

Response to call for ideas for Integrated National Transport Strategy

18 February 2025

Summary

- Visitor travel forms an increasingly important element of rural transport, but this aspect is often overlooked in the development of transport plans and strategies.
- Our submission focuses on ensuring that the travel needs of visitors to National Parks are considered in this new strategy. It must address the travel needs of visitors as well as residents if it is to cover rural areas effectively and be a truly integrated national transport strategy.
- We highlight the reasons for paying particular to this issue, including new legislative requirements for public bodies when making decisions which affect these areas.
- We also set out the initiatives that we would like DfT to support through this strategy including safe, attractive cycling and walking routes, better integration between bus and rail services to the piloting of innovative solutions using new technologies such as demand responsive services.

Introduction

Campaign for National Parks is the independent voice for National Parks in England and Wales. Our independence from Government means we can speak out for Protected Landscapes when no-one else can. Founded in 1936, we bring together a campaigning collective of organisations and individuals from all walks of life, united in common cause. Our first campaigns resulted in the creation of our National Parks. Now, inspired by our past, we fight for the future.

We want a world where nature and people are thriving in our National Parks, where wildlife is wild and natural beauty is protected for generations to come; where everyone, no matter their age or background, can access, feel inspired by and fight to protect the future of these truly amazing landscapes. With National Parks at the heart of everything we do, we are here to unite, inspire and empower everyone to take action.

Our submission focuses on ensuring that the travel needs of visitors to National Parks are considered in this strategy. It must address the travel needs of visitors as well as residents if it is to cover rural areas effectively and be a truly integrated national transport strategy. Many

of the points we raise apply equally to National Landscapes (previously known as Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty or AONBs) and the issue of sustainable travel for visitors is also of wider relevance for all rural areas.

Visitor travel forms an increasingly important element of rural transport, but this aspect is often overlooked when considering the connections between rural communities and nearby towns and cities. For example, it is essential that the needs of visitors to rural areas are properly taken into account when developing, and implementing, the Government's reforms to bus services.

Our submission also highlights new legislative requirements relating to National Parks and National Landscapes (collectively referred to as Protected Landscapes) which are an additional reason for paying particular attention to the needs of visitors to these areas.

Q1. In your opinion, how could the transport network be better 'joined-up'?

One of the key issues facing rural areas is the need to consider how increased numbers of visitors can visit safely and sustainably in ways that also provide benefits to the local communities in these areas. This is a particular issue for areas such as National Parks which receive high numbers of visitors. According to the [National Travel Survey](#) (NTS), the most common trip purpose in England in 2023 was for leisure purposes including day trips and holidays, accounting for an average of 243 trips per person per year (27%), compared to an average of 117 trips for commuting and 169 for shopping. The majority (71%) of these leisure trips are made by car or van. The NTS does not indicate how many of these trips take place in rural areas but Visit England [research](#) on domestic rural transport found that 89% of all overnight trips to the countryside were made by car.

The limited transport options available mean there is currently a strong reliance on the car among visitors to National Parks - around 93% on average - and high volumes of traffic can have a negative impact on the tranquillity and natural environment. Providing improved alternatives to the car ensures that increased numbers of people can visit without damaging the special qualities for which these areas are valued and would also allow people who do not have access to a car to visit them more easily. Nearly [a quarter of households in England](#) do not have access to a car and rely on public transport for most of their journeys and the numbers are even higher in many of the urban areas close to National Parks, for example, 39% of households in Manchester are carless. While residents of National Parks generally have higher than average levels of car ownership, there is still a significant minority who do not have access to a car and these people are increasingly isolated as local shops and services have closed. So improved alternatives to the car will benefit those who live in National Parks as well as those who want to visit them.

Currently, many of those who might benefit the most from the health and well-being opportunities provided by National Parks are excluded from them due to the lack of affordable and available transport options. Demographic information collected as part of [a survey of visitors](#) to Dartmoor National Park in 2023 showed that those with longstanding health issues or disabilities were significantly under-represented among visitors to the National Park.

