

Paths for everyone

National Cycle Network physical review and action plan

Midlands and East of England



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Sustrans is the charity making it easier for people to walk and cycle.

We connect people and places, create liveable neighbourhoods, transform the school run and deliver a happier, healthier commute.

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1. Introduction to the National Cycle Network

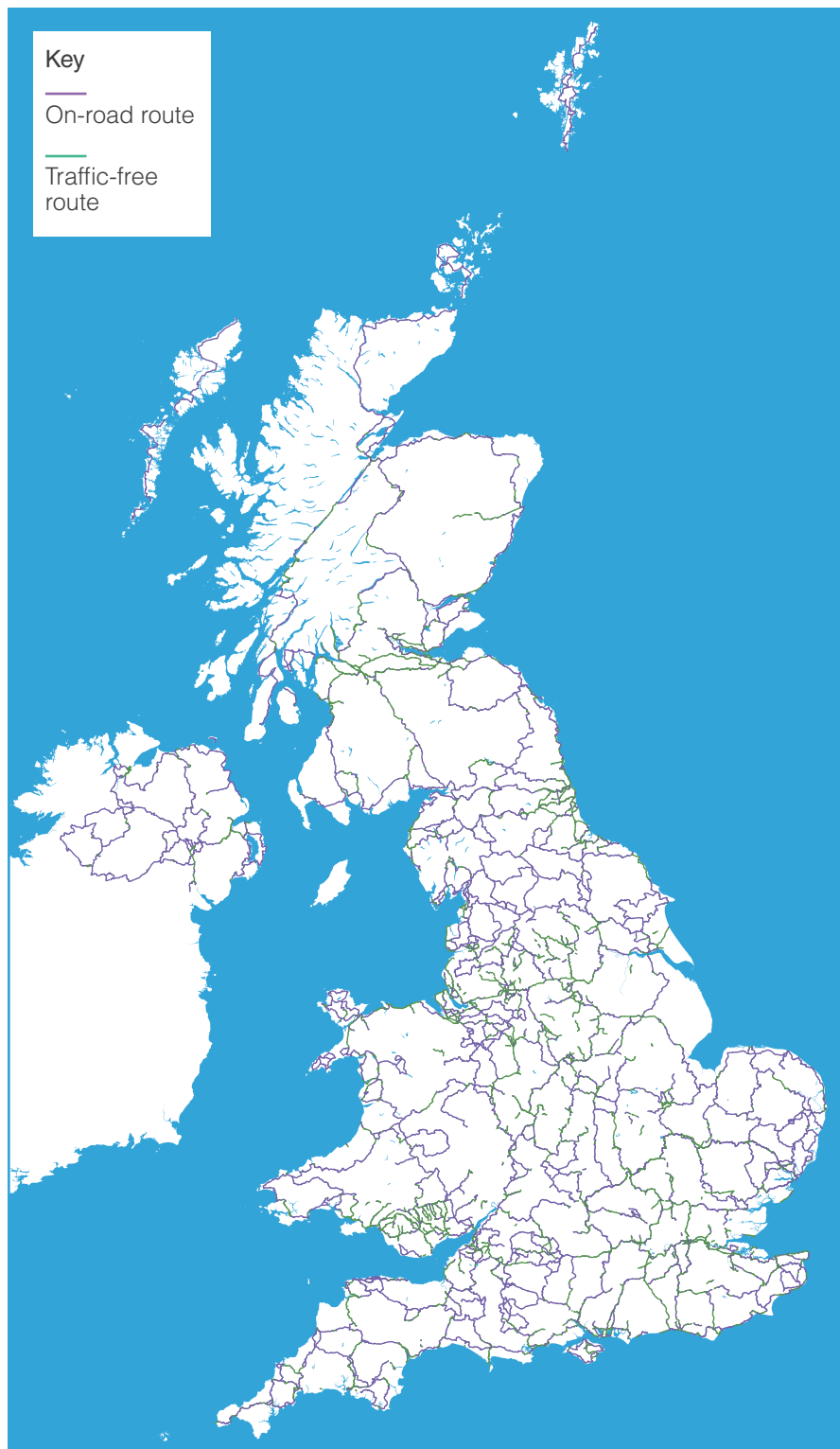
The National Cycle Network is a 23-year-old network of 16,575 miles of signed routes spanning the UK. It is used by walkers, joggers, wheelchair users and horse riders, as well as people on bikes.

It began with a National Lottery Grant (via the Millennium Commission) in 1995 and a pioneering vision to create high-quality, convenient routes for walking and cycling. Since then, we have worked with hundreds of partners to grow the Network into every corner of the UK.

Sustrans has worked with partners, stakeholders, staff and volunteers to conduct a comprehensive review of the entire Network.

A new shared vision has been agreed that will define the revitalised National Cycle Network:

A UK-wide network of traffic-free paths for everyone, connecting cities, towns and countryside and loved by the communities they serve.



The physical audit of the Network

All 16,575 miles of the National Cycle Network were surveyed by a team of independent assessors during 2015 and 2016 and all key characteristics recorded, including surface type, width, lighting, barriers and signage, as well as road classification for on-road sections.

The data was captured in the field on hand-held devices, then uploaded to our online geographic information system (GIS) for analysis.

The audit data has created a snapshot of the condition of the Network and provides a level of understanding and

overview for the Network that has never been available before.

In order to compare different sections of route, Sustrans has developed a Level of Service Measure scoring system based on four route quality indicators:

- Surface quality
- Way-finding and signage
- Flow
- Traffic-related safety

Surface quality

Is the surface smooth enough for all types of cycle to be used here?

All on-road sections are scored relatively high as they generally have a smooth surface. Traffic-free sections do have poor surfaces in some locations and this is reflected in the score for this measure.

Way-finding and signage

Can this route be followed without a map?

