

ROWIPs - MAKING THE MOST OF EXISTING RESOURCES

Producing a Rights of Way Improvement Plan is a significant undertaking, and the demands of this process can seem quite onerous to the rights of way team, ROWIP officer, or - in a number of cases - the one person who does all ROW tasks.

Whilst it isn't always encouraged or apparent, working for a County Council or Unitary Authority potentially puts at your disposal a wide range of specialist skills, knowledge and experience of relevance to the strategic vision of ROWIPs.

At times it may seem simpler to try and do things yourself or within your team. But for ROWIPs to make a real difference, working in partnership with other departments or organisations is not just beneficial - it's essential. Here's why:

- Producing a successful ROWIP that will make a difference requires a wide range of skills and processes, many of which are not traditionally found or developed in ROW teams.
- Actively involving other people and teams in the process not only helps bridge any skills gap, it also builds the wider rapport and awareness that will help in implementing the ROWIP and securing more resources.
- Depending on your authority, support from other departments may not be recharged in whole, or in part, to your budgets - in essence meaning this can appear to be 'free' assistance. Such colleagues may also be doing something already you can add to.
- Different teams may be able to indirectly secure more support for ROWIPs if your own management structure is not as supportive as it might be.
- Other people may already have research data and contacts with different communities that will save you acquiring these from scratch.
- A joined-up approach will be seen as 'good news' by councillors and can prevent embarrassing situations for your authority, when scarce resources appear to be 'wasted' through people not talking to each other, or 'consultation fatigue'.
- A broader base of support and involvement can give you personal support and encouragement when things get challenging, as they inevitably will at times.
- ROWIPs are the responsibility of the County Council or Unitary Authority as a whole. Nowhere does the legislation say it's a job wholly or partly for ROW officers, so you need no excuse to make use of what is available!



How to do it:

- Look through the ROWIP checklist (available from your regional Countryside Agency officer) and make notes about all the different internal teams and external partners who may be involved in related activities.
- Then see where the links may be, by getting a good overview of what's happening in and around your authority's area by, for example,;
 - ✓ Going to Council public information points, libraries and tourist information centres and looking through all the literature.
 - ✓ Browsing all areas of your Council's website.
 - ✓ Searches on www.google.co.uk with phrases like "walking" & "Your-County".
 - ✓ Looking through recent committee reports available from your Committee Secretariat or similar team.
 - ✓ Speaking to colleagues in-house and at adjacent authorities.
- Approach likely partners to initially just find out what they do and how they could help you - and of course, how you could help them!
- Partners may be very busy too. Allow several months to make connections: an open, personal approach will build more rapport than a general memo or email.
- Consider not using the term 'ROWIP' with partners initially, as this may be off-putting or limit what they think you are interested in. Use more general language that fits better with their agendas - which you have found out in advance by doing your initial research!

Who can help: examples of what internal and external partners can offer

<i>Policy and research unit</i>	<i>Overview of council policies and links with access. Specialist skills and networks for market research with the general population and key groups.</i>
<i>Highways & Transport</i>	<i>Transport engineers; LTP, cycling and walking officers</i>
<i>Diversity unit</i>	<i>Contacts with minority groups and advice on how to engage with them.</i>
<i>Access officer</i>	<i>Existing contacts with disabled people in the area and related statistics.</i>
<i>Information Technology</i>	<i>Specialist software to analyse data and knowledge of other departments with specialist skills and data sets.</i>
<i>Education, youth & community services</i>	<i>Existing contacts with young and older people, related policies & statistics, school journey plans, plus networks for awareness raising.</i>
<i>Regional development agencies</i>	<i>Regional research, statistics and data, plus strategic planning; also consider regional Local Government Association contacts.</i>
<i>Primary Care Trust</i>	<i>Information and funding about health promotion initiatives and travel issues for journeys to health centres, hospitals etc.</i>
<i>Adjacent local authorities</i>	<i>Information on needs, demands and facilities for people coming into/out of your area. Potential for shared research and complementary policies.</i>
<i>Other access providers</i>	<i>Organisations like Sustrans, Forest Enterprise and British Waterways can have use and demand data, specialist local knowledge, skills & materials.</i>

This is a small sample of the partners who can help; department titles and functions may differ between authorities.