



Rights of Way Improvement Plans National Evaluation

August 2008

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1. Background and Introduction

Section 60 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000¹ places a new statutory duty on local highway authorities (excluding inner London Boroughs) to prepare and publish a Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP) by 21st November 2007. The ROWIP must assess :

- a) the extent to which local rights of way meet the present and likely future needs of the public;
- b) the opportunities provided by local rights of way for exercise and other forms of open-air recreation and the enjoyment of the authority's area;
- c) the accessibility of local rights of way to blind or partially sighted persons and others with mobility problems.

In addition to assessing these matters the ROWIP must include a statement of the action the authority proposes to take to secure an improved network of local rights of way.

1.1. National Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP) Evaluation

This report contains the findings of research to evaluate Rights of Way Improvement Plans and assess the impact of the process in England.

The main objectives of the research were to:

- evaluate and inform Natural England on the **ROWIP development process** and implementation in England;
- advise Natural England of **lessons learnt** through the ROWIP process;
- pull together national and regional **assessments of final ROWIPs**;
- identify and develop **further advice** to share with Highway Authorities and other partners in the future.

1.2. National evaluation methodology

The research for this report was carried out in three main ways :

- A questionnaire was designed (see appendix 5) and emailed out to ROWIP contacts in all English highway authorities and outer London Boroughs;

¹ http://www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts2000/ukpga_20000037_en_1

- All final ROWIPs (whether published or awaiting approval) were read and assessed;
- Telephone 'interviews' were held with a number of authorities, others (including LAF members) were spoken to during training events.

1.2.1. The questionnaire

The questionnaire was designed to provide key quantitative facts, and to provide baseline data to build on with later research. It was emailed out in October with an initial response deadline of November 2007, although responses arriving as late as the end of January 2008 were included in the evaluation. Preliminary results were published on The Access Company's website in February 2008².

The questionnaire (which had a 84% response rate) addressed :

- How many authorities met the November 2007 deadline;
- The progress of those failing to meet the deadline;
- The number and scope of joint ROWIPs;
- Involvement of external consultants in preparing ROWIPs;
- The involvement of Local Access Forums;
- Volunteer involvement;
- The success of ROWIPs in attracting external funding;
- What areas of action are given priority for implementation;
- Whether the ROWIP process has been beneficial.

1.2.2. Assessing ROWIPs

Overall, seventy-eight ROWIPs were reviewed and evaluated. These included :

- Fifty-six final published ROWIPs;
- Nineteen final ROWIPs awaiting council approval;
- Three published draft ROWIPs;

² <http://www.theaccesscompany.co.uk/uploads/File/ROWIP%20questionnaire%20results%20feb08.pdf>

Of these, five were joint ROWIPs;

- Two in the South West: covering three authorities (West of England Partnership) and two authorities (Poole and Bournemouth);
- Two in the North West: covering five authorities (Merseyside) and three authorities (Lancashire);
- One in the North East covering five authorities (Tyne and Wear).

The results of the questionnaire were used to identify final published ROWIPs. As we were assessing the quality of the final ROWIP we did not, as a rule, include draft ROWIPs. Three drafts were included in the evaluation because of their importance as early exemplars, but for a number of reasons had not been finalised by the November deadline (York, Hampshire and Dorset).

It is possible that changes may have been made to a number of ROWIPs after our evaluation resulting in potential discrepancies between the page numbers we quote to highlight good practice, and those in the final published document.

Our assessment approach was designed to establish if the ROWIP was “fit for purpose”, and if it covered all aspects included in the statutory guidance. We also judged whether or not the authority had embraced the wider ROWIP concept (i.e. if they had used the ROWIP process to properly assess how to improve access for everyone, rather than merely producing a document which proposes ‘business as usual’). We did not attempt to compare authorities with each other.

The assessment recorded how well written the ROWIP was and whether each ROWIP covered the key areas of :

- Overall accessibility (was it available and readable);
- How well it linked to other strategies; were joint priorities identified with health, economics and transport links;
- An assessment of all users’ needs, including blind and partially sighted people and people with mobility problems, as well as other under-represented groups;
- A network assessment, including the adequacy of the network, the quality of it, as well as whether the wider network of non-definitive access had been included (including cycle tracks);

- The statement of action, including how well this related back to the demand and network assessments, whether it gave equality of consideration to all users and to landowners; the extent to which it went beyond existing statutory duties and the level of detail given for delivery.

The evaluation framework used to assess the quality of ROWIPs is attached at appendix 4.

During the assessment we sought out examples of good practice and identified these in our report.

ROWIPs which had not reached the final stage were not included in the assessment. Where we had no information on progress we looked for ROWIPs on the authority's website; if there was no information we regarded these as not being completed. Where we knew ROWIPs to be final we either accessed them directly from authorities' websites, or contacted the ROWIP officer to request a copy. A number of final ROWIPs were not assessed as we were unable to obtain copy (despite allowing three direct contact attempts of either phone calls or emails - see also section 2.3). These are identified in appendix 2.

1.2.3. Telephone interviews and face to face conversations

As the questionnaire results were analysed a number of further questions arose which were investigated through telephone calls to authorities, or face to face conversations with them at training events. LAF members attending training events were offered the opportunity to contribute their thoughts to the research, and a number of them did so.

In order to identify the specific issues and challenges faced by National Park Authorities phone calls were made to each National Park. The findings from this research are covered in section 5.2.

1.3. Layout of report

This report includes findings from three stages of research. A series of regional reports has been produced to address specific regional issues. This national report covers :

- The assessment of the quality and scope of ROWIPs (section 2);
- The degree to which authorities have achieved effective links between the ROWIP and the Local Transport Plan (LTP) (section 3);
- How authorities are starting to implement the ROWIP (section 4);

- The role of key stakeholders, including Natural England, National Park Authorities and LAFs (section 5);
- The impact of the ROWIP process (section 6);
- The impact of the changes in monitoring and reporting requirements (BVPI 178) (section 7.3);
- Key findings including issues, challenges and recommendations (section 7).

Throughout the report examples of good practice from published ROWIPs are highlighted in text boxes, and page numbers are given to ease reference back to the original ROWIP.

2. Assessment of quality and scope of ROWIPs

2.1. Progress to national coverage

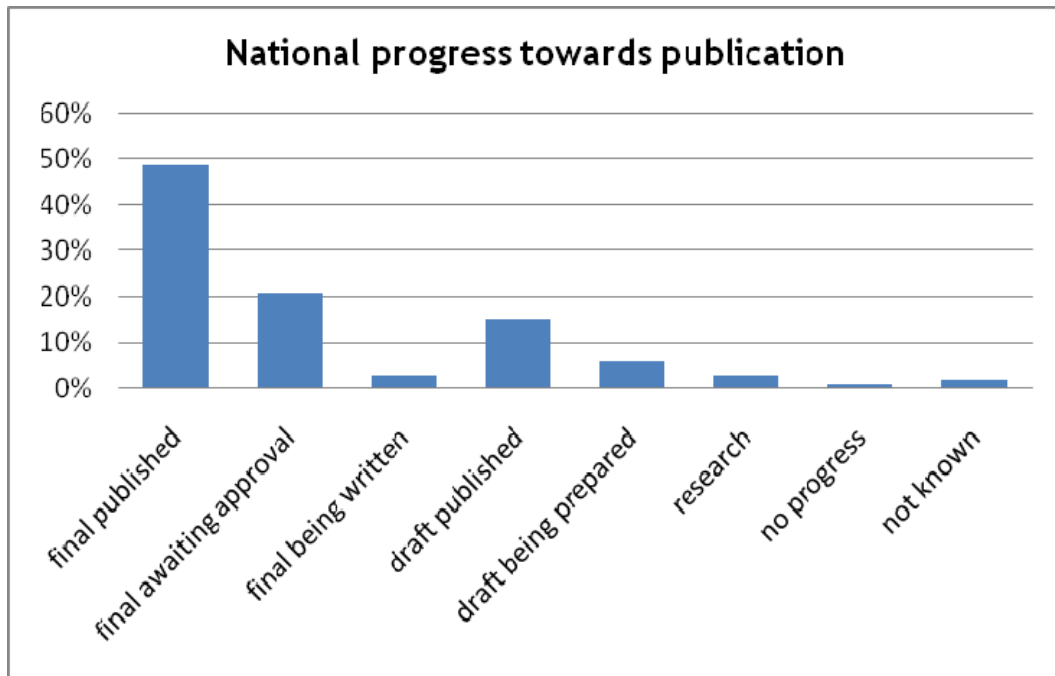


Figure 1 - progress towards publication
(data from questionnaire response and personal communication)³