Providing more ‘joined-up’ transport for visitors to National Parks

More effective integration of journeys

This is an issue that Campaign for National Parks has been considering for some time. Successful initiatives to improve integration between transport modes tend to focus on developing both operational integration (ensuring a seamless physical interchange between modes) and integrated timetabling/through-ticketing with connecting services. Our 2016 report, *Tackling Traffic*, identified a number of examples of delivering a more ‘joined-up’ transport network in National Parks, including Moorsbus collecting passengers from train stations and the Lake District’s B4 network, which encouraged people to mix their modes of travel (bike, bus, boot and boat) offering physical interchanges, integrated ticketing and timetabling as well as enhanced services.

An [earlier study](#) of integrated transport in National Parks for DfT found that a small number of factors were critical to the success of most integrated transport schemes. The most common factors were effective use of partnership working; an appropriate source of funding; effective promotion; and the integration of services, tickets and information. While the case studies in this report are now several years old, they provide some important details about how selected National Park Authorities (NPAs) have been able to increase the use of public transport services in the past. For example, the case study on effective marketing and promotion highlights marketing campaigns and the introduction of through ticketing and discounted fare deals for families. Other case studies highlight the benefits of a flexible ‘mixed use’ of services. One example included is the Pembrokeshire Coastal Bus Network which made vehicles available for community use outside the ‘core’ operating hours of the services thus increasing the utilisation rates of individual vehicles. The research concluded that many of the most effective integrated transport measures involved the subsidising of new public transport routes, which require revenue rather than capital expenditure.

As well as improved integration between different types of public transport, consideration should be given to ensuring that there is good integration between public transport and other sustainable modes of transport. In particular, ensuring that passengers can conveniently combine travel by public transport and bicycle would make it much easier for visitors to access destinations in National Parks which it might not be possible to reach directly by public transport. This requires a range of different measures such as easy access to bike

hire at major transport interchanges (including bus stations as well as train stations), and the ability to transport bicycles on public transport.

Support for active travel

Walking is the most popular recreational activity in National Parks and there are good networks of footpaths in all the National Parks. While walking is rarely promoted as a means of transport within the Parks it is worth noting that there are potential opportunities to use the walking opportunities in these areas to encourage visitors to walk more when they return home. There is anecdotal evidence from our [Mosaic programme](#) of people who have been introduced to walking on visits to National Parks and as a result have started walking more for local journeys in their own communities. This has obvious benefits in terms of health and social inclusion.

Cycling is more likely to be used as transport as well as for recreational purposes as it allows people to travel longer distances. Many parts of the National Parks are served by the National Cycle Network, allowing people to explore the Park without a car. It is also possible to combine cycling and rail travel for journeys in some of the Parks. Some National Park Authorities are introducing other measures to encourage and support cyclists such as secure cycle parking at stations and attractions and working with businesses in their area to promote the benefits of cycle tourism.

There is significant potential for e-bike use by visitors in National Parks, particularly if measures are introduced which increase the opportunities for visitors to travel to/from National Parks using a combination of rail and e-bike. DfT has previously supported a shared e-bike programme which included a number of pilot projects aimed at visitors. The [evaluation](#) of this programme identified the need to explore the potential for increasing e-bike (and pedal bike) availability at more rail stations, travel hubs and accommodation networks across the UK. The report also suggested that further research is needed into how e-bikes can contribute to accessibility in more rural areas. Many of the measures that are important for supporting the use of e-bikes are the same as those which are needed to encourage cycle use more generally – conveniently located, secure cycle parking and cycle-friendly accommodation (and information about where to find this) and above all providing good segregated cycle routes and making roads safer for cyclists by reducing the speed of vehicles and giving cyclists clearer priority.

There is a need for safe, attractive cycling and walking routes which allow for everyday local journeys in National Parks by both residents and visitors. These routes should also provide links between National Parks and surrounding built-up areas, railway stations and visitor attractions. It is essential that Active Travel England works closely with the National Park Authorities to ensure such routes are given sufficient priority.

