

Linking People to the Landscape



The Benefits of Sustainable Travel in Countryside Recreation & Tourism

By Claire Sparkes & Chris Wood
for Widen the Choice, funded by
The East of England Development Agency



Widen the Choice



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Cover Picture

A guided walk on Halvergate Marshes, in the Norfolk Broads, organized by the Wherry Lines Community Rail Partnership, with which Widen the Choice works closely. The walks start and end at railway stations.

Picture: Chris Wood.

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When travel by car becomes more expensive and less viable due to rising fuel costs, there may be no sustainable travel network available for recreational travel in the countryside. Fewer people will then be able to reach and explore the countryside and take advantage of the benefits the countryside provides for their health. Local economies will suffer as tourism dries up and socially excluded groups of people will never get the chance to visit and experience the life-enhancing properties of the countryside.

Definitions and Acronyms

This table provides the meaning of a number of terms and acronyms used throughout this document.

Definitions	
Human environment	Man-made surroundings that provide the setting for human activity.
Landscape	An expanse of rural land encompassing natural and managed countryside.
Natural environment	All living and non-living things occurring naturally.
Public transport providers	Train operating companies, bus companies and local authorities that support public transport services.
Recreation	The expenditure of time in a manner designed for therapeutic refreshment of one's body or mind. Recreation is active for the participant, in a refreshing and diverting manner.
Sustainable transport/travel	Means of travel which have a smaller ecological footprint than the private car, for example: train, bus, walking, cycling and water transport.
Visitor destination	Somewhere a person goes for the purpose of recreation. This may be a nature reserve, historic property, country park, long distance trail, market town, area of open country or a protected landscape.
Acronyms	
AONB	Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty
CA	The Countryside Agency (now part of Natural England)
CRC	Commission for Rural Communities
CRP	Community Rail Partnership
DEFRA	Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
DfT	Department for Transport
EEDA	East of England Development Agency
GAA	Green Access Audit
LA	Local Authority
NE	Natural England
NEF	New Economics Foundation
NNR	National Nature Reserve
NT	The National Trust
RSPB	Royal Society for the Protection of Birds
RTPO	Rural Transport Partnership Officer
WtC	Widen the Choice

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Summary

The Impacts of Travel for Recreational Purposes

Travel for leisure and recreation has substantial impacts on the natural and human environment. These impacts are both wide-ranging and, in certain visitor hotspots, concentrated into relatively small areas of exceptional landscape. They are also mostly associated with the use of the private car. Very few people use any other transport option.

Climate change

Human-induced climate change is happening, and probably much faster than initially predicted. Because there is no single way of significantly reducing carbon emissions in the transport sector, a variety of measures are required to achieve a reduction in emissions across all forms of transport and all journey purposes, including recreation.

Biodiversity

Over the course of the last 100 years, over 100 species have been lost in the UK. As leisure travel by car increases, its impact is felt on some of our most fragile ecosystems. The countryside is under further pressure from the demand for more and improved roads and other infrastructure.

Air pollution

Particulates and nitrogen oxides, released into the atmosphere from fuel combustion, have a significant impact on air quality, both locally and on communities and ecosystems far from the pollution source, through acid deposition. Emissions affect vegetation and ecosystems, and human health.

Visual and noise pollution

A fundamental attraction of the countryside is its appearance, attractiveness and peaceful qualities. Visual pollution of the countryside includes signs and advertising, lighting, traffic and parked cars in villages and on small country roads, and an increased demand for local infrastructure.

Congestion

Congestion compounds the negative effects of travel by car. An increase in the volume of traffic, moving at slower speeds, produces more local air pollution, causes delays for local people, hastens the degradation of the rural road network, spoils the roads for walkers and cyclists (although higher traffic speeds are more dangerous) and decreases people's enjoyment of the countryside.

Road danger

Whilst it appears that rural roads are getting safer, the statistics hide the fact that people are put off walking and cycling because of the danger. This in turn makes roads more dangerous, whereas they become safer as numbers walking and cycling rise.

The Benefits of Sustainable Recreational Travel

The Economic Benefits

Sustainable travel helps capture money in the local economy. People travelling on foot, pedal cycle and public transport are more likely to spend their money in locally owned shops and facilities. They are unable to carry everything they need with them and consequently buy their food, refreshments and other necessities when and where they need them. These direct economic benefits increase inward investment into local communities and are improved when the number of visitors and the length of stay are increased. There is also a wider value to local communities and the regional and national economy from walking and cycling, with significant cross-sector benefits. Sustainable leisure travel benefits local economies in two ways. Firstly, it brings people who are new to countryside recreation out to villages, market towns and visitor destinations who will spend 'new' money. Secondly, it encourages people who would normally have gone into the countryside by car, to go by a sustainable means, and thus spend their money with local businesses.

Countryside visitors are crucial to the survival of local businesses, providing top-up trade to village shops, cafés, pubs and other community facilities.

The Health Benefits

Across the western world lifestyle illnesses are a major contribution to poor health. Physical inactivity is placing a catastrophic burden on society, leading to chronic disease and a lack of independence in the elderly. More children are becoming obese and inactive, and thus more likely to become obese and inactive adults. Even moderate activity can maintain the vitality of the body and prevent heart disease, diabetes, strokes, cancers, disabilities, depression, osteoporosis, anxiety and sleep problems. Without regular exercise, there is a steady decline in the function of the body, which eventually needs treatment and support from the NHS, and social care at considerable cost to the economy. The economic impact of the UK's poor health, due to physical inactivity, is approximately £8 billion, made up of the cost to the NHS, work absence and early mortality.

People need to get more active, in an enjoyable and easy way, so they want to come back for more.

Activities such as walking and cycling, as means of travel in and to the countryside, and as recreational activities in their own right, provide physical activity essential to health. Even low levels of participation can bring substantial benefits to people's health.

The Social Benefits

There is no equality of access to countryside recreation. Levels of participation in outdoor activities are highest amongst people with children aged 10 to 15, older independent couples and people with access to a car. The car is the main way people get to the countryside, so that people without cars do not often see the countryside as a realistic destination for them. Compounding this is the relative lack of good public transport serving the countryside. Despite a strong desire to participate in countryside recreation, disabled people, black and ethnic minorities, the young and residents of inner cities all face obstacles preventing them from using the countryside for recreation. In order for people from under-represented groups to enjoy the same levels of access to outdoor recreation as other people, sustainable transport and outdoor access projects need to be specifically designed to meet these groups' needs and to give them the confidence to enjoy the countryside.

Changing travel behaviour

People are currently committed to their cars. Few people in general perceive buses and trains to be an option for getting out into the countryside. Walking and cycling have become much less attractive as motor traffic has become faster and heavier, and as rural roads have been upgraded to suit. In order to really challenge travel behaviour, policy makers and transport operators are going to have to take an innovative approach to getting people to try a different way of getting about. Behaviour change is a complex and long-term process and there are no easy solutions, but if people are going to be persuaded out of their cars, work needs to begin on encouraging this change now.

When travel by car becomes more expensive and less viable due to rising fuel costs, there may be no sustainable travel network available for recreational travel in the countryside. Fewer people will be able to reach and explore the countryside and take advantage of the benefits the countryside provides for their health. Local economies could suffer as tourism dries up and socially excluded groups of people will never get the chance to visit and experience the life-enhancing properties of the countryside.



