

# The National Cycle Network in Northern Ireland

Route User Monitoring Report 2004



## The National Cycle Network in Northern Ireland is...

### Changing the way we move...

Half of all cyclists are cycling more now than they were one year ago. 43% of cyclists intend to cycle more in the future than they are currently cycling.

### Improving the health of the nation...

The Network has helped three quarters (74%) of all users to increase their levels of regular physical activity, 40% by a large amount.

### Helping people go about their everyday lives...

- 44% of all trips on the Network are for utility purposes.
- 21% of all trips are commuter trips, and 17% are shopping trips.
- Almost half of all trips on the Network are for recreation purposes.

### Reducing congestion and vehicle emission...

More than a quarter of Network users could use a car instead of cycling or walking but choose not to.

### Improving access for all...

- 84% of users are pedestrians and one in every eight NCN users is a cyclist.
- 95% of users feel the Network is safe regarding traffic, personal security and path quality.
- 48% of Network users are female, and 52% are male. One fifth of users are children.

## Introduction

**Northern Ireland is served by 700 miles of National Routes on the National Cycle Network, with plans to extend this to 1000 miles by 2008.** Sustrans co-ordinated a series of Route User Surveys on twelve existing routes during the summer of 2004. These were designed to provide detailed profiles of route usage, including volume, nature of use, the profile of users, trip origins and destinations, and issues of particular concern to users.

The surveys took place at the twelve survey stations on one weekday and one weekend day during the school holiday period and on one weekday and one weekend day during term time, between August and early October 2004. In each case the surveys were conducted between 0700h <sup>(1)</sup> and 1900h.

Individual reports including a one-page summary are available for all sites – 12 in total – and these are available from Sustrans. In general, weather conditions for August and September were wetter than average and it is expected that this will have influenced user numbers. <sup>(2)</sup>

This material represents a baseline for Sustrans' surveys of National Cycle Network usage in Northern Ireland and it is planned to carry out follow-up surveys during 2006 and 2007 to assess any changes in usage patterns. There is also useful data being collected by a number of other organisations, particularly Roads Service, at a number of locations on the NCN using automatic cycle counters.

The surveys took place at 5 sites in Belfast and at locations in Derry, Craigavon, Coleraine, Omagh, Newry Canal, and two sites on the Loughshore Trail, at Antrim and Maghery. Two surveys also took place at Ballymena and Larne, on routes that will become National Cycle Network in the future, but the results are not included in this summary on existing routes.

(1) Ormeau Park Survey from 0800h to 1900h.

(2) The Met Office Rainfall Report 2004.

# Summary of Results

**The results from the 12 survey sites show a large variation in usage type and user profile between sites.**

At Millennium Bridge in the centre of Coleraine, for example, 97% of all users were pedestrians, whereas beside the Newry Canal - a more isolated rural greenway - more than half the users were cyclists (51%). Journey purpose shows an equally diverse profile - the Lagan Towpath had 82% of all users on recreational trips whereas, in Craigavon near the shopping centre, only 30% of journeys were for recreation and 68% of

trips were for utility purposes. The survey results have proved very useful in providing previously unknown information on usage. Just as important will be trends that are established in the follow up surveys in years to come. We would encourage those interested in more detailed information, to read the individual site-specific route reports. There are 12 in total, one for each site, and these are available from Sustrans.

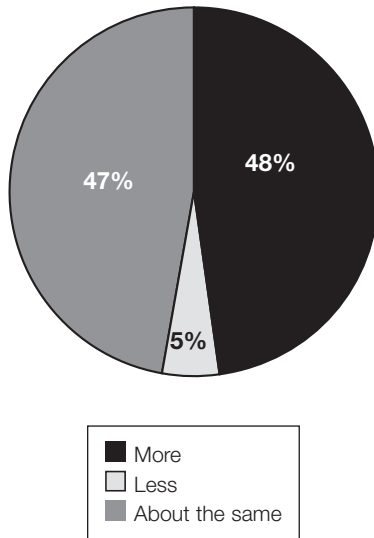
## Changing the way we move... increasing cycle use

**In order to increase cycling levels in Northern Ireland, effort is focused on encouraging existing cyclists to cycle more and encouraging those who do not presently cycle, to start cycling.**

There are many encouraging indications that the National Cycle Network is helping to encourage more cycling. Among existing cyclists, nearly half (48%) said they are cycling more than they did the previous year, with only 5% cycling less. Indeed looking ahead, 43% intend to cycle more in the year to come. Importantly the routes are also encouraging new cyclists, with 12% of cyclists either new to cycling or starting to cycle again.

Overall on the Network, 46% of cycle trips are utility journeys - 32% are for commuting.