Car-free tourism packages

[Examples](#) from other European countries show the importance of integrating different aspects of what is offered to visitors in order to make car-free travel as easy as possible. The Kalkalpen National Park in Austria, adapts the hours of the events it organises to suit the bus timetable and additional buses are provided when there are special events attracting large numbers of people. In the Saxon Switzerland National Park in Germany, free maps are distributed to visitors providing details of walking routes and information on the public transport to reach them. Users of public transport also get reduced entry to the visitor centre. Elsewhere in Germany, the Berchtesgaden National Park has developed a package called 'Be mobile by train' which includes a return ticket, a seven-night stay in a guest house and transfer by taxi to and from the accommodation as well as an 'Upper Bavaria Card' which is valid for three days public transport use. In Austria luggage transfers from the nearest railway station have been used to help overcome one of the main barriers to arriving by public transport. These are offered as part of a package of measures along with guest cards which give visitors free use of frequent bus services and taxi-buses from the station to hotels and other accommodation.

These types of packages are also now starting to be developed by some of the National Park Authorities (NPA) in the UK in order to tackle the pressures caused by high numbers of visitors arriving by car. Eryri NPA undertook a Parking and Transport Review as a result of which they have introduced measures such as a pre-booking system for visitors wishing to park cars in the busiest part of the Park and a seasonal Park and Ride service.

The legal framework

The two statutory purposes of National Parks are:

- To conserve and enhance the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of the National Parks (the conservation purpose)
- To promote opportunities for the public understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities of the National Parks (the recreation purpose)

Where there is an irreconcilable difference between these two purposes, then the conservation purpose should take precedence.

National Park Authorities also have a statutory duty to seek to foster the economic and social well-being of local communities within the National Park.

A number of recent, and ongoing changes, to legislation create both new opportunities, and new requirements, for improving the options for car-free journeys to National Parks. Local transport authorities in areas in and around National Parks should be encouraged to use the powers included in the Bus Services Bill currently going through Parliament to franchise networks of services which specifically addresses the needs of visitors to National Parks. This should include, for example, providing services to 'honeypot' locations and ensuring

there is good integration with local rail services. We would like to see government support for a pilot of rural bus franchising specifically aimed at visitors to National Parks.

A recent change in legislation means that there is also a new imperative for public bodies to consider the needs of visitors to National Parks when planning bus services. [Section 245](#) of the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act (LURA) 2023 which came into force on 26 December 2023 requires all relevant authorities to seek to further the purposes of National Parks when making decisions which affect the land in these areas. Given the vital role that transport plays in supporting both the conservation and the recreation purposes, all public bodies making decisions which have implications for transport in these areas, such as government departments and local highway authorities, must consider how those decisions are helping to further these purposes, and should be putting far more effort into providing a “joined-up” transport network in these areas.

Defra has recently published [guidance](#) for relevant authorities on what they must do to demonstrate compliance with this important new duty but our experience to date shows that the duty is not being complied with effectively in most cases, in part because there is little awareness of it. DfT must apply this new duty when making decisions on the Integrated National Transport Strategy and should ensure that the implications for Protected Landscapes are properly considered as part of this process. The Department should also ensure that all local highway authorities and sub-national transport bodies are aware of the need to apply this duty in their own decision-making.

The economic benefits

Increasing the opportunities for visitors to reach National Parks is also important for the local economy in areas which rely significantly on tourism. National Parks England [data](#) shows that there are approximately 90 million visits to National Parks in England each year contributing more than £6 billion to the economy. Visitors who use public transport are more likely to spend money on food and drink locally and are more likely to pay for tourist attractions. For example, users of the Moorsbus in the North York Moors [reported](#) that they spent over £12 per person on average in 2023 in local shops, cafes and recreational facilities.

Bus services are also important in terms of bringing employees of tourism businesses into National Parks from adjacent towns. Problems with the availability, affordability, frequency and reliability of bus services are often [cited](#) by rural tourism businesses as one of the primary reason for staff shortages, and in some cases have resulted in businesses having to reduce their opening hours or even close altogether.

