Exercise in the UK Countryside: Effects on Health and Psychological Well-Being, and Implications for Policy and Planning.***

The abstract summarises their findings:

“There is evidence that contact with the natural environment and green space promotes good health. It is also well known that participation in regular physical activity generates physical and psychological health benefits. The authors have hypothesised that ‘green exercise’ will improve health and psychological well-being, yet few studies have quantified these effects. This study measured the effects of 10 green exercise case studies (including walking, cycling, horse-riding, fishing, canal-boating and conservation activities) in four regions of the UK on 263 participants. Even though these participants were generally an active and healthy group, it was found that green exercise led to a significant improvement in self-esteem and total mood disturbance (with anger-hostility, confusion-bewilderment, depression-dejection and tension-anxiety all improving post-activity). Self-esteem and mood were found not to be affected by the type, intensity or duration of the green exercise, as the results were similar for all 10 case studies. Thus all these activities generated mental health benefits, indicating the potential for a wider health and well-being dividend from green exercise. Green exercise thus has important implications for public and environmental health, and for a wide range of policy sectors.”

Its concluding comments note that:

“From the range of case studies examined for this research, the study concludes that green exercise generates mental health benefits regardless of the level of intensity, duration or type of green activity undertaken. Green exercise has important implications for public and environmental health. A fitter and emotionally more content population would clearly cost the economy less as well as reducing individual human suffering. In today’s world where sufferers of stress and mental illhealth are more commonplace, nature can act as a vital health resource.

Mental illhealth is already problematic in the UK with at least one in six individuals suffering at any one time. Depression and mixed anxiety are more commonplace, with incidence rising from 7.8% in 1993 to 9.2% in 2000. The associated public health costs are thus growing, with £3.8 billion of the NHS annual expenditure used in the treatment of mental illness and a further £0.68 billion used for personal social services expenditure. With the resulting costs incurred due to lost outputs, and the increased expenditure on the provision of care, the importance of regular access to nature is paramount. This research shows that improvements to mood and self-esteem can occur, and as depression and depression-related illness is estimated to become the most pronounced source of ill-health by 2020 (WHO, 2001), the need to encourage regular participation in green exercise activities becomes ever more important for addressing mental ill-health.

Obesity and related conditions already cost more in public health terms than smoking (Kenkel & Manning, 1999; Lang & Heasman, 2004), and will overtake

smoking as industrialised countries' largest source of mortality in a decade if current trends persist. Thus increasing support for and access to a wide range of green exercise activities for all sectors of society should produce substantial economic and public health benefits. There is an important challenge in identifying barriers and developing innovative solutions for all social groups, particularly those who feel excluded from green space."

The Trails Trust recognises the **social benefits** of use of multi user tracks in its aims "Access should be free and open to all whether young or old, disabled or fit, well off or socially disadvantaged. Access should be non discriminatory and multi user. Families and groups of friends often wish to walk, cycle and ride together"

In its October 2007 report *Creating Multi-user Public Rights of Way - A Guide for Local Groups 'The Case for an Inclusive Policy on Multi-user Paths throughout England and Wales'* it also says:

"We believe that Councils and Government should use public money to benefit the maximum number of user groups in line with Best Value, and not restrict use to individual user groups. Since 2003 we have succeeded in opening the majority of cycle paths in both Somerset and B&NES Council areas to equestrians. Previously these were only for cyclists and pedestrians."

What are the economic benefits?

Figures show 23,272 horses registered in Gloucestershire (2009) with an estimated £69,491,000 – nearly 70 million - going into the local economy annually, supporting feed suppliers, farriers, vets, farm diversification via livery yards, saddlers, horse transport, equine tourism and more. There are, for example, 184 registered farriers currently working within 30 miles of Cheltenham, while a quick online survey of livery yards and riding stables in Gloucestershire revealed over 90 establishments, not counting the small DIY liveries, specialist training centres, cross country courses and studs.

In October 2014's edition of *Cotswold Life*, George Barks of Stacks Property Search described the "lifestyle premium", the positive effect of riding facilities on property prices: "Location in relation to competitions and activities has a significant effect on value ... a most important factor is to be able to ride out safely from your yard especially with young children on ponies and to find a suitable network of bridlepaths."