

# 5 The Needs of Rights of Way Users

## 5.1 Different Users and their Needs

5.1.1 The different users of public rights of way are usually classified according to the method by which they access the countryside and the types of public right of way they are legally allowed to use.

- On foot (including those in wheelchairs and mobility vehicles) – all rights of way.
- On horse back – bridleways, restricted byways and byways open to all traffic.
- By bicycle – bridleways, restricted byways and byways open to all traffic.
- By non-motorised vehicle – restricted byways and byways open to all traffic.
- By motor vehicle – byways open to all traffic only.

5.1.2 This chapter looks at the needs of each type of user as well as the particular needs of two special interest groups – people with restricted mobility and black and minority ethnic people. A further two related key areas are information and public transport. These cut across several user interests and are also dealt with in this chapter.

5.1.3 For information on the amount of use the public rights of way network receives in East Sussex see 3.7.

## 5.2 Needs of Walkers

5.2.1 Walking is the easiest and cheapest form of exercise and recreation for most people and is by far the most popular form of physical activity carried out for leisure purposes, as can be demonstrated by the following data:

- In the UK, 77% of adults say they walk for pleasure at least once a month, with 62% stating it as their main form of exercise (ICM research survey in February 2000).
- The UK General Household Survey for 2002 showed that 35% of adults had gone for a walk of two or more miles in the previous four weeks. However, this is a drop from 45% in 1996, with a marked decrease in men walking within the previous four weeks from 49% in 1996 to 36% in 2002.
- During the last five UK General Household Surveys carried out from 1987 to 2002, walking has consistently come out as the most popular physical activity, scoring two to three times more than the next most popular activities such as swimming and 'keep fit'.
- The UK General Household Survey in 2002 shows the South East England region as being the third highest UK region (excluding

Northern Ireland) for participation in walking in the four weeks prior to the survey.

- 5.2.2 The entire network of public rights of way is available to walkers (a map showing the rights of way network in East Sussex is in 4.1). However, this does not mean that there aren't gaps in the footpath network or that the existing network does not need improving.
- 5.2.3 The County Council's ROWIP discussion group on walking advised that walkers are keen to see more paths in East Sussex well signposted and easy to use. Evidence from the data collected from stile counters confirms that basic improvements to a route usually lead to significant increases in use (see 3.4). There is also a desire to see safety improvements on busy road crossings and sections of roads used by walkers to link different paths.
- 5.2.4 Other priorities for walkers are:
- The need for a clear enforcement policy from the County Council
  - The County Council to follow 'gaps-gates-stiles' approach with the removal of unnecessary stiles. As stiles can be good waymarks a waymark post should be installed when a gap is created.
  - Develop short routes that link-up larger networks.
  - Improvements to bridleways.

**Objective 2.a.**

Encourage and assist volunteers to help with work on public rights of way, including improvement work as well as basic maintenance.