[Research](#) published by DfT found that supported bus services generate between £2 and £2.50 in benefits to local communities for every £1 of local authority spend as a result of improved access to work and leisure activities and reduced road congestion and carbon

emissions. This is before taking account of some of the wider economic benefits identified in local surveys such as the increased spending in local businesses noted above. There are, therefore, strong economic development arguments for ensuring public transport is designed to take account of the needs of National Parks and other rural areas.

The environmental benefits

There are significant environmental benefits to providing improved alternatives to the car for tourists visiting National Parks particularly where appropriate marketing is used to promote the service to existing car users. Visitor travel currently [accounts](#) for nearly one third of the total carbon budgets for the UK's National Parks and there are significant opportunities to reduce this. It is [estimated](#) that the GoLakes Travel Project in the Lake District saved over 41,000 tonnes of carbon as a result of reducing carbon emissions from visitor travel by around 8%.

Reducing the number of people who travel to National Parks by car would also help reduce the associated impacts of noise pollution, light pollution, road danger and the blight and severance caused by high volumes of traffic. This would provide benefits to local communities and enhance the experience of visitors as well as providing environmental benefits.

Q2. How could data be used to improve the transport network?

We have considered data and technology together as part of our response to Q3.

Q3. How could technology be used to improve the transport network?

Most of the attention on the use of innovative new transport technologies has been focused on urban areas, and it is essential that the implications for National Parks and other rural areas are also considered. However, this is only going to happen if consideration is given to the particular constraints that exist in rural areas. Many of the innovative services introduced by the private sector in urban areas, such as the [Arriva Click service](#), have focused on offering an alternative for commuters, often taking advantage of the fact that they can benefit from facilities that are not available to car drivers, such as bus lanes to cut through congestion. They are generally catering for fairly reliable, regular and year-round journeys in areas with high numbers of travellers who can be reached easily by promoting the scheme in the local area.

There are now examples of such services being introduced in National Parks, such as the [Moorlands Connect](#) service which covers much of the Staffordshire Moorlands within the Peak District. This service is aimed at both residents and visitors and includes bookable bike carriage so also provides good opportunities for 'joined-up' travel between different modes. There is significant potential for other similar initiatives aimed at visitor travel in rural areas,

particularly to help improve access to key visitor attractions ('honeypot' locations) in National Parks from the nearest railway station or nearby urban areas. However, the private sector may be more reluctant to invest in such services because they are likely to take longer to become established, demand is likely to vary according to the season and the weather, and more effort will need to be put into marketing to reach people across a wide area. A greater level of public sector investment will be needed in order to test new technologies in rural areas.

There are huge benefits to be gained from improving car-free access for visitors to rural areas and strong arguments for why this is a particular priority for National Parks. National Parks would, therefore, be perfect places to test a number of new transport initiatives and identify which would be of most benefit for both visitors and residents. New technology also provides new opportunities to introduce demand management measures and greater consideration should be given to the role of such measures in National Parks. They are likely to be more acceptable to the public if any income is ring-fenced for the provision of initiatives which support car-free travel so this is potentially an important source of revenue for bus services and active travel infrastructure as well as a way of encouraging people out of their cars. Examples could include increased parking charges, the removal of informal parking and experimental road closures.

Central government should provide the funding and other necessary support for a 'smarter travel National Park' pilot which tests new types of on-demand app-based shared services alongside the use of travel demand management measures such as parking charges or road pricing. The pilot should also support the development of sustainable travel hubs - key centres within the Park offering a range of activities within one location and good car-free access to other locations nearby. The evaluation of the pilot should inform future policy and funding priorities. Such a pilot was one of the key recommendations in our 2018 report, [National Parks for all: Making car-free travel easier.](#)

Central government should also be encouraging innovation in rural areas by providing more evidence and data on the benefits of providing improved transport. The availability of more comprehensive evidence to demonstrate the importance of investing in visitor transport and the benefits of improved access to National Parks would help make the case for increased support from both the public and private sector. For example, it would be helpful to have more evidence of the benefits to the local economy as a result of increased expenditure by visitors arriving by sustainable transport, and the cross-sector benefits such as improved health and well-being. This could be part of a wider piece of work to develop new economic models which take account of the full range of costs and benefits associated with visitor travel to, and around, National Parks.