The score reflects whether a section is signed in both directions, one direction or not at all.

Flow

Can a relaxed speed (typically around 8 mph) be continually and safely maintained here?

Path width, pinch points and restrictive barriers are the main constraints under this measure. (A relaxed speed may be lower than 8 mph in some circumstances.)

Traffic-related safety

The question our surveyors had to answer was:

Would most people allow an unaccompanied 12-year-old to cycle here?

This is the most subjective measure as it is based on the surveyor's assessment of whether a section of road is suitable. Due to inconsistencies between surveyors, Sustrans has acquired INRIX traffic data, which gives an objective measure of traffic volume and speed, based on information from commercial fleets, GPS, cell towers, mobile devices and cameras.

This means that we can set threshold criteria for on-road sections and define what would be acceptable for a quiet-way section. The INRIX data was validated

using actual traffic count data for all roads in Cornwall, with thanks to Cornwall Council.

Weighting is applied to the safety measure in order to recognise that a traffic-free route should have a higher traffic-related safety score than an on-road route.

- Traffic-free route +6
- On-road section meeting quiet-way traffic criteria +4
- Other roads -4

Urban Rural Classification	Section Average Speed ¹	INRIX Volume Index ²	Equivalent AADT ³ traffic volume
Urban	<=15 mph	<=11	2,500
Rural	<=25 mph	<=9	1,000

Scoring

Each measure has a four level scoring system either Yes, Perhaps, Probably Not or No, with a score of 3, 2, 1 or 0 assigned.

Score	3	2	1	0
Level	Yes	Perhaps	Probably Not	No

Classifications

The highest possible score for a high quality traffic-free section is 15 points and this is considered to meet the Very Good standard. Lower scores are classified as Good, Poor or Very Poor as below:

Score	15	10-14	6-9	0-5
Classification	Very Good	Good	Poor	Very Poor

1. It is recognised that the use of average speeds only provides an approximate indication of the speed characteristics of a road. As part of the improvement of sections of National Cycle Network designated as quiet-way it will be a requirement for there to be a speed limit of 40mph in rural areas (or 20mph in built-up areas).

2. INRIX Traffic Volume Index - measured on a scale 1-16 with 1 being very low traffic volume and 16 very high traffic volume

3. AADT - Annual Average Daily Traffic is a measure of traffic flow and is the total volume of vehicle traffic of a highway or road for a year divided by 365 days.

Physical review and action plans

Seven physical review and action plans have been developed, one for each of the Sustrans geographical regions and nations of the UK, as a key element of the 'Fix it' strand of the review.

Each action plan defines the state of the Network for its area, outlines the strategic priorities identified for the region or nation and shows the number of miles that need to be improved in order to get the Network in the area to Good and Very Good.

A number of activation projects are identified in each of the plans, chosen to reflect a range of project types (upgrading existing on-road sections, improving traffic-free routes, dealing with dangerous crossings and junctions, creating new route corridors) as well as geographical diversity and deliverability within a tight timescale.

The implementation of the activation projects will build the momentum of the revitalisation of the Network resulting from the review.

Network development plans

The action plans will be backed up with full Network development plans that set out long-term, detailed plans for the entire regional/national network.

These plans will be developed by the Sustrans Network development teams in each area, in consultation with the advisory panels, volunteers and other stakeholders, and will be live documents that are continually updated, becoming the blueprint for the development of the Network.

Design principles for the National Cycle Network

A key objective for each physical review and action plan is to detail what is required to achieve a Very Good standard for the whole of the Network – that is a standard that offers users a consistent, safe and fully accessible

experience. This will require the essential elements of a route – good signage, a smooth surface, sufficient width, no barriers to interrupt continual movement and safe interfaces with motorised traffic – to be upgraded where this is not currently the case.

The preference for on-road sections will be to create alternative traffic-free routes. These sections will be either off-road (away from the road) or on fully separated infrastructure within the road corridor, with all routes being suitable for an unaccompanied 12-year-old to use.

Where the creation of traffic-free routes is not viable, it may be possible to change the road character to create quiet-way sections. Quiet-way sections will have a speed limit of 40mph or less and a traffic flow below 1,000 AADT in rural areas (20mph and 2,500 AADT in built-up areas). In addition, they will include traffic signs and road markings to highlight the speed limit and to inform people driving a vehicle that they should expect to encounter people walking, cycling or riding a horse in the road and they should provide good visibility to enable all users to see each other.

Where traffic-free routes cross roads, or other busier roads in the case of quiet-way sections, these crossings or junctions will need to allow safe movement for people using the Network.

To achieve the Very Good standard a set of design principles has been created to guide the design of all new and improved sections. These design principles are set out in the National Cycle Network: Paths for Everyone report.

Where it is not possible to improve an existing section of Network it may be necessary to consider de-designation. This process will involve engagement with key stakeholders and reasonable steps would need to be taken to ensure route continuity for the Network as a whole.

2. Overview of the Network in the Midlands and East of England

The Midlands and East of England have around 18% of the UK total of National Cycle Network routes at **3,350 miles** and some of the highest density of traffic-free routes.

Of the Network in the Midlands and East of England a total of **2,224 miles** (66%), is on-road and of this 144 miles are on A or B roads, with 2,080 miles on unclassified or minor roads reflecting the predominantly rural nature of the Network.