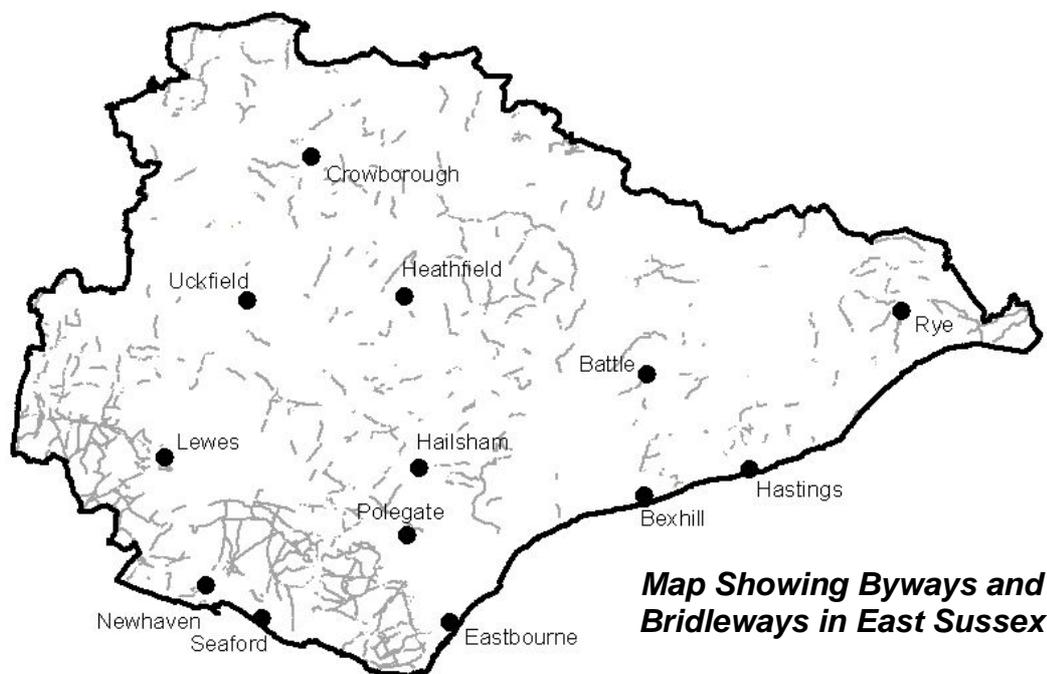
**Objective 6.a.**

Develop a series of short, circular walks from urban areas that are attractive and easy to use, especially aimed at those who do not necessarily access their local countryside on a regular basis.

### 5.3 Needs of Equestrians

- 5.3.1 East Sussex has a higher than average number of horse riders. In the National Equestrian Survey 1999, 37% of all riders recorded were in the London and South East England region, compared with these regions having 33% of the UK population.
- 5.3.2 A report published in 2003 by the High Weald Bridleways Group (HWBG) estimates that the horse riding population in their area (approximately the eastern half of East Sussex) was 6,616. The population of the area is 89,700, therefore riders constitute about 7.4% of the population. This is considerably higher than the national average of 4.5% of the population who enjoy riding in the UK each year.

5.3.3 The main problem for horse riders in the county (outside the Sussex Downs AONB) is the fragmentation of the off-road network available to them. This means that riders are required to use roads for at least part, if not most of a normal trip. The map below shows the distribution of the network available to horse riders and demonstrates the fragmentation problem, especially away from the South Downs. One third (155 miles) of the 465 miles of public bridleway in East Sussex are within the South Downs.



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5.3.4 The HWBG survey gives some useful information about local riders' experience of access to safe off-road riding in the High Weald. Of 77 respondents, five were not road users as they felt that the roads were too dangerous to ride. The remaining 72 respondents gave the following reasons for using roads:

- to access bridleways (22);
- lack of alternatives (19), and;
- poor bridleways (6).

5.3.5 Fifty-three of the 77 respondents reported that they had, at some point in time, been involved in an accident or a near miss involving a horse on the highway.

5.3.6 According to the County Council's statistics there have been 39 road accidents involving horses in East Sussex in the period from 2003 to 2005, although this figure includes both ridden and loose horses. In the same period five horse riders have been injured, one seriously and four slightly. The overall trend shows the number of accidents involving horses fell from 19 in 2003 to 9 in 2005. However, this might reflect a reduction in the use of roads by horse riders rather than improved levels of safety.