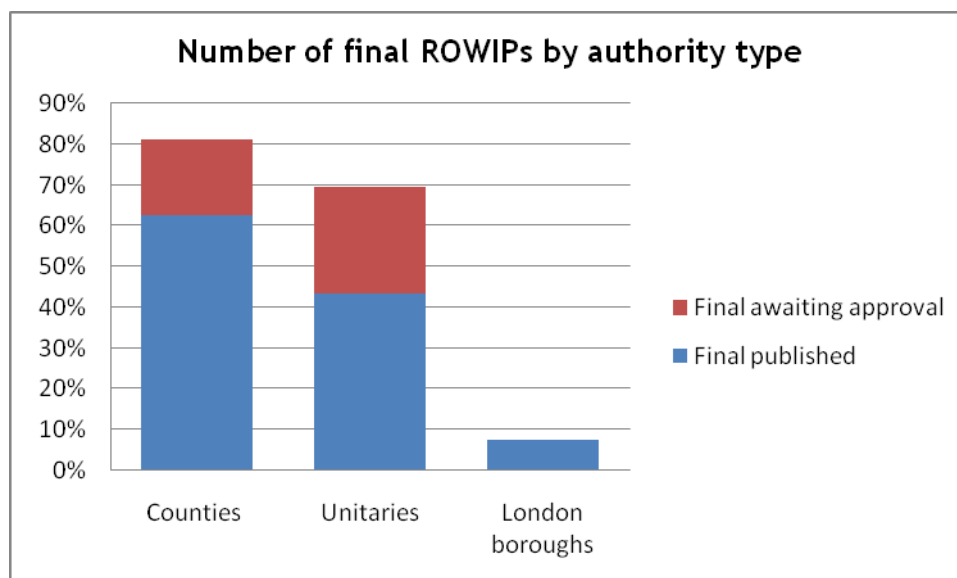


Figure 2 - number of final ROWIPs by authority type

³ details of progress by each authority are shown in appendix 2 - where progress is 'not known' the authority did not respond to the questionnaire and was not interviewed by telephone

For the purpose of this research an authority was judged to have met the statutory deadline of 21st November 2007 if it had published a final ROWIP, or written a final ROWIP which was waiting for authority approval before publication. Overall two thirds of authorities responding to the questionnaire met this deadline, although this figure hides the difference in progress between the different types of authority. Figure 2 shows that just over 80% of county councils met the deadline, slightly fewer unitary authorities did (70%), and only one London Borough did.

Table 1 : Regional progress towards publication (at the end of November 2007)

Region	Final published	Awaiting approval	Final being written	Draft published	Draft being prepared	Research	No progress	Not known	TOTAL
East of England	5	1	0	2	0	0	0	1	9
East Midlands	8	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	9
North East region	8	3	0	0	1	0	0	0	12
North West region	7	11	0	3	0	1	0	1	23
South East region	10	1	1	4	1	1	0	0	18
South West region	9	1	0	4	0	1	0	0	15
West Midlands	4	3	1	3	2	0	0	0	13
Yorkshire & Humber	5	3	1	1	3	1	1	0	15
TOTAL	56	24	3	17	7	4	1	2	114

(The table shows the number of authorities - the overall number of ROWIPs is different due to joint ROWIPs)

The table excludes outer London Boroughs - only one London ROWIP was included in the assessment (Harrow). Bromley completed a ROWIP within the deadline but we were unable to source a copy. The published ROWIPs we were unable to access are shown in the table at appendix 2.

2.1.1. Reasons for missing the deadline

Reasons cited by authorities, including the exemplar authorities, for missing the statutory deadline include :

- It is more important to write a good quality ROWIP, if a little late, than a "lip service" ROWIP to meet the deadline;

- Some authorities were late getting started on the ROWIP and so were delayed from then onwards;
- Where authorities have identified the need to restructure in order to deliver the ROWIP;
- Where “one officer does all” there is very little spare capacity for work in addition to statutory duties;
- Several authorities lost key staff and experienced subsequent recruitment difficulties;
- Consulting on the draft ROWIP, dealing with the representations and producing a full ROWIP has taken much longer than planned;
- The size of the task has meant that drawing it all together into a published document is challenging.

2.2. Overall quality

In general, the quality of ROWIPs is good, 67% being good or very good and only 15% poor (refer to figure 3 on next page). Research addressed how fit the ROWIP was for local purposes, evaluating demand and network assessments and how well these have been tackled and reflected through in the statement of action. Assessment criteria are listed at appendix 4.

Writing ROWIPs has clearly involved hard work by officers and PROW teams; many have dedicated an enormous amount of time and energy to the process. Some of the best practice is highlighted in this report, but there will be more examples of good practice in implementation in the future and this will be shared via the Institute of Public Rights of Way (IPROW) website.

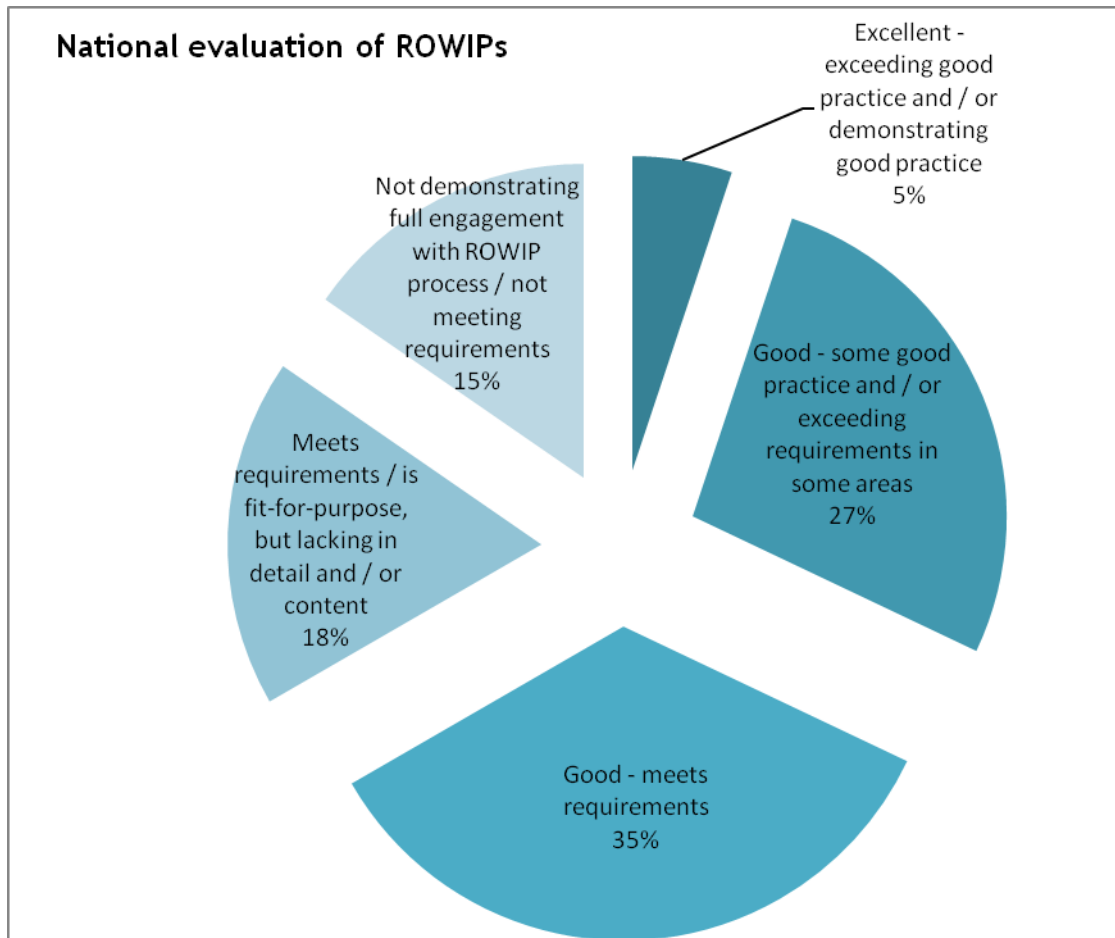


Figure 3 - evaluation of ROWIPs

- Overall the quality of ROWIPs is good, with 85% being fit for purpose;
- All have some good sections, two-thirds (66%) meet the requirements of section 60 of the Countryside and Rights of Way (CROW) Act and the DEFRA guidance and include all required detail;
- 5% are excellent;
- 15% do not demonstrate full engagement with the ROWIP process, or do not meet requirements. A ROWIP assessed as failing to meet requirements would have at least one of the following elements :
 - No evidence of local consultation with users;
 - No evidence of a network assessment;

- No evidence of consideration of the needs of key groups as defined in the CROW Act, for example people with mobility impairments and blind or partially sighted people;
- The statement of action only includes actions which are already statutory duties - there is no commitment to 'improvement'.

2.3. Accessibility of ROWIPs

A small number of ROWIPs were difficult to locate. Methods included; searching the authority's website, emailing a direct request (up to three times), and telephoning.

Several authorities publish their ROWIPs on a website split into a number of separate documents (in one case 50 separate sections). While this approach benefits users with slow internet connections, in most cases it serves to make the ROWIP less accessible, as the sections are not described (apart from chapter or section numbers) or signposted clearly. We recommend that authorities include the option to download a single document (either with or without images as some authorities have done to reduce the file size) or to include a summary saying what information each section contains. For example, **Birmingham City Council**⁴ have written a good ROWIP, and have worked hard to make it accessible. They have split the document into small sections on the website for ease of downloading, resulting in three pages of pdf files with no explanation. This research has led to a commitment on their behalf to improve the website.

Some ROWIPs are too large to be placed on the internet and are only available in hard copy on CD. ROWIPs that are hard to access are listed in appendix 2.

Some authorities' websites include information about the consultation on the draft ROWIP; a number give full details, including the authority's response to comments received. This approach allows interested people to track the evolution of the ROWIP from draft to final giving confidence in the process.

