

Horses on the National Cycle Network

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About Sustrans

Sustrans makes smarter travel choices possible, desirable and inevitable. We're a leading UK charity enabling people to travel by foot, bike or public transport for more of the journeys we make every day. We work with families, communities, policy-makers and partner organisations so that people are able to choose healthier, cleaner and cheaper journeys, with better places and spaces to move through and live in.

It's time we all began making smarter travel choices. Make your move and support Sustrans today.
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Introduction

Sustrans is the country's leading sustainable transport charity and our vision is a world in which people choose to travel in ways that benefit their health and the environment. This means that the focus of our work is on increasing the amount of walking and cycling people do for their everyday journeys. One aspect of this work is creating the right physical environment for people to walk and cycle.

This note¹ provides guidance to anyone using Sustrans design documents when developing the National Cycle Network (NCN). It is based on our 30 years of experience of developing routes for the benefit of walkers and cyclists and in particular our work in developing the Network since 1995.

The National Cycle Network

The NCN has been a Sustrans project since 1995 and is now over 13,000 miles long. The Network is not formally designated as part of the highway network, although it does in places coincide with minor highways, and Sustrans receives no core funding from Central Government for its maintenance. Rather it is delivered through a variety of legal arrangements dependent upon the particular route it follows at any given location and is made up of a mixture of types of route including quiet roads, greenways from converted former railways, canal towpaths, paths across private land of all sorts, paths through public parkland/ open space, as well as public highways and no doubt other ways and paths.

Horses will of course automatically have access to nearly all of the Network which is on the public highway, generally quiet roads, restricted byways or bridleways. However where the Network runs over land that is not in Sustrans ownership and does not include a right of way for equestrians, then the landowner will determine whether horses may use the path. The Network includes a significant number of permissive paths and some of these explicitly exclude horses from using the route. In these circumstances horses would not be able to use the route irrespective of its design and construction.

Where a route follows the course of a bridleway or restricted byway there is a statutory obligation to provide a route that is available for walkers, horses and cyclists to use and in developing the Network this must be taken in to account. In the case of bridleways, cyclists must give way to pedestrians and persons on horseback and the maintenance obligations of the highway authority do not include facilitating the use of the bridleway by cyclists.



In Scotland, the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003 gives all non motorised users statutory access rights to most land and inland water. This means that horses are allowed on all paths, irrespective of width or surface. As a result, when designing paths, consideration must be given to equestrians and installing appropriate infrastructure, such as gates that they can open easily and higher parapets on bridges. Mounting stones/platforms have been put in on some routes. Horse drawn carriages (including disabled driver carriages) are also permitted on shared-use paths in Scotland, which has caused some issues with access controls, but their use is only very occasional and local instances can be managed.

¹ We are grateful to CTC, the British Horse Society and Byways and Bridleways Trust for their comments on the draft.

Design Criteria

An understanding of the width required to accommodate two-way use of a path can be calculated from the space needed by each user type:

- The clear space needed by a moving cyclist, comprising their actual width plus deviation, is known as their dynamic width and this is generally taken to be 1m²
- A horse and rider occupy a width of around 1.5m^{3,4}
- The maximum width of a mobility scooter is 0.85m⁵

Allowing clearance for a horse rider and cyclist to pass comfortably a desirable minimum width of 3m will therefore be required; provided there are verges, this will also be wide enough for two horses to pass. At widths below that, one or other user will need to leave the path and use the verge; where this occurs regularly it will make the route less attractive for cyclists.

Clearly a greater width will provide a higher level of service for each user group.

Existing Design Recommendations

Sustrans produces several documents containing guidance on the design and construction of the NCN and other walking and cycling infrastructure. It is important to recognise that this is guidance and not a standard with any mandatory status. There should therefore be sensible application of that guidance to each situation. Where the guidance on widths, surface material etc can be applied without difficulty it should be followed as good practice.

