

# Visitor Travel

## Policy from practice

**As people get out more to enjoy our natural and cultural heritage, rural leisure trips have become one of the fastest growing sources of traffic. The distance travelled for day trips in the UK has increased by nearly 30% since 1985. More than seven out of ten day trips, and nearly eight out of ten holiday visits, are currently made by car.**

Tourism is one of the largest industries in the UK, worth £74 billion in 2003, and employing 2.2 million people. The industry relies on both a high quality environment and good access for visitors. But our increasing dependence on car access is placing a heavy burden on site managers and car traffic and pollution can undermine the very assets which visitors come to see.

As well as creating environmental and operational problems a growing reliance on car based access for visitors creates problems for the 28% of households which do not own nor have access to a car and for whom enjoying a day out can be much more difficult.

Each year, the National Trust manages over 13 million visits to 'pay for entry' properties and over 50 million visits to our coast and open countryside.

Along with other tourism and leisure providers the National Trust depends on car visits. Yet the consequences of too many cars on the road and pressure on car parks are all too clear. For example:

- Visitor dissatisfaction - congestion is cited as a primary reason for declining visitor numbers at some National Trust

properties in the South West

- Visual blight - overspill car parking or lines of traffic can spoil the setting of a fine country house or area of wild coastline
- Noise pollution - motor vehicles disturb the peace and tranquillity of the countryside much valued by visitors
- Air pollution – traffic growth is the single largest contribution to greenhouse gas emissions and are projected to increase by as much as 23% by 2020
- Costs of infrastructure - each car park costs the National Trust on average over £11,500 per year and the typical cost of a new car park is around £1million.

Set against this is the convenience which the car provides for the vast majority of Trust members. Meeting their needs while seeking new and less damaging approach is a real dilemma.

In recent years, the National Trust has concentrated its approach on encouraging a greater choice in leisure travel by:

- Participating in over 28 schemes to provide car-free leisure across the country in partnership with local authorities, public transport operators and other attractions
- Investing over £100,000 into setting up and running transport projects
- Marketing and promoting car free leisure journeys with campaigns such as the promotion offering rail passengers two for the price of one admission to National trust

### Breeze up the Downs



The bus service to Devil's Dyke as part of the Breeze up the Downs initiative takes about 72,000 visitors per year to enjoy the South Downs, half of whom do not have access to a car

properties in association with the Association of Train Operating Companies

- Making leisure journeys by public transport fun by introducing open top buses, ferries, tour guides and even steam trains
- Encouraging cycling visits to properties, with over 200 National Trust properties now located within 2km of the National Cycle Network
- Developing visitor travel plans to manage pressure and restricting parking at several of our properties
- Promoting sustainable access to individual properties by providing information in each case on how to arrive by foot, cycle, bus and train.

Such measures are helpful in widening transport choice but the Trust remains heavily dependant on car based visitors and our visitors enjoy the aforementioned convenience which the car provides.

## Castle Drogo

Castle Drogo and the Teign Gorge receives about 135,000 visitors per year. During school holidays the property typically receives 700-1,000 visitors per day, and on bank holidays numbers can reach 1,700. Almost all arrive by car.

There are two car parks, which between them can take up to 500 cars. Access is a major problem with very narrow lanes up to the property, which can become completely gridlocked for up to two hours at a time if large vehicles such as coaches or agricultural machinery meet visitor traffic.

Staff and volunteers trying to sort out the problems regularly get blamed for the traffic chaos. The congestion problems on the lanes led two coach tour companies to drop Castle Drogo from their itineraries in 2004. This led to a loss of 4,000 visitors.



## Learning from experience

At best, National Trust properties have shown that well designed plans for visitor travel can greatly reduce the number of people arriving by car and also deliver a wider range of benefits. Properties such as Greenways in Devon and Prior Park in Bath, demonstrate that the majority of visitors are happy to leave their cars at home.

Nevertheless, the challenge of reducing car travel to many other Trust properties remains. In most cases new sustainable travel options have only touched a minority of the visitor market, and have not solved problems of congestion or significantly reduced the need to provide parking.

