

# Rural Transport Learning Network Roundtables 2024-5

## Roundtable 2 Tourism 26 November 2024

**Professor Stephen Joseph, chair:** For some years now the University of Hertfordshire been running a set of round tables, looking at transport outside cities and rural transport on the basis that this does not get discussed as much as urban and interurban transport. The accounts from those round tables are on the SMU website.

<https://www.herts.ac.uk/study/schools-of-study/life-and-medical-sciences/business-support-and-consultancy/smart-mobility-unit/Roundtable-research>

The latest sets are on the Transport East website.

<https://www.transporteast.gov.uk/rural-networking-partnership/>

This is part of a new series for this academic year. A roundtable last year focused on visitor travel and there was lot of interest in it. There is a lot more going on in what is a very fast moving area, and all the speakers are doing practical things in different areas around this. It was important to revisit this area and capture what's going on. There is a lot of experience and background in this area. Afterwards, there will be a non-attributed write-up produced. There is a good range of people working in this area and we are starting to develop a community of interest in this.

The University has a MSc in Transport Planning:

<https://www.herts.ac.uk/courses/postgraduate-masters/msc-transport-planning>

Some of the students involved in that and in the Sustainable Planning MSc have been involved in discussions about visitor travel in their dissertations.

The University has its own bus company Uno: <https://www.unobus.info/> which has around 100 vehicles, running across West Hertfordshire and so we, as it were, walk the walk as well as talk the talk.

### Presenters:

Nat Taplin, Good Journey

Alistair Kirkbride, Low Carbon Destinations;

Matt Winfield, Chief Operating Officer, Sustrans

### Participants:

Amy Blake, Executive Director, Eco Attractions Group;

Ruth Bradshaw, Policy and Research Manager Campaign for National Parks;

Roger Clarke, Hope Valley Climate Action Group;

Jenny Couch Place Development and Marketing Lead, North Lincolnshire Council;

Rachael Farrington, Head of Government Affairs, Visit Britain;

Alanna Kite, Head of Partnerships, Visit Herts;

Sharon Payne, Regional lead for Rural Mobility, Transport East

James Probert, Director of Development, Historic Houses;

Hannah Shrimpton, Peninsula Transport Programme Director, Devon County Council;

Zsolt Schuller, Outdoor Experiences Project Manager, National Trust;

Chris Trolley, Sustainable Travel Executive, Royal Horticultural Society;

University of Hertfordshire:

Stephen Joseph, Chair, Professor of Transport Studies, UH;

Scott Copsey UH;

Maurizio Catulli UH;

Nicholas Davies UH;

John Sturzaker UH;

Sue Walsh UH.

There were 19 participants. Sectors represented were: national, sub-national and local government, technology/innovation, transport operator, transport consultancy, academic research, non-governmental organisations. Stephen Joseph chaired the discussion.

The following abbreviations indicate the sector making comments:

ACAD Academic  
NGO Non-governmental organisation  
CONS Consultant  
CC County council or unitary authority  
REGG Regional transport body  
GOV National government.  
INNOV Innovation sector  
OP Transport operator



Rural Transport  
Roundtable - Nov 202

### **Presentation 1: Nat Taplin, Good Journey** <https://www.goodjourney.org.uk/>

The focus of the presentation is mainly on partnerships that we have been working with over the last couple of years or longer, e.g. the partnership with the Royal Horticultural Society, English Heritage, and the National Trust.

Good Journey as an organisation is all about promoting car-free days out and car-free breaks across the UK, in particular helping people to reach visitor attractions and leisure activities of all kinds without cars. We have over 500 attractions and itineraries across the UK, including a lot of the biggest visitor attractions around the UK, in particular historic houses, including Chatsworth, Blenheim Palace, Castle Howard and Holkham Hall, for example, are all members of Good Journey.

<https://www.blenheimpalace.com/visitus/green-travel/>

There are two particular reasons why visitor attractions should be tackling this and welcoming car-free visitors, and the first of those is the environmental impact of car traffic. Around 60%+ of all Scope 3 emissions from a typical visitor attraction come from cars. English Heritage have come up with a figure of over 60% of CO2 from visitor travel, with a very similar figure from Blenheim Palace. The interesting thing is that Scope 3 emissions are often the largest portion of carbon being generated by visitor businesses, so this figure of 60% actually may equate to quite a large or even possibly the largest chunk of overall emissions from a given visitor attraction.

The second big reason is all about inclusion and widening access. 22% of households in the UK do not own a car and once you get into the cities and the lowest income areas that figure goes up to over 50% of households without a car. So there's a big issue around widening access to leisure, to nature and to culture and having equal access for everyone to enjoy those things.

**Royal Horticultural Society:** They have done some really great work in the last few years and have really stepped up their game around car-free travel since the days when they first joined Good Journey. Now they have a situation where there is a 30% discount for people arriving car-free at any of their big five gardens that RHS has around the country. They have also been doing some interesting work around the presentation of information on their website. An example from RHS Bridgewater shows how prominent the message is around traveling car-free. It comes right at the top of the web page to find out how to reach the garden, linking free to Good Journey for their visitors to be able to use the journey planner to plan car-free travel.

They have also done some great work around visitor buses and experimenting with different ways to get bus services that are viable to each of their gardens. RHS Bridgewater had nearly 5000 people coming by bus during the peak season this year, and that was an 89% increase on the figure from the previous year. They have been trialling different approaches and what they have done now is to get the bus service actually provided by Transport for Greater Manchester. This is a tweak to an existing bus route to get it to call in at the garden. They are moving away from a model where they are paying to get the bus service provided to proving that it is viable, proving the demand is there and then getting it provided by the existing transport providers in the area.

Their flagship garden, Wisley, has a slightly different model, where they have provided the bus service themselves, partnered up with a community transport provider and the local authority. They are looking at making the service viable for the long term. 7000 people are coming car-free on the shuttle bus from Woking Station to Wisley and enjoying a 3% discount for arriving car-free. Thirdly, at Harlow Carr Garden, near Harrogate, they have teamed up with Harrogate Bus and they now have a bus stop much closer to the site. This is also served with electric buses run by the Harrogate Bus Company on a commercial basis with the

local bus operator, taking the risk and the reward for providing those services, with over 5000 people arriving at Harlow car-free on those buses this summer season, representing about 2% of visitors. Messaging about car-free travel is prominent in the advertising. There are posters up around the site, which is great to see, with everyone driving in their cars, as is seeing a really prominent message and banner there when they do arrive, to flag up that there is an alternative for future visits.