The National Trust's Wicken Fen Vision provides an exciting prospect for sustainable, active recreation on the Fenland doorstep of Cambridge. Wicken Lode. Picture: Chris Wood.

1 The Impacts of Travel for Recreational Purposes

Travel for recreational purposes has a substantial impact on the natural environment. A recent study completed on behalf of Natural England (Clifford, *et al.*, 2008) identified some of the impacts as falling into two main categories, those that impact on the natural environment and those that impact on the human environment. The following table provides a useful starting point for a discussion of the impacts of leisure travel.

Environmental impacts of leisure travel	Human impacts of leisure travel
Loss of and damage to biodiversity	Congestion
CO ₂ emissions	Noise pollution
A reduction in local air quality	Visual pollution
	Accidents and the perceived risk of accidents

Table: The environmental and human impacts of leisure travel (Clifford, *et al.*, 2008)

The impacts of travel for recreational purposes on the countryside are considerable. They are both wide-ranging and, in certain visitor hotspots, concentrated into relatively small areas of exceptional landscape.

These impacts are most widely associated with the use of the private car. The England Leisure Visits Survey 2005 (Research International, 2006) showed that the private car is, by far, the dominant means of transport by which people arrive at their visitor destination. In 2005, in England, a total of 3.6 billion leisure trips were made, of these 20% were to the countryside and 2% were to seaside or coastal destinations. In both cases, the private car or van was the main way in which people arrived at their destination (58% and 63% respectively). Very few people took any of the other transport options

The private car is, by far, the dominant means of transport for leisure travel.

available to them, such as the train, bus, coach, bike or taxi (Clifford, *et al.*, 2008).

The river Little Ouse near Santon Downham in Thetford Forest, well linked by footpaths to Brandon and Thetford.
Picture: Chris Wood.



Climate change

Climate change, due mainly to carbon emissions, is an overarching issue in any discussion of the impact of travel for recreational purposes. It is now widely accepted amongst decision-makers that human-induced climate change is indeed happening, and probably happening much faster than initially predicted. The UK has recently increased its goal of cutting greenhouse gas emissions from 60% of 1990 levels to 80% of 1990 levels by 2050 (Wintour, 2008), emphasising the urgency and scale of the challenges that climate change presents. The argument for reducing greenhouse gas emissions, specifically from leisure transport, is sometimes hard to make, as the proportion of emissions from this source is low compared to emissions from other types of journey. It can be argued that to make an impact on greenhouse gas emissions from transport it would be more pertinent to tackle commuting, air travel and freight. However, the greenhouse gas emission targets are going to be tough to achieve. Because there is no single way of significantly reducing carbon emissions in the transport sector, a variety of measures is required to achieve a reduction in emissions in the most cost-effective manner, across all transport modes and all journey purposes (DfT, 2008).

The current rhetoric predicts that low carbon technologies will be the key to meeting our greenhouse gas emission targets. However, these technologies do not yet exist and it is somewhat dangerous to count on them as the panacea for hitting our targets for greenhouse gas emissions (Commission for Rural Communities, 2008c). Indeed, it is predicted that their contribution to reducing emissions, whilst significant, would not even provide half the reduction necessary, compounded by the likely impact of recession in slowing the uptake of new, more efficient vehicles (Buchan, 2008).



Air travel is the most damaging impact of leisure globally. Awareness of this is growing, which, along with the increasing cost and difficulty of flying, is expected to lead to more people holidaying at home. This brings with it its own set of problems, as most of these holidays are likely to be taken by car.
Picture: Chris Wood.

A recent modelling exercise carried out on behalf of the Commission for Rural Communities (2008b) showed that inward tourism has a significant impact on the estimated transport-related carbon emissions of rural communities. In a demonstration market town community, much of the carbon footprint from travel falls outside the area, as travellers come to the town from dispersed origins. Through the modelling process, it was evident that even a small shift in people's means of travel could lead to a significant carbon saving. The study concluded that the only way to lower the carbon footprint of small rural communities, whilst continuing to support tourism and the local economy, was through a shift to public transport. As a result of the need to cut carbon emissions, the study predicted that rural areas that are close to towns will see an increase in weekend tourism. However, more remote communities, particularly those with no significant tourist attraction, will suffer, unless linked by linear attractions such as long-distance cycling, walking or equestrian routes.

Air pollution

Particulates and nitrogen oxides, released into the atmosphere from fuel combustion, can have a significant impact on local air quality, particularly in urban areas. Emissions also have a long-range impact on communities and ecosystems far from the pollution source through acid deposition. The impact of these emissions is felt by vegetation and ecosystems, but also by human health. Air pollution can have a serious and life-threatening impact on children, older people and those who have heart and lung conditions (Clifford *et al.*, 2008). It is important to note that, although most of the air pollution effects are felt in urban areas, many people travelling to recreational destinations in the region travel from and through urban areas. Thus, leisure travel to rural areas still impacts on air quality; even though the immediate vicinity of the destination may not be affected, other areas are, due to the need to get people there by private car.

Visual and noise pollution

A fundamental attraction of the countryside, to the people who visit it, is its appearance, attractiveness and peaceful qualities. These qualities combined contribute to the mental and physical well-being of people who live in and visit the countryside, and are central to the enjoyment people have when they are there. Visual pollution of the countryside includes excessive signage and advertising, light pollution at night, traffic and parked cars in small villages and on small country roads, and associated infrastructure. An increase in the use of the private car to get to destinations in the countryside can alter its fundamental qualities, such as sense of place and landscape character and quality (Clifford *et al.*, 2008). This affects visitor enjoyment negatively, especially in some of our highest-quality landscapes.

Biodiversity

Over the course of the last 100 years, over 100 species have been lost in the UK (DEFRA, 2008b). This is due to a variety of factors, such as the loss of ecological habitats, conversion of land for agriculture, the pollution of land, water and air, and climate change. As leisure travel by car increases, so its impact is felt in some of our more fragile ecosystems, such as in the Norfolk and Suffolk Broads, the Suffolk Coast and Heaths, the heathland of the Brecks, the wetlands of the Fens, and the Chiltern Hills. More leisure travel by car also puts more pressure on our countryside through demand for more roads, an upgrade of existing roads, pressure for more infrastructure, such as car parks, and the inconsiderate behaviour of visitors, such as parking on rural road verges (Clifford *et al.*, 2008).

Congestion

Congestion compounds the negative effects of travel by car. In fact, the Department for Transport (2000) has predicted that traffic growth and congestion on rural roads will surpass that on urban roads by 2010. An increase in the volume of traffic, moving at slower speeds, produces significantly more local air pollution. More congestion can have other effects too:

- local residents and people travelling for business experience more delays;
- local residents experience severance, where they cannot easily cross or walk along local roads;
- the rural road network suffers degradation;
- other road users, such as cyclists, walkers and horse riders, are increasingly inconvenienced by slow-moving traffic; concomitantly, increasing volumes of free-flowing traffic increase their vulnerability;
- there is a decrease in people's level of enjoyment of the countryside.

Road danger

Statistically, it seems that our rural roads are getting safer (Commission for Rural Communities, 2008a). In 2005, we were less likely to be killed or seriously injured than in 1994. However, the rate of reduction in casualties on our rural roads is slower than for other types of road. This is related to the fact that people drive at comparatively high speeds on them. This is a daunting prospect for the non-car user of rural roads, many of which are promoted for walking, cycling and riding.

