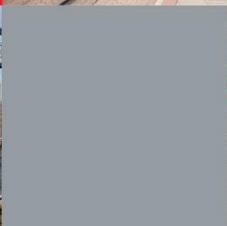


Cyclists, pedestrians and equestrians: a summary of priorities for Highways England's Network

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Introduction

Transport Focus is the independent consumer watchdog representing the interests of all users of England's motorways and major 'A' roads, the Strategic Road Network (SRN) managed by Highways England.

While cyclists, pedestrians and equestrians' use of the SRN is confined to single and dual carriageway major 'A' roads because they are prohibited from using motorways, they need to be able to cross all Highways England's roads safely – whether in an urban or rural environment.

Between now and 2020 the Government will invest substantial sums in improving the SRN, and planning for the five years after that is already underway. We believe it is important to understand the priorities of cyclists, pedestrians and equestrians in relation to these roads, and in particular to take their views properly into account.

The objectives of this study were to:

- understand the key issues and barriers that cyclists, pedestrians and equestrians face when using or interacting with the Highways England network
- understand themes that are common to cyclists, pedestrians and equestrians
- make a series of recommendations about how Highways England and the Department for Transport could more effectively address their needs.

We met the key organisations representing cyclists, pedestrians and equestrians. Those involved were British Cycling, British Horse Society, Cycling UK, Living Streets and Ramblers. Their interests are distinct, and this report describes the issues identified for each mode of travel, along with examples of the types of problems experienced. First of all, we highlight a number of themes that are common to all three types of user.

We then make a number of recommendations and will now work with Highways England and the Department for Transport to ensure that these issues are fully considered in future investment decisions.

Interests common to all

From our discussions with these organisations it became clear that many issues were common to cyclists, pedestrians and equestrians.

- Safety, whether users are crossing the SRN or travelling along it, is of crucial importance. Provision that has been made for cyclists, pedestrians and equestrians should be maintained to an agreed standard and inspected on a regular basis.

- The quality of the journey experience is also important to these road users. Key factors that influence journey satisfaction include the type of path surface, noise levels, lighting, signage and physical segregation from road traffic without an excessive increase in distance travelled.
- Cyclists, pedestrians and equestrians want provision incorporated for them at the outset of the scheme design, rather than 'fighting' for adaptations later. They believe that cost inflation when design adjustments are made later leads to proposals not meeting cost-benefit requirements – the view being that acceptable cost-benefit ratios would be achieved if proposals were designed in from the start.
- Better dialogue with Highways England project teams on individual schemes is needed, especially if measures for cycling, walking and horse riding cannot be delivered as originally proposed. This is especially important when users were asked to provide input during the initial design phases. It was a simple message. If people think Highways England has agreed to incorporate something, the company should go back to them and explain if that 'something' later turns out to be impossible.
- We found that, on the whole, users preferred physical separation from motorised vehicles. This could be by separating a byway, bridleway, footpath or cycle path from the carriageway itself, but following the same broad alignment.
- There needs to be better provision for cyclists, pedestrians and equestrians who need to cross motorways and major 'A' roads. Users preferred these to be level with the carriageway (in other words not involving a bridge or subway, but they recognise that there will be practical limitations).
- Users explained that the Highways England's network can be a barrier to making journeys, severing links between communities, places of work and routes such as the National Cycling Network, footpaths, towpaths, byways and bridleways, junctions and roundabouts. This is especially important as many users need to cross the SRN to continue along the local road network. Many junctions lack even basic crossing provision and pavements at present.

Interests of pedestrians

In our discussions with groups representing pedestrians we heard a strong message that in the design of new road schemes, and when upgrading the existing network, their needs must be considered from scheme conception. Also, without careful consideration the network can sever communities and make it difficult to get to a bus stop, local amenities or others parts of the community.

Specific thought should be given to the design of major roundabouts and interchanges. Slip roads with high volumes of fast traffic are a real concern. This is especially important where the network connects urban areas to out-of-town leisure areas such as the rural rights of way network, or to retail and business parks. Lack of provision for pedestrians and cyclists is believed to force people to use motorised vehicles because of safety fears.

There also needs to be greater emphasis in highway design on facilitating 'utilitarian walking'; that is, travelling on foot as distinct from walking for leisure. This is particularly important for short local journeys to friends, amenities or links to public transport. Where Highways England's network passes through built-up areas, there needs to be recognition that these roads have a significant role in facilitating these types of journeys. It is important that pedestrian facilities such as pavements and crossings are designed accordingly.

Crossing busy carriageways can be extremely hazardous for pedestrians, especially for those who are elderly or less mobile. They prefer to cross on the same level as motorised traffic although this has obvious practical limitations. Bridges are the next preferred option, with subways a third preference (although difficulties in protecting the latter from anti-social behaviour, especially in urban areas, is understood). The location and type of crossing also requires careful consideration to ensure they are in a safe, accessible and convenient location. User-operated crossings are preferable when traffic lights are involved.