- 5.3.7 The County Council's ROWIP discussion group with equestrians felt that, although horse riders have a right to use the road, there is a need to increase the separation of horse riders from motor vehicles by providing safer road crossings and better 'off-road' connections between bridleways and byways. There is also a desire to see the development of good quality short circular routes of approximately five miles in length. These would be particularly suitable for younger or inexperienced riders and also for disabled riders.
- 5.3.8 Other priorities to come out of the meeting were:
- Resolving lost ways and claims.
  - Improving maintenance to existing routes.
  - Benefits to rights of way users from road schemes.
  - Provision for horse box parking at suitable sites.
  - Resolving obvious gaps in the bridleway network.
  - Completing the Hailsham Circular Bridleway proposals.
  - Providing a rights of way map on the internet.
- 5.3.9 There are, of course, maintenance issues with many bridleways. The surface of bridleways can become very poor, especially away from the South Downs. This can only be resolved by surface and drainage works which is an expensive solution. A further problem for horse riders can be difficult or inappropriate gates. Encountering such a gate can cause horse riders to dismount. Without assistance or mounting blocks re-mounting can be difficult or impossible.
- 5.3.10 Toll rides can be a way for landowners to provide land for equestrians to use in addition to the rights of way network. However, these are only available to those riders who pay a subscription. More encouragement should perhaps be given to landowners to provide permissive access, such as can be provided through Defra stewardship grants.
- 5.3.11 Byways open to all traffic (BOATs) and restricted byways (RBs) are the only parts of the public rights of way network legally available for carriage driving. However, the physical nature of some of these byways may make them unsuitable for carriage driving. There seems to be little evidence of this kind of recreational use of the network in East Sussex and it is fair to say that amongst the main groups of rights of way users the County Council has heard least from carriage drivers.
- 5.3.12 Both bridleways and byways offer a greater potential for use by people with restricted mobility than most footpaths. See 5.6 below.

**Objective 2.a.**

Encourage and assist volunteers to help with work on public rights of way, including improvement work as well as basic maintenance.

**Objective 3.b.**

Make roadside verges safer for horse riders and other users.

**Objective 3.c.**

Close obvious gaps in the rights of way network.

**Objective 4.b.**

Improve and promote a series of routes designed for disabled people.

**Objective 7.f.**

Improve opportunities for promoted off-road rides for equestrians and cyclists.

## 5.4 Needs of Cyclists

- 5.4.1 Cycling has been a popular form of outdoor recreation for at least one hundred years. The Countryside Act 1968 first permitted the use of bridleways by bicycle and, in more recent years, mountain biking has led to a greater demand for countryside access by cycle. The legal right for cyclists to use bridleways means that improvements to the bridleway network will assist cyclists as well as horse riders and walkers.
- 5.4.2 There are two National Cycle Network (NCN) routes passing through East Sussex, which include a number of off-road sections. The off-road sections include the Cuckoo Trail (Polegate to Heathfield) and the Forest Way (East Grinstead to Groombridge). These routes are almost entirely on dismantled railways.
- 5.4.3 Whilst the provision for cycling away from the road is considered as part of the Rights of Way Improvement Plan, on-road and next-to-road cycleways are dealt with as part of the Local Transport Plan and Cycling Strategy. However, on-road and next-to-road cycleways can provide an important link between off-road routes and from urban areas into the countryside.
- 5.4.4 The Cuckoo Trail is a dedicated cycle track and part of the NCN Route 21. It links several towns and villages along the line of the old railway been between Polegate and Heathfield. It is extremely popular for cyclists and other users such as walkers and horse riders. Surveys have shown that approximately 250,000 cycle trips are made on the Cuckoo Trail each year.
- 5.4.5 The NCN Route 21 is also part of the Avenue Verte, a cycle route from Paris to London, via the Newhaven to Dieppe ferry, which partly runs along dismantled railway lines on both sides of the Channel. This route uses both the Cuckoo Trail and the Forest Way but the on-road link between these two off-road routes is currently unsatisfactory.

5.4.6 The South Downs provides more challenging off-road cycling and this activity has become very popular in the Downs in recent years. In 2005, **SD** 250,000 cycle trips were estimated to have taken place on the South Downs Way. In the rest of East Sussex off-road cycling is probably not as common as horse riding as there are limited continuous lengths of off-road routes to attract significant numbers.

5.4.7 The proposals for the Pebsham Countryside Park between Bexhill and St Leonards include the provision of facilities for cyclists. A 'greenway' (open to cyclists and pedestrians) is planned to run parallel, but away from, the new Bexhill to Hastings Link Road. These proposals will not only increase recreational facilities where currently few exist but also provide a safe, traffic-free route for commuters and school children between these two towns and neighbouring rural areas.

5.4.8 There are other areas where the provision of off-road cycle routes would provide a clear alternative to the motor car for commuters and school children. Proposals such as the Lewes to Newhaven cycle path are designed to provide a safe and convenient route that will be attractive to such potential users as well as to the recreational cyclist.