Sustrans has published a Connect 2 and Greenway Design Guide⁶ which sets out design parameters to be achieved in all Connect2 schemes, which are being implemented as part of the NCN. This guide states that where appropriate, greenways should be available to all, including horses. This guide also provides recommendations for path widths, see Figure 1 below for details on a shared use path, where the horses have a separate but adjacent way alongside the surfaced path.

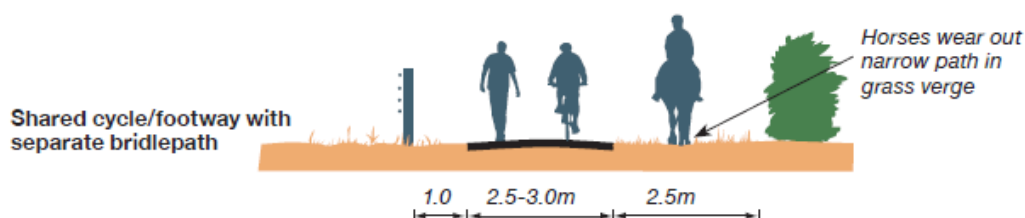


Figure 1 – Connect2 and Greenway Guide p80

Sustrans has developed a multitude of shared use paths throughout the UK and publishes guidance on path widths suitable for shared use by pedestrians, cyclists and horses. Sustrans information sheet FF27⁷ states that 3m minimum width should be provided on a shared cycle track/footpath and bridle path with a preferred clearance of 1m on either side of the path, see Figure 2.

² Local Transport Note 2/08: Cycle Infrastructure Design, DfT 2008

³ Cycling by Design, Transport Scotland, 2010

⁴ Standards and Dimensions on Bridleways and Byways, British Horse Society, April 2010

⁵ A Guide to Controlling Access on Paths (Draft), Sustrans 2011

⁶ Connect2 and Greenway Design Guide, Sustrans 2009

⁷ Ways Through the Countryside, Information Sheet FF27, Sustrans 2000

Shared Cycle Track/Footpath and Bridlepath

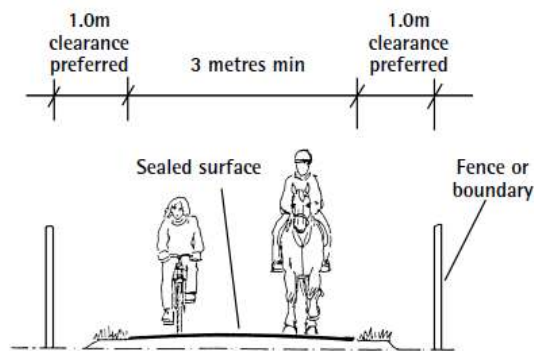


Figure 2 – Sustrans information sheet FF27

Bury MBC, which has a long track record of developing multi-use paths, uses the following specification which has evolved over time:

- a single 3m wide path with 1m wide mown verges, to avoid the maintenance liabilities of multiple surfaces
- bitmac for ease of maintenance, lifespan and as a speed deterrent for horses
- buff coloured stone chip surface dressing to make it look less urban

The British Horse Society (BHS) recommends⁸ standards and dimensions for shared use paths. This guidance states that a minimum width of 5m for new bridleways is desirable, however recognises that this is not always possible. This does not state clearance requirements on each side of the path, so the 5m approximates to a 3m path with two 1m verges; this allows for vegetation which may grow in from the sides, livestock which may put their heads over a fence, easy access for maintenance machinery, and reduces the likelihood of surface damage where a path is unsealed. The BHS will usually object to a bridleway diversion proposal where the width of the replacement bridleway is less than 4m.

A joint guidance note by BHS / CSS⁹ on Horses and Highway Surfacing¹⁰ highlights an increasing incidence of horses slipping on road surfaces, thought to be due to binder rich thin surfacing materials; this is a temporary phenomenon which reduces as binder wears off and aggregate is exposed. The note provides guidance on dealing with this issue. Where horses are to be permitted on a shared use path with a sealed surface, the guidance in this note may be useful when selecting surfacing materials.