*Current levels of cycling compared to one year ago*



Total 4 day user count with number and % of cyclists			
Site	Total users	Total cyclists	% cyclists
Coleraine	11,747	287	2.4
Comber G'way	517	123	23.8
Craigavon	571	102	17.9
Foyle Valley	3,461	339	9.8
Hauler's Way	1,703	720	42.3
Lagan Towpath	2,488	813	32.7
Antrim	452	130	28.8
Maghery	181	47	26.0
Newry Canal	275	139	50.5
Omagh	995	108	10.9
Ormeau Park	1,740	472	27.1
Waterfront Hall	3,349	449	13.4

## Improving the health of the nation...

**Sedentary lifestyles and a lack of physical activity are contributing to an epidemic of obesity in the United Kingdom and Ireland, but people who incorporate physical activity into their daily lives are at lower risk.**

One of the easiest ways to boost physical activity is to include walking and cycling in the daily routine, such as during the journey to work or school. The results from the survey show that the National Cycle Network is a resource that people are using to increase their physical activity levels. Three quarters of all users confirmed

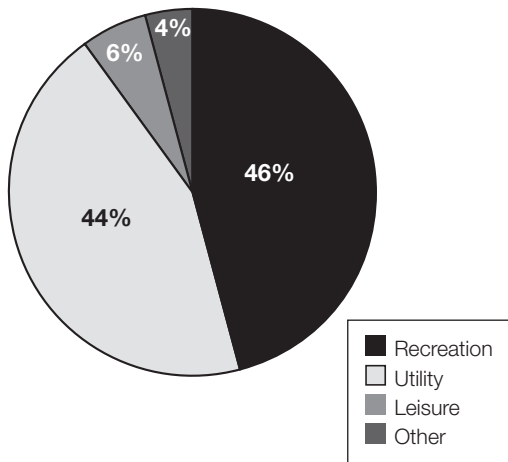
that the routes have helped them increase their amount of physical activity and 40% of all users said that the route had helped them increase levels of regular physical activity by a large amount.

Photo Credit: © Sustrans/Lorcan Doherty



# Helping people go about their everyday lives... trip purpose

Purpose of journey



The chart opposite shows a fairly even split between journeys taken for recreation and utility purposes. Recreation trips are non-essential trips to a non-specific destination, such as just going for a walk or cycle. Utility trips are essential trips to a particular destination or for particular function. Leisure trips are non-essential trips to specific destinations such as the cinema or sports centre.

Due to the focus on traffic-free routes, the Network may be perceived as mainly a recreation facility, but clearly

this is not the case. Indeed when examining some of the sites in the urban areas there are many sites with a majority of users carrying out utility trips i.e. Coleraine 77%, Craigavon 68%, Omagh 58% and Ormeau Park in Belfast 53%. These splits vary considerably between sites. Recreational journeys occur both in rural areas such as the Newry Canal, where 90% of trips are for recreation and on certain urban paths. The Comber Greenway in East Belfast has 64% of trips for recreational purposes.

## Reducing congestion and vehicle emission...

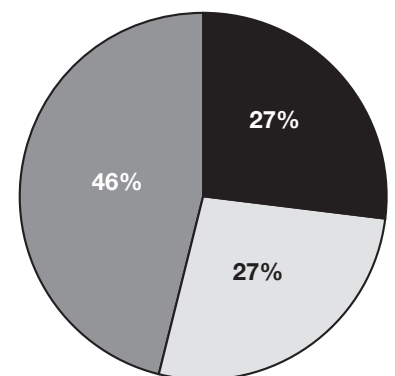
**Overuse of motorised transport presents many problems. Changing the way we travel by increasing the amount of people who walk and cycle will improve our lives in the future, with clearer roads, cleaner air, a healthier environment, improved personal well-being and better quality of life.**

So what contribution is the Network making to reduce car use? Of the respondents who did not use a car for any part of their trip, 27% of them could have but chose not to. It is difficult to put a realistic figure on how many car journeys the National Cycle Network has saved in Northern Ireland, but clearly the National Cycle Network is contributing to a reduction in use of motorised transport.

**Results:** 74% of users used no other mode of transport to make any part of their trip. 22% used a car to access the route, and the remaining 4% used other modes of transport. It is interesting to note that only 7% of cyclists used a car to access the NCN compared with 29% of pedestrians.

Means of accessing the NCN route		
	Frequency	Percent
Walking/Cycling only	1050	73.6
Car	319	22.4
Public Transport	52	3.7
Other	5	0.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>1426</b>	<b>100</b>

*Whether respondents could use a car for the trip instead of cycling and walking (respondents who did not use a car for any part of their trip only)*



Yes, could have used a car but chose not to  
 No, car was not an available option  
 No, recreation by cycling/walking is main purpose of trip

## Improving access for all...

### Young people

The Network has a wide age range amongst users and is popular with all sections of the community. Encouragingly, at a time when there are major concerns about young people becoming less active, one fifth of National Cycle Network users are children aged under 16 years. The highest percentage of use by young people is at Craigavon and Omagh (both 33%) Maghery (25%) and the Comber Greenway in Belfast (22%). All these sites are in residential areas. At the Waterfront Hall in Belfast, 52% of the users on the weekend day during the

school holiday period were under 16, with a large percentage of these using the area to socialise rather than travel.