5.4.8 A number of bridleways and byways are featured in local cycle route guides such as 'Off the Cuckoo Trail' and 'Rye Rides'. There are also 'Cycle East Sussex' leaflets showing rides available based on the NCN routes in the county. Ideally, the off-road sections of these routes should be maintained to a standard fit for most, if not all, bicycles.

5.4.9 In recent years mountain biking has become a very popular pastime. In East Sussex the South Downs offers an excellent and well used facility for mountain biking. These users can be split into three main categories:

- SD**
- Recreational riders - families, novice riders, fitness
  - Sports riders - enthusiasts, endurance riders, fast riders
  - Free riders – mainly young riders using natural and manmade objects to create a challenging terrain

5.4.10 Most mountain bikers usually wish to enjoy:

- Uninterrupted riding
- Car free routes
- Views
- Feeling of escape
- Water points
- Sense of adventure

5.4.11 However, mountain biking can bring problems, especially in popular areas like the South Downs. These problems can include overuse and overcrowding, riding on private land and unauthorised trails, and conflicts with other users (such as walkers and horse riders).

**SD**

**Objective 3.c.**

Close obvious gaps in the rights of way network.

**Objective 4.d.**

Improve the surface of specified bridleways and byways to facilitate use by cyclists and people in wheelchairs.

**Objective 7.f.**

Improve opportunities for promoted off-road rides for equestrians and cyclists.

## 5.5 Needs of Recreational Motor Vehicle Drivers

- 5.5.1 Recreational motorists have the smallest part of the rights of way network available to them: byways open to all traffic or BOATs make up about 2% of the total rights of way network in the county. Generally in East Sussex, there is not a serious problem with illegal motoring on other types of public rights of way.
- 5.5.2 The main problem associated with recreational motorists is the use of BOATs when surface conditions are poor. Where damage to BOATs is caused the County Council's response in recent years has been to temporarily close affected routes while repairs are carried out, or while they recover naturally.
- 5.5.3 The best and most appropriate method of reducing damage to the surface to BOATs (as with most public rights of way) is for them to be provided with a suitable surface. This is, of course, the County Council's duty. However, it is an expensive option. On average, estimates put the costs of surfacing at around £100 per linear metre of BOAT. To put it another way, the average cost for surfacing a mile of BOAT is around £150,000.
- 5.5.4 One solution to prevent damage to BOATs by recreational motorists is a Traffic Regulation Order (TRO). East Sussex County Council has not generally favoured this option and prefers, where possible, to uphold the legal right of motorists to use the few rights of way available to them. By working with groups such as the Motoring Organisations Land Access & Recreation Association (LARA) the County Council has only needed to introduce one permanent TRO (seasonal from October to March each year) on a BOAT during the last 20 years.
- 5.5.5 The County Council's ROWIP discussion group with motorists was in favour of the County Council using the option of TROs only as a last resort, and then they should be either temporary or seasonal. The preferred option is to use a method of voluntary restraint (promoted by LARA) on a damaged BOAT.
- 5.5.6 The Statutory Guidance on Rights of Way Improvement Plans issued by Defra says that:

*“wherever possible, proposals for improving rights of way should not unduly benefit one class of user at the expense of another. Improvements that are intended to benefit cyclists, harness-horse drivers, horse riders or walkers should not unduly restrict lawful motorised use of public vehicular rights of way”.*

5.5.7 The Guidance goes on to say that:

*“the management principles set out in ‘Making the Best of Byways’ may be used to avoid conflict over the use of byways that are regularly used by vehicles”.*

**Objective 2.a.**

Encourage and assist volunteers to help with work on public rights of way, including improvement work as well as basic maintenance.

**Objective 3.f.**

Limit the use of legal orders to control public use of byways open to all traffic.

**Objective 4.c.**

Recognise that some users of motor vehicles on byways open to all traffic (BOATs) are disabled and this may be their main method of accessing the countryside.

**Objective 4.d.**

Improve the surface of specified bridleways and byways to facilitate use by cyclists and people in wheelchairs.