Furthermore, it is important to note the difference between the statistics and what people actually experience on a day-to-day basis. According to the statistics, we may be less likely to die or be seriously injured, but this is in part because we are less likely to use our roads as walkers or cyclists because we are frightened to do so. In *Death on the Streets* (Davis, 1993), what we mean by 'safe' is thoroughly challenged. There is 'safe' meaning not posing a threat or a danger *to* others and 'safe' meaning being in a situation not exposed to danger or threat *from* others. Therefore, the extent to which a form of transport is dangerous can be understood as the extent to which the person using it is at risk from others, or as how much danger the person poses to others. In order to encourage people to travel by sustainable means, they need to feel and perceive the roads they are using as safe. It does not matter whether they are statistically less likely to get killed or seriously injured, if they do not perceive the roads to be safe, they will simply not use them, preferring to stay in the relative safety of their cars. The consequence of this is that people are less likely to walk and cycle on rural roads and so do not benefit from the effects of non-motorised, active travel. The fewer people who walk or cycle, the greater the chance of injury actually is, and the more people who walk or cycle, the safer roads become for them, as the behaviour of drivers changes (Jacobsen, 2003).

2 The Economic Benefits of Sustainable Travel for Recreational Purposes

Sustainable travel helps capture money in the local economy. People travelling on foot, pedal cycle and public transport are more likely to spend their money in locally owned shops and facilities. They are unable to carry everything they need with them and consequently buy their food, refreshments and other necessities when and where they need them. These direct economic benefits increase inward investment into local communities and are improved when the number of visitors and the length of stay are increased. The development of sustainable visitor travel can help increase the level of these economic benefits by increasing the number of people who take part in recreational activity, using more sustainable means of travel, so increasing the amount spent in local businesses and facilities. People who travel by car, on the other hand, are more likely to spend their money in the wider economy, bringing the things they need with them from home, or buying food and other such necessities from roadside shops, particularly service stations, and superstores.

The economic value of sustainable recreation

There is a very strong economic case for supporting sustainable travel for tourism and recreation. Substantial economic value comes from visitors using sustainable transport, benefitting local communities, and the regional and national economy. For example, Capita Symonds (2006) tried to set a financial value on the benefits walking (using local rights of way and the Hadrian's Wall National Trail) brought to a very small rural town, Brampton in Cumbria. The estimated amount of walking-related money potentially spent in Brampton in 2006 was £376,125, which supported between 10 and 15 full-time jobs in the area. Even in a small community, the economic impacts of walking are considerable.

Another, well-known study, commissioned by the Ramblers Association (Christie and Matthews, 2003), examined the economic and social value of walking to England. They found:

- an estimated 527 million walking trips are made annually to the English countryside;
- the expenditure associated with these trips was in the region of £6.14 billion, supporting between 180,559 and 245,560 full-time-equivalent jobs.

Cycling also has a significant impact on local tourist economies. Work by Sustrans (2007) on behalf of One North East estimated the economic impacts of four routes that form part of the National Cycle Network in the North East of England (the C2C cycle route, the Coast and Castles cycle route, Hadrian's Cycleway and the Pennine Cycleway) and found they make a notable contribution to the regional tourism economy. The four routes attracted 302,000 cycle trips in 2006. The people using the routes contributed £9.6 million of direct expenditure to the North East's economy in 2006, representing a value of £13.4 million to the wider economy. This supported 216 jobs in the immediate vicinity of the routes. The study was able to separate out the effect of local people and that of visitors to the region and found that, in 2006, visitors from outside the region generated £5.9 million, supporting 95 full-time-equivalent jobs. One North East has gained the competitive edge in the development of its cycle tourism product, investing £2.7 million in the four routes between 2002 and 2006, an average of approximately £200,000 *per annum*.

Some research on the specific contribution of bus passengers to local economies has been done. Contrary to the general assumption that bus users are the poor relation in tourism, a survey of 18 tourist areas across Great Britain (Guiver and Lumsdon, 2006) found that average daily spending from bus passengers was £16.18 per person. The survey was subject to significant under-reporting of expenditure, particularly in the evening, so that this result compares favourably with the average of £20.70 from the 2002/2003 UK Day Visits Survey, where it is assumed that the majority of visitors travel by car. Where people who travelled by bus stayed in overnight accommodation, their daily spending increased by £26.40 per person. A further study of bus routes in the Lake District (Guiver, 2009), again subject to under-reporting, found the average daily amount spent by bus users to be £19.47, with a further £25.76 each on accommodation for those that stayed. Interestingly, the survey found that passengers without cars available spent more than those with cars at their local travel base (although some of the difference may have been from the omission of motoring costs incurred on other days (petrol), where the car was used on the survey day in addition to the bus or in order to reach the bus stop).

On a much wider scale, there are large and tangible economic benefits to people using the countryside and its tourist destinations *per se*. The expenditure of tourists in rural areas is a major economic benefit of leisure travel. It is estimated that tourists in the UK spent £11,380 million in 2007 (Visit Britain, 2007). The following amounts were spent in England in 2005 in pertinent destinations (Research International Ltd., 2006):

- £9.4 billion in the countryside overall;
- £1.4 billion at the seaside and coast;
- £0.4 billion specifically in National Parks;
- £0.2 billion specifically on trips to Open Access land.

The qualitative economic impact

The headline statistics are impressive, but more importantly the effects of this spending on local businesses need to be understood. The situation on the ground is complex and many businesses are struggling to survive. However, a qualitative study examining the economic benefits of outdoor access in Bedfordshire (Bedfordshire County Council, 2003) showed that many visitors travelling to tourist destinations by car rarely visit communities near their destination, instead driving straight home after their visit. They do not make any direct contribution to local



Countryside visitors are crucial to the survival of local businesses, providing top-up trade to village shops, cafes, pubs and other community facilities.

*Bodham, North Norfolk.
Picture:
Chris Wood.*

businesses. The study carried out a number of telephone interviews and focus group surveys, during which several local business people commented that countryside visitors were crucial to their survival, providing top-up trade to village shops, cafés, pubs and other community facilities. This was despite the small proportion of trade these businesses received from countryside visitors. Local business people strongly believed that walkers and cyclists benefit local businesses more than visitors by car. The latter are often more self-sufficient and not looking to buy lunch, snacks, *etc.* Walkers and cyclists were also believed to engage more with the local community.

There are many other economic benefits from recreation using sustainable forms of transport, including the generation of a stronger sense of community from businesses recommending each other, the development of a market for local produce, and farm diversification.

Sustainable travel helps local economies in two ways

- It encourages people who are new to countryside recreation out to villages, market towns and visitor destinations, bringing 'new' money to rural areas.
- It encourages people, who would normally have gone into the countryside by car, to go by more sustainable means, and thus spend their money with local businesses rather than national or international chains.



The town of Corfe Castle, Dorset, derives a great deal of its income from tourism, and one local tourist attraction can also be a more sustainable way to get there: the heritage Swanage Railway is striving to re-establish its link to the national network at Wareham station. Picture: Chris Wood.

Picture this...



The river Alde, near Snape, Suffolk. Picture: Chris Wood.