The remaining 34% of the Network, a total of **1,126 miles, is on traffic-free paths.**

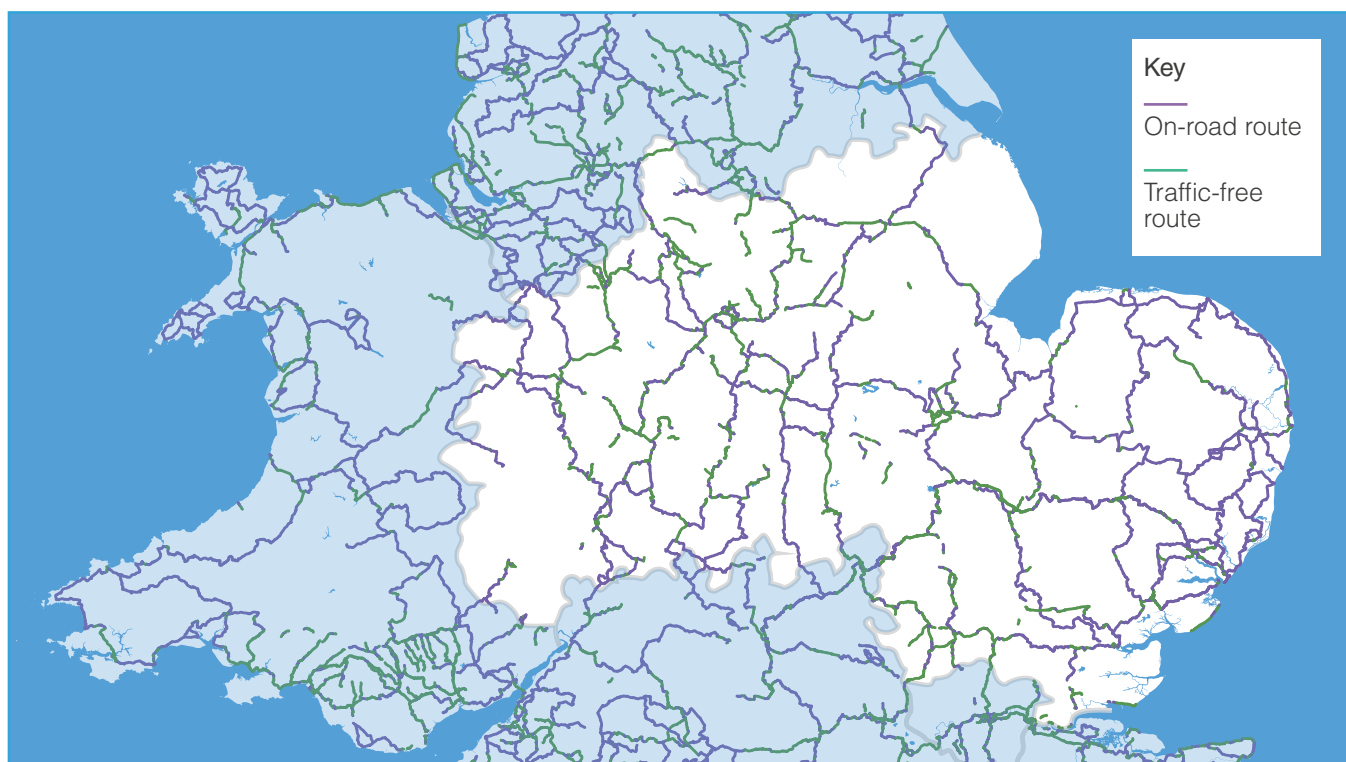
The Network in the Midlands and East of England includes long distance challenge routes including:

- National Route 1 from Barton-upon-Humber to Chelmsford down the east coast and connecting into London.

- National Route 6 from North East Derbyshire to Hertfordshire and connecting into London.
- High Peak Trail which connects at Parsley Hay with the Tissington Trail (National Route 68)
- A number of other 'high' trails in the Peak District and links with the Trans Pennine Trail in the North.

An economic impact study of the National Cycle Network in 2014, showed over 764m user trips per year for these routes, generating an estimated investment to the local economy of over £7billion since 1995.

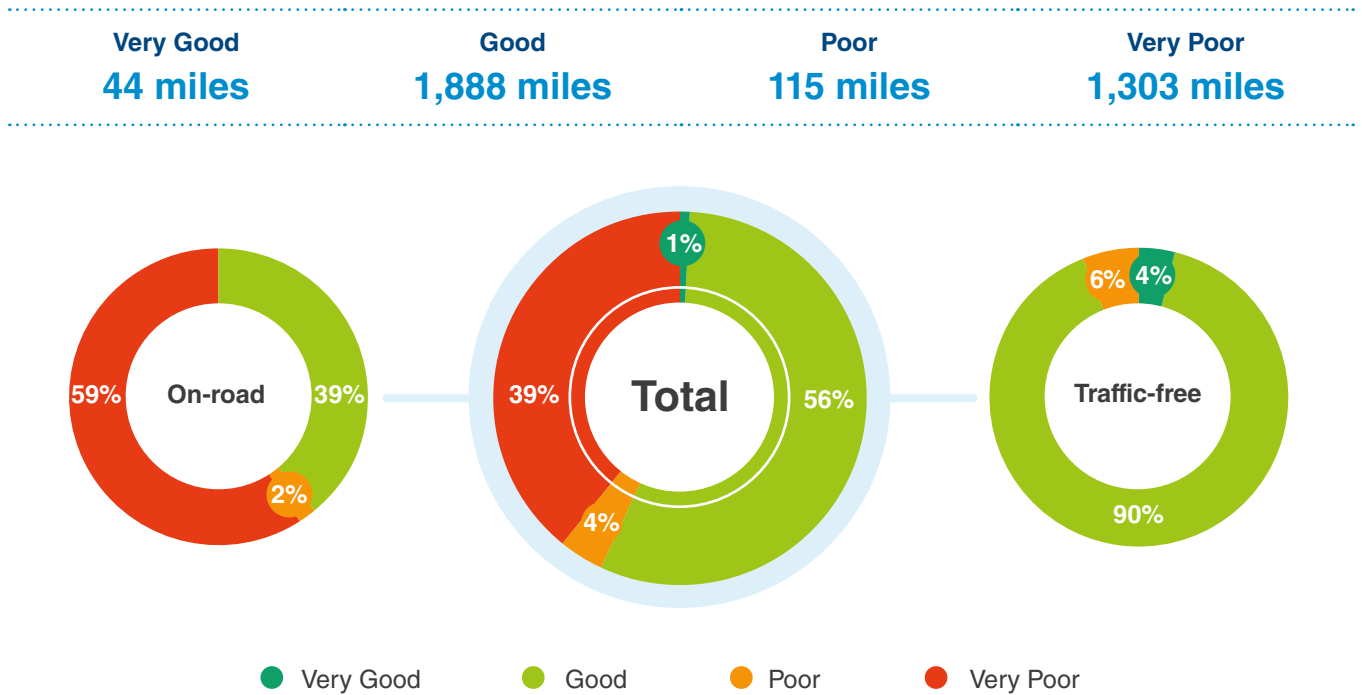
The Network runs through several National Parks and National Trust land holdings such as Clumber Park, Buxton, Peak the District and connects with the major cities of Nottingham, Birmingham and Cambridge.