4

http://www.birmingham.gov.uk/GenerateContent?CONTENT_ITEM_ID=60420&CONTENT_ITEM_TYPE=0&MENU_ID=12049#

2.4. Readability

One of the main challenges facing an authority writing a ROWIP is meeting the needs of all “audiences”. ROWIPs have to appeal to, and be understood by, members of the public, user-groups including disabled people and volunteers. They also have to work as local authority policy documents making sense to local and regional government colleagues, elected councillors and non government organisations. They have to provide an evidence base for funding bids, and have to make all the relevant connections in terms funders can identify. We considered how well ROWIPs were written to meet these needs. Many excelled (examples are shown in appendix 1), others fell into the trap of using too much jargon.

Some ROWIPs, for example **Bracknell**, mindful of the fact that people will be reading them who are new to the term “public rights of way”, include background information about rights and responsibilities, or the countryside code.

There is a huge range in size of documents. Some of the better ROWIPs are presented as thorough summary documents with the full research details available elsewhere. This approach makes the document more accessible, and usable. A large ROWIP doesn’t always correlate with good quality - it is possible to cover all the essential information in a few pages. Some ROWIPs are too long (**Sandwell** at 226 pages is overly long, for a small borough and **Bury** at 215 pages - however the quality of the ROWIP is good). Others are very brief, for example **North Lincolnshire’s** ROWIP is only 16 pages long.

- **Cheshire’s** ROWIP is well written and laid out, presenting a mass of information in easy to digest sections. The layout is innovative, with wide side margins presenting either useful background details or interesting facts which do not upset the flow of the text;
- **Staffordshire** includes quotes from users and key points in different coloured text, - making it easy to extract key facts and information;
- **West of England Partnership** ROWIP has a good clear summary;
- **Darlington and Northamptonshire’s** methodologies are clearly explained (page 9 and 18 respectively);

- Suffolk's ROWIP is well laid out;
- Hertfordshire's is clear and concise;
- Lincolnshire's material is clearly presented and structured (page 6 with web links to full findings on page 25);
- Barnsley includes good summaries at the end of each chapter; Dorset includes summaries at the start of each chapter.

2.5. Scope of ROWIPs

In November 2002 Defra issued statutory guidance for local highway authorities on preparing, publishing, assessing and reviewing rights of way improvement plans. The guidance covered all aspects of work required to meet the requirements of section 60 of the CROW Act. In conjunction, the Countryside Agency began the exemplar project (section 5.1), to encourage authorities to look beyond the statutory guidance and include the whole access resource, including not only cycle tracks (which were included in the statutory guidance) but also permissive access, CROW open access land, parks and green spaces, towpaths, and other linear access. Authorities were also encouraged to broaden the scope of users' needs and include people with all disabilities beyond those groups specified (people with mobility and visual impairments).

Some authorities embraced this broader approach by avoiding the term ROWIP. For example :

- Kent's ROWIP is called "*Countryside Access Improvement Plan*";
- Cornwall's ROWIP is called "*Cornwall Countryside Access Strategy*" and "*Public Path Improvement Programme*";
- Bedfordshire's is called "*Outdoor Access Improvement Plan*".

Throughout the ROWIP process authorities have been encouraged to include the whole access resource in their ROWIP. Most have done this to some degree, although nine have taken the term *Rights of Way* Improvement Plan very literally and only looked at routes included on the definitive map and a further six barely went beyond the government guidelines.

An example is the Isle of Wight ROWIP; structured closely around the Defra guidance, seemingly without any local interpretation.

2.5.1. ROWIPs that considered a wider network

- York - (exemplar authority with research on including the wider network) identified many linear routes / open access areas and considered their integration with the existing network (page 44 - 5);
- Bedfordshire - "*...In 2003 government made Bedfordshire County Council one of eight national pilots for the development of Rights of Way Improvement Plans. As such, we took the requirements for the Plan and extended them to create a broader Outdoor Access Improvement Plan (OAIP), an approach now recognised by the government and other authorities as Good Practice...*" - their assessment includes council-owned sites, community forest and woodland, nature reserves and wildlife sites and rivers and waterside sites (page 8);
- Stoke on Trent - "*...The ROWIP will consider both definitive rights of way and all other paths that exist or could be created. This is irrespective of current legal status (e.g. greenways, canal towpaths). These paths may be under the direct control of the city council, partners or any other body...*" (page 1);
- Cambridgeshire - includes consideration of their own land (County Farms - page 9) and good links to the environmental stewardship scheme (page 15), and wider access (page 20 - 21) including nature reserves and those managed by other public bodies;
- Derbyshire - includes the National Forest (page 14 - 15) and a good summary of wider opportunities (page 29);
- Doncaster - included a link to a separate open access management plan (page 15), an overview of ESA in full schemes in the area, parks and open spaces, canals and

rivers and nature conservation sites. It considered the accessibility to various woodland sites by user groups (page 49);

- **East Sussex** - links to a separate “Accessible Natural Greenspace Study” and includes a comprehensive overview of a wider access network, including access to water (page 35 - 44);
- **Joint Tyne and Wear** - includes a good map overview of the PROW network early on (page iii), considers the contribution of secure permissive routes (page 23), the potential use of roadside verges, and river access for canoeists (page 24) - amongst others;
- **Kent** - includes TOLL rides and other permissive routes and other equestrian access opportunities (including into Forestry Commission sites and coastal horse riding);
- **Leicester City** - includes a desk-top survey of potential routes (page 27 - 28), considering them in terms of known barriers, lighting, surfacing, or known cycling prohibition orders. Nearly 150 km of new routes have been identified; over half of which are on council-owned land, which they have then prioritised;
- **Lincolnshire** - access types well-linked to policy statements (e.g. page 17) and a wider network considered in a clear, logical way (page 42 - 45);
- **Southampton** - strong on mapping other potential PROW (page 4, page 18, page 35) and includes a consideration of access to water;
- **Staffordshire** - gives a clear and logical overview of a wider network (page 29 - 32), including a consideration of suitability of routes for each user group.

See also appendix 6.

2.5.2. Inclusion of Cycle Tracks

Section 60 (subsection 5) of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act defines which routes must be included in a ROWIP⁵.

⁵ “Local rights of way” in relation to a local highway authority, means (a) the footpaths, cycle tracks, bridleways and restricted byways within the authority’s area, and (b) the ways within the authority’s area which are shown in a definitive map and statement as restricted byways or byways open to all traffic. A cycle

Sustrans' "National Cycle Network" and "Regional Cycle Routes" were often cited in ROWIPs as this part of the assessment - but this is only part of the picture - in built-up areas there are often cycle tracks that link town with countryside, and are useful links for all users, in particular people with limited mobility as they tend to be surfaced and free from stiles.

45% authorities failed to successfully include cycle tracks in their ROWIP. Some only included a definition of a cycle track with no further information. A number of reasons were given for this, including not having any cycle tracks :

- Some authorities have a 'cycling officer' responsible for promoting and encouraging cycling / implementing a separate 'cycling strategy'. In most authorities this role sits within the transport team and the opportunity has been lost to connect with the rights of way team. In many it has been very difficult to build strong links with the cycling officer, resulting in less than effective working. Sometimes ROWIPs have stated that "*cycle tracks are part of the Highways department*"⁶, with no further details. Where the ROWIP process has worked well cycling officers have been involved in the process and have contributed knowledge and expertise to the process;
- Rights of Way officers work within complex and restrictive legal systems. Many struggle to comprehend the legal status of cycle tracks which may have been built by the authority without any legal definition, perhaps implying some permissive status. As a consequence some ROWIPs have noted that there are "*no cycle tracks under the legislation*"⁷ or "*the length is not recorded*"⁸. Some ROWIPs offer an interpreted definition of cycle tracks, but have not included these routes in their network assessment or related them to how people use a whole access network⁹;
- This issue of defining a cycle track is further complicated as routes are sometimes additionally called "cycle routes", "cycle trails" or "cycle ways". The difference

track is defined as, 'a way over which the public have a right of way on pedal cycle, with or without a right of way on foot', but not including cycle tracks on the sides of roads (cycle lanes).

⁶ Swindon ROWIP

⁷ Referring strictly to the Cycle Tracks Act 1984 (Harrow ROWIP & Sandwell ROWIP, although Sandwell included them in the public consultation)

⁸ Redcar and Cleveland ROWIP

⁹ Bolton ROWIP

in culture between a rights of way section with a rigorous legal framework as opposed to a transport section promoting cycling and providing a number of facilities can be very marked, and in many instances is the primary reason why what would appear to be two teams with similar aims cannot work effectively together;

- Information on the locations of cycle tracks is not always easily available. Some authorities have good maps of cycle routes, often in GIS, allowing easy visual analysis of how they relate to the definitive map. Unlike the definitive map and the list of streets there is no duty to record in one place the location of cycle tracks¹⁰. This can make the task of including them in the ROWIP assessment very difficult;
- Some ROWIPs may have resisted full inclusion of off-carriageway cycle tracks into their assessments, fearing that they would be seen to take responsibility (from another body or another department) for the maintenance of the route(s).

¹⁰ However, Doncaster ROWIP demonstrates good practice by including a local cycle map (page 22 and page 46)

Dorset highlighted the difficulty of finding out about cycling provision in a large county area, listing a number of issues relating to cycle tracks (page 50) including :

- *"... Few figures exist for Dorset detailing cycle track provision... digitised mapping of the cycling resource is incomplete;*
- *No individual cycling officer exists within Dorset County Council;*
- *No research has been undertaken to investigate the value of cycling for public health, tourism or the local economy."*

Authorities that best covered the cycle tracks element of the assessment were often those where the authority area is small and compact, or where there are some known cycling routes to include, or the officer is already part of the Highways Department or the ROWIP is already part of an LTP partnership (for more information about LTP links see section 3).