**English Heritage:** There has been a partnership running for a couple of years with a light touch arrangement. They came in with 11 of their properties, including some really big names, e.g. Audley End House and Garden and Dover Castle, offering 20% off for people arriving car-free by train, bus or bike.. This season they have been promoting that really effectively with the bus and train operators, in particular Southeastern and Stagecoach. The results are that they have had £165,000 worth of income recorded from people arriving car-free at just those 11 properties. They are pleased with that result and are looking at rolling that out across their portfolio of properties, which is great news.

**National Trust:** There has been a much more in-depth project with the National Trust over the last 2 years. This began in the North of England in 2023, working with 10 properties and that was then rolled out across England and Wales to a further 34 properties this year. The National Trust website tells people about sustainable travel options to their places and gives it more prominence. It is a hot topic and it increasingly will be for national business organizations who ignore the issue. A post was shared 114 times and got 179,000 views about the problem of car parking, and in that instance the overflow car park at Clifton and the overflow from that into their parkland. Lyme Park in the North of England last year gained some hostile publicity in local and national media over the issue of building a massive new car park of over a thousand spaces that was set to become the biggest car park in the Peak District. Since then, they made some really positive moves towards including green travel options and alternatives for their visitors alongside that car park.

The pilot scheme with the National Trust included a couple of key ingredients that all of the properties put in place this year. The primary one was providing better travel information, improving the messaging around arriving car-free, having positive messaging on the website in their social media before people arrive and also on site. Once people have arrived on site, the journey planner provided by Good Journey gives people step-by-step directions for how to get there car-free from wherever they are beginning their journey. Alongside that, as part of that kind of positive welcome, was a reward of some kind for people arriving car-free, and at many of those properties it was a free hot drink in the cafe. They chose that because it works equally well for members and people who are not going to be paying on the day to enter, and that proved to be a successful and popular reward for people arriving car-free, whether they were members or not. This is supported by online and offline publicity from around the places taking part in the pilot. A news stripe appears in the 'getting here' information on the Trust's website for those places.

Examples of some of the more involved 'on the ground' things that the different places have been trying to do include:

- Improving the routes from the bus stop to properties with gateway signage, waymarks showing the walking route, providing a separate car-free route;
- Scoping a shuttle link between station and property, e.g. providing a minibus driven by volunteers or a local taxi company;
- Engaging with cycle hire businesses to create a route to the property;
- Working with local bus companies to improve routes and signage;
- Working with train companies to promote rail travel to properties.

Case studies include:

- At National Trust Wallington, north of Newcastle, they have repeated and extended their successful free bus service on summer Saturdays from Newcastle. They have worked out that they are gaining more income so that they're paying upfront to Go North East to provide that service, but the spend per head from the people arriving on that bus is more than paying for the cost of providing that service.
- At National Trust Studland on the South Coast, they have got some great transport options already there. It is a fantastic place to arrive at on the chain ferry from Bournemouth and Poole. The open top buses go right onto the ferry, making for an amazing trip. They have also alongside that teamed up with Beryl Bikes, the public bike hire provider in Bournemouth and Poole, providing an extension for that service out at Studland. There are some fantastic and lovely flat cycle routes. There are fantastic options for car-free travel, and what they have done is focusing on making the journey part of the experience, communicating those options, so that people can actually see that it might actually be more fun and a great day out, with

more of a holiday experience, to do something different and to get there on bike. Other options include steam trains and other bus routes coming in from the other side of Purbeck.

- At National Trust, Tyntesfield, near Bristol, they have been doing some great social media work to promote the existing bus service out from Bristol. They have got a good bus route, dropping off at the end of their drive and they have produced some great show reels, one with Trixie the dog having a car-free day out and enjoying the free drink at the cafe on arrival.

Staff reported that it is difficult to translate this activity through into an increase in visitors choosing car-free options. It just shows that this is a long-term process. This is something that takes multiple seasons and long-term messaging across many channels before and after arrival, incentivising people and making the journey easier. It is a long term game but an organisation like the National Trust has spent decades becoming car-centred, creating a business and an organisation which revolves around cars. It is not possible to change that in the space of a season. It is going to take years to begin to turn around that culture and get people to think about visiting in a different way.

There was a visitors' survey at all of the sites taking part in this pilot. Statistics included:

- 50% of their visitors are open to visiting car-free; that includes people who are already, sometimes or often visit car-free;
- 26% say that they might visit car-free in the future if car-free visiting was made easier for them.
- A range was offered of possible things that people thought might help to shift their future travel, with 56% citing easier access by bus or train as the thing that is most likely to influence them in the future. That was way ahead of any of the other choices.
- 13% said that better bus and better bike and walking routes might tip them into change, and about 13% cited having a reward or a discount. There is a clear message about where we need to make the improvements, and in particular that last mile link through from the bus or train to the property.

In conclusion, here are some of the recommendations to the National Trust for the future and that will also be recommending to other partners:

- Improving information, getting car-free travel information up the top of the running order. It is the same principle as putting vegan menu items at the top of the menu. More people are going to choose them if they're right there at the top.
- Introducing a national level reward, whether it's a free hot drink or something else across all National Trust properties.
- To create a flagship property where we can really demonstrate what good looks like, somewhere where everything is done to a gold standard, e.g. the way marking, the signage, shuttle bus, the on-site welcome, left luggage, water refills, bike repair kits, all of those things that one would want to see to make it really easy and welcoming for car-free visitors.
- Longer term ambitions that we are encouraging the Trust to think about include a car-free membership, to have a well discounted level of membership for people that does not include the free car parking that National Trust membership is so bound up with. This makes good sense all round, because there are a number of the properties that are hard to get to without a car. So anyone without a car is already having a chunk of places taken off their membership access. This opens up a new market of about 15 million people, many from London who at the moment are not getting value from their National Trust membership, whether it pays its way and if they get enough value out of the places they can reach. Once the new visitors are on site, they spend money in the cafes and shops, so it makes great business sense.

Finally, it has been calculated that if they could shift one in a hundred National Trust visitors to come car-free, that would remove half a million journeys a year off the roads. There is a massive impact that could be had from a small shift in behaviour.