Condition of the Network

Our analysis of the audit has provided a snapshot of the condition of the Network in the Midlands and East of England, with all sections rated as Very Good, Good, Poor or Very Poor.

In the Midlands and East of England the National Cycle Network audit ratings are as follows:



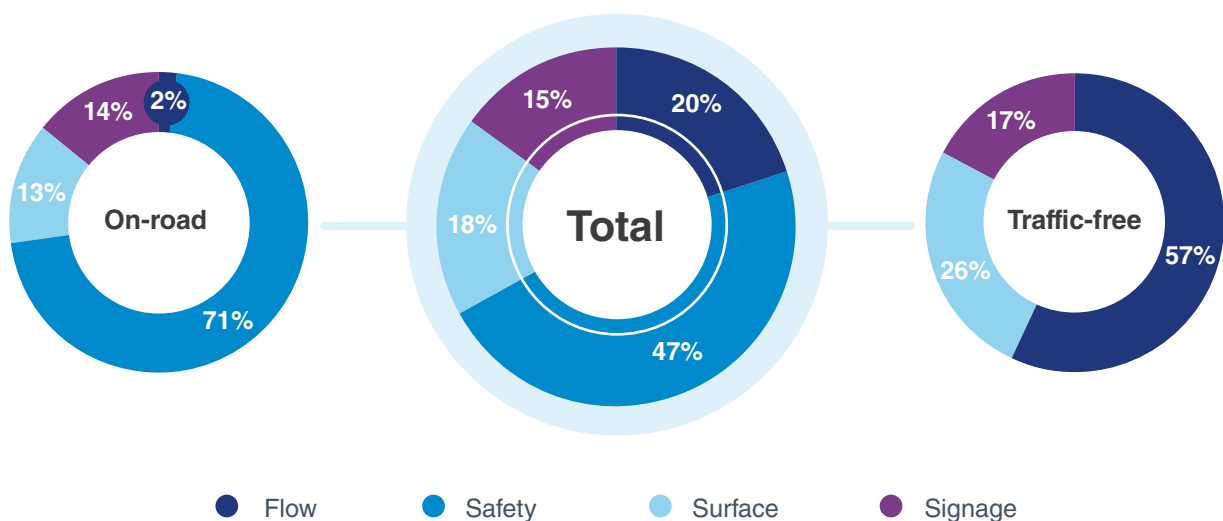
Identifying the issues

It is possible to run reports that show which of the main issues – traffic safety, surface, signage, flow - are causing the routes and paths to under-perform.

Nearly half (47%) of the issues on the Network in the Midlands and East of England are due to traffic safety

concerns, followed by 20% flow issues, 18% surface issues and 15% signage issues.

These reports can also be run for the on-road and traffic-free sections of the Network independently as shown below:



3. Strategic priorities for the Midlands and East of England

The priorities for the improvement of the National Cycle Network in the Midlands and East of England are as follows. These are in addition to the UK-wide strategic priorities of increasing accessibility and improving signage that are outlined in section 5.

Improving the existing routes

Safety first

The first priority will be to deal with sections of the Network that are a safety concern and that includes very busy and fast roads, including all A and B roads, and improving dangerous junctions and crossings.

Consistent user experience

The second priority is to ensure a consistent standard of experience for users of the Network. Initially focus will be on improving the traffic-free sections that receive the most complaints and impact on the reputation of the entire Network. Emphasis will be placed on improving the surface, repairing missing or damaged signage and removing restrictive barriers and pinch points.

Creating new routes

Filling the missing links and gaps in routes

The review of the audit data is helping to identify priority missing links. All new sections will meet the Network quality standard and will be focused on completing key routes or critical sections, providing strategic coherence for the region and in some cases enhancing intra-regional connections.

Creation of new routes to improve connectivity

In some cases new routes or corridors will be required to ensure that there is efficient connectivity.

De-designation of routes

Route assessment and de-designation

Of the Network in the Midlands and East of England 1,303 miles (39%) is classified as Very Poor. These sections are all on-road and most are on busy A and B roads.

Many contain hazardous junctions as well as being in some cases, poorly signed and, in places, rough surfaced

Some of these Very Poor sections of on-road routes, particularly where the usage is low and other routes exist, will be considered for de-selection from the National Cycle Network. Reasonable steps need to be taken to ensure route continuity for the Network as a whole and some on-road improvements may also help mitigate this situation.

67 miles (2%) of the off-road Network is classified as Poor, mainly due to flow and surfacing issues.