Good practice examples include :

- **Joint Tyne and Wear ROWIP** (page 21) gives a good, clear definition / distinction between various types of cycle route;
- **Cambridgeshire** (page 11) includes a map of known cycle routes, and considers legal definitions as well as inspection regimes and surfacing types together. It acknowledges that, *"...there is as yet no single source available to the public describing all cycleways in the county..."*;
- **Leicester City** (page 7) states that, *"...legally, off-highway Cycle Tracks are excluded from definitive mapping - and are a regular source of uncertainty as a result. However, Leicester City Council has decided to extend the scope of its mapping to include them, distinguishing between those routes that include Pedestrian User rights and those that do not."*;
- **Derby City Council** considers well the two categories of *"purpose built cycle ways"* and *"Council-owned multi-user paths"*;
- **Sheffield** (page 12) gives a good overview of local cycle tracks, and makes strong links

to their cycling action plan / school travel plans;

- **Doncaster** (page 22 and 46) refers to a separately available cycling map, which covers all sorts of traffic-free cycling routes, including Greenways, Trans-Pennine Trail, Cycle lanes and minor roads;
- **Wakefield** (page 18) considers cycle tracks in terms of their existing surfacing;
- **Staffordshire** (page 119) considers Sustrans routes and the integration of the Local Cycling Network - the latter clearly provides routes leading from and within urban areas to wider countryside;
- **East Sussex** (page 36 and 49) integrates well the use of disused railway lines as promoted recreational routes, (including visitor monitoring data showing how popular these routes are).

A further issue is the unclear relationship between cycle tracks and bridleways. Cyclists using a route as part of transport link will generally prefer to find a sealed surface (tarmac or similar), whereas a bridleway is likely to be surfaced to a lower standard, if at all, and include access for horse riders. Potential links on the urban fringe may be suitable as either cycle tracks or bridleways - with pros and cons for both - and it may be difficult for an authority to make the decision on upgrading the surface.

2.6. Assessment of demand

Some ROWIP officers made the point that the findings from user groups can be too general to be useful. They would have preferred this element to have been omitted from the ROWIP and replaced by a national study done by Natural England. They felt that the resources the local user engagement had taken up would have been better spent on the network instead.

Despite this, 75% of authorities reported that the process had resulted in them achieving a better understanding of users' needs. The exemplar project provided research findings on the needs of users, and many authorities used these to good effect by quoting the national research and relating that to the local situation. Good examples are **Rutland** and **Kent's** ROWIPs - see appendix 1.

In approximately 40% of ROWIPs there was an over-reliance on generalities and national research which was not related to local needs - suggesting that little or no local consultation was carried out.

2.6.1. The needs of users

Evidence of genuine engagement with local users was mixed. Many authorities demonstrated a good understanding of the needs of local walkers, cyclists and horse-riders. A number used quotes from consultees throughout the document e.g. **Lincolnshire** and **Durham** which brought the consultation alive. Many used government statistics and other research that included the exemplar projects, the leisure day visits survey (ELVS2005), Defra research on MPV users, and others¹¹); the better ROWIPs then linked this to their local situation and highlighted any local issues. Weaker ROWIPs did not make these *local connections*.

- **Rutland** draws briefly on national and exemplar results (for example, General Household Survey 2002, and the Entec report as part of the exemplar programme) and applies this well to the local situation and local research (e.g. page 22 - 23);
- **Derby City** (page 21 - 30) also compares the national situation with local research findings well;
- **North Somerset** covers user needs based on general or national research - although in the statement of action there is a commitment to research more in order to fill the knowledge gaps.

Disappointingly, some ROWIPs overlooked key users including dog walkers and carriage drivers, or only referred to them in negative terms relating to conflict; other ROWIPs identified users' needs or issues mainly through just talking to PROW officers.

¹¹ Including : General Household Survey 2002, the ENTEC National Survey for PROW use and demand (developed alongside the guidance, 2001), National Travel Surveys, DEFRA research on MPV users, Active People Survey, Department of Transport figures from website, MORI polls, Ramblers' Association research in 2003 on economic & social value, Countryside Agency "By All Reasonable Means" booklet and other Diversity Review work, Countryside Agency regional "The State of the Countryside" reports, Countryside Agency "Sense and Accessibility".

A small number of ROWIPs appear to have been written as a desk exercise – simply writing down what the officers already knew – either about network deficiencies or users’ needs. While this is not necessarily bad in itself, as many officers will have an excellent understanding of the local situation – it represents a missed opportunity to discover what local people actually want – and does not show full engagement with the ROWIP process.

2.6.2. Mobility and visually impaired users

Outreach to people with limited mobility was mixed, although most ROWIPs attempted it. Fewer managed to provide evidence of engagement with blind or visually-impaired people, although a number acknowledged this lack and identified further work as a priority in the statement of action (for example **Merseyside** joint ROWIP makes a commitment to further outreach (page 36). Engaging with harder to reach groups is a new area of work for many rights of way teams, and it will take time for them to make the right contacts and identify ways to work with them. Many authorities do not have any disabled or visually impaired representatives on the Local Access Forum.

A number of authorities went beyond the guidance and took a really wide definition of people with limited mobility and gained from the process. Some ran a specific focus group to identify needs and issues. Examples include :.

- **Barnsley** (page 20) integrated people with limited mobility into each user type instead of regarding them as a separate group;
- **Medway** (page 18) showed evidence of the learning process through engagement with people with limited mobility;
- **Darlington** included a specific focus group for blind people (page 86);
- **North Yorkshire** included deaf people, disabled horse riders and people with mental health problems (page 43);
- **Devon** – put them at the front of all the user-groups in the ROWIP instead of last (page 39);
- **Lincolnshire** ran specific focus groups for people with disabilities (pages 34 – 36);
- **Lancashire’s** ROWIP (page 65) recognises the need to train staff in the needs of these groups (although the authority are already leading the way in improving

accessibility for all);

- Somerset (page 38) held specific focus groups for mobility impaired users;
- Rutland's ROWIP (page 21) includes examples of good practice with good outreach to blind and partially sighted groups.

Many authorities are prioritising improving accessibility (as a result of the requirements of the DDA and in response to user consultation), but are thwarted by current legislation. They would welcome a change or strengthening of the law (S.69 of the CROW Act, 2000) to allow them to insist on more accessible countryside furniture where it has been impossible to reach an agreement with landowners.

2.6.3. Potential users

Work with potential users and non-users was overlooked in some ROWIPs. Examples of ROWIPs which did reach out to potential users include :

- Darlington - ran focus groups to reach young and old people, families, and other less well represented groups including anglers, sports groups (runners and orienteers) and dog walkers (page 84 - 88);
- Somerset (page 51) identified the need to work with the 'children and young people directorate' of the council, including a plan for ROW officers to visit schools;
- Warrington ran professionally planned focus groups to engage with young people (page 6).

2.6.4. Mechanically Propelled Vehicle (MPV) drivers

The needs of motorised vehicle users were generally not covered, possibly due to the ambiguity in the guidance which didn't list this group as one that should be included, only referring to byways in terms of how they contribute to the access network. Because of

the ambiguity in the guidance, only 55% ROWIPs included information on MPV needs, for example **Worcestershire** (page 21). A minority only referred to MPV access in terms of user-conflict and enforcement.

Joint Merseyside (page 66) noted that it was challenging to outreach to carriage drivers and MPV groups, and are committed to continually monitoring demand for these groups.

2.6.5. Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) and other under-represented groups

As part of the ROWIP process several authorities worked hard to find out what BME groups want from the network, often for the first time. BME groups, despite making up significant percentages of the population in some areas tend not to be significant users of the rights of way network, and they have proved difficult to reach in some areas (possibly because they do not see themselves as 'walkers'). For example :

- **Birmingham** ensured these groups received good survey coverage (for example surveying areas of high unemployment, large BME communities) - and recognised the need to do more outreach work;
- **Doncaster** (page 34) carried out research with BME groups and with a wide diversity of other groups;
- **Calderdale** are committed to outreach work with BME groups in the first year of their action plan (page 33).

Some areas with large ethnic communities did not disaggregate their consultation responses into BME and other groups so it was difficult to see how representative the findings were - more supporting details on the methodology and approach would have been useful. For example **Oldham** has 14% ethnic population, but the ROWIP appeared not to include their views, and despite **Burton upon Trent** (in Staffordshire) having 28% ethnic population, the authority did not appear to carry out any specific research with this group.

2.7. Network Assessment

The network assessment was one area which many authorities requested guidance on early in the process. The large authorities in particular struggled to find a suitable methodology due to the sheer size and scale of the task. Many ROWIPs include an assessment of the density of rights of way by parish or by proximity to settlements, and while this provides some baseline information it does not provide information on the adequacy of the network. Others, for example Lancashire, assessed the network initially through a visual examination of GIS (geographical information system) layers and identified areas with few rights of way (repeated for footpaths and bridleways), then went on to carry out more detailed analysis. Smaller unitary authorities found this easier and were able to assess their networks in more detail. The critical part of the network assessment is matching it to people's current or future use and reaching conclusions.

Some ROWIPs didn't have a specific "network" section. Some made no reference to "network assessment" or any alternative process.