[https://www.goodjourney.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/Visitor\\_Bus\\_Toolkit.pdf](https://www.goodjourney.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/Visitor_Bus_Toolkit.pdf)



Rural Roundtable  
2024-11-26 Kirkbride

**Presentation 2: Alastair Kirkbride, Low Carbon Destinations** ([www.lowcarbondestinations.org](http://www.lowcarbondestinations.org))

The speaker has worked for many years on car-free leisure issues and did a Churchill fellowship, visiting Europe and looking at how they dealt with visitor travel. From that has developed [lowcarbondestinations.org](http://www.lowcarbondestinations.org), developing ideas including some brought back from the Alps, visitor travel, options and policies.

The theme for today is policy and strategy. A framework is needed for these ideas to work better.

The good work that is being done is being made in spite of the policy framework in which we work in an attempt to expose what the vacuum looks like.

We have been working with Cumbria tourism, funded by Westmorland and Furness Council in the Lake District over the last year or so at three valleys, focusing on the locality scale, and especially the valley scale, in places like the Lake District. That seems to be how visitor access and travel is planned, managed, how the finances work and how the governance works that that scale. It is bigger than individual attractions, but smaller than the local authority scale. That is what works. So we have been trying to explore how that might work back in the UK context, and this is the approach that we have been trying to take, rather than the typical travel planning approach. We have taken an approach that borrows from overseas, but also looks a lot more pragmatically at the UK as well.

What sort of access and transport do visitors want? It has been shown that people want these experiences. They are quite often in rural areas with sensitive and protected landscapes. People are going to places for the quality of those landscapes themselves. So how many cars might actually fit into those landscapes? We have been looking at that in some detail. In terms of the locality profile, marketing and visitor markets, people of different views generally can agree on the valley car carrying capacity.

- What does a world-class visitor transport system look like for Langdale?
- What are the annual costs?
- How would we pay for and manage it?

This reflects the approach to this material.

Some work was funded by a variety of sources: Friends of the Lake District, the National Park Authority and the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation. It was trying to get away from the immediate and the urgent to try to gauge appetites for future transport systems in places like this.

Citing a recent survey, responses from visitors and residents were considered, showing that they do not really want things to stay as they are. They want managed access to busy places at busy times. They want really good, integrated public transport. We might already know that, but it is useful to know what the general appetites of the public are out there. Perhaps most visitors don't know what they want, because they are visitors. They are on holiday. They are not thinking about these things, but if you do force them, they want less traffic and better public transport. Nowhere do they say we want bigger car parks or more car parks. Residents want better public transport, park and ride, better cycling, restricting access. In terms of what people and visitors actually want, it is quite clear what the mandate is that they are giving to places. As regards park carrying capacity, there are far too many cars in these places. Every car parking space at Langdale was counted in order to understand how much capacity there is and what we might think of as the carrying capacity. Langdale has about 600 parking spaces that visitors can use that are legal, but some of that is borderline. If you add in pop-up car parks, it goes up to about 900. There are about 390 parking spaces that are probably okay.

So what do we do with that? What do we do with the fact that on a busy day about two thirds of the car parking is ridiculous. And what do we do with those visitors? How do we capture revenue from those visitors to provide different types of services? Those questions will not be answered today – this is just illustrating the approach that is being taken.

The busyness of different valleys is really different. Langdale has busy weekends through about nine months of the year. Hawkshead, which is 15 miles away, is really seasonal. The ecology of access is quite different in different places.

The model focuses on how people get to destinations and what happens when they are in the destination. What do we do about luggage? What do we do about governance and economics?

In a lot of these places, looking specifically at 6 areas, the key topics are

- Active travel routes;
- Integrated public transport;
- Guest passes;
- Bike networks;
- Visitor parking management to restrict visitor access to these places.

These destinations are in demand because they are so beautiful. We are managing demand for people wanting experiences in places like this. So we need to occasionally get our heads out of bus services, car parks, yellow lines etc. This is what visitors are going for and we need to get in their heads a bit more often.

Referencing a map, the Langdale summer bus services are the blue line on the map. The green dotted line is the main spine going up through the Lake District with about 9 buses a day. This is what a world class transport service looks like. It has enhancements on those services and services into other areas. Visitors do not just go up and down Langdale. They go to other places, too. They want to get back. They want to do different things. What we are saying is 'what does a world class visitor bus service network look like' and it looks something like this.

Costings: enhanced services cost anywhere from about £100,000 to about £300,000 a year. If we distributed those extra costs over an area, what would they come out to? £300,000 is the full cost; £100,000 is anticipating contributions from various organizations. It does mean that you can get world class bus services from as little as 20p per person, or up to about £6 per car, depending on how you want to cost it. This demonstrates that, once we start looking at what good looks like, what are the total costs of that and how might you distribute those costs? Then we start thinking about things like visitor levies, or however we might want to do it. These costs are really quite affordable. It's just that when you see £300,000, everyone gets a bit nervous, but you do not have to.

There is a lot of noise out there at the moment, so how do we pull this together? In order to grab these opportunities, we need to get organised in terms of the visitor, as we have been trying to do, but there are some great opportunities at the moment.

1. Visitor levies: e.g. visitor revenue in the Lake District and proposals from the Scottish Government and the Welsh Government.
2. Over-tourism: as an issue, it is not political. It is dealt with in different ways, but everyone gets it.
3. How do we start considering locality scale visitor access and transport in terms of devolution and the biggest overhaul to buses in a generation? There are all sorts of things happening with the new government and we need to get organised in terms of visitor transport in order to make the most of that. Cumberland Council is doing impressive work on buses, getting much more innovative in terms of what they are doing and have started to subsidise bus services again. There was no talk of tourism travel in that, and there was no mention of the National Park, so that is missing.
4. Best practice from Ullswater as to businesses getting together, underwriting and developing bus services because they recognise the benefit to businesses of really good transport services locally.

Acknowledgment is needed that visitors want change, and this is not broadly acknowledged enough by everybody. There is a whole new generation of visitors coming through that are not like the last ones in terms of their attitude to the car. Are we designing destinations that are ready for them? There are some, yes, but that's not everywhere.