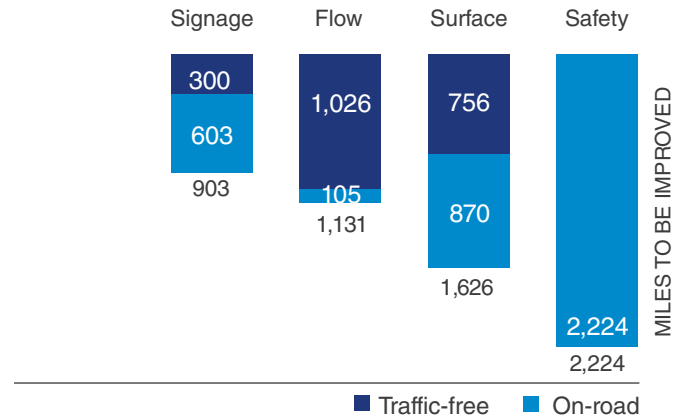
4. Quantifying the ambition for the Midlands and East of England

Closing the gap to Very Good

The focus of the action plan is to bring all of the Network in the Midlands and East of England up to a consistent Very Good standard.

The graph (right) shows the minimum number of miles, in each category, and for on-road and traffic-free sections that must be improved for the entire Midlands and East of England Network to qualify as Very Good:

The gap to Very Good



On-road improvements required to be classed as Very Good:

<p>2,224 miles</p> <p>of on-road Network need to be re-routed onto alternative traffic-free routes or have the characteristics of the road changed to create quiet-way sections.</p>	<p>603 miles</p> <p>need signage improvements.</p>	<p>105 miles</p> <p>that have barriers or pinch points that need to be addressed (such as cattle grids).</p>	<p>870 miles</p> <p>need surface improvements.</p>
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Traffic-free improvements required to be classed as Very Good:

<p>300 miles</p> <p>need signage improvements.</p>	<p>756 miles</p> <p>need surface improvements.</p>	<p>1,026 miles</p> <p>need flow improvements.</p>
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Junctions and crossings

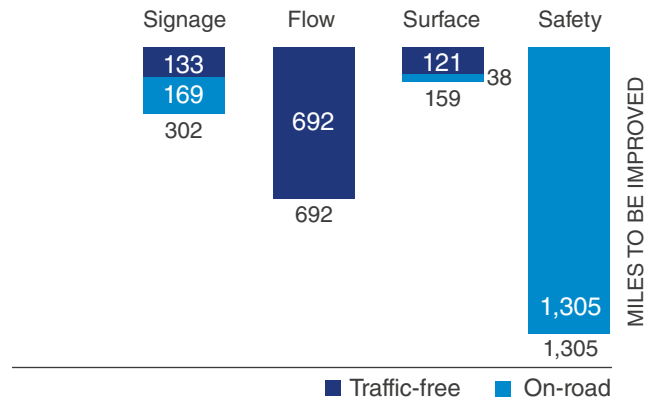
55 crossings

identified in the Midlands and East of England as requiring attention to make safe, based on a comprehensive dangerous crossings/junctions assessment carried out in 2017.

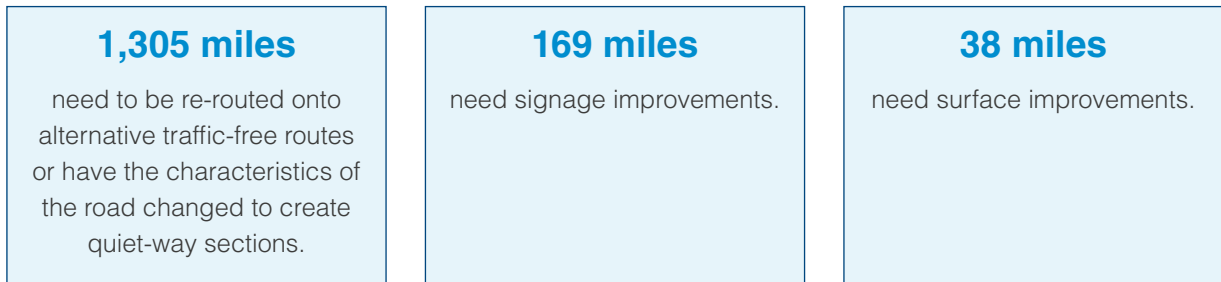
Closing the gap to Good

The focus for the first stage of improvements will be to get the Network to a Good standard.

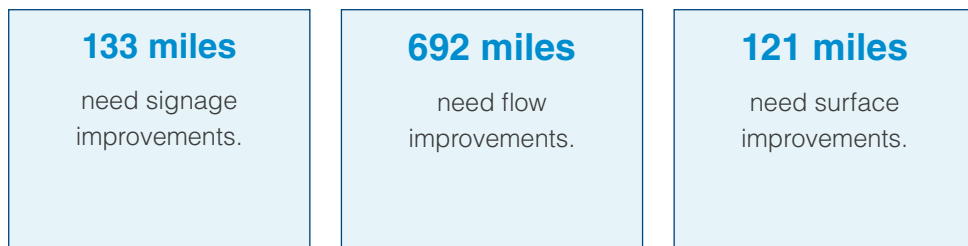
The gap to Good



On-road improvements required to be classed as Good:



Traffic-free improvements required to be classed as Good:



5. UK-wide priorities

Accessibility

Equality of access for all users of the Network is very important and forms a key element of the vision. We want the entire Network to be suitable for everyone and cater for all types of cycles including trikes, cargo bikes, hand-bikes, trailer bikes, tandems as well as being accessible for those on foot and users with pushchairs, wheelchairs, buggies and mobility scooters.

Restrictive barriers, steep ramps, high curbs and width issues on the Network itself are recorded in the physical audit under the service level measure 'Flow';

- **1,131 miles** of traffic-free routes and paths in the Midlands and East of England have barriers and/or width issues that impede flow and in many cases prevent access for all.

As a first step to addressing this it is recommended that an accessibility working group is established to focus on accessibility issues across the Network. This will involve experts in the field as well as local volunteers and community groups.