Other factors to consider when designing a route for horses include:

- Height of bridge parapets: the Highways Agency specifies a minimum of 1.8m¹¹. Lower parapets may be acceptable in particular circumstances⁸ and the advice of the local BHS Access Officer should be sought. A 1m of solid infill is recommended.
- Headroom at subways and underbridges: desirable is 3.7m, minimum 3.4m⁸ though in exceptional circumstances a lower height may be acceptable.
- Clearance of overhanging branches: minimum 3m, preferably 3.7m⁸
- Mounting blocks
- Bridle gates and other access controls

⁸ Standards and Dimensions on Bridleways and Byways, British Horse Society 2010

⁹ County Surveyors' Society, now ADEPT (Association of Directors of Environment, Economy, Planning and Transport)

¹⁰ Horses and Highway Surfacing, ENG 03/05, CSS 2006

¹¹ Requirements for Road Restraint Systems, TD19/06, Highways Agency 2006

- Road crossings

Further useful guidance on equestrian access can be found on the BHS and Ride UK website and on the [Scottish Access Technical Information Network \(SATIN\) website](#).

Issues Arising

Sustrans regional staff and local authorities have extensive experience of the operation of traffic free paths that accommodate horse riders.

In some local authorities which include rural areas there is a general presumption to permit use by equestrians, whereas in others they are permitted only on certain routes. In some quarters it is argued that introducing horses onto an established shared use cycle / pedestrian path effectively downgrades existing users by their presence and compromises the route.

The most common minimum width for such paths where the surface is shared is 3m, although examples of path widths of 2.5m and occasionally 2m were found. However, in most cases, particularly where path widths were below 3m, horse use is very low or else a wide verge is available for use by horses.

Surfacing of these paths is a mixture of bound and unbound materials. There was frequent reporting of damage from horses to those paths with unbound surfaces.

A number of issues of concern have been raised in feedback:

- Damage to the surface of unsealed paths used by horses
- Damage to steep sections of path with unsealed surfaces caused by cycles, which make a channel which water then follows and erodes.
- Where a separate bridle path is provided but poorly maintained or becomes overgrown, some horse riders will use the cycle path in preference. This can be mitigated by high quality construction of the bridle path at the outset.
- It can be difficult to fund the maintenance of a separate bridle path in which case a shared surface may be preferable so as to avoid maintenance liabilities of two parallel paths
- Some horse riders do not like sealed surfaces, particularly where they are installed on existing bridlevays. On a newly created bridlevay a sealed surface may be acceptable although an unsealed surface is preferred by horse riders.
- Steep sealed surfaces can be slippery for horses and may need anti-skid surface dressing; this is likely to improve the route for cyclists as well.
- Concerns expressed by wheelchair / mobility scooter users and mothers with young children over sharing paths with horses.
- Where anti-motorbike access controls are in place, additional accesses for horses need to be provided at all or selected access points; there is an issue of who should fund these.
- Complaints of inappropriate cyclist behaviour around horses (too fast, too close, not indicating presence from behind)
- Cyclists feel worried passing horses.
- Hazards for cyclists from horse dung, especially skidding in wet weather or hitting an obstruction in freezing conditions, is a repeated concern.



A number of constructive points have been highlighted with respect to accommodating horse riders on traffic free routes:

- Despite some concerns, there are very few reports of actual conflicts between users.
- Horse riders tend to avoid times when a path is busy.
- Develop and promote a Code of Conduct to educate all users about sharing paths. An example of a sign used by Sustrans in Scotland is included as Appendix 1.
- Launch of a Friends group for a route as an attempt to broaden the volunteer base, including encouragement for local horse riders to get involved in managing the route.

Pony and traps can be considerably wider than a single horse, though many can pass through a 1.6m wide gate, and they may be of greater concern to other path users. They are not permitted on Bridleways (except by permission of the landowner) but have a right to use Restricted Byways; their use of permissive routes depends on what is written into the agreement. In most areas their use is very occasional.