### Male and females alike

There is a fairly even split between male and female users, with 48% of users female and 52% male. 25% of all adult cyclists are females.

### Elderly users

One in ten of all cyclists were elderly (over 60 years) as were 5% of pedestrians.

Continued.....

**High levels of satisfaction**

We questioned users on how safe they felt on the routes. Encouragingly around 95% of users felt safe (either very or fairly safe) relating to traffic, their personal security and the quality of the route surface. A separate survey (3) carried out for Roads Service shows the conditions for cycling in Belfast are dramatically better on the National Cycle Network than on other roads in Belfast. On the Network at the Ormeau Bridge, 80% of cyclists thought conditions for cycling were "good" or "very good". At Bradbury Place where cyclists share a busy road with other traffic, 70% of cyclists thought conditions were "bad" or "very bad". We assume that those new or returning to cycling are more likely to start cycling along high quality routes such as the National Cycle Network, rather than on the existing road network.

(3) WS Atkins, Belfast Cycle Study 2003

**Resource for pedestrians**

The National Cycle Network is often perceived as a resource for cyclists only, but in fact there are many different user groups on the traffic-free sections. Across all 12 sites, 84% of users were pedestrians, 13% were cyclists, and 4% were other users (mainly joggers). However there are marked differences between the sites. Millennium Bridge in Coleraine saw nearly 3000 pedestrian users per day, representing 97% of all users. Other sites with a high percentage of pedestrians include, Omagh 88%, Derry 86%, Waterfront Hall Belfast 86% and Craigavon 81%. It is worth noting that 23% of users on the Lagan Towpath site at Stranmillis are joggers.

# Summary of recreational use

The following information relates to those respondents whose journey was taken for recreational use. Recreation trips are non-essential trips to non-specific destinations such as just going for a walk or cycle. In summary, on the National Cycle Network:

- 46% of trips are for recreational purposes.
- 72% of recreational trips are by pedestrians.
- 25% of recreational trips are by cyclists.
- 81% of recreational users state that the route has helped them to increase the amount of regular physical

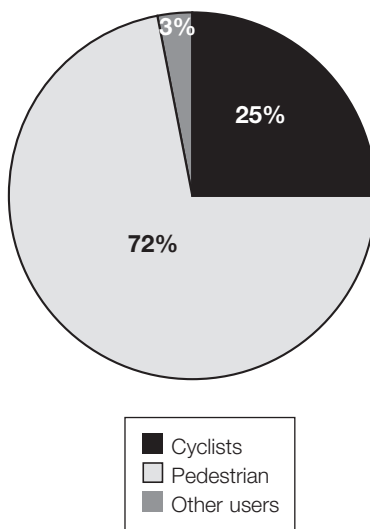
**activity they undertake and nearly half (47%) said the Network helped them to increase the amount of regular physical activity by a large amount.**

- 70% did not use a car to access the route and only 3% used public transport.
- pleasant surroundings (31%) and personal health and fitness (29%) are the most popular main reasons for using the routes for recreation.

Whether the route has helped respondents to increase the amount of physical activity regularly undertaken?		
	Frequency	Percent
Yes, by a large amount	200	46.9
Yes, by a small amount	143	33.6
No	83	19.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>426</b>	<b>100</b>

Starting base of recreational trips		
	Frequency	Percent
Home	624	85.1
Other	59	8.1
Holiday base (more than 1 night)	30	4.1
Holiday base (1 night)	20	2.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>733</b>	<b>100</b>

Activity of recreational route users interviewed



Main reason for recreational trip		
	Count	Percent
Pleasant surroundings	200	30.5
Personal fitness	109	16.6
Convenience of route	87	13.3
Safety on the route	83	12.7
Personal health	83	12.7
Quality of route	48	7.3
Other	35	5.3
journey efficiency	9	1.4
Money saved on route	2	0.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>656</b>	<b>100</b>

# Partner Organisations

A number of organisations that have worked in partnership with Sustrans to develop the National Cycle Network in Northern Ireland, helped co-fund this survey and the production of the reports, including:

DOE Environment and Heritage Service, DRD Roads Service, Lagan side Corporation, DCAL Inland Waterways, Derry City Council, Newry/Portadown Canal Joint Development Committee, Loughshore Trail Committee, Craigavon Borough Council, Coleraine Borough Council, Omagh District Council, Ballymena Borough Council, Lame Borough Council and Belfast City Council