British tourism is seen as the visitor economy, with a real emphasis on attracting in international tourists, whereas in a lot of other places it is a case of 'get our own house in order first'. Most visitors to most destinations in the UK are domestic, and yet an awful lot of emphasis is on international tourism. This leads us in the wrong direction. There is a norm that is emerging elsewhere that in the UK, with visitor or guest cars, local scale governance is stopping this leakage of visitor revenues out of areas.

There are different roles and responsibilities between public, private and community sectors. This has been demonstrated that this is a real thing in mainland Europe which is from a visitor/ destination management perspective. This shift to resident liability is driving tourism strategy, not vice versa, and it is partly a post-Covid thing, but it gets really interesting in what that means.

There is a vacuum of governance in the UK on transport and tourism.

We will sort it:

1. Coherent visitor areas recognised by DfT re: transport governance (powers, abilities, funding);
2. Costed plans developed (by whom?) for access and transport for coherent visitor localities;
3. Economic models established for UK transport services for visitor-dominated localities.

We need different economic models. Overseas, the economic models of visitor travel are quite different to the UK. The Ullswater Hopper work is demonstrating that there are opportunities for looking at different economic models here.

4. Move beyond the demonstrator and pilot: establish formal comprehensive structures and policy. We don't think of urban travel from demonstrators and a pilot perspective. We need mainstream structural systems through which visitor travel is considered. Visitor travel is the square peg trying to fit in a round hole. We either need to change the shape of the hole or the shape of the peg.

<https://visitpeakdistrict.com/blog/car-free-days-out>





### **Presentation 3: Matt Winfield, Sustrans: Work with National Parks on Active Travel**

([www.sustrans.org.uk](http://www.sustrans.org.uk))

The purpose of the presentation is to present the work carried out by Sustrans in national parks, and then to talk about opportunities and barriers. Sustrans is moving towards a new strategy period in the next financial year for five years. We have a new priority around the integration of public transport and active travel.

Sustrans is interested to do more on this, particularly with bus and coach operators. We have got quite a lot going on with national network rail and train operating companies. There is a lot more we need to do.

Our mission is to make it easier for everyone to walk, wheel and cycle. Sustrans is a UK wide charity. We have a particularly big operation in Scotland. There are 600 people working across the UK doing all kinds of things. The biggest of those things is to make the National Cycle Network (NCN) much better. It is 13,000 miles of route across the UK.

A lot of it is in good condition, but quite a lot of it is not. Sustrans is working to improve that and it is a big focus. There is a lot of work in towns and cities. Over the last years of our strategy, the focus has been a lot more on towns and cities and we really want to switch that out and respond to the issue of transport poverty in rural areas by being much more active in that space.

Regarding Scotland, we have been working in both Lomond and Trossachs and the Cairngorms, and the examples here are quite typical of the work in Scotland. There are some strong relationships in those national parks, particularly with the head of visitor services. The model in Scotland is different to the rest of the UK, where we have quite a close relationship with Transport Scotland, and we have a number of funded programs that then grant funds to local authorities and others. As an example of the work we have been doing in Loch Lomond and the Trossachs, we have been working with a community trust to deliver improvements to the National Cycle Network.

They are often really lovely and quite rural in nature. So things like an improvement to our National Cycle Network Route 775, between two small communities which is about moving an on-road bit of national cycle network onto the A85 trunk road to an off-road path. This is a big scheme driven by the local community. Those projects can be quite expensive, are quite time consuming, but have a potentially big impact.

The way we direct funding in Scotland is driven by Transport Scotland in part, and we have good relationships with the national parks, and in Scotland, Sustrans' ambitions and national park ambitions tend to align. Transport Scotland's direction is that more of the NCN programme should be targeted in urban areas because the benefit cost ratio is easier to justify in those contexts where user numbers are likely to be higher. This is quite a challenge for our work.

The elements of our proposals to Transport Scotland focus more on leisure and tourism a little bit harder and this is increasingly difficult in a constrained fiscal environment to justify. In the Cairngorms National Park, we have delivered six active travel projects. This is about building a pipeline of routes in these places. When funding comes on for construction, they can be taken forward and we are beginning to help provide funding to them to deliver some of those routes.

In England, there is a lot of different work going on, e.g. the North York Moors National Park, where we have delivered a big feasibility study across that national park which is similar to a Local Cycling and Walking Investment Plan (LCWIP). This includes a number of links, for example from the village of Staithes in the Park to Whitby. These are links that are deliberately intended to support local journeys as well as visitor journeys. We do need to make that overlap. A lot of this work we do in national parks is in partnership, e.g. with WSP. Often, it is difficult to get on frameworks, and we have to partner with those consultants that have access to those frameworks.

Another piece of work in the North Yorkshire Moors is something called the Cinder Track. We have not been working in national parks for long enough to have a good batch of monitoring data but we are building up our 'before' data as an example in North Yorkshire Moors. We have carried out route user intercept surveys in 2023 on the Cinder Track between Burniston and Clifton. Construction is due to complete shortly, and then we will have to wait for a period and then do the 'after' monitoring, but the need, particularly throughout England, is to be clear that the uplift that these routes generate is there. The monitoring is a really important part of this work. In Northumberland, we are currently in discussion about doing an active travel network piece

there, again with WSP. In the Yorkshire Dales, where we have been working for about 18 months, again on a network development plan for the park, this was actually delivered formally as an LCWIP. National parks got LCWIP funding for this local cycling and walking infrastructure plan. It is planned for a network of local cycling and walking routes. It has typically been thought of as more of an urban solution.

The Lune Valley is a gorgeous part of the country just north of Lancaster, often pass through as people drive up to the Lake District. We are fortunate here to have a generous benefactor who is paying for the feasibility of a long route that builds on an existing Greenway that is 5 miles north of Lancaster, a place called Bull Beck, to take you up into Kirby Lonsdale and Ingleton, into the Yorkshire Dales National Park. So the bottom bit of this already exists, and is quite an extraordinary experience, as you cycle out of Lancaster with beautiful hills. The plan is that this connection will reach right into the National Park. It is quite a long way, 13 miles or so from Lancaster into the Yorkshire Dales National Park. The point of it is, it will make some really interesting connections for people in local communities on that route, as well as perhaps providing a visitor attraction for some people who are a bit more ambitious or better able who could make that route. Finding the funding from outside of the normal routes creates a really interesting opportunity for us. We can be more ambitious. We have the revenue to develop this, and it's millions of pounds. It is complicated. There are a large number of landowners, but it allows us to attract small bits of match funding and some capital funding across the different landowners to gradually build this route. You might see bits that appear not to be coherent at the start, because we have to build where there is the opportunity, but we have the plan for the full length of that route.