Use of design documents

The Network will normally be shared with horses subject to there being adequate width for the expected numbers of users and provided the surface is suitable. There are however occasions when this recommended guidance cannot be achieved. The land available for purchase or lease may not be sufficient to achieve the recommended widths. There are places where there are physical obstructions which preclude building a path to the widths recommended, such as a canal towpath which has a building along side it, therefore limiting the width of towpath available. In these circumstances a decision has to be made, as to whether the reduced width is acceptable for the anticipated use of the route.

The potential numbers of pedestrians, cyclists and horses using the route will also need to be considered and a judgement made. Clearly where the route is likely to be predominantly for leisure purposes, the lower numbers of cyclists and walkers should normally make it easier for them to use the path comfortably with horses. Conversely where the path is a busy commuter route with lots of cyclists heading to work it may be a problem for a horse to walk along the route with lots of cyclists; however, it is likely that horse riders will avoid those times.

The nature of the surface can influence whether a route is suitable for use by horses. A stone dust surface is more susceptible to wear and Sustrans' experience shows many cases of routes which have such surfaces being damaged by horses' hoofs; over time the surface may become unusable to most cyclists and wheelchair / mobility scooter users and uncomfortable to pedestrians. As Sustrans is aiming to get ordinary people using bikes and walking, a good quality surface all the year round is important. On occasions Sustrans is obliged to use stone dust rather than tarmac surface which may mean horses could be excluded from the path.

Summary

Sustrans sees no problem in principle with horses sharing paths with walkers and cyclists subject to there being adequate width available. There are examples of this happening throughout the NCN. However, Sustrans does not generally recommend permitting pony and traps on these routes; where there is demand to allow them, a greater width may be appropriate.

Sustrans and others produce design guidance which contains recommended dimensions, surfaces etc. This is guidance for good practice and not mandatory. Where the recommended details cannot be applied, a judgement should be made as to whether a lesser specification is satisfactory for the

particular situation. However, a width below 3m may require one or other user to leave the path when a cyclist passes a horse rider and so is not recommended and should only be considered where usage is low.

Where a segregated bridle path is proposed it should be constructed to a high standard so as to minimise future maintenance requirements. A sealed surface is still recommended for the cycle path as it is likely that a proportion of horse riders may choose to use that.

However, it is important to recognise that funding the construction of new traffic free routes is generally justified on the basis of encouraging cycling and walking as modes of transport, for people to travel actively rather than by car; the use of these routes purely for leisure being secondary. If substantial additional expenditure is required to accommodate equestrians, the vast majority of whom are undertaking leisure journeys, this may need to be funded out of other non-transport budgets. There is, however, a requirement on Highway Authorities to integrate the Rights of Way Improvement Plan with the Local Transport Plan, which could assist in the funding of new and improved rights of way.

APPENDIX 1: CODE OF CONDUCT SIGN: EXAMPLE.



The sign features four white icons on a dark blue background: a bicycle, a person riding a horse, a person walking a dog, and a person in a wheelchair. Below the icons is the title 'Shared Use Path' in large white font. The sign contains several paragraphs of text providing guidelines for path users, including a general message of responsibility, a prohibition on unauthorized vehicles, and specific instructions for walkers, cyclists, horse riders, and dog owners. It also includes contact information for Sustrans and their logo.

Shared Use Path

This is a shared use path, which means it is for everyone to enjoy responsibly. Be considerate and courteous to other path users.

Unauthorised vehicles are not allowed.

Leave no trace, clean up after yourselves and your animals – nobody else will.

Walkers and Joggers
Listen for bicycle bells or other warnings from path users. Allow those moving faster than you the space to pass when it is safe to do so.

Cyclists and Horse Riders
Travel at a sensible speed. Warn others well in advance when they may not see you approaching. Pass other users slowly and give them plenty of room. Ride in such a way that it doesn't damage the path surface.

Dog Owners
Keep your dog under control and be aware of the lead obstructing other path users.

Take care in the winter as paths are not treated and may be icy.

For more information please call
0845 113 00 65 or visit www.sustrans.org.uk

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