- Northamptonshire were one of the few authorities to attempt a GIS modelling approach to their network assessment (pages 21 - 26 and appendix 1);
- Leicester City carried out a desktop survey to identify potential rights of way, which they then surveyed and recorded information on street furniture, surface type and condition, lighting and barriers.

2.7.1. Network condition and connectedness of the network

Network condition was often considered in terms of BVPI 178¹² statistics with accompanying analysis of the results together with other statistics on the number of requests for maintenance. A few authorities have the technology and the data to apply an "asset management" approach, and these figures are well incorporated (for example Kent and York).

¹² Best Value Performance Indicator number 178, relating to the "ease of use" of public rights of way. Each year, five percent of the authority's rights of way (by length) are chosen at random; half of these are surveyed in spring and half in autumn. The minimum criteria, amongst others, is that each route should be clearly signed where it leaves a surfaced (metalled) highway, the route should be free from obstructions, and the "average" person (with "average" footwear) should be able to follow the route with a 1:25,00 map. See also section 4.3.2 for further discussion.

- Worcestershire presents good data including BVPI figures (page 17 - 18) and the use of monitoring equipment to collect user numbers;
- Bedfordshire considers the condition of the network in terms of public perception.

The connectedness of the network has been analysed using GIS or other tools (see section 2.7.2) and sometimes known 'gaps' or 'fragmentation' issues have been outlined. This has been done well when considered in terms of each user group - for instance, horse riders or people with limited mobility. Where this is not done well authorities provide lists of inadequacies in the access network such as major road crossings or known anomalies; without further analysis this information does not describe the network.

- Leicestershire includes an excellent adequacy analysis - particularly good on fragmentation and gaps, with a good discussion of results;
- Hampshire (Test and Itchen plan page 5 and 8) includes an excellent discussion about connectedness and fragmentation;
- Bedfordshire (page 72 - 73) is strong on fragmentation in the statement of action "*completing the jigsaw*".

2.7.2. Adequacy of the network

Many ROWIPs concentrated on network density by parish; a misleading and not very informative approach. Large, upland parishes may have few people and not need a high density of rights of way, smaller ones may have more people and have high demand for more routes. Assessing adequacy by density gives no information on how connected, or fragmented, the network is or how useful it is to the local population. Other ROWIPs considered network density by population density (in other words, the provision of access from where people live) which is a much more useful, but still incomplete approach. The best ROWIPs used a variety of measures - including the suitability of the network for people's needs.

- Derbyshire (page 19 onwards) considered the network from the point of view of each user group with locations of fragmentation and gaps. This was illustrated with A4 maps taken from the GIS of their network. They considered population density, condition data and rights of way length per parish. All of this was translated into clear conclusions of adequacy;
- Wakefield (page 33) includes a good discussion of the adequacy of the network and reaches clear conclusions;
- Leicestershire (page 63 - 66) investigates households most isolated from the ROW network, and on page 96 matches desire with the available network;
- York's (page 47 - 59) assessment was logical and innovative. York used the Entec methodology with backup information;
- Barnsley matches stable locations with bridleway provision (page 47 - 49). Firstly with a map showing all the bridleways and stables, then a second map showing usage information collected from the horse-rider survey, before identifying gaps in the network, where future demand will be and explanation of patterns of usage;
- Southampton (page 26), East Sussex (page 69) and Bracknell (page 29) reach clear conclusions about adequacy.

2.7.3. The wider network assessment

From the start of the ROWIP process authorities were encouraged to look beyond the definitive map and address the wider less defined network of access. Many authorities found this challenging. Considering access on routes not shown on the definitive map, nor protected by rights of way legislation requires a major cultural change for many authorities. A number of officers expressed concerns about the resource implications of looking at a wider network *"We can't maintain our paths, if we mention other paths we'll be expected to pay for them too"*. However the public do not distinguish between access opportunities based on the legal status, and the majority of ROWIPs have included some non-definitive access in their network assessment.

Appendix 6 gives examples of how ROWIPs covered elements of a wider access network.

2.7.4. Environmental Stewardship

Many ROWIPs included the number of kilometres of environmental stewardship scheme routes that exist locally as part of their network assessment but few ROWIPs considered either the locations where stewardship routes can help fill the gaps, or secure higher rights; the application of the least-restrictive principle (gaps, gates, stiles) within stewardship agreements; and the need for more integrated promotion of the stewardship network.

However, good practice includes :

- Norfolk (page 26) includes a map of the environmental stewardship locations;
- Oxfordshire (page 26 - 27) gives a good overview of local stewardship schemes and a detailed accompanying text;
- Durham (page 52) considers cross-compliance as well as environmental stewardship;
- Doncaster (page 44) considers suitability of stewardship schemes for horse riders;
- Darlington (page 84) points out that environmental stewardship route locations are sometimes mismatched with demand; that agri-environment schemes should also be considered in the urban fringe (page 8);
- Somerset (page 33) is looking to secure public access on lapsed environmental stewardship routes;
- Hartlepool (page 51) plans to develop a database of missing links that could be requested in environmental stewardship applications.

Natural England are working on a developing an approach for targeting Higher Level Stewardship (HLS), and will be working with authorities to identify ways in which ROWIP priorities can be related to HLS targeting.

2.7.5. Presenting network information

GIS maps have been used in many ROWIPs to present a successful overview of the network and various access categories.

Lincolnshire (page 47) maps PROW intersections with main roads, and network anomalies;

Staffordshire presents good maps in their excellent and innovative network assessment, using GIS to build up maps of proximity to population (page 17), then adding demand / attractors (page 20 -21), then density of network per user (page 33 - 38);

Durham (page 28) - some of the maps lacked a colour key, so interpretation of the information was impossible and the scale of some made them hard to read. Including major towns on maps aids understanding and familiarisation and accompanying interpretation text is vital - **Durham** did well in this respect.

2.8. Concluding the assessments

Good ROWIPs summarised the findings of the research and drew conclusions which they then turned into actions. The quality of this section was therefore partly dependent on having tackled the assessments well. Some authorities struggled to condense the enormous amount of information they collected, others kept this section short but made the detailed findings available in a separate document.

Warrington - a compact ROWIP but includes references to fuller research / background separately on their website.

Some ROWIPs statements of action do not clearly follow from the network assessment or the user assessment. It is not always clear where the conclusions have been drawn from - showing the rationale and the evolution of the actions would have helped. In some places, issues raised by users didn't clearly translate into the statement of action - and there is no explanation of why not. For example the **Isle of Wight** ROWIP consulted with blind groups but there is no evidence of their voice in the proposed actions.

- Lincolnshire (page 73), Leicester City, Northumberland, Lancashire, Swindon, Rotherham and Harrow made the links between the assessment and the statement of action well.
- Bath and North East Somerset (the West of England Partnership) joint ROWIP was particularly good at making clear links between the consultation and the statement of action.

2.9. Statements of Action

Statements of Action are an interesting complex blend of policy directions, “themes” from the research, beneficiaries, specific project locations, partners, resources and timescales (for the first year of the plan as well as the 5-year or 10-year life of the plan). In terms of readability, the statement of action often tries to present a lot of information in one place. Many ROWIPs include codes, reference numbers, symbols, acronyms and jargon - which, unless working with the document day-to-day, are difficult to interpret.

Harrow’s ROWIP demonstrates good practice, in that although they include codes, these are repeated at the bottom of each page in the statement of action, allowing easy reference.

Oxfordshire and Shropshire have the statement of action near the front of the document being the element that many people will turn to first. For this to work successfully the assessments in the main document must reach clear conclusions that can be logically evidenced to the statement of action. Other ROWIPs, despite lacking the evidence in the process, focus well on delivery and implementation.

Some ROWIPs, realising the potential lack of implementation funding, have ended up being very cautious. The actions are vague and often relate to actions such as “producing a list of ...” or “improving the functionality of...” or “monitor the collection efficiency of...” rather than any real improvements on the ground. Others are so limited by concerns

relating to costs that all actions include the terms "... as resources allow", or words to that effect. This has a dumbing-down effect on the document thereby reducing its value.

The better ROWIPs have fully embraced the ROWIP process and produced ambitious (and expensive) lists of actions which meet the needs of the public for more connected networks, better information etc. The Isle of Wight ROWIP made the point that benefits should not benefit one user at the expense of another.

Few statements of action have managed to include all elements (clear actions, links to previous assessment, timescales, quick wins, costs, partners, timescales) in a clear way. Examples of good statements of action include :

- **Bedfordshire** - which has good theme headings making the actions easy to understand and easy to relate to the assessment;
- **Derby City** - the timescale columns are clear, helping the reader see when the actions are planned;
- **Warrington** - clear and easy to follow progression from research to issues to actions;
- **Cumbria and Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead and Hertfordshire** - clearly shows who benefits from each action (this has not been done well in most statements of action);
- **Bracknell and Warwickshire** - quick wins easily identifiable;
- **Medway and Sheffield** - are rare in that they include actual costs;
- **Hampshire** - good equality of consideration for all interested parties;
- **Sandwell** - methodical and consistently structured;
- **Bolton** - included a section on improving communications with landowners (page 44).

