

WHY BARRIERS?

Many of the traffic-free paths that Sustrans promotes are designed for walkers, cyclists and wheelchair users with additional access in some areas for horse riders.

Motorised vehicles, especially cars and motor-cycles, are not permitted to use them. For years access barriers to prevent illegal use by motorbikes have been considered an essential component of cycle path design and construction. Attitudes have begun to change more recently with the chosen level of control being as low as possible commensurate with the problem to be tackled, and bollards are now the preferred form of access control (1). Sustrans is also developing ways in which existing access barriers can be bypassed (see Figure 1 and photo).



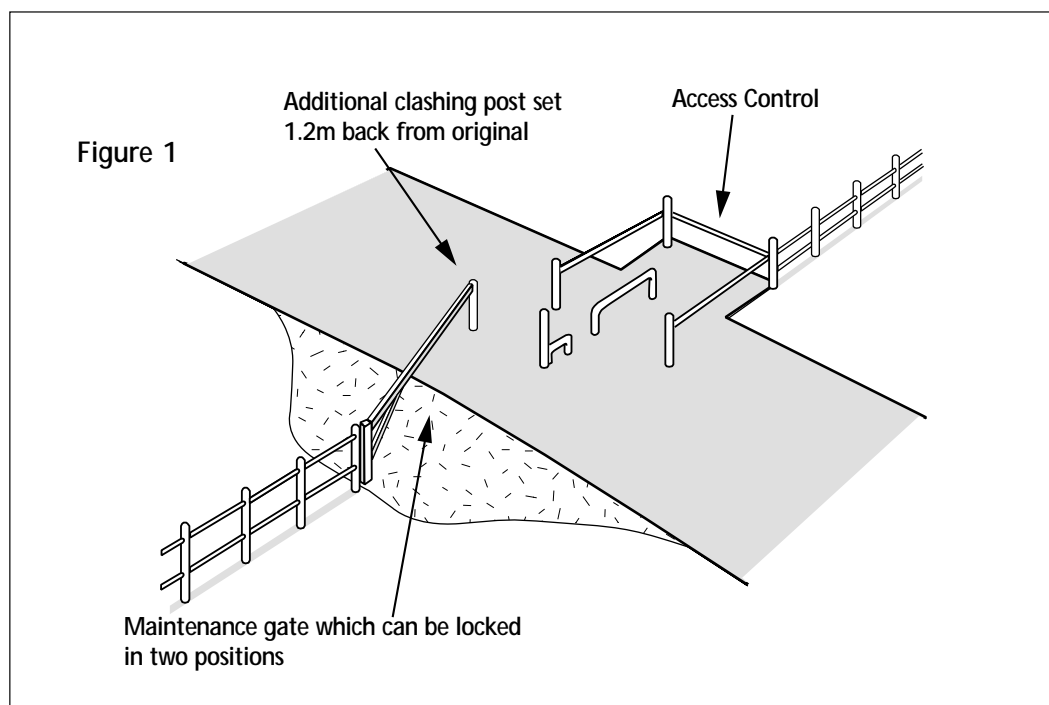
Bypassing access barrier.

Chiseldon to Marlborough

BARRIERS RESTRICT LEGITIMATE USERS

Anything more obstructive than bollards is inconvenient to ordinary cyclists and may be totally impassable for those with trailers for shopping or children, tandems, especially if loaded, recumbents and any other non-conventional bike.

Access controls frequently inhibit the use of a path by many disabled people especially those using any form of wheeled vehicle apart from a conventional pushed wheelchair. Indeed, in the words of one path manager, 'Access controls stop the very people we want to use paths the most'.



ABUSE BY MOTORCYCLISTS

Most of those who manage cycle paths find that illegal use by motorcyclists is often a persistent problem which access barriers may do nothing to solve. Cycle paths are generally used by motorbikers who fit into one or more of the following categories:

- a. they are too young to drive on the road;
- b. they have no tax or insurance;
- c. the motorbike is stolen.