In many rural areas footpaths and bridleways often emerge onto or lead off 'A' roads. We were told of numerous instances where public rights of way were not aligned on the two sides of the road: they are staggered by several hundred metres. This requires pedestrians to walk on verges, often with dense foliage, or step into the road and face oncoming traffic in order to reach the next path. Also, pavements can run out on one side of the road, then switch to the opposite side requiring pedestrians to cross the road. In some rural areas there are no pavements at all on Highways England's 'A' roads, forcing all pedestrians to walk on the carriageway.

The A35 near Winterbourne Abbas, Dorset, pictured below is an example. Two bridleways emerge onto the A35 a few hundred metres apart, with no provision to get between the two apart from walking in the carriageway. Photo taken at Point A.



Where provision has been made for pedestrians to use major roads, the quality can vary greatly. In certain areas pedestrians find themselves very close to the carriageway on poorly-maintained surfaces being buffeted by air turbulence from passing vehicles. In wet weather the situation can be worse, with carriageway surface water and spray making pedestrians wet even if it is not raining. Using an unlit, poorly-maintained path in the winter months when it is dark early was also cited as an issue.

Pedestrians would prefer physical separation from high speed and heavily-used carriageways. Purpose-built, parallel paths for pedestrians greatly enhance journey quality, especially when these routes are clearly marked to avoid conflict with cyclists and horse riders.

User groups also say that some drivers behave inappropriately towards pedestrians trying to cross or travel along 'A' roads. There is a desire to see improved driver behaviour, including increased awareness that pedestrians have a right to use these roads.

Interests of cyclists

Organisations representing cyclists told us that most cyclists try to avoid travelling along major 'A' roads where possible. They feel that many road improvement schemes have not made proper provision for cyclists. The perception that these roads are unsafe for cyclists deters some from using them. With a growth in cycling predicted in the coming years, there is keenness to ensure the infrastructure is ready for this.

The cycling user groups told us that quality cycling provision needs to be considered at the very early stages of new road construction. Any new road scheme should consider cyclists in two distinct areas; those that need to travel along the road and those that need to cross it.

Major junctions on 'A' roads present their own issues for cyclists to safely navigate and are of particular importance as they allow access to and from local roads, retail and business districts. Poor design and minimal cycling provision can lead to these important areas being effectively inaccessible by bike from residential areas.

Cycling groups told us that the siting of crossing points needs to be carefully considered so that they are located on 'desire lines' (where people will intuitively cycle left to their own devices). They perceive that too often schemes involve them crossing where it was convenient for the design team to put them, rather than for the cyclist to use. Cyclists prefer not to have bridges or subways, and therefore to cross level with the carriageway, to avoid having to dismount and extend their journey time.

When it comes to travelling along 'A' roads, we were told that cyclists prefer "corridors" that are safe from heavy traffic and vehicles travelling at high speed. In this regard cyclists usually prefer physical segregation from motorised vehicles, but along parallel, direct routes that don't require long diversions away from the alignment of the carriageway.



Photo: Cycling on a segregated path. Photo courtesy of Highways England.

We were told that the quality of cycling infrastructure is of key importance in maintaining current usage and in encouraging more cycling. As well as surface quality, other aspirations include shielding cyclists from excessive traffic noise; signage improvements; prevention of flooding; and improved links with other cycling routes. The latter should include close cooperation with local authorities to maximise connectivity.

The provision of cycle-friendly infrastructure varies throughout Highways England's network. We were told that there is no agreed standard for what good looks like. There is also a desire to see regular maintenance and safety checks on cycling assets to ensure they remain fit for purpose.

Interests of equestrians

The British Horse Society told us that use of Highways England's 'A' roads with horses is limited. Many roads do not offer provision for horses and are therefore considered unsafe to use. Indeed, horse riders perceive that better provision is made for pedestrians and cyclists.

To ensure that there is quality provision in highways infrastructure for equestrian use, there is a strong call for their needs to be considered where appropriate at the conception of both new road and improvement programmes. As the design develops there is a desire for stronger engagement with equestrian groups at a local level to ensure maximum benefit is realised from the investment.

As with cyclists and pedestrians, usage can be split into those who need to cross Highways England's network and those who need to travel along it. A top priority for horse riders is to improve the ability to cross busy carriageways and their preferred option is to use a Pegasus crossing because the controls are higher and they can stay mounted. These user-operated crossings allow horse riders to cross safely because traffic lights stop vehicles, helping to keep the horse calm.



Photo: A Pegasus crossing. Photo courtesy of British Horse Society.

Pegasus crossings should be used near to bridleways, multi-user paths and venues such as riding schools. This is especially important when paddocks, training grounds and exercise areas are separated from other buildings by a road. Where a Pegasus crossing is not feasible, dedicated underpasses are the preferred solution, particularly at major junctions, and where dual carriageways and motorways need to be crossed.