A minority (2%) considered only statutory duty-type work (in this respect the statement of action looked more like a "business plan"), and a further fifth of the reviewed ROWIPs

barely went beyond statutory duties. Approximately 75% considered statutory duty work *and* improvements, while two considered only improvements. Very few ROWIPs included SMART targets that were clearly defined and thought-through, related to actions either in the first few years of implementation or for the whole 5-year (or 10-year) period and linked to indicators that were likely to be meaningful in annual reports. Without such detailed planning for implementation, it is not clear how the actions will turn from a “wish list” into a prioritised, monitored and logical sequence of discrete tasks. In part this is a product of the work that highway authorities still have to do to identify resources and partnerships.

Sandwell is one of the few with clearly measurable targets presenting a comprehensive, methodical and consistently structured statement of action (page 52 onwards);

Stoke-on-Trent has attempted SMART actions quite successfully, with some implementation work already underway; as did **Rotherham**, including a methodology to prioritise the actions (page 99).

2.10. ROWIPs written by external consultants

Just less than half (44%) of all authorities surveyed used consultants for some part of the ROWIP process. Much of the hard work of writing a ROWIPs is in building relationships and making contact with people. There is a concern that where external consultants have been employed to write ROWIPs the benefits of the process will not be fully felt. For example where consultants have been used to assess local demand or users’ needs the knowledge from the assessment will be included in the ROWIP but the deeper understanding will remain with the consultant. This may result in the officers lacking the insight that direct contact with local users and potential users would have brought.

11% of surveyed authorities used consultants to write the ROWIP from start to finish. There is a risk in these cases that the true benefit of the ROWIP has not been achieved and “signed up to” - that the relevance of the rights of way network is understood by the authority and that the work of the rights of way team is integrated into the work of the authority, with good strong links between departments.

However:

- 36% of the authorities using consultants to write the whole ROWIP reported that the process had resulted in more effective working within the authority;
- 45% reported an increased understanding of the relevance of rights of way;
- 91% reported an increased understanding of the needs of users;
- All of the authorities using consultants to wholly write their ROWIP identified at least one positive benefit to the authority of writing the ROWIP.

Warrington were unable to write their ROWIP in-house due to lack of resources, so they contracted the work out to a consultant they already worked with through the LTP. The process has proved beneficial and in particular it has helped to raise issues, and to reassure users that they will be listened to. The ROWIP is good, exceeding the requirements and/or demonstrating good practice in some areas.

“The whole process has been quite helpful in raising awareness that there are other people involved - partnerships.

But it is hard-going to deliver the actions - the consultants have done their job - but getting buy-in from staff and management is difficult.”

2.11. ROWIPs in large and small authorities: advantages and challenges

“The beauty of being a small authority is that you can reach everyone; I already have some funding to implement some of it, off the back of the LAF, the ROWIP and management support. Now I’ve got to spend it!”

Large authorities with separate rights of way teams were the first to start ROWIP development, raising concerns that the unitary authorities with fewer staff resources would not be able to keep up. This fear proved unfounded - the unitary authorities have not only caught up but have produced some excellent ROWIPs.

Both large rural and small urban authorities have benefited from the ROWIP process, and both have faced challenges.

2.11.1. Rural County Councils

Advantages

- Generally started earlier - which was not necessarily an advantage, although they provide much needed examples of good practice for later starters to refer to;
- Most of the exemplar work was done by county councils, causing some unitary authorities to feel that the research was not relevant to them - although all authorities were able to find some useful information from the exemplar project;
- Most were able to employ a dedicated ROWIP officer to work on the plan;
- Many have good GIS systems which can hold all the ROWIP data (although many have yet to find the resources to map all of their information).

Challenges

- The sheer size of most counties made the task difficult - writing a plan to cover a range of different landscape character areas, possibly one or more National Park, other designated areas and urban areas proved the most challenging aspect. This was approached in different ways, with some writing the plan in sections relating to Countryside Character Areas, and Hampshire taking this one stage further and writing a series of mini ROWIPs for each area;
- The network assessment was particularly challenging for many large authorities;
- The scale of the task was made more complex by the number of partners and stakeholders needing to be involved - as one officer reported simply keeping up with what everyone is doing is a full time job;
- Having a good, well established, rights of way section at the start of the process has not always been an advantage - it is more difficult to change the culture of an authority which is already working well. In some large authorities the ROWIP officer has felt isolated and removed from the work of the section, rather than the work of the section being steered by the ROWIP.

2.11.2. Urban / unitary authorities

Advantages

- The size of the area makes the task easier, in particular the network assessment - consultation with users is easier when the whole area can be easily seen on one map;
- The scale made it easier to identify where improvements are needed - for example **Darlington** listed the places where links were required - this is not possible for a large county;
- It is easier to make strong LTP links as often there is close working between the two teams, or even the same officer holds both responsibilities. It is easier to understand the role rights of way play as part of the transport network in urban areas;
- The single tier planning system makes closer integration with planning easier with greater potential to benefit from S.106 agreements.

Challenges

- Many smaller authorities have very few public rights of way - and many do not have a definitive map (although this has freed some up to be more creative and look at access in the broadest sense without being hampered by legal definitions);
- Many do not have a dedicated rights of way officer, often the ROWIP is a small part of someone's job;
- Several have found the only way to get their ROWIP written was to use consultants;
- Raising the profile of the ROWIP and increasing the understanding of the relevance of the network is a challenge in many small authorities.

Urban (or part-urban) authorities with good elements include :

- **Hartlepool**, the LAF has a high profile, and as whole the ROWIP is grounded in where people want to go;
- **Birmingham**, is especially good on constituency links and cross-cutting links to other local plans and is readable, logical and straightforward;
- **Sandwell**, despite being long, the ROWIP has some very good sections including; health and regeneration links; respect for local towns' culture; network

assessment; statement of action and LTP links;

- Tyne and Wear and Merseyside, the two joint LTP area ROWIPs are good - a model which other urban areas may wish to follow in the future.

(See appendix 1 for more examples).

2.12. Less successful ROWIPs

Despite the variety in approach and quality of the ROWIPs all represent a significant amount of work from the authorities and an attempt to meet the requirements of the guidance. Many of the good ROWIPs have elements which are less well-covered, and some of the poor ones have excelled in some areas.

- Some authorities have failed to demonstrate that the ROWIP will result in a change in working practice - they have not fully embraced the ROWIP concept of looking at the network from a people-focussed view;
- A small number are still very much led by the definitive map and associated statutory duties;
- A number are un-ambitious - due to concerns about funding. Proposed actions qualified by "if resources become available" - it is likely that the lack of certainty is to gain authority approval and adoption.

Where ROWIPs have not fully embraced the process this is recorded in appendix 1.

A number of ROWIPs include too much detail on internal issues peripheral to the main ROWIP. These include a lengthy section on the authority's management of the network (Kent chapter 5); a history of PROW section (Darlington page 13 and page 89) and internal reporting systems (Isle of Wight page 10). While this level of detail is interesting to colleagues in other authorities and may help people understand the internal mechanisms at work, it is often irrelevant to the main aims of the ROWIP and no interest to the public. This illustrates the difficulties of writing a document for many audiences.

Some include policies, objectives or priorities with no clear explanation of how they were formulated. For example it is not clear if they were they already in existence, agreed in

consultation with the Local Access Forum or after engagement with local user groups. For example it is not clear from Medway's ROWIP how the priorities in the statement of action were reached.

2.12.1. Demand Assessment

It was not always possible to judge the level of user engagement carried out by an authority by reading the ROWIP. Some ROWIPs made no direct reference to consultation but referred to findings. Gloucestershire does not specify what consultation they carried out but includes statements such as *"During the consultation, some users felt that more permissive access should be provided. Others felt that access should always be a legal right and that there should not be too great a reliance placed on permissive agreements."*

In other ROWIPs although consultation is not explicit, the conclusions reached relate well to local needs, suggesting consultation has taken place. For example Warwickshire's Countryside Access and Rights of Way Improvement Plan is good and meets requirements, showing a good theoretical understanding of users' needs despite not clearly demonstrating how engagement with users took place.

2.13. Economic policy links

Despite the evidence arising from the foot and mouth outbreak in 2001 of the importance of the rights of way network to the rural economy, few ROWIPs demonstrate the economic benefits of rights of way.

Worcestershire gives an excellent example of the links to economic benefits including the value added by one member of countryside staff (page 10 - 12): *"...It is estimated that the average cost to employ a member of staff to carry out rights of way and open space management is £15,000 - £18,000 per annum, and the equivalent return to the regional economy through the rights of way provision is approximately £1 million per employee, (It should be noted that this figure was estimated in 2003 and does not include National Insurance, superannuation.). This does not include the significant contribution that volunteers, farmers and land managers play in keeping the network open and subsequently encouraging greater use. It can therefore be seen that the total economic benefits are greatly in excess of the costs of path improvement and maintenance..."*

3. Linking with the Local Transport Plan

There are a number of different ways ROWIPs and LTPs have been linked :

- The ROWIP was published early, in time for inclusion in LTP2;
- The ROWIP includes reference to policy statements and targets from the LTP, and other related documents (such as a cycling strategy);
- The ROWIP includes details of the contribution of rights of way to the “shared objectives” and ROWIP implementation projects have links with these shared objectives;
- The ROWIP statement of action includes, or links well with LTP actions, targets or indicators (or even a “code” referring back to the shared objectives);
- The ROWIP monitoring arrangements are tied-in with LTP annual reports;
- The ROWIP is successfully accessing LTP funds for projects.