## **5.6 Needs of People with Restricted Mobility**

- 5.6.1 People with restricted mobility include people who use mobility vehicles, wheelchair users, the blind and visually impaired, older and elderly people, and people with children in pushchairs, and there is a wide range of abilities amongst people in this group.
- 5.6.2 In 2004 the Countryside Agency commissioned research into the needs and perceptions of under-represented groups for access to the outdoors and countryside. It found that disabled people value the way of life of rural communities and generally anticipate being made to feel welcome. They also value the natural or physical environment, but expect to feel vulnerable because of the inherent unpredictability of the landscape.

- 5.6.3 The County Council held a discussion group in 2005 with people interested in access to the countryside for the disabled. The main priorities for the Improvement Plan coming out of that meeting were:
- The removal of physical barriers to people wishing to access the countryside.
  - A condition survey of public rights of way.
  - Tactile waymarking for the visually impaired.
  - Improved information on site and via the internet.
  - The improvement of dangerous road crossings.
- 5.6.4 One of the most common obstacles to many people using public rights of way is the step stile. The County Council will therefore work towards replacing step stiles with gates or gaps, wherever beneficial, possible and affordable. However, it is recognised that removing stiles can reduce the security of property and livestock.
- 5.6.5 The County Council is also working with the Fieldfare Trust (a national charity promoting disabled access to the countryside) to draw up a disability access policy. This is partly to ensure that the County Council complies with the Disability Discrimination Act and partly to build on the work of the European Union funded Interreg project on improving nine routes around East Sussex for disabled access. This policy will include a Position Statement on 'Gaps, Gates & Stiles'.
- 5.6.6 The Riding for the Disabled Association (RDA) is a registered charity giving more than 23,000 adults and children in the UK the ability to enjoy the benefits of riding or carriage driving. There are nine RDA centres in East Sussex. There are also many people with mobility problems who are able to ride or carriage drive without the help of the RDA, and for whom the horse provides a means of getting out into countryside which would otherwise be completely inaccessible to them.

**Objective 4.a.**

Take the needs of disabled people into account when carrying out work on public rights of way.

**Objective 4.b.**

Improve and promote a series of routes designed with disabled people in mind.

**Objective 4.c.**

Recognise that some users of motor vehicles on byways open to all traffic (BOATs) are disabled and this may be their main method of accessing the countryside.

**Objective 4.d.**

Improve the surface of specified bridleways and byways to facilitate use by cyclists and people in wheelchairs.

## **5.7 Needs of Black & Minority Ethnic People**

- 5.7.1 Research into the needs and perceptions of under-represented groups for access to the outdoors and countryside was undertaken by Ethnos (the UK's leading research organisation specialising in ethnic minorities) in 2004.
- 5.7.2 The top finding was that, contrary to assumptions, Black and Minority Ethnic people are keen on outdoor recreation once they have tasted the experience. That lack of experience, lack of appropriate, targeted information and lack of confidence are key barriers. Lack of transport also prevents many Black and Minority Ethnic people being able to access the countryside. For some, racism and discrimination are experienced.
- 5.7.3 People from ethnic minority backgrounds were found to value the dimensions related to the natural environment and the slow and simple life of rural communities. However, they also expect to feel excluded and conspicuous in what they perceived as a solely white social environment.
- 5.7.4 Defra has recently consulted on a draft Diversity Action Plan (titled 'Outdoors for All?') which aims to address the problems that various minority groups have in accessing the countryside.
- 5.7.5 In order to encourage more Black and Minority Ethnic people into the East Sussex countryside, the County Council has begun to organise some guided walks in conjunction with Sompriti (the East Sussex organisation supporting Black and Minority Ethnic people) for black and minority ethnic elders. The feedback from the walks has been particularly positive and more are planned. It is hoped that a positive introduction to the countryside through guided walks will encourage more black and minority ethnic people to venture out unaccompanied.

### **Objective 5.b.**

Provide a wide range of accessible information on opportunities to enjoy the rights of way network.