Signage

Signage issues are common to the whole Network and can be split into three main areas:

- Signage issues on the Network itself that need fixing or amending including missing, obstructed or damaged signing or unclear, confusing or misaligned signage.
- Signage that promotes the Network including educational information, local maps, distances to attractions, local services and other user information.
- Signage that directs users towards the Network – from town centres, train stations, linking routes and other places of interest.

903 miles of the Network in the Midlands and East of England require signage improvements:

- **603 miles** of this is on-road and will need the permission of the relevant Highway Authority, which may be Highways England (Trunk Roads) or Local Authority (County Roads).
- **300 miles** of this is on traffic-free sections.

6. Activation projects

Identification process

It is important that the results of the National Cycle Network review are backed up by immediate and visible action.

The results of the physical audit have enabled Sustrans teams to identify a number of activation projects that can be delivered by 2023.

However, we recognise that opportunities will arise to improve the standard of other sections of the National Cycle Network.

These activation projects will become the focus of attention following the publication of the physical review and action plans and will be central to the push for the further resources and time that is required to deliver the improvements to the Network.

In addition the projects will allow for testing of new governance systems, the marketing strategy, funding mechanisms, community and volunteer involvement, maintenance and monitoring developed as part of the National Cycle Network review.

The activation projects have a good geographical spread across the UK and will cover the full range of strategic priority categories as shown in the diagram below.

It is expected that where the activation projects successfully resolve key issues within each category they can be used as a blueprint for improvements that will be rolled out across the Network.

The selection process for the activation projects has included consultation with the regional and national advisory panels, local highway authorities, Sustrans volunteer groups and Sustrans staff working on and using the Network.

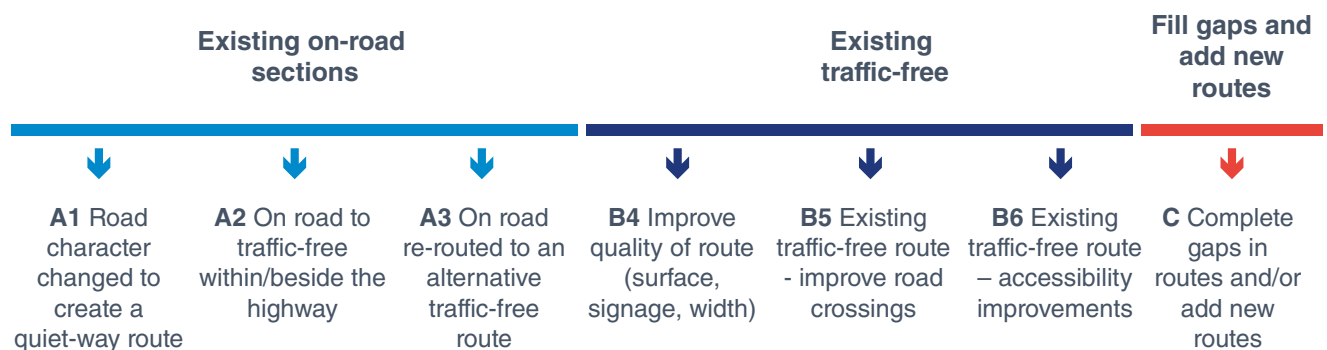
We will progress schemes linked to Highways England investments and the Department for Transport's Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans (LCWIP) wherever possible and funding has been provided by those organisations to develop a number of the activation projects in England.

More LCWIP initiatives are anticipated in the next few years and will provide excellent opportunities for prioritising local investment on improvements and connections on the Network and local walking and cycling infrastructure in built-up areas.

A prioritisation checklist has been used to help with the identification and prioritisation of the projects:

- Is the project **deliverable** by 2023?
- Does the project support the **strategic aims** of the National Cycle Network in the region?
- Does the improvement support **access for all**?
- Does the project support the delivery of a **traffic free network**?
- Does the project improve the **safety** of the section of National Cycle Network it deals with?
- Does the project improve a section of National Cycle Network that has **high current usage**?
- Is there **good potential for increased usage** in the future?
- Is there land **funding available** for this project?
- Is there **land owner support** for this project?
- Is there **community support** for this project?

Strategic priority categories



Activation projects for the Midlands and East of England

Category A1: Road character changed to create a quiet-way route



National Route 6 – Sewel Greenway, Luton to Dunstable

WHY A valuable and popular section of National Route 6 that links Luton to Dunstable.

PROBLEM Two sections of Good rated greenway are joined by a complicated section of on- road route that uses busy residential streets with poor junction facilities and inadequate signage.

SOLUTION Bypass the ‘Dog Kennel’ stretch and on- road section past the TA centre, improving the link between the Luton to Dunstable section of National Route 6 and the Sewel Greenway. Some resurfacing and implementation of improved side road crossings will be included.



Category A3: On-road re-routed to an alternative traffic-free route



National Route 41 – Lias Line, Rugby to Long Itchington

WHY This key section of National Route 41 runs between Long Itchington and Leamington Spa then onward west towards the Grand Union canal. It follows an old railway corridor that if built and completed would increase visitor access to places such as Warwick Castle, Draycote Water and the Wildlife Trust sites like Ashlawn and Cock Robin Wood.

PROBLEM The route will be severed by HS2 and currently suffers from a rough surface, overgrown vegetation, poor access points and ground levels that don't meet standard gradients.

SOLUTION Create a 3.5m wide traffic-free multi-user trail with a smooth surface, expanding the wildlife corridors and increase volunteer activity to support local communities. Once completed the path will link into the existing attractive route that joins with Rugby and Leamington Spa, passing pretty villages, wildlife reserves, reservoirs and canals.