However it remains an issue that not all authorities have managed to integrate the ROWIP with the LTP or to convince their transport team colleagues of the relevance of the ROWIP.

3.1. Timing

A minority of ROWIPs were published in 2005-6, in time to be included in LTP2, but the majority were published later. The majority of authorities made reference to the ROWIP in the LTP2. Publishing early to meet the LTP2 deadline has not necessarily resulted in good joint working. Gloucestershire County Council were one of the first to include the ROWIP as an appendix to the LTP - but the ROWIP is un-ambitious with frequent references to '*if resources allow*'.

Hertfordshire's ROWIP is an example of an integrated ROWIP which was produced as part of LTP2 (pages 5 and 45).

3.1.1. Shared objectives / policy links

A number of authorities made good clear links between the aims of the ROWIP and those of the LTP - see appendix 1 for examples. Merseyside's and Tyne and Wear's ROWIPs both include tables clearly demonstrating the links between the two documents.

Table 2 - LTP/ROWIP links taken from the Tyne and Wear ROWIP

LTP Aims and Objectives	ROWIP Link
Accessibility	Network improvements will enable people to walk or cycle more easily between local amenities, employment and education. Inclusive design will provide opportunities for all users and increase peoples social interaction stopping people feeling isolated.
Air Quality	Encouraging people to use Public Rights of Way, particularly for short journeys can reduce the dependency upon private vehicles and therefore reduce pollution, leading to improvements in air quality.
Congestion	The Public Rights of Way network has the potential to assist Highway Authorities to tackle congestion if access networks are planned to connect destinations with local communities and public transport. This will reduce reliance on private transport.
Crime and Anti-social Behaviour	Increasing use of the network can reduce crime and antisocial behaviour. It is recognised that the potential for such activity diminishes on routes that are popular and well used.
Health	Public Rights of Way provide increased physical and mental health benefits to users through encouraging exercise and outdoor recreation.
Quality of Life Issues	Using Public Rights of Way and accessing the countryside is known to contribute to people's well being and assist with liveability policies. Opportunities for leisure and recreation can have a positive impact on people's quality of life.
Safer Roads	Public Rights of Way can exist in isolation from other forms of traffic and can therefore assist in reducing accidents if they are made relevant and promoted to potential users. They can provide vital links across major roads such as motorways avoiding potential casualties, linking communities and improving general accessibility.
Sustainable Transport	Public Rights of Way offer users a variety of sustainable forms of transport, they offer choices: which are both varying in their nature and are inexpensive and environmentally friendly.

It is the combination of stating shared objectives, local interpretation and clear presentation that helped make this element of the ROWIPs clear. Further examples of ROWIPs that made these links particularly well include:

- **Barnsley** - cross-boundary working on links to LTP objectives (pages 8 - 10);
- **Bolton** - creating links between ROWIP projects and LTP objectives (pages 5 - 7);
- **Derbyshire** - good presentation of the shared objectives (page 43);
- **Hartlepool** - clear links to the LTP and other policy areas (e.g. page 17 - 18);
- **Leicester City** - excellent links (pages 16 - 21);
- **Northamptonshire** - (page 10 - 11) clear policy links to the cycling strategy and the shared objectives;
- **Nottingham City** - excellent links from the start and throughout;
- **Oldham** - clear links to the LTP aims and objectives (pages 12, 14 and 15);
- **Oxfordshire** - well-stated and set-out contribution to shared objectives (pages 18 - 19);
- **Sheffield** - shared priorities stated at the start of the ROWIP (pages 6 and 7) and interpreted locally;
- **Shropshire** - shared priorities well-presented (page 7);
- **Southampton** - links to shared objectives well-explained (pages 9 - 10);
- **Slough** - strong on policy links, including the LTP (pages 9 - 10, page 32 and appendix 7);
- **Somerset** - good on shared priorities with the LTP and consideration of indicators (page 15 and throughout);
- **Staffordshire** - Good involvement of the joint LAF evident in setting themes and priorities and linking these to LTP objectives (page 93 - 94);
- **Wakefield** - clearly set-out (page 13);

- Warrington - aligns well with LTP shared objectives.

3.2. Good LTP / ROWIP links

Generally, the ROWIPs that seem to have made strong links to their LTP cover urban areas, unitary authorities, or those ROWIPs that are part of an existing LTP partnership. These authorities have found it easier because :

- The smaller size of the authority; it is easier to make strong LTP links due to generally closer working between the two teams (in more than one case the same officer is responsible for the area's LTP and the ROWIP);
- The more urban nature of the authority: it is easier to understand the role rights of way play as part of the transport network in urban areas;
- These authorities are also more likely to have included the cycle tracks element of the ROWIP network assessment.

- Merseyside's and Tyne and Wear's joint ROWIPs developed out of an existing LTP partnership which employed a ROWIP officer¹³; Both have ROWIP officers funded through the LTP partnership, based within the LTP team. Both have made excellent links to their LTP throughout their ROWIPs. They are already considering developing new, local indicators, to replace BVPI 178;
- Darlington's rights of way team already had good links with their LTP team strengthened by the ROWIP. The transport team has more confidence to include ROWIP projects in the LTP.

Strong LTP links are not limited to unitary authorities or LTP partnerships :

¹³ Merseyside ROWIP covers Knowsley, Liverpool, Sefton, St Helen's and The Wirral. Tyne and Wear ROWIP covers Gateshead, Newcastle, North Tyneside, South Tyneside and Sunderland. Furthermore, both areas also have LAFs which reflect these areas (although the Merseyside LAF encompasses a slighter *wider* area and so will consider more than one ROWIP).

- Durham provides an example of good practice , including funding case studies;
- Cambridgeshire's ROWIP also made good links to the LTP throughout, and have built on this since publication to fund a "Lost Highways Officer" within the authority.

3.3. Challenges

A significant number of authorities are still struggling to maximise the LTP links. These include some of the large rural authorities. Discussion with officers suggest that the degree of integration often depends on personalities and authority culture rather than common sense and good practice.

In rural areas, the LTP resources are already stretched. *"It's a case of a little butter spread very thinly",* one officer reported, *"... projects are assessed in the LTP using a scoring system - even the most promising projects fail to reach the 'bar' for consideration in the next three year's funding programme. For example, completing a section of disused railway line into cycle route lost points because its rural starting point would mean people would put their cycles onto their cars, and so more car journeys would be created. Another promising example, a new link between the railway station and the village centre, just couldn't get enough points. It's as if the LTP scoring is geared towards the bigger projects. We are now just hoping to influence their scoring mechanism for LTP3...".*

National Parks may also find that they are relying on their respective highway authorities to influence the LTP for each area. For example, **Exmoor National Park Authority (NPA)** reported that both **Somerset** and **Devon County Councils** have been unable to find a way to link their ROWIP objectives of the NPA with those of the LTP. However, this is not always the case. **Redcar and Cleveland** have made good LTP links and are accessing funds for work both within the National Park and outside it. Also, small achievements were cited by **Northumberland NPA** through the County Council's proactive approach in securing money from the LTP to repair a path.

Many authorities reported that publishing the ROWIP has brought about closer working between themselves and the LTP, or at least an excuse to talk to the LTP team more often. Although, as in any partnership working, it requires consistent and regular effort.

Despite much hard work, **Shropshire** have been unable to make full use of LTP funds because of the differences in culture of the two teams - LTP projects are generally worked-up with plans and diagrams, and the LTP team cannot relate to the less formal way of working in the rights of way section. Other authorities also reported that LTP projects sometimes have access to "preparation" funds - involving engineers' surveys, specifications and diagrams - but the cost of preparing such a work plan is often prohibitive for a rights of way section.

North Yorkshire and **Cumbria's** ROWIPs failed to get any recognition of their ROWIP in their LTP. **Devon's** ROWIP was published in time for LTP2, yet did not achieve full integration until the publication of the 2006 annual action plan, which reports accessing LTP funds, reflecting hard work on the part of the officers involved.

3.4. LTP3

Specific guidance is still awaited on how best to integrate ROWIPs with the third round of LTPs¹⁴. Most authorities intend to review (at least to some extent) their ROWIPs at this stage, and thereafter adopt the same timescale for publishing and review.

- **Bury** - (page 136) are committed to producing a separate LTP annual progress summary (in addition to the ROWIP annual report).

The guidance on the integration of ROWIPs into LTPs has caused confusion. Authorities would have welcomed much clearer guidance on how the two documents relate to each other. In some cases ROWIPs were rushed through to meet LTP deadlines (for example **Gloucestershire**), without allowing enough time for the ROWIP process to be carried out. The difference in timescales has caused confusion - with a lack of clarity on whether the ROWIP needs to be reviewed every five years (with the LTP) or ten years (as in the CROW

¹⁴ The guidance might be able to tackle some of the issues raised in this report. Officers would welcome, in particular, guidance on integrating improvements for horse-riders with the LTP.

Act). Many early ROWIPs have not set a review date, others have set a five year review - making the point that ten years is a long time in local government.

There is also ongoing concern about the relationship between ROWIPs and transport generally and it is widely acknowledged that not all areas covered by the ROWIP fit well with the LTP. (For example use of the network to access services in rural area, and recreational horse riding in all areas.) However, Tyne and Wear's joint ROWIP has done excellent work on the needs of equestrians, as has the joint Merseyside ROWIP (both LTP funded).

3.5. Funding

Approximately 45% of ROWIPs have accessed funds through their LTP (sums of up to £300,000 p.a.). Examples are given in appendix 8.