While incentives such as reduced entrance fees for those who arrive by public transport or cycle can encourage people to leave their cars at home, their main benefit is in providing incentives which attract a new type of visitor, rather than encouraging people to change their journey behaviour

Although we have some way to go in changing behaviour, the National Trust experience in providing more sustainable leisure travel shows that they can deliver a wide range of benefits. For example

- Encouraging alternative means of transport such as cycling or walking brings money into the local economy - tourists on cycling holidays spend almost £20 a day more than the average for UK holidays
- Providing public transport access to rural leisure sites helps people without cars to enjoy the nation's natural and built heritage.

- Encouraging alternative transport such as cycling and walking delivers wider health benefits
- Schemes established for tourists can benefit local communities in meeting their transport needs
- Off peak promotions can increase visitor numbers substantially in the low season
- A well run service can add to the visitor experience, as the journey becomes an enjoyable part of the trip

It is clear, however, that individual organisations like the National Trust are unable to tackle the issue of providing access while reducing car dependency in isolation. Our experience shows that successful schemes require sustained funding and support. In an increasingly difficult funding climate the opportunity to maintain existing and develop new schemes is increasingly in jeopardy.

Start up grants for transport schemes are helpful, and have proved useful but we need longer term funding in

### Fal River and Trelissick



In Cornwall the National Trust has worked in partnership with both the private and public sector to promote water transport on the River Fal and to create a new landing for ferries at Trelissick.

order to allow a service to develop and establish itself over several years. For example, the Shropshire Hills Shuttle Bus is only now starting to become self sufficient after 3 years and yet its grant support is under threat putting at risk this much valued scheme.

Services are most likely to be successful if they meet the needs of both visitor and the local community. The Pembrokeshire Greenways transport service is used as much by the local community to get to the beach as by visitors.

Effective and targeted marketing and advertising is also needed in order to promote these schemes. This too requires both time and money.

We have found partnership with local authorities and public transport operators are usually critical in attracting funding and achieving viable services. Partnerships involving different agencies can also help by pooling funding from a variety of sources.

The scope for partnerships is especially good in protected areas where agencies are increasingly taking an area-wide approach to car-free visitor access, such as in Pembrokeshire, and along the Jurassic Coast World Heritage Site.

There are also benefits in restricting access by car to certain sensitive sites and charging for parking differentially according to the season or time of day. In future, this kind of measure is likely to become increasingly important.

In our experience the business risks of reduced visitor numbers can be managed best by providing practical alternatives to ensure that visitors can still visit, and supporting wider cultural change in attitudes to car use.

## Prior Park

Prior Park Landscape Garden was opened in 1996 by the National Trust. The garden is in the south of the city of Bath, about 30 minutes walk from the city centre.

When the Trust first looked at opening the garden, local residents were concerned that the area would be overwhelmed with traffic.

In response the Trust decided to provide no visitor parking. The Trust has taken various actions to

make it easy for visitors to reach the site without a car.

It subsidises established Sunday services passing the site ensuring they are synchronised with opening and closing times.

The property has successfully negotiated with an open-top tour bus company (Bath Bus Company) to start a new Bath Sky Line tour route via Prior Park.



This allows visitors to explore Bath in a new way and gives them access to the popular 6 mile Bath Sky Line walk

## Widen the Choice

Widen the Choice is a regional partnership between the National Trust and RSPB in the East of England. It promotes greener ways for visitors to reach over 60 National Trust and RSPB properties.

Managed by just one partnership officer, the scheme has installed cycle stands at 28 locations and works through other networks to improve and promote local transport options.

One such scheme is CoastLink, a creative way of responding to visitors and locals needs by means of a dial-a-ride service. This provides access to

some of Suffolk's finest coastline.

The partnership costs £35,000 per year with 75% of the funding coming from the Countryside Agency. Real savings have been made through operating on a regional scale, including the cost of producing leaflets such as 'Birds by boat' and 'Journey into Lifetimes'

With the funding running out in March 2006, the National Trust is looking for ways for the partnership's work to continue whilst tackling challenges such as a tight funding budget both internally and externally.



## Future challenges

There are a number of challenges to delivering real change in visitor travel.

### Improving the infrastructure

There are significant infrastructure problems to overcome - poor public transport, especially on Sundays; train and bus services which do not connect; excessively high speed limits and no pavements or cycle paths on many busy rural roads. All act to discourage alternatives to the car.