Those who can legally use a motor bike on the roads prefer to do so and the rest may find their way onto cycle paths by trespassing across private land regardless of access barriers. In

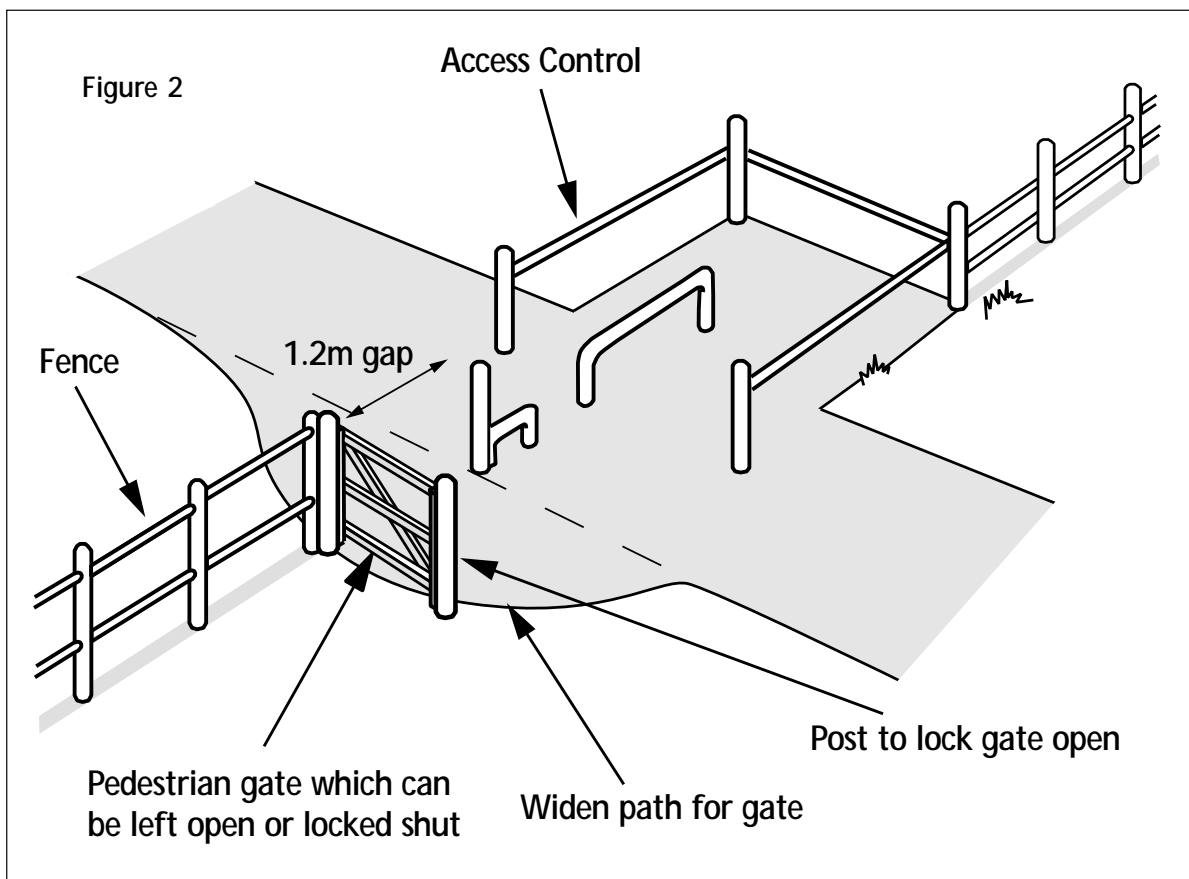
other words, while barriers may be an inconvenience, as a way of stopping illegal use by motorcyclists they frequently do not work. Consequently, in order to attract as many legitimate users as possible, Sustrans advocates the removal of access barriers wherever possible.

THE 1995 DISABILITY DISCRIMINATION ACT

Under the terms of the 1995 Disability Discrimination Act, service providers are expected to 'take reasonable steps to remove or alter a feature...that makes it unreasonably difficult or impossible for a disabled person to use the service: (2) Initially this requires Sustrans to have a stated policy (3) which says that there should be a presumption

against the use of any barriers, with bollards being the first choice of access control.

From October 1999, under the terms of the Act, physical adjustments will be required to existing barriers to give access to those with disabilities. Initially this could be a simple matter of fitting RADAR locks to access gates but given that RADAR locks are unpopular, often difficult to use and take away the independence of many disabled people, Sustrans advocates the removal of barriers. In any case it is likely that this will be mandatory from 2005 when any sort of barrier denying access specifically to disabled people will almost certainly become unlawful. While there is the caveat that the removal of physical barriers may not be required if there are genuine safety issues, if motorcyclists are obtaining access to cycle-paths



regardless of barriers, then removing them is unlikely to appreciably increase the risk.