Can you picture a place near where you live where there are footpaths, cycle routes, a market town or two, with a train station and landscapes where people want to walk? You will be able to envisage the effect co-ordinated development of sustainable transport could have.

For example, the Suffolk Coast and Heaths Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty is perfectly placed for people living in the Ipswich area (which is the northern part of the Government's 'Haven Gateway' housing 'Growth Point') to enjoy active recreation. The recreational potential of the landscape could be maximised by the further development of its sustainable travel network. This in turn would benefit the area's rural economy.

Trains and buses run from Ipswich to Woodbridge, Melton, Saxmundham, Darsham, Halesworth, Leiston and Aldeburgh, which form gateways to the countryside. These places all make excellent starting points for people to get out into the landscape on bike or on foot. There are extensive networks of footpaths and quiet roads for cycling, which have potential for enhancement, and Suffolk County Council plans to make significant improvements to public transport in the southern part of the area, using a mixture of scheduled and flexible buses, along the lines of CoastLink in the north. A number of small ferries provide cross-river links in the summer.

The RSPB, The National Trust, Suffolk Wildlife Trust and Natural England have major nature reserves along the coast, notably at Minsmere, Dunwich Heath, Orford Ness, Havergate Island, North Warren and Walberswick. There are two long-distance footpaths and strategic cycle routes. The Forestry Commission has three forests and there are a number of heritage attractions, particularly Sutton Hoo (National Trust), Orford Castle and Leiston Abbey (both English Heritage). Through publicity, information and partnership working, particularly with the Suffolk Coast and Heaths Unit, Suffolk County Council, National Express, the East Suffolk Line Community Rail Partnership and conservation organisations, sustainable transport could play a key role in promoting the attractions of the area, thus supporting the local economy.

3 The Health Benefits Associated with Sustainable Travel for Recreation

The Problem with our Health

Across the western world a number of lifestyle illnesses are contributing to the demise of people's health. Physical inactivity is placing a catastrophic burden on society (Bird, 2004), leading to chronic disease and a lack of independence in the elderly. More children are becoming obese and inactive, and more likely to become obese and inactive adults. However, simple and moderate activity can maintain the vitality of the body and prevent heart disease, diabetes, strokes, cancers, disabilities, depression, osteoporosis, anxiety and sleep problems. Without regular exercise, there is a steady decline in the function of the body, which will eventually need treatment and support from the NHS, and social care at a considerable cost to the economy. Activities such as walking and cycling, as means of travel in the countryside, are the kinds of moderate physical activity that are essential to the promotion of health. Even low levels of participation in these activities can bring substantial benefits to people's health.



Walking and cycling are clearly beneficial to health, as is public transport, as it involves moderate exercise to get to and from the stop or station. It also allows people who might not otherwise be able to take exercise in the countryside to do so. Walkers boarding a train at Berney Arms halt in the Norfolk Broads after a Wherry Lines Community Rail Partnership guided walk. Picture: Chris Wood.

Facts and figures relating to physical activity and health benefits (Bird 2004)

- In 1998, only 37% of men and 25% of women met the Government's recommendation that adults should participate in 30 minutes of moderate physical activity on at least five days per week.
- As people get older, they become significantly less active. By the age of 75, only 7% of men and 4% of women were taking enough exercise to benefit their health.
- In children, boys are generally more active than girls and the difference between their activity levels starts to grow when they reach the age of six.
- Physically active adults have a 20-30% lower risk of mortality than inactive people.
- Coronary heart disease (CHD) causes 117,000 deaths nationally. Up to 37% of the deaths from CHD are due to physical inactivity.
- Brisk walking for five hours a week may slowly reverse the build-up of deposits in the coronary artery.
- Physical activity reduces blood pressure in people with high blood pressure.
- Approximately 2.3 million people suffer from diabetes, which makes them more likely to suffer from CHD, stroke, kidney failure, limb amputation and blindness. Moderate physical activity and weight loss can reduce the risk of developing diabetes by about 50% in an average population.
- Exercise is associated with a reduced risk of cancer and improved physical function in cancer patients. The psychological benefits of exercise can reduce the level of pain in cancer patients.
- Obesity is currently a problem of epidemic proportions in the UK, with 22% of men and 23% of women being obese. 16% percent of children, aged between two and fifteen, are obese, The incidence of obesity has been increasing in all age categories.
- People who are physically active feel happier and more satisfied with life at all ages. Even a single bout of exercise can result in improved energy and mood. Physical activity can also make people feel better about themselves, particularly those with initially low self-esteem. Physical activity can also help people cope with the impacts of stress such as high blood pressure and muscle tension.

The following table (adapted from Bird, 2004) illustrates the economic impact of the Country's poor health due to physical inactivity.

<i>Health problem due to physical inactivity</i>	<i>Annual cost to the NHS</i>	<i>Annual cost due to lack of earnings</i>
Angina	£215 million	£455 million
Heart attacks	£89 million	£194 million
Strokes	£59.8 million	£118 million
Diabetes	£56.6 million	£204 million
Obesity	£480 million	Not provided
Adult depression	£37 million	£1 billion

The Cabinet Office has calculated that inactivity in England costs £8.2 billion (£1.7 billion to the NHS, £5.4 billion for work absence and £1 billion through early mortality). The Scottish Office has calculated that if there were a 1% decrease in inactive Scots then 157 deaths would be prevented

each year, saving £85 million in lost work. Hospital admissions would fall by 2231 cases each year, saving £3.5 million.

Is There a Solution to the Current Levels of Physical Inactivity?

The levels of physical inactivity in this country are clearly a huge problem and it needs tackling at every level. If more people, who were previously inactive, become moderately active, they will experience a range of health improvements which will substantially improve their quality of life and their ability to contribute to modern society. The economy will be a major benefactor of bringing health benefits to people through a sustained increase in activity levels. Sustainable transport means people travel in more physically active ways, enabling people to meet the target of 30 minutes moderate physical activity, four times a week. Indeed, it has been found (Bird, 2004) that levels of walking which meet the current requirements are more likely to be attained with:

- local access to public space;
- an attractive local area, with enjoyable scenery;
- safe footpaths;
- low levels of traffic, with trees;
- a diversity of land use;
- easy access to public transport; and
- a friendly neighbourhood.

People need to get more active, in an enjoyable and easy way, so they want to come back for more.

Where a supportive environment and positive culture are in place to support physical activity, people are nearly eight times more likely to walk at recommended levels (Giles-Corti, 2006). Organisations in regional and local government need to work with the public health sector to understand the value of green space as a resource which brings a wide range of benefits to the physical and mental health of local people. It is vitally important that this resource is maintained for future generations, who themselves will be struggling with lifestyle-related illnesses. National, regional and local government organisations are also well placed to work in partnership with landowners, health and environment NGOs, and the voluntary sector, to lift the barriers to people spending more time in the natural environment.

An assessment of the people who use the National Cycle Network has provided some striking results in terms of physical activity (Cope, *et al.*, 2003). It showed that a high proportion of such people are from groups at high risk of cardiovascular disease (older people, men and individuals living in deprived areas), who have been particularly difficult to involve in other forms of physical activity. Pretty *et al.* (2005) found that there was a significant problem in attracting inactive people, *i.e.* those who would most benefit, to participate in moderate physical activities, such as conservation work, walking, biking, riding, boating, horse riding and fishing. Off-road routes on the National Cycle Network provide people with a safe environment, where they feel free to develop their cycling skills, without having to negotiate busy traffic. This supports the high-priority public health policy of increasing activity levels amongst the most sedentary people.