Even where there is adequate provision of alternatives, a lack of well targeted information and marketing means some services have failed to attract the expected levels of use.

### Creating viable services

We cannot expect people to leave their cars and venture into the countryside by alternative means if they perceive this will be difficult, dangerous, expensive or uncomfortable.

Achieving the critical mass to make quality alternative services viable is key. Well marketed bus services, affordable prices and on line information such as TransportDirect.com and Journey Solutions could attract large numbers of passengers. Where demand is too low to sustain a regular service, demand responsive transport schemes may offer a better option.

### Costs and regulation

Driven both by concerns about climate change and emissions and the need to restrain traffic growth, the Government is turning its attention to fiscal instruments such as road user charging and petrol duty. Such measures could have a potentially significant impact on leisure and tourism providers and it is critical that these are fully considered in any future debate.

The role of land use planning in addressing traffic growth is significant. Planning already promotes the use of travel plans for workplace and schools, and could start to require the same approach for leisure and tourism sites. This has already been the case for several National Trust properties and helped identify opportunities for addressing the impact of car travel and promoting alternatives.

### A deteriorating funding environment

Rural services, and particularly recreational services, are currently competing for resources in a deteriorating funding environment. Many existing visitor travel initiatives have involved public transport improvements funded by the Countryside Agency's Rural Transport Partnership scheme and the Government's Rural Bus Challenge fund.

Both these sources of funding have now ended, leaving schemes vulnerable to funding shortfall.

Whilst some may survive as going concerns, the market alone will not be sufficient to sustain many of these services.

The switch of resources for rural development to the Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) has created a funding and policy vacuum which is already undermining existing rural transport schemes.

There is a high level of concern within the rural transport sector that the RDAs do not have the capacity, experience or inclination to fund the kind of schemes that have been funded by the Rural Transport Partnership Scheme.

There is a need to help RDAs recognise the contribution of tackling visitor travel to their wider objectives. This could involve rolling out knowledge and experience of current activity and creating a leisure travel plan training initiative for RDAs and Regional Assembly staff.

### Culture change

People are strongly attached to the individual freedom and ease which car use provides. Addressing the culture of car use is an essential part of any approach to encourage people to use alternative means of travel and manage traffic growth.

Alongside changing financial signals an provision of new and better alternatives it is essential that sustainable visitor access is marketed as an integral part of the visitor offer. Schemes have 'fun' components that make them part of the visitor experience also help in attracting car users.

## Cycling

Edrfgghg some blurb from Jo burgon about how fabulous our cycling provision is and info on the partnership with sus-trans.



## Surrey Hills Explorer Bus

More than just a green transport service, this popular guided tour of the Surrey Hills AONB which takes in Polesden Lacey and Box Hill is dogged by funding issues.



## A way forward

- The growing emphasis by the Government on road pricing and 'smart' measures such as travel planning, should consider visitor travel and how it can be applied in the countryside as well as congested urban areas.
- Visitor travel planning should be given the same emphasis and promotion by the Government as afforded to workplace and school travel plans. Guidance on developing effective visitor travel plans should build upon the lessons already learnt and visitor travel plans should be required for planning consent for new and expanded visitor attractions.
- There is a need for comprehensive improvements in rural public transport in Britain, with a strong supporting policy framework and permanent stable funding for rural transport schemes. This should look at improving the reliability, adequate coverage and costs for users.
- There is an urgent need for long term revenue funding to support rural and leisure transport schemes and to integrate them into Local Transport Plans
- Lead tourism and marketing organisations, such as Visit Britain, at a national, regional and local level should highlight and promote the importance of sustainable leisure travel as integral to their work.
- RDAs should identify priority areas for transport investment as part of their new role in delivering DEFRA's public service agreements on improving accessibility in rural areas and improving rural economic performance.
- Local transport authorities, public transport operators, leisure organisations and others should work together to ensure travel needs of sites are taken into account in Local Transport Plans, bus strategies and accessibility planning to secure funding.
- Rural rail has the potential to play a major role in encouraging sustainable leisure travel. We need to extend the network in some areas to provide new and better serviced lines and introduce a 7 day timetable which recognises the importance of weekend leisure travel. .

Other topics in this series:

Tourism

### Photographs

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