

England access forum

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Rt Hon Geoff Hoon MP
Secretary of State for Transport
Department for Transport,
Great Minster House,
76, Marsham Street,
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10th November 2008

Dear Secretary of State,

Stimulating the Economy

I was interested to read in the Financial Times that you have ordered a review to see which projects could be brought forward and accelerated to stimulate the economy only to discover that they are locked into existing timetables. I can empathise with your frustrations having had similar experiences in my days as a County Chief Executive.

It occurs to me that there is an area where small-scale but "on the shelf" projects of great potential benefit already exist. The Government required highway authorities, in consultation with their communities to draw up Rights of Way Improvement Plans (ROWIPs). The aim was to produce a network for the 21st Century relevant to the health and recreational needs of communities. This may mean, for example, circular family routes, better disabled access, or "urban lungs" to encourage exercise and fitness. They include paths for walkers, cyclists and equestrians (and all three). As an example, in my own County of Cumbria the ROWIP led to the identification of over 300 worthwhile schemes, only a tiny fraction of which have been implemented, due to lack of funding.

Tackling this backlog of bespoke projects ticks an awful lot of boxes in Government policies and could be taken forward in partnership with DEFRA, Natural England, and Highway Authorities. A relatively small investment would bring rich rewards and put significant sums into local economies. The work would be carried out by small contracting businesses to which this could be quite literally a lifeline

I am sure that the volunteer members of the 81 statutory Local Access forums in England would do all that they could to identify and expedite projects.

Yours sincerely