Category A3: On-road re-routed to an alternative traffic-free route



National Route 5 – Rea Valley, Longbridge, Birmingham

WHY Longbridge is a location with allocated growth in terms of housing and business. Sustrans have currently got project officers working with communities to increase

sustainability i.e. access to work and education. The current section is a Very Poor on-road route that makes it difficult to change people's behaviours.

PROBLEM Busy on-road section with high traffic volumes, poor junction facilities and signage issues means it is not suitable for a 12-year-old. This area is increasingly expanding with new business and housing allocation with little investment in active travel infrastructure.

SOLUTION To remove the on-road section at Tessall Lane which is a busy, steep road and re-route it onto a new greenway along the River Rea (min. width 2.5m with smooth surface). This will divert the route into the newly developed Longbridge town centre where it will link with businesses and new housing development sites.

Condition of the Network		— — — Proposed route realignment
Key	— Very Poor	— Very Good
	— Poor	— Good
		○ / ✕ Crossing/barrier for improvement
		— Scope for improvement measures

Category A3: On-road re-routed to an alternative traffic-free route



National Route 54 – Darley Abbey to Little Eaton

WHY This section of the A38/A61 is part of Highways England’s network and even though there is a cycleway adjacent to the road it is under-used by people walking and cycling due to high traffic speeds, high volume of traffic and lack of vegetation management.

PROBLEM The cycleway is narrow (under 2.5m in width), and is made worse by encroaching vegetation. Its proximity to the busy A-road means that users are very close to fast-moving traffic.

SOLUTION Re-route the Network away from the A61 at the B6179/Abbey Hill junction at Little Eaton, utilising the underpass underneath A38 Abbey Hill road and create a new traffic-free section along the river towards Darley Abbey.

Category B4: Improve quality of route (surface, signage, width)



National Route 11 – Chesterton, Cambridge

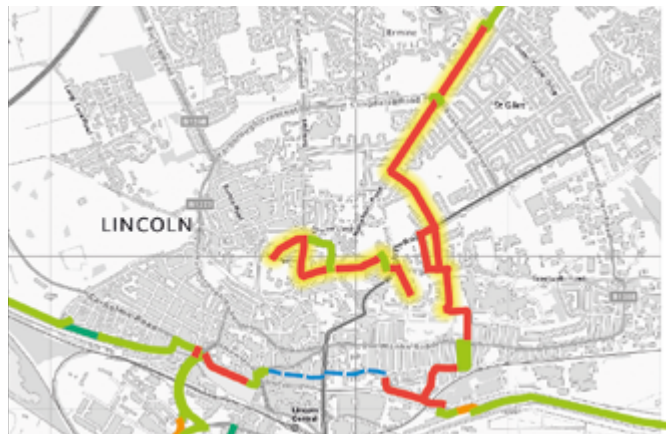
WHY Cambridge have invested in their Greenways and the route along the River Cam. However this section of National Route 11 is not traffic-free and does not meet quality standards in terms of width, safe crossings and signage.

PROBLEM Narrow on-road sections with damaged/missing signage

SOLUTION Re-route starting from heading west of Cambridge city centre. Instead of turning north west over Riverside Bridge, continue north east along Riverside, onto Stourbridge Common, then across Green Dragon Bridge and on to Fen Road, then joining the towpath, then turning north back to cross Fen Road and onwards to Moss Bank. At the end of Moss Bank is a new cut-through onto the foot and cycleway which runs alongside the Busway extension, passing Cambridge North station, on to Milton Road, which can be crossed by a toucan, and onto the Busway route to St Ives.

Once the Abbey Chesterton Bridge and Chisholm Trails are complete the route will change again so that the Cam is crossed on the new bridge rather than Green Dragon.

Category B5: Existing traffic-free route - improve road crossings



National Route 1 – Lincoln city centre

WHY Missing link in Lincoln city centre between National Route 64 and National Route 1 which is one of Sustrans most iconic routes that connects Scotland with southern England.

PROBLEM Route 64 connects Lincoln to the West, running alongside the Brayford pool which is a hive of activity. However, there is currently no link through the city to National Route 1 that heads towards Boston along the high quality Water Railway that follows the River Witham.

The issue is compounded by a traffic regulation order that prevents access to Lincoln city centre via bicycle, and difficulties presented by a bridge over the A15 Broadgate that limits access due to its steep gradients and low parapets. In addition, there is damaged and missing signage and no safe crossing over Wigford Way.

SOLUTION Create a connecting link through the city centre, with improved crossing points at major roads that will join National Route 1 with National Route 64 and make it safe for all users. Replace damaged signage and remove traffic regulations that restrict cycle access.

Category B6: Existing traffic-free route – accessibility improvements



National Route 41 – Lias Line, Draycote Water

WHY The section of National Route 41 from Rugby to Draycote Water reservoir and country park near the village of Dunchurch, and onto Draycote is rated Good in the audit. However, seven of the access points along the section have very restrictive barriers that prevent access to the route for many users.

PROBLEM The barriers are mostly narrow with rough surfaces, steps and structures that limit access, in some cases horse stiles are present alongside the barriers. Several of the entrance points also have poor signage and overgrown vegetation that compound the problems.

SOLUTION Barriers need to be removed at Long Itchington, Bourton Lane, Birdingbury and Draycote and Rugby. The access ramps require widening and a sealed surface will be implemented. This will allow access for everyone.