There are plenty of constraints in the New Forest while looking at how to create safe spaces for cyclists, across a narrow crossing, on a narrow road where there is the tension between a path that is designed to fit into a rural context against a path that is usable by all types of cyclists, and all types of walking and wheeling for the users. This has a cheaper full life cost, and is easier to maintain, and is good in all conditions. There is work coming up in Wales. We are talking to the Brecon Beacons about the opportunity for e-bikes in that space, but we have not had any commissions there yet.

**Summary of Experience:** Colleagues work across many national parks in different governance contexts. Local walking and cycling plans are important. This is a way of unlocking funding from Active Travel England. It is a way of embedding those elsewhere into neighbourhoods or local plans, and just having a really clear, coherent plan for how that might look. It is not about one connection here. It is about an overview of an area. Where are the nodes? Where do you want to get to? How are people going to move around? How can you benefit local people as well as visitors.

There is a lot more work needed on quiet lanes, repurposing particularly quiet roads, just for cycling and walking and Sustrans has been doing some work across the UK, not in national parks, at the moment on this. Clearly it is an excellent low carbon solution, but it is often quite a difficult thing to achieve. Going for funding and understanding the way BCRs are weighted requires needing to demonstrate the value from the investment, which is easier, typically, in an urban context, when you are not looking at the wider benefits of investment in terms of health and rural transport poverty.

Design challenges: We need to present designs to the Local Transport Note 1/20, the cycling design standard or other local design standard. If you lay a bit of tarmac, it is initially going to look very dark and quite stark over time. It will fade. You can roll into the surface. You can make it look pretty much like you want, but you need to have a good quality path where the space affords. In a new car park that has been treated in that way, the bike route may be being treated in a very different way. However, we do need to respect local character.

Complications with land rights are always difficult. This came up from colleagues in England, working in national parks. In Epping Forest, the Verderers in there were really challenging. Epping Forest has got a really nice path in the north, but the bit in the south is just a muddy track that gets super wide when it rains, as people try to avoid the mud, and is unusable by anyone other than mountain bikers or particularly adventurous runners or walkers. So even making minor improvements can be really difficult.

This is a bit of a difficult one, but national parks often have a really good vision on standard travel, but the practice and expectations mitigate against this change. The expectation is that people are going to travel by car and that just perpetuates the issue. We need to shift to more of a planning paradigm of vision and validation to understand what you want to see, how people want to behave, but understanding that some locations are really tricky. The relationship with the highway authority is critical. The additional layer of governance there can make things slow.



There are funding issues. Our experience is that often we are asked to give unpaid advice as a charity to a national park, and it does not need to be a bit of paid work. This is not pointing a finger at one particular national park but is it a box ticking exercise? Where is the real drive to make change and understanding the constraints?

The flip side of this is that historically national parks have had limited access to transport funding, particularly in the space that Sustrans works in, but that seems to be changing, with active travel funding, capability funding and access to elsewhere funding. In England and in Scotland, through our 'places for everyone' programme, there is now more access to funding.

There are some opportunities. The rural design guidance from Active Travel should appear in the spring and should be quite exciting. That will talk about quiet ways and about how to move towards them. The repurposing of leisure networks: many of these areas do have routes in them that are quite well established. What are the opportunities there to make connections or improve the surfaces so that people are going to be using them for a wider range of trips? This has been touched on elsewhere about the partnership working across the beneficiaries within the tourism industry, joining that up more. Resources are a problem in local authorities. Loads of local authorities and parks do not have the resource to do this. In Scotland where we have had people embedded in national parks, typically, they go and they work for the National Park, which is a problem for us as we lose good people, but it is brilliant for that national park to have someone who really can drive forward that agenda. There is a cost to that, of course.

E-bikes: following ten years of discussion, they will unlock all kinds of potential in national parks, so we need to design with that in mind.

Comments and questions were invited on the three presentations:

- The blacktop kerb routes and protected landscapes get pretty contentious, quite fast, and how are the competing ideas best reconciled?
- Land rights have been mentioned in the past on roundtables about potentially the need for stronger CPO powers to get full routes. Sometimes you can get one landowner that blocks a key bit of a cycle route.
- Q. What are the lessons drawn from working on this and opportunities, benefits and ways forward?  
A. Some of the numbers quoted in Presentation 1 and some of the cases cited in Presentations 1 and 2 can be said to produce real benefits, e.g. In Wallington, where people would not have visited that property if there had not been a free bus.
- Q. When speaking to people in the hospitality industry, it looked like there was a desire to do things around visitor travel and to reduce the impact, but because they were such small businesses, micro SMEs with minimal staff, they did not know how to deal with things individually, but collectively, there might be opportunities to do more in specific areas. Is that something that has seemed to come through?  
A. (Alistair Kirkbride) Yes, these are the concerns of an awful lot of visitor areas. Most businesses and visitor areas are small businesses, and they are up against it, whether it is because of post-Covid or the cost of living. A lot of hospitality jobs are very low paid and housing costs and living costs in these places are very high. The frustration in a lot of these places is that there is a lack of a coherent body to discuss these things where different viewpoints can come together. A lot of the destination management organisations are about developing the destinations for visitor economy primarily, and they are not called destination management organisations anymore. There is 'economics' in the title, yet the community voice is very much more about the community and National Park authorities. The thing found overseas was that there is a body that brings all these together at a locality scale, and that allows this forum for these things to be discussed, e.g. in Lauterbrunnen in Switzerland and Saalfelden in Austria; how do you get people to work and how do you create the conditions so that local people can come back and live and work in those areas? This is as important in those discussions as asking, 'How do we get more visitors into the area that spend more'. We do not seem to have those structures here that allow that to happen. It only exists in some places but it is not the norm and that is the difference.

Further to the Lake District work we are doing, and in Ullswater, there is Sustainable Integrated Transport for Ullswater (SITU)<sup>1</sup> that is a coming together of visitor businesses, parish council and other community

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<sup>1</sup> <https://situcumbria.org.uk/>

networks, so it can happen. There needs to be awareness that it should happen, but then all sorts of other things start happening which gets really interesting.