## **5.8 Needs of Other Recreational Users**

- 5.8.1 There are other users of public rights of way and access land and those for whom there are few, if any, formal access arrangements. Hang-gliding and, more recently, para-gliding have been popular activities in the South Downs since the 1970s. Sites such as Caburn and Firle Beacon are used all-year-round but require the permission of the landowner.
- 5.8.2 The High Weald has been a popular venue for rock climbing for a number of decades. The most well-known sites include Eridge Rocks, Harrisons Rocks, High Rocks and Bowls Outdoor Pursuits Centre. Again, this activity requires the landowner's permission.
- 5.8.3 At the moment, canoeing and kayaking can only take place by right on tidal waters. The permission of riparian owners (those who own the land over

which rivers and streams flow) is believed to be required on non-tidal waters. More on this subject in 4.15.

- 5.8.4 The provision of new public rights of way, permissive access or the improvement of existing access may enhance the recreational experience that these, and other, groups could enjoy in East Sussex. The existing and potential needs of these groups will be considered in rights of way improvement planning.

## **5.9 General Findings on Users and their Needs (Rights of Way Use & Demand Study 2001)**

- 5.9.1 Summarising the general findings from the six focus groups conducted as part of the Rights of Way Use and Demand Study (Entec, 2001), broad consistencies included:

- There is a demand for a range of improvements to existing access, particularly to complete and link networks of bridleways for cycling, horse riding and walking.
- There is a demand for information and education to address user conflicts, especially on roads and bridleways.
- Better information provision could increase the frequency of visits, especially amongst casual users and the young.
- Improved facilities for disabled visitors would also benefit other groups, such as the elderly and the less fit.
- There was a wide dissatisfaction with public transport as a means of getting to the countryside.

- 5.9.2 These findings generally concur with the County Council's own findings in its Rights of Way Improvement Plan consultations. However, there has, so far, been little expression of dissatisfaction amongst rights of way users with public transport in East Sussex.

## **5.10 Needs of Non-Users**

- 5.10.1 The assessment of the needs of non-users is probably the most difficult area to research. Unlike existing user groups, non-users usually don't bring their views to the County Council. However, the Statutory Guidance on Rights of Way Improvement Plans published by Defra in 2002 states that the Plan must have regard to future use as well as current demands.

- 5.10.2 The reasons why people are not users of the rights of way network are varied. The Rights of Way Use and Demand Study (Entec, 2001) found that 44% of households in the UK had no member taking part in activities in the countryside. The main reasons given were:

- Too busy/no time 24%
- Health problems 16%
- Old age 13%
- Not interested 12%

5.10.3 Faber Maunsell, in research commissioned by Nottinghamshire County Council in 2003, found the following reasons for non-use:

- Lack of awareness of the network 28%
- Mobility (including old age and health) 15%
- Do not need/want to use paths 10%
- Poor condition of paths 10%
- Personal safety concerns 8%

5.10.4 The main reason of 'lack of awareness' is possibly one that can be addressed by better targeting of information. However, it has to be accepted that there are some people who have no interest in using rights of way.

## **5.11 Need for Information**

5.11.1 The use of public rights of way is publicised in a number of ways by a variety of bodies and individuals.

5.11.2 The County Council plays a major role, developing high quality recreational routes based on the rights of way network, providing information on walks and rides in a range of formats, and co-ordinating extensive programmes of guided walks and cycle rides. Recreational routes fall into two main categories, long distance paths (LDPs) (which are dealt with in 4.7), and circular routes (see 4.8). It also produces a six monthly magazine 'The Meresman' about rights of way and countryside access.

5.11.3 Traditionally, most promotion of walking and rights of way by the County Council has been via leaflets, distributed through Tourist Information Centres, Libraries and other outlets, in some cases backed up with signs or an information board on site. Increasingly though, promotion is via the internet.

5.11.4 There is scope to make better use of the internet, especially if the Definitive Map of public rights of way in East Sussex is fully digitised and refined to make it suitable for wider public use. A number of local authorities now have a public rights of way map on their website alongside other countryside access information. However, it needs to be borne in mind that a sizeable proportion of the population do not have ready access to the internet, and it will therefore be important to maintain a good selection of information in leaflet form.

