

Walking and Cycling Network Development Guide

Technical Information Note 49

September 2017



About Sustrans

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.

Join us on our journey. www.sustrans.org.uk

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Registered Charity No. 326550 (England and Wales) SC039263 (Scotland)
VAT Registration No. 416740656

Document number:	TIN 49
Revision number:	v001
Purpose of issue:	Guidance
Date issued:	September 2017
Author:	Simon Pratt
Checked:	Neil Aldridge
Review date:	July 2018

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Introduction

This guide is designed to help local communities through the process of developing a new route or network for walking and cycling. Sustrans has been helping to deliver the National Cycle Network for over 20 years, including greenways, long-distance touring routes, links to schools and urban streets. Over this period we have gained considerable experience across all aspects of walking and cycling strategies, network development, route design and community engagement. Our engineers have detailed knowledge of highway design and have worked on some of the most prominent cycling projects across the country.

Sustrans is a charity and our goal is to get more people walking and cycling rather than make a profit. As such we are able to offer very competitive rates and a service that is flexible and focussed on outcomes that can be delivered.

Local communities are well placed to make the initial case for a new route or network as they know the area and can gain support from local people and politicians. It does need motivation and commitment, with a typical project taking five years or longer from concept through to completion of construction. Sustrans can provide support through every stage of the process, with local communities taking the lead.

The main stages of walking and cycling route development are outlined below:

1. Identifying opportunities
2. Getting people involved
3. Feasibility study
4. Stakeholder engagement
5. Land negotiation
6. Preliminary design
7. Planning permission and other consents
8. Funding
9. Detailed design
10. Construction
11. Promotion
12. Maintenance

1 Identifying opportunities

Many people have a clear idea of their needs, maybe a route linking a village and the neighbouring town, or a network of safe routes around a school. In this case it is important to check local Council plans to see if there are existing proposals. It is also possible that a route is identified as part of the National Cycle Network, so do check with your local Sustrans Network Development Manager.

If the aims are wider, such as developing a network of routes across a whole town, Sustrans can help with the following:

- drafting an Active Travel Strategy
- data analysis to combine geographical information with population demographics, key trip generators, economic growth areas to determine likely route corridors
- assessment of existing routes
- production of maps and diagrams.

2 Getting people involved

At a later stage it will be important to show local support for your project and it is never too early to get local people involved. You can team up with existing community groups or start your own – Sustrans can provide contacts with similar groups across the country, who may be able to help. We can also help in contacting local Sustrans volunteers – there are over 4000 across the UK.

Your local Councillors (Parish, Town, District, County, City etc.) and MPs can be very helpful and their support can be invaluable.

Starting an online petition is one way of gauging the level of support and for finding potential supporters. Social media is also a powerful way to “test the market” and find people who can help.

Case study: Frome's Missing Links

The popular NCN route 24 (Bath to Southampton) passes through the Somerset town of Frome. However steep hills, main roads and railway lines make the connections into and out of Frome both dangerous and difficult for residents and travellers alike. Our aim is to eliminate these obstacles both to the north towards Radstock and south to Longleat with new safe and relatively flat paths (approximately 5km and 2km respectively). We have been working with Sustrans over many years to try to achieve this. These missing links are being completed in phases.

So far we have:

- Found suitable routes for the two paths and helped negotiations with the many landowners
- Gained considerable local support (over 2000 supporters) + full backing of the Frome Town Council
- Created a charity and website able to take donations
- Raised £15,000 locally for Phase 1 to the north. This, combined with £120,000 raised by Sustrans, enabled this 1km section to be completed in 2015
- Raised a further £29,000 in the local community and successfully applied for a £48,000 grant to enable a start on Phase 2 construction to the north.
- Volunteers have saved significant sums of money by undertaking non-specialised construction work
- Volunteers cleared 700 metres of overgrown railway track, lifted the rails and removed the sleepers to significantly reduce Phase 2 costs.
- Liaised with housing developers to the south to ensure their design allowed for 1km of our path in that direction.

More at <https://fromesmissinglinks.org.uk/>



3 Feasibility study

Once the opportunity is identified, a technical study will be needed to determine the feasibility of the route or network and to give an indication of cost. This could be a very basic assessment of the route alignment, or a more detailed engineering study with technical drawings and schedule of costs. The feasibility study can include:

- Written foreword by influential supportive project partners;
- Introduction including history, aim and objectives;
- Other schemes and opportunities in the area;
- Local and government policies that support this project's aims and objectives;
- Consultation undertaken;
- description of the current problems and obstacles to walking and cycling;
- An estimate of the likely number of users
- Potential economic benefits of the proposals;
- Route design, highway interventions, environment, structural liability and ecological issues;
- Land ownership
- Detailed maps and plans with proposal descriptions, cross-sections, alignment diagrams and photos.
- Technical information showing best practice from nationally gained knowledge;
- Estimated costs and identification of potential funding sources;
- Realistic programme of works and section phasing recommendations.