Q4. How, if at all, would you improve the way decisions are made about the transport network?

When local transport authorities have to make very difficult decisions about which bus services to support, the needs of residents tend to take priority over those of visitors. This often means that services for those wishing to travel into National Parks from surrounding urban areas are given low priority. Week-end services are usually particularly badly affected by such decisions with public transport access in National Parks often at its most limited on Sundays and public holidays despite the likelihood of these being the most popular day for visiting. Even where bus services are available on a particular route, they may not be sufficiently frequent or run late enough for people to feel confident about relying on them for a day trip in case they get stranded.

Achieving the kind of improvements needed to provide better car-free options for visitors will require National Park Authorities (NPAs) to have a stronger influence over the decisions that affect transport provision in their area. NPAs must be statutory consultees on the Local Transport Plans and sub-national transport strategies for their area, and on related implementation plans such as Bus Service Improvement Plans. This will give them more opportunity to secure effective co-ordination between services and modes (bus/rail, bus/bicycle, etc) and other supporting measures such as integrated ticketing and real-time information provision.

There are significant opportunities for sub-national transport bodies and local transport authorities in areas with National Parks to encourage innovation in rural areas by working with NPAs to improve opportunities for car-free travel for visitors. However, there is also a need to consider the role that NPAs themselves should play. A large number of different organisations have some responsibility for the provision, promotion and funding of transport in each National Park including the NPA, local transport authority, bus operators, train operating companies, Network Rail, central government, and individual tourism attractions and accommodation providers. With so many different organisations involved, there is a need for one organisation to take a strategic overview of how best to improve access for visitors. We believe that NPAs should take on this role, working closely with the transport authorities in their area. Although they are not transport authorities, NPAs are planning authorities and can use their planning policies to influence travel patterns. They also have a strong interest in improving sustainable travel as it makes such an important contribution to National Park purposes.

Q5. Any other comments?

Dangerous Driving

The strategy needs to address the fact that the transport choices made by others can limit other people's options, particularly when it results in dangerous or unpleasant conditions for those not using cars. Speeding traffic can deter people from walking and cycling in National Parks. One-in three drivers [admit](#) to driving too fast in rural areas and [more than half of all fatalities](#) in crashes (59.8%) occur on rural roads. There is also some [evidence](#) which

suggests that people are more likely to drink and drive in rural areas and this has been attributed to the lack of public transport available.

Affordability

We would like to see a continuation of the bus fare cap. If full fares are charged the high cost can be a significant deterrent to using rural buses and the bus fare cap has played a valuable role in helping address this. Initial [assessments](#) show that take-up of the £2 fare was highest among low-income households without access to a car and that the reduced cost was encouraging them to take more journeys. The same research also found strong support for the scheme among operators. Some operators also offer their own tickets for off-peak or group travel which can significantly reduce the costs of travel but unfortunately, such tickets are not available in all National Parks, and it is often very difficult to find out information about the cheapest options or any group discounts that may be available.

Revenue support

Often what is most needed in rural areas is relatively small sums of money to provide revenue support for existing bus services, and to ensure that there is good information available for visitors. There are a number of examples of bus services in National Parks which provide a valuable service for both residents and visitors, but which have struggled to keep going in recent years due to increasing costs and the limited revenue support available. For example, despite providing over 500,000 passenger journeys on its services since it was established in 2007, the Dales and Bowland CIC which runs [Dalesbus](#) in the Yorkshire Dales has had to develop an innovative approach to financing it, including crowdfunding and sponsorship. Such an approach relies heavily on the commitment of volunteers to ensure that the services can continue to run each year and although it has been very successful in the short-term, the CIC's most recent [annual report](#) highlights that fundraising is becoming ever more difficult.

National Park planning protections

We would also like to highlight that any transport proposals must take account of the additional planning protections which apply in National Parks and the need to avoid doing anything which would damage the special qualities for which these areas are designated. This is particularly important when considering new modes which could potentially be intrusive such as drones and autonomous vehicles.

For further information about the issues covered in this evidence, please contact Ruth Bradshaw, Policy and Research Manager (ruthb@cnp.org.uk)



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