5.11.5 Guided walks, and to a lesser extent guided cycle rides (some of which are 'off-road' on bridleways and byways), are the other main way that the County Council publicises rights of way. Extensive programmes of walks (Exploring East Sussex) and rides (Cycling East Sussex) have been developed over several decades, and have been recognised nationally as examples of good practice.

5.11.6 Guided walks are particularly good at encouraging people who do not have the confidence to use rights of way using maps, or who do not feel safe walking on their own. They are also a good way to publicise new paths,

paths which have recently been improved, and rights of way away from popular areas. Walk leaders are encouraged to start and finish walks at points accessible by public transport, although this is not always possible in a largely rural county.

5.11.7 The effort of the County Council to publicise rights of way is complemented by the work of other organisations and the private sector. In particular, there are a large number of commercially produced books describing circular walks. These are mostly walks devised by individuals, are not backed up by special signing or waymarking, and fill a slightly different niche from the walks developed by the County Council.

5.11.8 Commercially produced guide books are of course charged, as opposed to the free leaflets produced by the County Council. The County Council is generally happy to let the private sector fulfil the demand for this style of guide book and does not intend to produce publications for which there is a charge.

**Objective 5.a.**

Improve and make more accessible the information held on the Definitive Map of public rights of way.

**Objective 5.b.**

Provide a wide range of accessible information on opportunities to enjoy the rights of way network.

**Objective 5.c.**

Improve the information 'on the ground' on rights of way.

## **5.12 Need for Public Transport**

### **Rail**

5.12.1 East Sussex is relatively well served by railways, and these provide generally good links between town and country.

5.12.2 The busy east-west coastal route links most of the main urban areas with each other and with the countryside in between, notably the South Downs, the Pevensey Levels, the eastern end of the High Weald and the Rye Levels. In addition, it provides connections to Brighton, London and Ashford International.

5.12.3 North-south links are provided by the London to Hastings line via Tonbridge, the London to Lewes line via Haywards Heath, the Lewes to Seaford line via Newhaven and the London to Uckfield line via Edenbridge. All of these lines have retained most of their smaller stations in rural locations, and on the whole provide an excellent means of accessing large parts of the East Sussex countryside. However, rail links do not provide good access into the Weald from the Brighton, Lewes, and Newhaven areas, although there are extensive bus services.

- 5.12.4 This extensive rail network has been capitalised on to a degree, with promotion of both walks and cycle rides from railway stations by the County Council and the South Downs Joint Committee, sometimes in conjunction with the rail operators, most notably in the 'Trails by Rail' leaflets produced during the 1990's. However, for some people the comparatively high cost of fares can be discouraging.
- 5.12.5 The coastal route east of Hastings (known as the Marsh Link Line) has recently seen services to its rural stations reduced to make travel between Hastings, Rye and Ashford quicker. However, this has made it more difficult to use the smaller stations in between such as Doleham, Three Oaks and Winchelsea.
- 5.12.6 Recent changes in rolling stock have much reduced the capacity of trains across the county to carry bicycles, making it difficult to promote the use of rail in connection with guided cycle rides or other cycling events.

### **Bus**

- 5.12.7 The bus services in East Sussex are extensive, and allow access to a great deal more of the countryside than by rail. The principal bus routes tend to be between main towns such as Brighton, Eastbourne, Hastings and Tunbridge Wells. These routes provide good and regular rural access, even at weekends.
- 5.12.8 Encouraging more people to use the bus to access the countryside is a challenge. For example, even though the majority of guided walks featured in the County Council's programme 'Exploring East Sussex' are linked to public transport, surprisingly few participants choose to use this option.
- 5.12.9 Some rural routes have seen services reduced in recent years, and at weekends (particularly on Sundays), when there is the most demand for access to the countryside, many services are now minimal or non-existent. The County Council supports, wholly or in part, around 15% of the services in the county, but tender prices are rising – in 2003 by approximately 20% – making this difficult to sustain. However, there are some excellent bus services, such as the Cuckmere Community Bus, which links a number of villages in the Cuckmere valley with local railway stations, towns and the adjacent countryside.