4 Stakeholder engagement

When the ideas are well developed and some work has been done on the technical feasibility of a proposal, it is important to contact those people and organisations with a direct interest in the route. This could include:

- Sustrans
- Landowners
- Local businesses
- Local walking, cycling and other interest groups in the area
- Local authorities
- Local politicians at all levels – Parish Councillor to MP
- Statutory interests such as Network Rail, Environment Agency, Natural England.

We recommend open and transparent communication with all parties, clearly setting out the proposal and the benefits to the local community. You may encounter some opposition, but it is better to know about this at an early stage before too much time and money is spent on developing your preferred route. It may be better to present a number of options rather than a single route proposal, so that people can make an informed choice. Sustrans has a speciality team that can help with community engagement and organisation of consultation events.

It is very helpful if you can get the proposal adopted within the Local Plan and any other local strategy or planning documents. This will increase the chances of funding from future developments in the area. Neighbourhood Plans are becoming increasingly important, so look out for these and make sure your proposal is included.

Case study: Selsey to Chichester Greenway

As a result of a traffic survey about the main road from Chichester to Selsey commissioned by Selsey Town Council in 2014 a working group of Selsey Community Forum was tasked with developing a direct cycle route close to the eight mile highway. Building on aspirations over a number of years the group asked four questions:

1. Is this feasible? As a result funding of £15,300 was sourced from local Councils and donors and Sustrans was commissioned to identify a route and see if there were any insurmountable challenges to the project. The full report indicated that the project was possible.
2. Is this desirable? A series of stakeholder conferences were set up inviting landowners, householders, councillors, businesses and others to consider the proposals. All were affirmative. As part of establishing desirability an environmental impact assessment was commissioned from Sustrans. The digital aspect is being undertaken. Fieldwork will follow once £10,000 of further funding has been raised.
3. Is this allowable? This legal stage will involve securing written landowner permission and planning permission. At all stages all relevant authorities have been kept informed of progress and it is hoped all legalities will be secured in 2018.
4. Is this build-able? Funding sources have been studied but County Council support is vital.

The working group is made up of dedicated gifted volunteers who have worked hard at the task. At present we are within striking distance of completing a tourist route but a commuter route still remains somewhat off. Without Sustrans' guidance this project would not be at this stage of development.

More at <http://www.selseyinfo.co.uk/>

5 Land negotiation

If your proposal crosses private land, you will need to obtain a formal agreement from the landowner. It helps to do some research before you approach the landowner; Sustrans can help and may be able to handle the negotiations for you. We have a wealth of experience having concluded over 850 land agreements. Some landowners will simply want fair compensation for the loss of land, while others may have good reasons for opposing any developments. Sustrans Design Manual has a chapter on “Land, Legal and Planning”, which is a useful starting point. This chapter includes detailed guidance on the legal options available.

Assembly of land to create the best possible route is the most important task in the development of traffic free routes. Negotiators must be patient and respond to the needs of the landowner. It can take more than one year to complete a legal agreement as land agents, valuers and solicitors maybe involved in addition to the landowner.

6 Preliminary design

This is the first stage in the design process, when a qualified engineer will need to draw up some initial plans and cross-sections prior to submitting a planning application. These plans will be detailed enough to assess the physical works required to build the route, but will not generally be sufficient for construction. Local authority engineers may want to comment on the designs, especially if they are being ask to maintain the route.

All stakeholders will need to be consulted and given the opportunity to make comments that can influence the designs. Public consultation is recommended, both online and through drop-in exhibitions. This is a valuable opportunity to demonstrate public support for the route and to identify any concerns about the proposals. Sustrans has a large team of engineers, urban designers and technicians who can help prepare the designs and provide cost estimates.

7 Planning permission and other consents

Most traffic free routes away from the highway will need planning permission, but you should check with your local planning authority. They can also advise on the planning process, the documentation required and the planning fee. Preliminary designs at a scale of 1:2500 or larger will be required, along with a Design and Access Statement, Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (PEA) and Flood Risk Assessment if necessary. Detailed advice is available in the Sustrans Design Manual.

You will need to allow three months and sometimes longer for an application to be determined. The planning authority may impose conditions that will need to be satisfied before work can start on site, such as further ecological surveys. Anyone can submit a planning application, but if you need expert help Sustrans could be the planning agent and submit on your behalf.