**NGO (Roger Clarke, Hope Valley Climate Action):** on this theme, the Hope Valley Climate Action Group has been looking in the Hope Valley in the Peak District at an option for this. Experiences were cited from elsewhere in Europe, in particular what is happening in Switzerland, following a visit to Stubaital near Innsbruck and talking to people from their tourist organisation, which is largely funded through a visitor tax. A couple of things they have done with that is

1) to upgrade walking and cycling trails through the valley to enable sustainable travel between settlements, not simply up in the mountains and

2) the most interesting thing was to support the local bus service - visitors, particularly in the winter, get a visitor card as part of their stay. The bus runs every half hour the length of the valley from 5am in the morning until 11pm at night, providing a viable alternative to the use of private cars, which we can only envy. Work is planned on following the Langdale model about what it would cost and how would you organise the kind of public integrated public transport system, which is the norm in the Alpine countries.

Regarding the point about buses to visitor destinations is really important. There has been the experience in the last couple of years in the Hope Valley, in the middle of the Peak district, of having the Peak sightseers bus provided by Stagecoach, a great open top bus trundling around in the summer that is well used, but it is not being developed as part of the public bus network. It is a free-standing operation, and when people board it, they are rather set back to find they got to pay £5 or more to travel on the bus. It is really important, if visitor buses develop, that they are seen as part of the public bus service as that creates better viability for public buses rather than a free-standing operation.

The second point about developing active travel routes is really important. We are working with the County Council on an active travel master plan for the Hope Valley at present and recognize all the issues identified. It is important that we do find ways of using some of the public road network to give priority to active travel, in and around the valley for walking and cycling, not simply walking routes up on the hills, and that we look at active travel. There is a risk, I think, as with some of the Sustrans approach being looking at, in joining up different settlements with a kind of longer distance cyclist in mind. What is really needed is active travel in and around settlements for both visitors and local people, so that it is micro and detailed, but rather than the lines on maps approach about across the National Park. Active Travel England, in their current support for national parks to look at active travel are focusing on the local and the everyday, not simply the longer-range routes. The Active Travel England guidance about rural active travel is a really important point. Can we make sure that where there is bus provision for people to access visitor attractions that it is part of the public bus network and Sustrans colleagues to make sure we are focused on the local journeys for walking and wheeling as well as cycling, not simply the longer-range cycling opportunities?

**GOV (Rachel Farrington, Visit Britain):** We have talked a lot about local leadership and the DMOs as they were. Visit England has gone through this process of taking the 200+ DMOs, many of which were overlapping different structures, different governance structures and funding structures. We are going about a process to produce just 40 LVEPs, as they're now called (local visitor economy partnerships), which will have a much better integration into local government, much better integration into local decision-making, community planning and all of those kind of things. Each of them also has a growth plan for that area. These conversations really highlight how important that process is, rather than having a disjointed visitor economy set-up actually with the new LVEP structure, feeding into Visit Britain and Visit England's activity. It makes the whole governance of this sector a lot easier. If there are opportunities to introduce anyone on the call to their local LVEP and set up those relationships, the support is there.

<https://www.visitbritain.org/research-insights/motivations-influences-decisions-and-sustainability-research>

Regarding a sector made up of SMEs, this is something that is recognised at Visit England, and we do a lot of support, training and resources around SMEs, going into the sustainability space, looking at the work of Good Journey over the past few years to see how they have been doing with some of the bigger organisations like RHS. There are definitely learnings we can draw across there into some of the training that we already have available.

Visitor tax is a very live issue and something that Visit England is very conscious of is that hypothecation is not something we are very good at in the UK. In terms of if you are taking a tax, is it then going to the visitor economy, or is it being reinvested as such? Or is it actually going into the central pot where it could be spent on anything? We are keen to see that where these levies are being introduced that they're either business led

like the one in Manchester, or they are being ringfenced for activities such as transport, street cleaning and all of those things that support the visitor economy.

Finally is the important distinction on the inbound versus domestic. With inbound, all of this is just as important because a lot of inbound visitors don't know how to navigate the road networks. They are not comfortable with driving on the "wrong" side of the road. So, having good public transport provision does help that inbound sector. Currently, the consensus is that domestic tourism is dispersal, and therefore we find it really difficult to get recognition from central government that it is something that needs funding and something that needs promoting.

Actually, the British spend £7 billion abroad. If we retain just 10% of that, think of the impact it could have on local communities and that spend in the UK. What we are constantly fighting for is domestic marketing but currently Visit England has absolutely no budget to do domestic marketing and market some of these fantastic products and destinations that have been discussed today. It is definitely a conversation to be picked up with colleagues who raised it about how we can draw attention to actually the economic impact that domestic tourism could have on these areas, and how that links up with the transport networks and supporting the building of sustainable transport networks for locals as well as visitors.

Some of Blenheim Palace's car park visitors are from overseas, so there is a story there.

**NGO (Chris Trolley, RHS):** On the role of local authorities and the influence they have on attractions like the Royal Horticultural Society, there is the example of RHS Garden, Bridgewater, in Manchester, where there is a positive relationship there with Transport for Greater Manchester (TfGM). This past year, they have run a service extension and diversion from an existing public bus service that comes right to our front door now. That is all well and good, but that is because we have a really positive relationship with TfGM. We have other gardens where we do not have as good a relationship with the local council, and they do not support us in the way that TfGM does. So if, for instance, in Wisley in Surrey, we run our own shuttle bus service there, which is a huge cost to us, which it does really well, but the funding is not always going to be there internally and Surrey County Council do not want to have anything to do with us, so there is very little support there.

The other side of the coin is that if you do not have that support, it is really difficult to do anything about it, but I do think what we are continuing to do is lobby those councils, and we need to continue to put that support on those local authorities. They have passenger transport units for a reason. They do have an obligation to provide these services where there is nothing else. So in rural locations like ours it is hugely relevant. However, we do need to keep lobbying those local authorities because they do have that obligation. There are positive examples but what you do not see is the negative ones that take time.