Increasing the use of public transport also provides the opportunity for more, moderate physical activity. Besser and Dannenberg (2005) showed that people who use public transport walk an average of 19 minutes a day in doing so. Therefore, increasing the accessibility of public transport not only makes travel more environmentally sustainable, it also contributes to good health through improving levels of physical activity.

In recognition of the urgent need to encourage greater levels of activity within the general population, the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE, 2008) recently brought together a series of recommendations to promote built and natural environments that encourage physical activity.

1. Local communities and experts should be involved in changes to the physical environment to ensure the potential for physical exercise is maximised. Ensure local facilities and services are accessible on foot, by bike and other modes of transport involving physical activity.
2. Pedestrians, cyclists and users of other means of transport involving physical activity should be given the highest priority when developing or maintaining streets and roads. Specific measures that are recommended include:
 - widening pavements and adding cycle lanes;
 - restricting motor vehicle access;
 - using road-user charging schemes.
3. A comprehensive network of routes for walking, cycling and other forms of transport involving physical activity should be provided.
4. Providers and managers of public open spaces, paths and rights of way should ensure that these can be reached on foot, bicycle and other forms of transport involving physical activity. They should also be accessible by public transport.

The Benefits Have Been Proven

A study commissioned by the Countryside Recreation Network (Pretty, *et al.*, 2005) researched the specific effects of active participation in the countryside, through a quantitative analysis of the effects of ten countryside activities across the UK. The activities included conservation work, mountain biking, walking, boating, woodland activities, horse riding and fishing. They found:

- There was a significant improvement in self-esteem as a result of green exercise in nine out of the ten case studies.
- Self-esteem was significantly correlated with a person's body weight. The higher a person's body weight, the lower their self-esteem score.
- Self-esteem was not affected by the intensity of the green exercise activity, although it did rise with very long visits to the countryside.

If the current levels of physical inactivity are going to be reversed, it is important that people can easily reach recreational opportunities that help them to do this. Entrenched inactive behaviour is going to be difficult to change, but it is imperative that people do become more active, for their own health and that of the country.

People can be enabled to become more active by developing active travel opportunities to get to recreational destinations and information to help their uptake.

4 The Social Benefits of Sustainable Travel for Recreational Purposes

In our society, recreation is recognised as an important human activity. This is clearly illustrated by the range of UK legislation that exists to protect our right of access to the natural environment (Clifford, *et al.*, 2008). The following Acts all protect this right:

- National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949,
- Highways Act 1980,
- Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981,
- Rights of Way Act 1990,
- Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000.

Social Inclusion

The recent *State of the Countryside* report (Commission for Rural Communities, 2008a) demonstrates that there is unequal access to the countryside. It showed that levels of outdoor participation are highest amongst people with children aged between 10 and 15, older independent couples and people with access to a car. Participation was lowest amongst people in the lower social classes (C2, D and E), single people aged 35 or over without children, those aged 65 or over, people with long term illness or disability, and members of non-white ethnic groups.

The car is the main way people get to the countryside, and the only way many believe it is possible. In fact, according to the 2001 census (<http://neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk>), a quarter of households nationwide has no access to a car, rising to nearly half in inner urban areas. In the East of England, 19.8% of households have no access to a car. In the cities of Norwich and Cambridge, 31.8% and 35.5% respectively of households have no access to a car, and in central urban areas, particularly those close to railway stations, the figures are higher – ward-level figures of 40.7% (Southtown and Cobholm ward, Great Yarmouth), 41.5% (Thorpe Hamlet ward, Norwich), 45.4% (Market ward, Cambridge) and 48.2% (Harbour ward, Lowestoft) are common.

Despite a strong desire to participate in countryside recreation, disabled people, black and ethnic minorities, the young and residents of inner cities have all expressed concern at the factors that prevent them



Everybody should feel able to enjoy the countryside and be made to feel welcome. St. Justinian's, Pembrokeshire.
Picture: Chris Wood.

from using the countryside for recreation. The following were identified through The Countryside Agency (2005) Diversity Review:

- the cost of visiting the countryside and problems linked to transport;
- a lack of knowledge of the English countryside and no 'cultural habit' of visiting the countryside;
- fear of discrimination;
- a lack of knowledge of available facilities and a basic lack of provision for disabled people;
- social isolation and a feeling of vulnerability due to the inherent unpredictability of the countryside;
- for young people, a lack of appropriate facilities.

As a consequence of this, the Department for Food, Environment and Rural Affairs (2008a), produced an action plan, which, amongst other things, aims to "embed diversity and equality principles in the planning and practice of outdoor recreation service providers" and seeks "accessible, available and affordable transport together with accessible transport information."

Currently, there is no equality of access to the countryside. In order for people from the under-represented groups to enjoy the same levels of access to outdoor recreation as other people, sustainable transport and outdoor access need to be designed to meet these groups' needs and to give them the confidence to enjoy the countryside.

Rural public transport works best when it caters for the needs of both locals and visitors. Coggeshall, Essex. Picture: Chris Wood.



It is vital to embed diversity principles in recreational travel planning and provision, and develop accessible transport networks and information.



© Countryside Agency / Julia Bayne

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Young people in the countryside benefit from measures to lessen traffic impact, such as the Quiet Lanes networks in Norfolk. Picture: Natural England / Julia Bayne.

5 Changing travel behaviour

Generally, people are very committed to their cars. Few people in general perceive buses and trains to be an option for getting out into the countryside. Walking and cycling have become much less attractive as motor traffic has become faster and heavier, and as rural roads have been upgraded to suit. Rural public transport has been starved of patronage as people who live and work in the countryside have been replaced by urban commuters and retirees. Buses have gone the way of other village services, shops and pubs, making the lives of those without cars in rural areas harder and forcing families who can ill afford it to have a car, reinforcing the trend (as they cannot then afford other options). Even people who are environmentally minded struggle to leave their car at home, because a comprehensive public transport infrastructure, that is easy and pleasurable to use, simply does not exist.

A recent report for the Scottish Executive by Steer Davies Gleave (2008) explored the role of transport in participation in cultural activity throughout Scotland. The research identified some key barriers to enhancing access by public transport – barriers instantly recognisable across the rest of Britain.

- A lack of information - including lack of information provision on the part of those generating travel [attractions].
- A lack of motivation to promote and achieve access by public transport.
- [A need to] relate travel behaviour to other objectives (from climate change to parking pressure).
- A lack of know-how on the part of attractions.
- A lack of clarity over who is responsible for promoting public transport access.
- Under-utilisation of community transport and demand-responsive transport solutions.
- Transport issues not being raised at a sufficiently early stage.
- A lack of knowledge-sharing on successful initiatives or ideas.
- A lack of integrated entry and travel ticketing.
- A lack of consideration of the visitor's end-to-end journey.

In order to really change travel behaviour policy makers and transport operators will have to take an innovative approach to getting people to try a different way of travel. Reliance on the market economy is going to fall short of driving behaviour change, although a long-term shift in the costs of driving will go some way to encouraging people out of their cars.