8 Funding

Dedicated funds for walking and cycling are limited, but there are occasional calls for schemes that you should look out for. In some cases, the money must be spent in a short time, so it is important to have secured all landowner agreements and planning permission before a funding bid is submitted. Local authorities may have their own funds, or may be able to apply on your behalf to their Local Enterprise Partnership or central government. Some organisations can provide lists of funding sources, which might include:

- Section 106 agreements or Community Infrastructure Levy
- National Park funding allocations
- Landfill Communities Fund
- A private deal with a landowner or developer
- Local transport funds
- Local Enterprise Partnership
- National government funds
- National Lottery
- Local trusts and charities
- Local Councillor discretionary funds.

It can be difficult to secure funds for design and planning work, but these can be included in a larger application for capital funds to build the route. Design and supervision is a legitimate cost in any construction project.

As a registered charity, Sustrans is able to apply for most sources of funding and we have been successful in many hundreds of applications in our own right and on behalf of others. Our business development team may be able to assist with your funding strategy or with writing funding bids.

9 Detailed design

Detailed drawings and cross-sections, typically at a scale of 1:500 will be needed to instruct contractors and to gain approval from local authorities. These drawings will include all the details of construction method, materials, earthworks, drainage, fencing and access controls needed to build the route. Sustrans engineers and designers have designed hundreds of walking and cycling routes, including bridges, tunnels, earthwork ramps and many miles of paths, so we will be pleased to assist.

Case study: Egrets Way

In 2011 a group of local residents decided that we wanted to build a network of shared paths in the Ouse River Valley in East Sussex, connecting the County Town of Lewes, the Port of Newhaven and the villages in between. At the time, we had little understanding of the many challenges which the project would present. We were confident that we could secure the support of local communities but had little appreciation of the technical and practical expertise which would be required to deal with funders, government agencies, contractors and, critically, dozens of landowners, access to whose land was essential for the success of the network.

The seven mile long network of paths is currently half-completed, renewed discussions with landowners are underway and additional funding is being sought. We are well aware that, if we hadn't invited Sustrans to carry out a feasibility study for us at an early stage and if we hadn't subsequently benefited from the experience and expertise which they brought to the management of the project, we would not have made the progress which has been achieved to date.

We are looking forward to continuing to work with Sustrans to deliver the project in a manner which makes best use of the groundwork they have laid over the past five years with landowners, planners, local councils and many other partners.



10 Construction

It may be useful to approach contractors for a quote prior to submitting a funding application, so that you have a better idea of likely costs. They are generally willing to quote against a preliminary design, but the more details you have the better. You should always allow a generous contingency of 20% or more, because there will inevitably be unforeseen circumstances once works start on site. You will need to include VAT in your budgets.

Most funders will require a competitive tender process with at least three quotes and this is a sensible precaution in any event, to ensure that good value for money is obtained. An engineer with experience of contract management will be needed to lead the tender process and to prepare suitable contract documents. Sustrans has more than 20 years' experience in dealing with specialist contractors and can help with the procurement process.

The contractor will be asked to provide a construction programme and duration for the works. There may be seasonal or ecological constraints that will affect start times, but you will need to allow a minimum of three months to appoint the contractor and allow them to mobilise. Frequent supervision of the works is needed to ensure that the path is built to the appropriate standard and the correct materials are used. Landowner and other stakeholders will need to be informed as work progresses and to arrange access for plant, materials and equipment.

11 Promotion

When the route is completed and ready for use, it is important to inform everyone that it exists. A celebratory event involving the local community is a good starting point and local press will often send a reporter or photographer. Social media can complement more traditional press releases and printed material. A programme of events, walks and rides can also help to raise the profile and get more people involved.

12 Maintenance

Although this is the last section, maintenance should be considered at the outset. Good design and construction can help to reduce long term maintenance costs, but all paths will need regular attention to keep them in good condition. The best solution is for the local authority to adopt the path as part of their highway network, although they will welcome local volunteer input in litter picking, vegetation clearance and reporting of major issues.

If the route is to be part of the National Cycle Network, Sustrans volunteers will be able to help with maintenance, both for routine tasks and occasional workdays. If there is no local volunteer group, Sustrans can help establish one and provide materials and support to get started.

References

Sustrans Design Manual <http://www.sustrans.org.uk/our-services/what-we-do/route-design-and-construction/route-design-resources>

Paths for All produce a useful “Community Paths Guide”, which is a practical guide to improving existing paths <http://www.pathsforall.org.uk/pfa/creating-paths/community-paths-guide.html>

Contacts

For more information and support, contact your local Sustrans office:

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