User groups also told us that many bridges cross Highways England's network, but they can be for the private use of landowners. They suggested that Highways England explore whether private bridges could be opened to increase connectivity between local communities at minimal cost. This would help long-distance journey planning allowing equestrians to safely cross Highways England's roads and connect to other routes, byways and bridleways under local authority control.

For equestrians travelling along major 'A' roads, we were told that segregated paths away from the carriageways are the preferred option, even if these are shared with pedestrians and cyclists. However, careful thought should be given to the type of surfacing used on these paths to prevent degradation through continued use. Where current provision is already made for horse riders along verges, care should be taken

that traffic signs do not impede riding or block visibility. Other hazards include poorly located drain covers in carriageways (on which a horse might slip), forcing riders further into the carriageway, and bridge parapets that are too low to provide adequate protection.

Conversion of 'A' roads to motorway or expressway

Whenever an existing 'A' road is converted into a motorway or upgraded to the proposed expressway standard, Highways England must carefully consider the impacts of excluding cyclists, pedestrians and equestrians on them. Wherever they are prohibited from using a section of the SRN it is important for Highways England to provide a safe route to all the places currently served by the road, as well as safe ways of crossing it. The earlier observation that some users would prefer a segregated path broadly following the alignment of the road should be noted.

Recommendations

Transport Focus therefore recommends the following:

- **User input to design** – prior to any new scheme entering the design process, Highways England should engage with cyclists, pedestrians and equestrians to ensure that their needs are at the heart of planning. This should include national representative groups for generic input which can then be shared internally within Highways England. Local user groups should also be consulted for project-specific detail. If designs change after initial engagement, Highways England should re-engage to find the next best solution.
- **Crossing the network** – any new road scheme or major upgrade should incorporate crossings for cyclists, pedestrians and equestrians from the very beginning, taking into account both current and potential use. These should, where possible, be along ‘lines of desire’ between key points. Careful thought should be given to installing the most appropriate type of crossing whether it be on the surface, an underpass or bridge.
- **Connecting networks** – careful thought should be given to how crossing roads can improve connectivity between communities and amenities. This should include collaboration with local authorities and local interest groups to maximise strategic and county-wide schemes to encourage non-motorised travel.
- **Junctions and roundabouts** – Highways England should seek to improve the experience of cyclists, pedestrians and equestrians at junctions and roundabouts. This should include the creation of traffic-free alternative routes.
- **Segregated paths** – Highways England should investigate ways for new and existing road schemes to incorporate segregated paths for cyclists, pedestrians and equestrians. Where possible these should be physically separated from the carriageway, but with minimal diversion from the intended route.
- **Minimum standards** – develop a set of minimum standards, beyond the current requirements of the Design Manual for Roads and Bridges (DMRB) for infrastructure intended for cyclists, pedestrians and equestrians. These should focus on the following areas:
 1. Surface quality
 2. Noise protection
 3. Physical protection from motorised vehicles
 4. Lighting (where appropriate)
 5. Flood prevention
 6. Signage
 7. Limited divergence from the existing carriageway route

8. Maintenance and inspection regimes
9. Crossings and underpasses

Once these standards have been developed and tested we would recommend Highways England incorporates them in to the DRMB.

- **Connecting Public Rights of Way (PRoW)** – where a PRoW commences or terminates at the edge of a Highways England 'A' road, Highways England should explore options to connect it with a PRoW on the other side of the road, especially if they are staggered by only a few hundred metres. Where this is not practicable, Highways England should engage with landowners and local authorities with a view to re-routing rights of way or constructing a path outside the current Highway boundary.
- **Explore existing assets** – Highways England should fully evaluate whether assets within the Historic Railway Estate could be brought in to use for the benefit of cyclists, pedestrians and equestrians.
- **Bridge environment** – Where a Highways England road crosses over another part of the SRN, a local authority road or a public right of way, the installation of spikes, netting or other means of preventing birds from perching underneath bridges would be helpful. It would help to reduce bird defecation onto paths below, reducing health risks and improving the pedestrian experience.



Photo: Pigeon defecation on footpaths under bridges, as seen here under the M5 at Oldbury.

- **Conversion of 'A roads' to motorway or Expressway**
Whenever an existing 'A' road is converted into a motorway, or upgraded to the proposed expressway standard, Highways England must carefully

consider the impacts of excluding cyclists, pedestrians and equestrians; providing suitable alternative provision where necessary.

- **Measuring usage of the network** – Highways England should explore low-cost solutions to gather data about the use of major 'A' roads by cyclists, pedestrians and equestrians. This would assist in building a national picture of route utilisation and provide a benchmark for, amongst other things, casualties versus usage on individual roads.

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