



# Joint Rights of Way Improvement Plan

Consultation 2007



BATH & NORTH EAST SOMERSET



  
South Gloucestershire  
Council

The **West of England** Partnership

## Why a Rights of Way Improvement Plan?

Under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 every highway authority has to prepare a 'Rights of Way Improvement Plan' (ROWIP). ROWIPs have to assess how well footpaths, bridleways, byways and cycle tracks:

- meet current and future needs
- provide recreational opportunities
- are accessible to blind or partially sighted persons and others with mobility problems.

The three councils of Bath and North East Somerset, Bristol City and South Gloucestershire have come together to put forward a joint ROWIP. North Somerset Council has a separate ROWIP but the two plans will in future be combined.

Our area has a population of almost 800,000 living in cities, towns, villages and isolated rural properties. Much of our countryside is in the Mendip Hills and Cotswolds Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs), the rest in the Forest of Avon Community Forest.



## Our vision

Our vision is to increase the use of rights of way by developing a network of safe and attractive routes which:

- *improve opportunities for sustainable access to essential services and facilities*
- *meet the present and future recreational needs of all members of the community, including those with visual impairment or mobility difficulties.*

## Needs of users

For 'everyday' trips - for example getting to school, work and local shops - walkers and cyclists need:

- *effective links with local facilities*
- *well drained and clean surfaces; lack of obstructions (free of potholes for cyclists)*
- *safe routes that avoid road hazards and provide personal security*
- *clear and noticeable signs.*

For 'recreational' trips walkers need:

- *variety of routes from short family strolls to long distance walks*
- *natural surface and environment; drainage that avoids excessive mud*
- *adequate signage and waymarks; information about routes*
- *safe routes that avoid road hazards and free of obstructions*
- *convenient public transport or car parking.*

Recreational cyclists and horse riders also need:

- *routes wide enough to share with walkers*
- *safe crossing points where routes meet the road network and convenient links, where necessary on-road or along road verges.*
- *convenient car parking.*

People who have a visual impairment or mobility problem have additional needs such as:

- *level surfaces; manoeuvring space for wheelchairs/ mobility scooters/ buggies and for horse riders to mount/ dismount*

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- *views unimpeded for wheelchair users, handrails, even steps, accessible seats/perching places, easy to use catches and gates*
- *clear edges to paths, clear marking of steps and structures and warning of hazards at head height for people with visual impairment*
- *special 'blue badge type' car parking.*

Joggers, dog walkers and motorised users also have particular needs.

There can be conflicts between the needs of different users and we aim to manage these, learning from best practice. We are also conscious that rights of way go across private land and that positive working with landowners is essential.

### The rights of way network

We have a 1400 mile network of public rights of way with around 90% being footpaths. Footpaths range from locally important links to well promoted routes like the Cotswold Way National Trail and routes along our rivers and canals. For historical and geographical reasons the provision of public rights of way is varied. Public rights of way are recorded on definitive maps and statements. Over the last 5 years we have processed over 120 legal orders to modify these maps or to create, divert or extinguish (remove) rights of way.

The cities of Bath and Bristol have relatively limited recorded rights of way networks but these are supplemented by a diverse pattern of other paths and routes. Most bridleways and restricted byways (those open to non-motorised users only) are in South Gloucestershire. Most byways open to all traffic (BOATs) are in Bath and North East Somerset.

As well as the network of public rights of way, our area has a wide range of other means of getting access to local facilities and the wider countryside. We have for example the Bristol & Bath Railway Path and other key routes that form part of the National Cycle Network. There is also access land including commons, public parks and permissive paths provided by farmers under the



## Public rights of way network



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Government's Environmental Stewardship Scheme and by landowners like the National Trust and Bristol Water. In addition, vital links are provided by highway footways and verges and within housing estates.

## Maintaining our rights of way

As highway authorities we have a duty to ensure that rights of way are adequately signposted, maintained, free from obstruction and fit for purpose. Current practice varies between the three councils. Signing problems have been identified through surveys and feedback from the public. Each council has maintenance contracts for vegetation clearance and control and there are also agreements with some Parish Councils. As well as general maintenance

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we have improvement programmes such as replacing stiles with kissing gates, surfacing and improved drainage.

### Promotion

We actively promote our rights of way and produce a variety of booklets and leaflets. Council websites have an increasing role to play. Many other organisations are equally active in promotion.

### Other documents and information

In assessing our rights of way we have drawn upon other documents and information. Influential have been the guidance notes and other publications of the Government and national agencies. We have also taken account of the Regional Spatial Strategy, which sets the regional framework for development and transport, and our community and corporate strategies. There is a close relationship between the ROWIP and the Joint Local Transport Plan. Our local plans and emerging local development frameworks set the land use context. The management plans of the Mendip Hills and Cotswolds Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and the Forest of Avon Plan are also important.

### Public consultation so far....

In 2006 we undertook a questionnaire survey and received almost 3000 replies, enough to give a good picture of public opinion. We found that walking, jogging and cycling were the most popular activities; over half the walkers used paths at least once a week. Three quarters of people used rights of way to enjoy the environment. Personal safety was a key concern and maintenance was also considered a priority.

### Priority themes

These and the many other survey findings were explored in detail in four 'local assessment areas' chosen to represent different types of location: Brislington, Oldbury-on-Severn, Sodbury and Timsbury. Joint Local Access Forum consultation events were held in these locations plus an area-wide event for access providers and interest groups.

Four themes came forward as priorities:

Theme 1 - improving maintenance and safety

Theme 2 - signing routes

**Theme 3** - providing information

**Theme 4** - enabling local travel.

## Statement of action

We have drawn up a Statement of Action focusing on the four priority themes. Some are short term 'quick wins' while others could take 5 years or more to complete.

To improve maintenance and safety we intend to:

- *survey the current condition of the network*
- *develop consistent standards for managing rights of way across the three council areas and classify routes accordingly*
- *develop a joint approach towards rights of way diversions, managing definitive map work and legal activities.*

To improve signing we plan to:

- *carry out a full review of current signs*
- *produce signage guidelines*
- *ensure that outside urban areas 90% of paths are signed where they leave tarmac roads*

To provide information we propose to:

- *make greater use of the internet, newsletters and press releases*
- *extend the range of promotional material*
- *give guidance to landowners*
- *promote access by public transport.*

To enable local travel we will:

- *improve access to schools, employment, health services and other local facilities*
- *improve provision for those with mobility difficulties and visual impairments*
- *seek road safety improvements in critical locations*
- *promote rights of way through travel planning*
- *work with planners and developers to secure improvements and new routes.*



## Implementing the ROWIP

Most actions will be funded and implemented by the councils but key partners and stakeholders will play important roles including the AONB and Forest of Avon services. We look forward to working closely with landowners. Annual business plans will be prepared by each council.

## What do you think of the ROWIP?

We believe the ROWIP is a major step towards developing a network of safe, accessible and attractive routes that meet present and future needs.

But the ROWIP is a draft and we want your views. Please fill in the questionnaire in the centre pages of this leaflet and return it in the freepost envelope.

## Getting a copy of the ROWIP

This leaflet highlights the main points. You can have a look at the full draft ROWIP document at council offices and local libraries or online at [www.jlaf.org.uk/rowip](http://www.jlaf.org.uk/rowip). If you would like your own copy please get in touch with us at:

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