

The Tarka Trail/National Cycle Network Routes between Morteohoe and Knowle

Report of the Head of Highways and Traffic Management

Please note that the following recommendations are subject to consideration and determination by the Committee before taking effect.

Recommendations: It is recommended that:

- (a) work on the incremental development of the route from Willingcott to Knowle be supported, to include applications for external funding, negotiations, obtaining necessary consents and construction;**
- (b) Ilfracombe Town Council be thanked for its role in hosting the working group.**

1. Summary

Members will recall receiving a presentation on the Tarka Trail at their meeting on 28 June 2011 when it was resolved:

“that the Cabinet be urged to support the completion of the Tarka Trail/National Cycle Network routes between Morteohoe and Knowle as a matter of urgency”. (Minute *61 refers).

Cabinet considered the Committee’s resolution at its meeting on 13 July 2011 and resolved:

“that the Cabinet Member for Highway Transportation respond to the Locality (County) Committee on the latest position and way forward at a future meeting.” (Minute *377 (c) refers).

In response to the resolutions above this report outlines current prospects for the connection of Ilfracombe to the Tarka Trail cycling route, with an off road path following the former railway where possible.

2. Background

The cycling section of the Tarka Trail is a major tourism attraction for the South West. It stretches for 32 miles from Knowle to Meeth via Barnstaple, Bideford and Torrington. In addition a further 3.5 miles of off road path has been developed from Willingcott to Ilfracombe. This leaves a gap of 4.3 miles in the off road route between Willingcott and Knowle, the subject of this report. The Tarka Trail is part of the wider Devon Coast to Coast route, now one of the foremost routes in the UK.

3. Proposal

The popularity of high quality off-road cycling trails and their potential for increasing visitor spending over a longer season is well established in Devon. Extending the off road path to Ilfracombe will bring a number of benefits to the town and surrounding areas. To summarise, this project will:

- bring substantial sustainable economic benefit and employment to existing settlements, and new and existing enterprises along the routes, by drawing in new wealth;

- provide opportunities for local spending, thus keeping wealth circulating within the area;
- assist in the diversification and regeneration of Ilfracombe;
- help to extend the tourism season thus reducing the emphasis on seasonal jobs, and providing an attraction which can be used all year round;
- create an attractive route adding to the tourism appeal of northern Devon;
- increase the season and viability of public transport systems including the North Devon Surf and Bike Bus and the seasonal ferries at Ilfracombe;
- help satisfy the enormous public support and enthusiasm for this kind of project within the region and beyond.

With the development of the route from Tavistock to Plymouth nearing completion, this scheme is now one of the two most important 'missing links' in the entire 102 mile Coast to Coast route, the remaining gap being from Meeth to Hatherleigh. The international dimension is also important, Willingcott to Knowle is an obvious problem at the start of the 'Velodyyssey' route (Ilfracombe to Hendaye in southern France). Completion will add value to the existing investment in routes, contribute to these wider initiatives and secure a marketing advantage. At present many people arrive at Barnstaple Station and turn south rather than venture on road to Ilfracombe.

The Council's policy is to follow the former Ilfracombe railway where possible. This is in fragmented ownership and some physical changes such as the removal of bridges have taken place. There are no major structures such as viaducts or tunnels. The railway follows a steep sided valley limiting the route options, though an on road interim route has been established since 1999. This is very hilly and circuitous. Part of the final route is already owned by the County Council and another stretch is a bridleway with rights for cycling. This leaves about 3.5 miles to acquire. The owner of one key section has already expressed a willingness to co-operate. The interim route allows for progressive extensions of the off road route.

A partnership group with Ilfracombe Town Council and local Members has been meeting regularly to progress the project and the main obstacle identified has been securing funding to match external bids. Several opportunities are being researched.

4. Consultations

This is a longstanding policy of the Council and further consultations will be carried out as each phase of the route is investigated.

5. Financial Considerations

The cost of the scheme will be significant but it is considered that this can be raised from a combination of transport funding, external contributions and through planning agreements and community infrastructure contributions.

6. Sustainability Considerations

Walking and cycling are sustainable forms of transport and it is clear that the Tarka Trail has had a strong effect in promoting their use in north Devon. The increased visitor spending that such trails bring, over a longer season, will help to secure existing, and create new jobs. The health effects of cycling and walking are well known.

7. Carbon Impact Considerations

Walking and cycling are low carbon forms of transport and there is a positive effect where journeys replace previous fossil fuel powered trips e.g. for commuting or local leisure trips. There is a possible negative effect if people make additional car borne trips to reach the trail. For this reason no parking is provided other than for the disabled, who would otherwise be excluded.

8. Equality Considerations

All railway paths are inclusive as the low gradients make them suitable for a wide range of abilities including wheelchair users. The trails are of especial benefit to those with low access to vehicle transport such as the elderly and young children. The Council's policy is also to accommodate horses where possible, subject to landowner's views. An Equality Impact & Needs Assessment will be carried out for each phase as it is brought forward.

9. Legal Considerations

There are no specific legal considerations.

10. Risk Management Considerations

This policy has been assessed and all necessary safeguards or action will be taken to safeguard the Council's position. No unusual risks with the approach outlined have been identified.

11. Options/Alternatives

The main option is to do nothing but this will not satisfy local demand, will not enable the benefits outlined above to start flowing, and will not make best use of previous investment. It is clear that the inclusion of on road sections in such trails does not promote cycling and walking and may act as a serious disincentive, especially for more vulnerable groups. Detailed options for route development will be considered as investigations proceed.

12. Reason for Recommendation/Conclusion

This is confirming work already in progress to meet the Council's policies.

Lester Willmington
Head of Highways and Traffic Management

Electoral Divisions: All in North Devon

Local Government Act 1972: List of Background Papers

Contact for enquiries: Graham Cornish

Room No. Gas Lane, Torrington

Tel No: (01392) 388499

| Background Paper | Date | File Reference |
|--------------------------------|-------------------|----------------|
| 1. Braunton to Ilfracombe file | July 1996 to date | F.10 |

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