THE DURHAM EXPERIENCE

Durham County Council owns almost 90 kms of disused railway lines, some of which were converted for walking and cycling use as far back as the late 1960s so it has long experience of the problems involved. This is an area of Britain where there is a tradition of illegal motorcycle use and where the number of motorbike thefts is high.

During the period from September 1997 to September 1998 the council has taken the initiative and removed all but a handful of controls where localised problems are still being sorted out. Contrary to everyone's fears, the existing motorbike problem has got no worse. "I think it fair to say that unauthorised motorcycle use takes place where the individuals concerned have convenient access to the site whether or not there are physical controls. Indeed the removal

of controls has greatly reduced vandalism of adjacent fencing and therefore saved repair costs" (4).

The removal of controls is unlikely to prompt motorcyclists to come from the other side of the county just to use a railway path. It is almost impossible for such people to make a journey of this nature and they already have suitable areas nearer to home where they can ride, albeit illegally. "The removal of barriers and providing 'free' access for motorcyclists has not meant greater problems or any increase in activity (in County Durham)" (4).

AN INITIAL DETERRENT

Some form of initial deterrent may still be necessary, however, when a path is first built.

In this situation Durham County Council installs access controls for about six months before removing them. This makes getting motorbikes onto the path more difficult and means that young motorcyclists often have to go to some lengths to do their riding. Once the levels of usage increase, the barriers can be removed.

"In our experience a high level of (legitimate) usage is the best form of deterrent when considering issues such as motorcycles...". (3)

Prior to the opening of a cycle-path, the problem of illegal use by motorcyclists is often one of perception on the part of landowners, planning authorities and others rather than a proven reality. In this case it is better to install only part of the full barrier in the first instance, narrowing the access, in order to see if the motorbike problem is a real one. If it proves to be the case, then the rest of the control can easily be added. Alternatively, a gate can be provided adjacent to the barrier which can initially be kept locked closed, but which can subsequently be locked in the open position. This is possible with either a pedestrian gate or a field gate (see Figure 1 and 2).

REMOVAL OF BARRIERS

When it comes to the removal of barriers, there are several ways of doing this, some of which are more drastic than others.

The simplest is just to take away the access control altogether, although



Restrictive access control.



Central barrier removed leaving a gap.

York



Restrictive access control



Central barrier retained, leaving a chicane.

York

care is needed at danger spots or on down gradients leading to road junctions where previously the access control acted as a check on cyclists' speed. A form of control, such as a chicane, which will reduce speeds may be required as a replacement.

A more prudent method is to install an additional removable clashing post for the service gate which enables the gate to be locked open leaving a 1.2 metre gap for users to pass through (see Figure 1).

Even in the partly open position, to the casual observer the gate gives the impression that the path is still closed to motorised traffic and this deters motorcyclists. Where no service gate is fitted, a pedestrian gate can be installed and locked open. Then if the motor-cycle problem proves to be insurmountable, the gate can be locked shut. It is important, wherever possible, to open all the controls on any section of path so that a recumbent cyclist, for instance, does not get part way along and find their way barred by a locked gate and an insuperable access control. It is important that the surface of the path around the altered access control is smooth and up to the standard of the main path to ensure that it is negotiable in a wheelchair after works are complete.

USING THE POLICE

"The most effective method of control is to involve the police. Durham Constabularytake motorcycles away from people who are riding off-road until they can prove ownership. This year (1998) they have confiscated 167 motorcycles and crushed over half to date. This is completely controlling the problem in most areas and is far more effective than trying to physically prevent access" (4)

References

1. Sustrans and Ove Arup & Partners, 1997. *The National Cycle Network: Guidelines and Practical Details, Issue 2.*
2. HMSO 1995. *The Disability Discrimination Act 1995.*
3. Sustrans 1998. "Disabled people and the National Cycle Network". *Information Sheet FF05*
4. Andrew Niven, Durham County Council Countryside Manager - pers comm. *September 1998. (Local authorities are invited to telephone Andrew Niven and discuss the removal of barriers with him - 0191 386 4411).*

We are grateful to all those who have contributed to the development of this document and welcome further comments, which should be addressed to Tony Russell at Sustrans

Sustrans
ROUTES FOR PEOPLE

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