Category C: Complete gaps in routes and/or add new routes



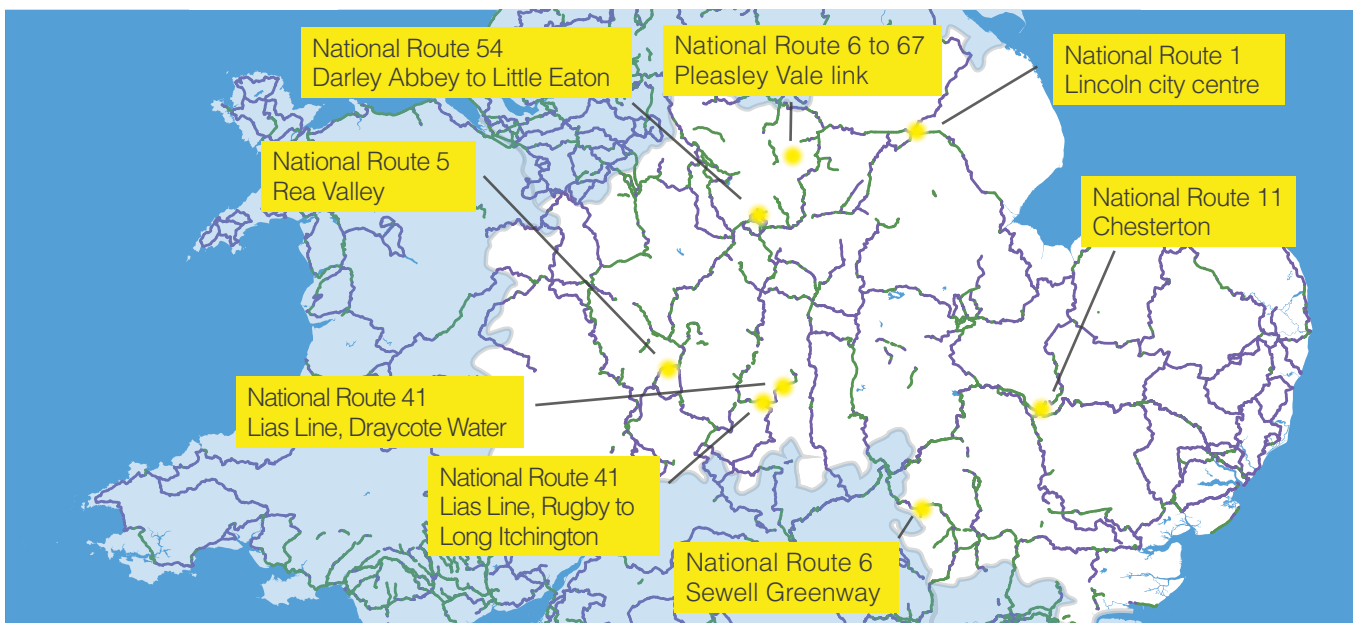
National Route 6 to 67 – Pleasley Vale link

WHY Connecting Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire, this area consists of historical coalfield town and villages. With little or no public transport, car dependency is high and there are high levels of deprivation. At the northern end of the area, National Route 6 runs through Clumber Park which hosts over 700,000 visits every year and encourages cycling within the site, but access to the site is restricted for cycles.

PROBLEM The coalfields area has an abundance of old railway lines for green corridors but most are overgrown and undeveloped. National Routes 6 and 67 are not connected by traffic-free routes but by a 60mph road with high traffic volumes.

SOLUTION To build a 3-metre-wide multi-user traffic-free paths along old railway lines and upgrade public rights of way networks. Connect National Routes 6 and 67 to communities in Clumber Park, Pleasley Vale and Mansfield. The development of the Clowne branch-line will also connect to Hardwick Hall.

Activation project map



7. Conclusion

The Midlands and East of England have 18% of the UK's National Cycle Network including some of the finest traffic-free walking and cycling routes offering unique sights from Derbyshire to Southend-on-Sea and from the Humber Estuary to Herefordshire.

We have remarkable landscapes, history, culture and architecture, with routes ranging from wild and ethereal mountain tracks to the fairy tale woodland trails of the National Forest.

We have over 50% achieving a Good standard overall with many traffic-free sections only requiring minor interventions to achieve a Very Good standard, primarily surface or flow considerations or where there has been growth in usage or restrictions due to vegetation.

On-road sections that are Poor or Very Poor will require significant interventions, mainly relating to speed and volume of traffic.

The priorities set out in this action plan reflect this situation, particularly in dealing with sections of Network on busy A or B roads, key crossing points and accessibility on well used traffic-free routes.

We would like to echo the "Paths for everyone" UK-wide review and thank our regional volunteers and supporters for their assistance throughout the consultation process, and their ongoing volunteering; including the Greener Greenways project that has transformed eight individual sections of the Network into habitats for wildlife.

One of the next steps is to work with partners to develop the projects identified into design-ready schemes. Sustrans will work with partners to identify funding plans enabling these projects to be delivered by 2023.

We will continue to work with local authorities, government bodies, volunteers and other external partners towards collating funding from a variety of sources such as CIL/ Section 106 and other developer contributions, Local Transport Plans and from other national and local funders.

Our long term Network Development plan will aspire to a Network of traffic-free routes for everyone to enjoy. Aiming for a Very Good standard that inspires future generations to walk and cycle, exploring the natural environment within their communities.

We will continue to work with volunteers and partners and use our audit data to focus resources and investment effectively. We will strive to make our routes a Network of paths for everyone that we are proud of. This will lead to improved health and wellbeing, increased access to safer routes and, enable more people to access employment and the fantastic green spaces throughout the Midlands and East of England.

Acknowledgements

Sustrans would like to acknowledge the following for their assistance in undertaking the National Cycle Network review in the Midlands and East of England and involvement with the Midlands and East of England National Cycle Network review national advisory panel.

The Midlands and East of England advisory panel have worked hard along with partners and volunteers to assess the activation projects for the region.

- Highways England
- Cambridgeshire County Council
- Central Bedfordshire Council
- West Midlands Combined Authority
- Derbyshire County Council
- Lincolnshire County Council
- National Trust
- National Forest
- Midlands and East volunteers
- Essex County Council
- West Midlands Combined Authority
- Canal and River Trust
- D2N2
- Warwick District Council