**Stephen Joseph:** In the last couple of weeks, a large sum of money was given to local authorities for bus services and, unlike previous bus service funding, this has been done on a formula basis, based on need, population, etc. which means that there is a large number of authorities, particularly rural ones outside cities, that have got sums of revenue and capital funding for buses and some capacity funding to employ people to spend it. One of the officials involved said 'there is nowhere to hide now'. So when local authorities say, 'we would love to put on buses to visitor attractions, but we have not got any money', that is no longer true. There will always be challenges and different views on what that money should go on, but there is now funding in most authorities. The allocations to each authority were published on the [dft.gov.uk](https://www.dft.gov.uk) website. This is in the last couple of weeks. Where there has been frustration with some local authorities saying there is no funding, it would be worth now going back to them highlighting this new funding from HMG for the next year, with an indication that it will be continued. Can we now have a conversation about that shuttle bus? What with limited rural bus services to rural attractions, there are now opportunities to address that.

**NGO (Zsolt Schuller, National Trust):** The National Trust has a mode-specific project called Cyclists Welcome, as well as lobbying for broader improvements around sustainable and active travel, working with Good Journey. Part of the external outreach is to raise the awareness of local authorities and people like Active Travel England and National Highways about the importance of leisure travel. Some of the research at the beginning of the project identified that leisure is the most single most common purpose for a car journey in England. Yet a lot of the focus is on utility trips.

More work is needed around blurring the boundaries and one of the interesting conversations with Active Travel England related to some work as part of a Cycling England project in 2010, where Cycling England put some money aside to do something called 'Finding New Solutions', which was looking at the routes back into everyday cycling for people. They did a project to look at a positive leisure, cycling experience as the first step

back into everyday cycling. The National Trust, along with the Lake District and Devon, did some work with that and it proved a causal link that a positive leisure cycling experience can be that first step back into everyday cycling. You do not tend to go with this focus on utility of people like Active Travel England and others. It is important to help them understand. You do not go from not cycling at all to cycling to work. You need to go and do something in between which is often a leisure experience, and that probably applies to bus or rail use, as well as this kind of intermediate step.

It is a slow game. National Highways are an interested partner. They have a very good picture about everyday trips to work and the timings of them, but they do not have a very good picture and data on leisure journeys. The National Trust, with all of its places, has a really good insight and data set that shows when people arrive, how long they stay, what days they arrive, etc. The National Trust is working with National Highways to ask could this data be useful to build into your overall model of how your network works and help identify the reasons for spikes and dips in demand.

<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/11745398.2016.1250648>

SJ: The National Trust is on a journey here. Is the sense that what was described by Good Journeys is going to be rolled out more widely to more properties?

A: It is hoped so. Being a transport planner within the National Trust, there is a capacity building exercise that is needed internally, so that this is not a flash in the pan. This needs to be a core part of our business going forward.

**GOV (Alanna Kite, Visit Hertfordshire)** (<https://www.visitherts.co.uk/>): Visit Hertfordshire is one of the local visitor economy partnerships for Hertfordshire and it also runs another of the LVEPs, Visit Kent, two major destinations and supporting sustainable travel, active travel, connecting visitors to key attractions and destinations are priorities. There has been collaboration with Good Journey in both counties to encourage lots of local businesses to offer incentives for those that arrive car-free. There are links with the National Trust.

In Kent, there was a link-up with Arriva to divert their route so that they could get the public transport route to stop off at Sissinghurst Castle Gardens, one of the top gardens to visit in Kent. They ran it as a pilot and it worked really well, so now it is part of their route. SMEs are supported as well as all of the business attraction destinations to help drive that purpose, to incentivise green travel and sustainable travel, to do that work collaboratively and in partnership, with transport operators, with local authorities and tourism businesses to overcome those last mile barriers and work towards that integrated leisure, travel into and around these counties, particularly for Hertfordshire.

Transport in and out of the counties is pretty good, but going from east to west is a complete nightmare. It is about trying to engage with local authorities and transport operators to ensure that leisure travel needs are factored into local transport planning. It is tricky. There is lobbying, both nationally at government level and having key discussions with stakeholders. A large part of what we do is fed by data and insights. There is an in-house research team. Perception research involves looking at what people think of these destinations, how they would travel and what they would like to see. Resident research asks if tourism is a positive force for nature, plus items like parking, traffic and litter issues that affect day to day life. Visit Hertfordshire is here to collaborate with partners and as many people as possible to fight the fight, plus aspects like signposting facilities, bike racks and EV charging etc. The wish is to be included in any discussion around transport and transport planning in any of these destinations. There is support for creating itineraries for car-free days out, promoting Christmas markets by train, having all of that information available for visitors to use, engagement with transport providers and operators.

**CC (Jenny Couch, North Lincolnshire Council)** (<https://www.northlincs.gov.uk/>): There is a responsibility for public transport as well as the visitor economy and the challenges that exist as a rural location. Some of the attractions are not big enough. There are not the historic houses or the gardens to visit, so there is a reliance on local visitors. Existing public bus routes are being used to try something different.

It is a challenge that when we get our Bus Service Improvement Plan funding, sometimes it will not cover those extra things that have been suggested. It is not as clear cut as we perhaps think it is. There is a reliance on getting people into the area via train and that is a big challenge, struggling with reduced services, cancellations, running late, missed connections and everything else. There is a bigger picture here. The plan is to look at what else we can do, looking at transport across a sparse rural area, and looking at the Greater Lincolnshire area. It is moving to a devolved authority, so enhancing those opportunities that there may be to work with Greater Lincolnshire partners on a more day to day basis, thinking about Lincoln City, where they

may get the benefit of the visitors going there. It may help to look at other public transport in terms of train and bus. Suggestions on how to address these challenges are welcome or to share experience around BSIP and looking at those very isolated rural locations.

SJ: In the National Rail awards, the customer service award this year went to East Midlands Trains for specifically the work done on the Nottingham to Skegness Rail service, which they had done a big refresh on. A lot of those people who want to do those summer journeys to holiday camps in the Skegness area do not have cars, and EMT's trains have done an impressive job on that, so that would be worth looking into. They ran buses when there were not enough seats on the trains from places like Grantham direct to holiday parks. The reason why this resonates is that they have done things like organise the queuing at major stations like Nottingham and had performing clowns or conjuring to entertain the children in the queue so as to make the journey part of what was interesting.