A recent paper by the New Economics Foundation (2005) described a range of ideas to help policy makers encourage more sustainable behaviour from the consumer. It noted several aspects of the way people make decisions, which could be applicable when trying to persuade people to use public transport.

- People watch the behaviour of other people and often copy it. They are encouraged to continue doing things when they feel that other people approve of what they are doing.
- Habits are also very important. People do many things, such as using their car, without consciously thinking about what they are doing. The problem for all policy makers who are trying to get people to reduce their car use is that habits are very hard to break.
- People's values, motivations and personal commitments are very important in determining their behaviour. They want their actions to be in line with their values. Often though, if they

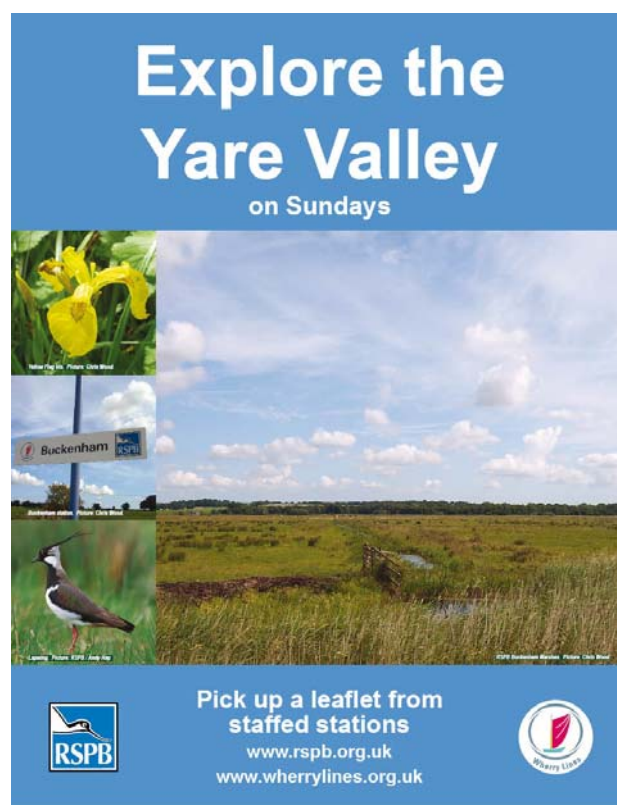
find their action is not in line with their values, they will change their values to fit their actions, not the other way around.

- People are bad at making calculations relating to their decision-making. Recent experiences and worry about unlikely events have a much greater impact than detailed calculations.
- In order really to change behaviour, people need to feel actively involved and effective in making those changes. Just giving incentives is not enough. However, once changes have been made through active processes, the behaviour change is much more likely to be permanent.

However, important as 'soft approaches' such as this are, it is clear that they have to be backed up by real changes in the availability of more sustainable options, a more conducive fiscal environment and regulation, especially as scepticism about climate change is still widespread in the population (King, *et al.*, 2009).

The barriers to enhancing access by public transport, walking and cycling can be tackled by enabling destinations to make themselves more accessible and empowering people to make more sustainable travel choices.

Widen the Choice has worked with train operator National Express East Anglia to develop weekend train links to the countryside of the Yare valley, Norfolk, and around Lakenheath station, Suffolk. (See Wood and Morris, 2008). On-train poster. Design: Chris Wood.



national express

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Appendix 1

Green Access Audits for Countryside Attractions

A Green Access Audit should be carried out for each visitor destination or attraction, in order to establish what options exist for reaching it by sustainable forms of transport. The audit begins with a desk exercise, examining maps, timetables, existing visitor surveys and published information. The known, surmised or expected origins of visitors are listed and any places from where it would be desirable to attract visitors are added. The latter may include towns or villages with good existing green travel links or populations with untapped potential, either in the socio-economic groups most likely to support the attraction or socially excluded communities that might benefit from improved countryside access.

The next, and most important, stage is the field audit. The destination and its environs are explored in person to establish the existence, quality, usability, legibility, safety and convenience of green access routes onto the property. Potential or actual foot, cycle, bus, train or ferry routes from all the previously listed origin points are tried out in person. This is not usually an overly time-consuming exercise, as many of the likely routes will converge.

Following the on-the-ground audit, it is essential to talk to all relevant stakeholders.

- The staff of the destination or attraction.
- Local authority passenger transport (and community transport), cycling, rights of way and highways officers.
- Any independent county Rural Transport Officer (often at the Rural Community Council).
- Other local partnerships, particularly Community Rail Partnerships and protected landscape partnerships.
- Bus and rail operators (although in many cases in rural areas it is actually the county or unitary council passenger transport unit which is responsible, as commercial bus services are less common).
- Cycling and walking interests, particularly Sustrans and cycling campaign groups, where they exist (this may include British Waterways, if routes use a canal towpath).
- Neighbouring visitor attractions, or those on the same public transport or cycle route, who may be willing to co-operate on green access work, or at least be supportive.
- Visitors – although this last can be the most difficult category to reach.

The result of this process is at least a series of recommendations that can be signed up to by property staff, and possibly a full Visitor Travel Plan, which may be needed to satisfy planning authorities, funders or, where a destination is not independent, its regional or national office.

(For further details, see Wood, 2009a.)

Appendix 2

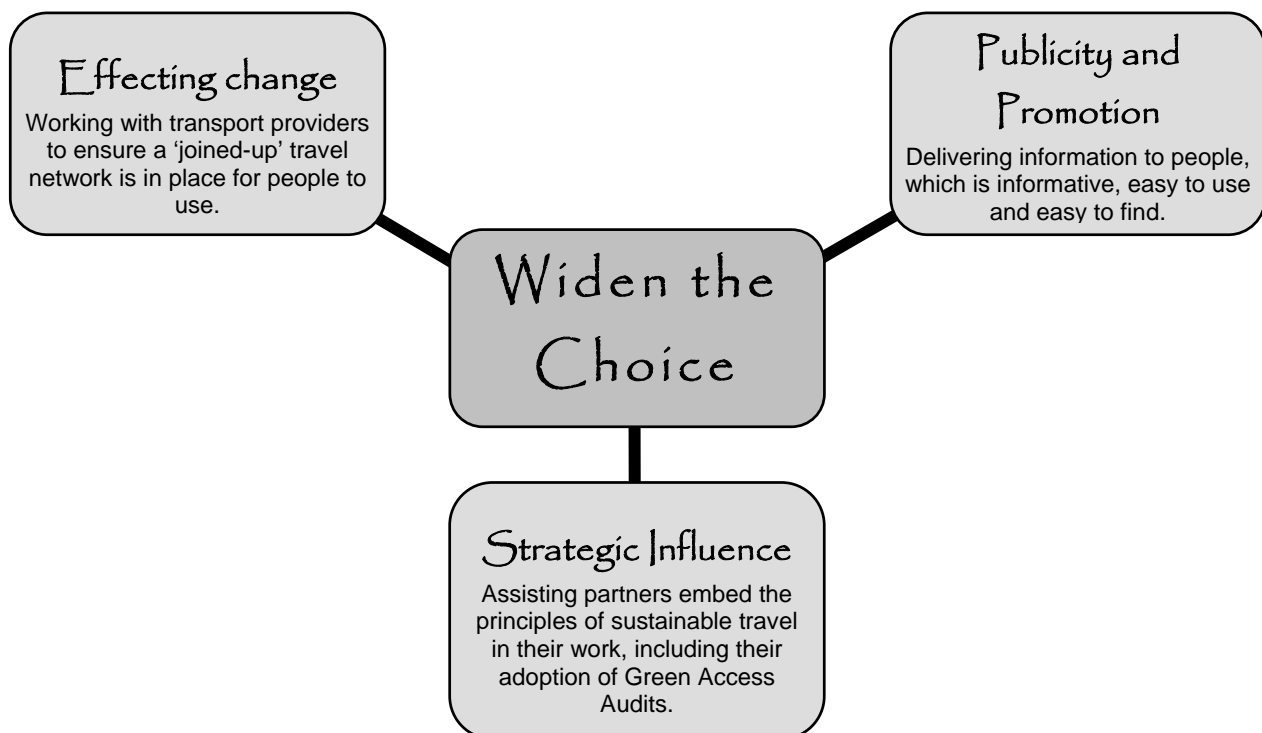
Widen the Choice, 2002-2009

Widen the Choice (WtC) has been a unique transport partnership, making it easier for people to explore the countryside by sustainable transport. Established in 2002, WtC worked to develop joined-up, sustainable recreational transport across the East of England and was cited in a recent study of sustainable leisure travel good practice from around the country (Speakman, 2008). It brought together Britain's two largest conservation charities, The National Trust and RSPB, with Natural England. (WtC was primarily funded by The Countryside Agency before it merged with the Rural Development Service of DEFRA and English Nature to form Natural England in 2006).

The key strengths of Widen the Choice

- It operated regionally and across district and county boundaries.
- It crossed the urban-rural divide that acts as a major barrier to many transport schemes.
- The work was based on the needs of the visitor.
- Its Transport Partnership Officer had 20 years of experience and extensive practical knowledge of sustainable transport for recreation.

The elements of Widen the Choice's work



Widen the Choice has enabled visitors to the region's countryside to travel by means other than the private car. In achieving this purpose WtC has:

- completed Green Access Audits (Appendix 1 and Wood, 2009a) for National Trust properties, RSPB reserves and other visitor destinations in the region (a demonstration of the success of Green Access Audits was their adoption by the Youth Hostel Association's Empty Roads Project);
- driven a major upgrade of cycle facilities at National Trust and RSPB properties;
- improved and promoted a range of access opportunities to recreational destinations through local and area-based partnership work;
- expanded into area-wide and linear audits for parts of the Suffolk coast, the North Norfolk coast and Icknield Way paths, which has fed into county council development work, as well as revising the Green Travel Plan for the Chilterns Gateway Centre at Dunstable Downs;
- carried out innovative partnership work with railway companies and local authorities to develop recreational travel opportunities, for example: working with National Express East Anglia to get people to RSPB Lakenheath Fen and Buckenham at the weekends (Wood and Morris, 2008); using the Wherry Lines, the Bittern Line and the CoastHopper bus to promote the exploration of the Broads and North Norfolk coast; and with Suffolk County Council to develop the CoastLink flexible bus in the Minsmere, Dunwich and Walberswick area;
- worked with Natural England on a Green Access Audit for the Holkham National Nature Reserve in Norfolk to begin a programme to assess all NNRs for their accessibility;
- produced a good practice guide to Green Access Audits and the implementation of their results (Wood, 2009a).



Widen the Choice has brought together National Express East Anglia and the RSPB in a highly successful project that gives rail access to RSPB Lakenheath Fen, and the surrounding Suffolk and Norfolk countryside. It has boosted ticket sales, making the station a 'Rail Gateway to the Countryside' (Wood and Morris, 2008). Picture: Chris Wood.

A full inventory of the Widen the Choice projects is given below. By making links between public transport providers, footpaths, cycle paths, bridleways, areas where people live and the natural environment around them, WtC has, in very real terms, linked people to their landscapes. In endeavouring to change the way people travel for recreation, WtC has helped address issues such as air, visual and noise pollution, greenhouse gas emissions, damage to biodiversity, road danger, congestion and vehicle pressure. It also sought to bring benefits to people who live in, work in and enjoy the countryside, benefits such as supporting local economic development, health improvement through walking and cycling, bringing people who are often excluded from countryside activities to recreational destinations, and educating people about the countryside, agriculture, conservation, heritage and the natural environment.

It is time to step up to a new level of working if the benefits of sustainable travel for recreation are to be realised and the travel behaviour of the countryside visitor is to be challenged.

Widen the Choice Projects

Green Access Audits and planning for change

- Good Practice Guide on Green Access Audits, with EEDA support (Wood, 2009a).
- Green Access Audits for 60 National Trust & RSPB places in 2002-2003, with further audits at new RSPB reserves (Rainham Marshes, London/Essex, Wallasea Island, Essex; Fen Drayton Lakes, Cambridgeshire) and Natural England's Holkham National Nature Reserve, Norfolk.
- Area-wide Green Access Audits on the Suffolk coast, partly supported by the Suffolk Coast and Heaths AONB's Sustainable Development Fund.
- Icknield Way Paths public transport access survey.
- Revision of the Chilterns Gateway Centre (Dunstable Downs, Bedfordshire) Visitor Travel Plan, for The National Trust and Bedfordshire County Council.
- Green access forum at RSPB The Lodge.

Walking

- Norfolk Coast Road foot and cycle links project with Norfolk County Council and Norfolk Coast Partnership, with detailed work on missing foot links in villages, smaller missing foot links outwith villages, and a potential Cromer-Sheringham cycleway (linked to North Norfolk Active Travel Project), a number of which have progressed to feasibility study. To date, one footway has been installed (in Titchwell).
- Installation of new verge footway between Thornham and Titchwell (Norfolk County Council).
- Improved signage where footpaths cross the road between NT Blickling and Aylsham by Norfolk County Council.
- Walk-leading for the Bittern Line and Wherry Lines Community Rail Partnerships.

Cycling

- Cycle stands for 25 National Trust and RSPB locations, funded by The Countryside Agency.
- On-going plans for new cycle routes linking to RSPB the Lodge, with the RSPB, Sustrans, Bedfordshire County, Mid-Bedfordshire and Central Bedfordshire Councils.
- 'Two-wheeled welcome...' leaflet (listing all National Trust and RSPB properties in the region with good cycle parking and/or close to the National Cycle Network or regional cycle routes,

with the nearest useful railway station), funded by The Countryside Agency and the Norfolk Community Rail Partnerships.

Bus & train

- Sunday trains for countryside access, working with National Express East Anglia, Community Rail Partnerships and the RSPB, including promotional leaflets and on-train posters, designed in-house, recognised in national awards (Wood and Morris, 2008).
- Steering group for the inception of the CoastLink demand-responsive bus (Suffolk County Council and The Countryside Agency) and subsequent development of demand-responsive buses on the Suffolk coast, working with Suffolk County Council, Suffolk Coast and Heaths Unit, East Suffolk Lines Community Rail Partnership, *etc.*
- Promoting the Chilterns Rambler bus and services to Shaw's Corner with the Hertfordshire Sustainable Transport Partnership (including formulation of a taxibus scheme).
- Involvement with the Bittern Line, Wherry Lines and East Suffolk Lines Community Rail Partnerships.
- Walk-leading for the Bittern Line and Wherry Lines Community Rail Partnerships.
- Involvement in the Tring Station Gateway partnership.
- Steering Group for the inception and initial operation of the Brecks Bus (Suffolk County Council and others).
- Input into the inception of the BroadsHopper bus (Norfolk County Council).
- Response for the East of England Sustainable Transport and Rural Access Forum to the Department for Transport's consultation on the definition of eligible services for the statutory bus concession in England, 2009.