**NGO (Ruth Bradshaw Campaign for National Parks)** ([www.cnp.org.uk/](http://www.cnp.org.uk/)): National Parks and National Park Authorities have cropped up already. One of the issues is that National Park authorities themselves do not have any powers over transport. So the way in which things are set up within their area makes a big difference. It was interesting to hear about the sort of different structure that Visit Britain is setting up with better integration with local government. It would be good to know how that links to National Park Authorities, because for some of them, one of the big issues that they are split across a number of different transport authorities within the area, e.g. the Peak District, which can make things quite complicated.

Visitor levies have been mentioned a couple of times, because people may be aware the Welsh Government has just introduced legislation to launch a visitor levy in Wales, and one of the issues there is it is not going to be ring-fenced to the protected landscape bodies like the National Park authorities, so money will be potentially raised from visitors to a national park, but there's no mechanism then for actually going back into ensuring that it is going to support the kind of measures that those visitors need, because at the moment it is just going to go into the general pots of the local authorities in the area. There are some real things that we need to look at to make sure that the structures and the mechanisms are in place to actually ensure that those organisations that have got potentially the most to contribute in terms of addressing some of the issues around visitor travel to rural areas and are actually benefiting from what is being set up.

Finally, just a reminder that there is now a new duty on public bodies to seek to further the purposes of protected landscapes. There is an added incentive, for example, on those local authorities that have just got more money for bus services to actually be considering how they are going to use that money to help address travel for visitors to national parks and that part of the purpose is about opportunities for people to enjoy these areas.

**NGO (Amy Blake, Eco Attractions Group)** ([ecoattractions.com](http://ecoattractions.com)): the Eco Attractions experience was raised and the challenges of getting decent bus services to their sites. Eco attractions is a network of attractions which promote or encourage visitors to enjoy visiting the locations. The network has 14 members, including the Eden Project and Holkham. The whole ethos of the attractions is to get people into the natural world and to appreciate being outdoors. Having been working together for about 10 years now as groups to focus on certain issues annually, this year we are looking at sustainable transport and how to encourage more visitors to participate or to visit the attractions by public transport. Research was carried out this year and last year to understand how visitors might be reaching the attractions, with about 90% of visitors visiting by car. The predominant reason is that the public transport just does not reach attractions and the last part of the journey can be challenging. For the more rural attractions, it is quite a significant part of the journey, so we can be talking 6 or 7 miles from the last stop on the bus or train route. A lot of the attractions just are not able to connect the different transport routes together to get the visitors into the attraction.

Gilbert White's house, for example, is one of our members and the buses don't run at weekends, so it is challenging for them to try to encourage visitors to come by bus. What we have been looking at is to attract a new set of visitors to the attractions, and maybe not try to encourage those that are coming to look at an alternative type of transport, but it is quite challenging for them.

The speakers reflected on what they had heard and to consider where next.

**Matt Winfield, Sustrans:** Sustrans are interested in those short journeys rather than long distance travel. That point has been made quite clearly in Scotland. The visitor economy along with some of the national cycle network routes is really quite dependent on those visitors, and it is really important that we have got some

research on that. Across the whole of the UK in the rural space it is about the issue of transport poverty for Sustrans, and how cycling, walking, wheeling, and greater integration with public transport can help. We know there are lots of people working in this space, but it is good to hear some uplifting stories from others as we move forward.

One of the best bike routes was delivered by National Highways through compulsory purchasing farming land in Lewes, East Sussex and we are understanding how we can be bolder there. We want to talk to National Highways about how they can have a planning condition where they are, where the proposal is near the National Cycle Network to improve it. We struggle when annual funding cycles are cut really quickly, so that is an issue, but there is optimism in the room around buses and the role buses can play, and some of the research from on the cost of buses. This is a space that we want to understand more and see how we can support, because people get to a bus stop by walking or wheeling, so it is that space that is important.

**Nat Taplin, Good Journey:** Regarding the difficulty of last mile travel for rural attractions, there are some great things that any attraction can do to change the mindset around this. So, for example, offering a taxi transfer by teaming up with a reliable local taxi operator and saying 'There's a fixed price transfer to get to us from X Town or X station, it's £12 for up to 4 people. Phone this number'. There's a world of difference between that and saying, 'the nearest station is 6 miles away, you'll have to get a taxi.' Something really simple like that can change the offer that changes the kind of perspective on that. Another example of that, rather than if you have some attractions that might have a couple of buses a day and you can either say 'We have got a really patchy bus service, so it's quite difficult to get here by bus', which is what you'll find some places saying, or saying, 'if you phone them up to ask their staff about car-free access instead', you can spin that as 'we have a bus service every day to our site, allowing for a full or half day visit and a lot of people, a lot of places'. People are going to be there for half a day, so they don't need necessarily a bus every half hour. It's great if there is one, but if there's a couple of buses a day they can get there. They can enjoy the attraction.

On a different point, there was mention of the idea of having a flagship car-free property with the National Trust. We would love also to create a flagship car-free destination, and to have somewhere in the UK where we can really show what great car-free breaks and great car-free holidays could look like.

The Alpine Pearls network <https://www.alpine-pearls.com/en> shows the standard to meet. It would be brilliant to have something along those lines to pick up on the research done elsewhere about what that whole kind of car-free holiday experience looks like, and what all those ingredients need to be, but rather than it being a model for us to actually find a place, a destination in the UK and make that happen on the ground with baggage transfer, with shuttle buses, with electric bike hire, all of those ingredients in there, so that the car-free experience actually becomes the unique selling point of the destination. We would be surprised how what a big draw that would be if we really delivered it on the ground so that people could have an amazing car-free holiday.

**Alistair Kirkbride, Low Carbon Destinations:** we have seen that really good things can happen, but it does not happen everywhere, and perhaps it should happen on a bigger scale. Having a demonstration would be great. How do we make really good stuff happen together? E.g. the emergence of LVEPS, the localisation of decision making that the government is calling about the changes in bus funding, the importance of local groups who are getting things done. Really good places work at scale when you restrict visitor car access, but a lot of the places I saw overseas had free buses and everything else, and people still drive everywhere, so you do have to restrict visitor car access.<sup>2</sup>

Chair: there's been some really good points made and lots of very interesting experience shared. Consideration will be given on how to keep this network going. Work is underway with the Royal Geographical Society on this, and so we may use this. We may bring people together there to work out how to take this forward.

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<sup>2</sup> Learn more about the LVEP structure <https://www.visitbritain.org/resources-destination-partners/local-visitor-economy-partnership-lvep-programme>