Promotion

- Leaflets and posters for the Sunday trains for countryside access project (leaflets for RSPB Lakenheath Fen and the Yare Valley, backed up by on-train posters), designed in-house and supported by National Express East Anglia, the Broads Authority's Sustainable Development Fund, the Heritage Lottery Fund and Forest Heath District Council.
- CoastLink leaflet, designed in-house and funded by the Suffolk Coast and Heaths AONB's Sustainable Development Fund.
- Leaflets promoting visiting by public transport for 18 National Trust and RSPB places, funded by The Countryside Agency.
- Leaflets, 'Birds by Bus/Train/Boat' for the region (train), North Norfolk coast (bus) and the Broads (bus and train, and boat), funded by The Countryside Agency.
- Posters promoting walking and cycling to RSPB The Lodge at Sandy station and Market Place, with Bedfordshire Rural Transport Partnership and WAGN, now First Capital Connect.
- Various work on public-transport-linked walks around the region.
- Car(e)-Free Itineraries: working with itinerary creators, formatting and reporting on a Natural England project to develop 'Car(e)-Free Itineraries' and a toolkit for their creation.

Sharing good practice

- Good practice events in Norwich and Rickmansworth, with the Hertfordshire Rural Transport Partnership, Car-Free Leisure Network and 'one' Railway (National Express East Anglia), 2007.
- Part of the East of England Sustainable Transport and Rural Access Forum (Chair 2008/9).
- Part of the production team for the Real Time Progress advocacy document (Rural Transport Partnerships in the East of England, 2005).

- Presentations and advice to National Trust and RSPB properties in other regions (e.g. National Trust Tyntesfield) and involvement with the former National Trust Visitor Travel Group.
- Good practice sharing with the Youth Hostel Association's Empty Roads Project.
- Involvement with the Car-Free Leisure Network and the Sustainable Leisure Travel Network.
- Published papers to the annual, national Transport Practitioners Meeting in 2005, 2007, 2008 and 2009, that in 2008, with Clive Morris of National Express East Anglia, winning the award for 'Best Paper demonstrating Sustainable Transport Solutions' (Wood and Morris, 2008).
- Papers and presentations to various other professional conferences.

Widen the Choice in the Protected Landscapes

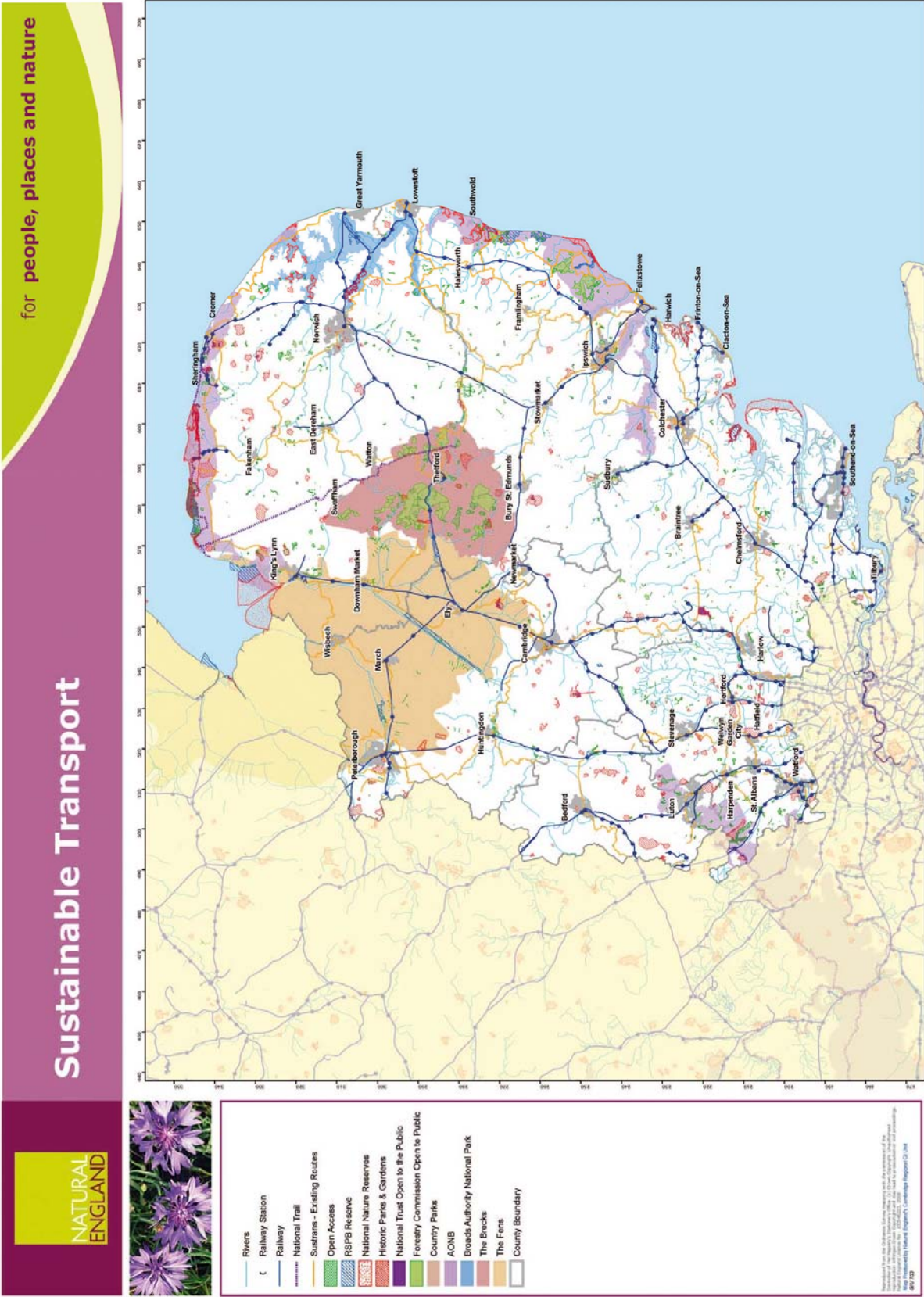


WtC was instrumental in Suffolk County Council's CoastLink bus (above, at Dunwich Heath), a highly successful, demand-responsive service in the Suffolk Coast and Heaths AONB, and has been part of the Hertfordshire Sustainable Transport Partnership, promoting the Chilterns Rambler bus (below, in Tring). Pictures: Chris Wood.



The 'Bittern Line' railway to Sheringham, operated by National Express and supported by a Community Rail Partnership (CRP), with which WtC has been active, is an excellent link to the Norfolk Coast AONB for walkers, especially combined with the Coasthopper bus (Norfolk Green & Norfolk County Council). Bittern Line CRP guided walk near Sheringham. Picture: Chris Wood.

Appendix 3 Sustainable Transport and the Countryside in the East of England



Widen the Choice



By Claire Sparkes & Chris Wood
for Widen the Choice, funded by
The East of England Development Agency