- Thurrock - bridleway projects have been added to the LTP works programme (page 26);
- Medway and Derbyshire include details of their LTP funding allocations (page 40 and 38 respectively);
- Hartlepool - LTP funding for a road crossing of the A19 (page 46) and a number of other LTP funded proposals in the statement of action;
- Devon - The 2006 annual action plan update identifies £80k + £117k LTP funding.

Others have reported that they thought they had made progress, but had yet to see any money. West Sussex reported that they thought they had got a foot in the LTP *"but the £80k per year has got lost. The ROWIP hasn't necessarily opened the door, but has given us the opportunity to talk to the LTP team more. But I find it hard to find the time to knock on that door."* Some ROWIPs are realistic in that they see the LTP as just one possible funding source.

4. Implementation

4.1. Progress

Just over half (54%) of the authorities responding to the questionnaire had started implementing their ROWIP. This includes authorities which have started to implement their ROWIPs ahead of formal publication. Lancashire's ROWIP (page 88) includes a good section explaining the implementation process. The majority (96%) are implementing some actions across the whole authority area.

4.2. Priorities

Not all authorities were able to indicate the priority of actions in their ROWIP - deciding priority depends on a number of changing factors including funding, staffing and political priorities.

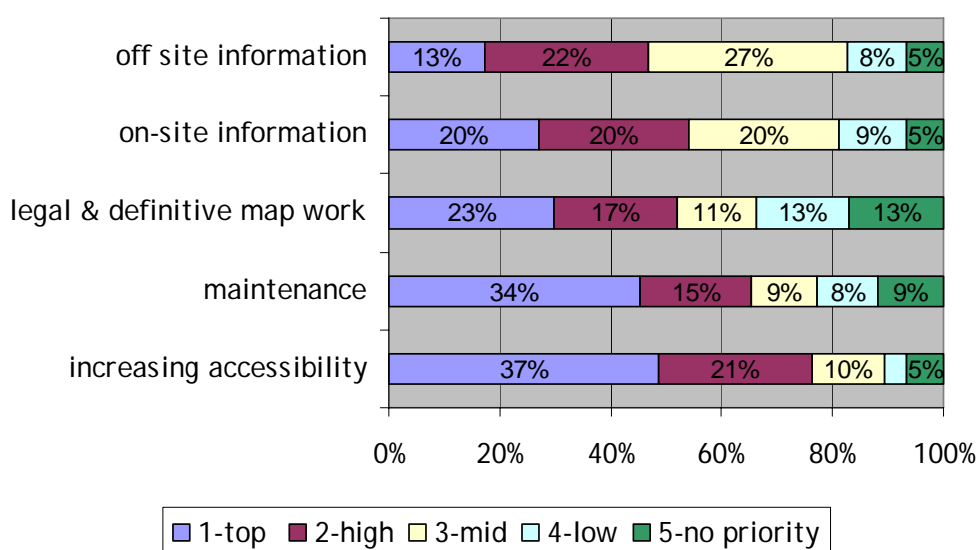


Figure 4 - ROWIP priorities for action from the questionnaire results

- Three quarters of ROWIPs (76%) prioritise increasing accessibility;
- Two thirds of ROWIPs prioritise maintenance;
- Over half (53%) prioritise definitive map work;
- 16% of authorities awarded both definitive map work and maintenance top priority;
- 26% gave top priority to improving on-site information (way marking, signage etc.);

- 17% gave top priority to improving off-site information (web, leaflets etc.), 7% awarded this no priority despite the majority of demand assessments concluding that people want more information about where they can go.

It is reassuring that although twelve authorities gave top priority to existing statutory duties (legal and definitive map work and maintenance) all but three of these awarded high priorities to other areas of work too.

Increasing accessibility was the area of work given top priority by most authorities, although fewer appear to recognise that increasing accessibility is more than removal of barriers and improvements on the ground - there is also a need for improved access to high quality information. Stoke on Trent includes a commitment to carry out a full access audit of the definitive rights of way network and to produce promotional materials to raise public awareness of the access network.

4.2.1. Priority for different user groups

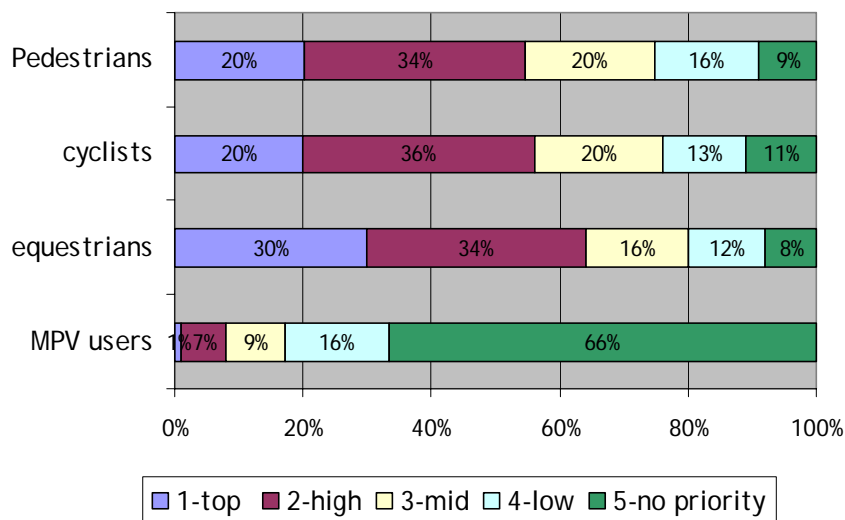


Figure 5 - priorities for action relating to user groups

- 16% of authorities responding to the questionnaire awarded equal priority to all users;
- 30% authorities awarded equal priority to pedestrians, equestrians and cyclists, with motorists having a lower priority;
- 9% of authorities awarded a higher priority to pedestrians than any other users;

- 21% gave lower priority to pedestrians than cyclist or equestrians possibly reflecting the better provision that already exists for pedestrians;
- 8% of authorities (generally in urban areas) awarded equestrians a lower priority than walkers and cyclists;
- 34% awarded either the highest priority, or a higher priority than to other users, to equestrians.

4.3. Monitoring / reporting

Effective monitoring and reporting is vital to raise the profile of the ROWIP and to demonstrate its impact. Most ROWIPs include some information on monitoring and reporting, but this is frequently very general. Few present clearly planned reviews with information on content, approach and timescales, the role of the LAF, or how the wider public may be involved. In some instances this is because authorities are awaiting regulations from government that require reporting in a particular way¹⁵.

Few officers allocate time to collating evidence on ROWIP implementation, even those which have been implementing the ROWIP for more than a year struggled to list what they have achieved. This is a missed opportunity, being able to demonstrate the impact and value of the ROWIP inevitably makes accessing funding easier. For example, **Bedfordshire**, one of the exemplar authorities, who are demonstrating good practice in implementation and have appointed a dedicated officer to raise funds to deliver the ROWIP - but did not have a record of what had been achieved until asked by this research.

Good practice examples include :

- **Wakefield** (page 54) clearly sets out what will be considered in the ROWIP annual progress report (review of actions, impact of action and next steps) together with monitoring against baseline data (BVPI 178 and other survey information) and a commitment to put more robust monitoring research arrangements in place;
- **Bracknell** (page 12) includes monitoring arrangements as part of their annual LAF report;
- **Cumbria** (page 17) includes clear arrangements for next steps / monitoring and

¹⁵ The CROW Act provides for the Secretary of State to make these regulations - Bury (page 136) and Lancashire (page 88) both make reference to the fact that they are awaiting these regulations.

reporting;

- **Bury** (page 136) - commits to a ROWIP annual report (including explanation for any targets not met), a separate Annual Progress Summary for the LTP, and a ROWIP Statement of Intent (work plan);
- **Derby City** (page 65) - monitoring arrangements are very clear, time-bound, and state how the LAF is involved and contents of future annual reports;
- **Hampshire** (e.g. Test and Itchen plan, page 4) includes clear involvement of the Countryside Access Forum as well as local committee;
- **Somerset** (page 55) link their monitoring with the installation of people counters on new routes, so that success can be evaluated;
- **Oldham** (page 52) commit to preparing an additional annual report for the LAF, detailing the previous year's achievements together with a review of priorities to remain flexible;
- **Torbay** (page 42 - 43) lists three approaches to monitoring involving senior officers, at least quarterly reports to the LAF, and key issues taken to elected members.

4.3.1. BVPI 178

The announcement in October 2007 that BVPI 178 is no longer one of the new National Indicators¹⁶ came too late to include in most of the ROWIPs. Only some of the last published were able to make reference to this fact, for instance :

Nottingham City (page 23) say, "... raised a number of concerns for users of the local rights of way network because there is no duty to record the "ease of use" of the network and therefore no benchmark for ensuring annual improvements..."

¹⁶ As part of the Chancellor's Comprehensive Spending Review and the White Paper "Strong and Prosperous Communities" - the set of around 1200 BVPI's has been reduced to 200 new National Indicators
<http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/localgovernment/nationalindicator>

4.3.2. BVPI 178 inclusion in published ROWIPs

BVPI has been a useful standard for authorities to aim for year-on-year improvements, and to raise the political profile of PROW within the organisation. This is often the only “monitoring” figures that highway authorities have routinely and systematically collected. Improvements to the BVPI figure have formed useful targets.

Most ROWIPs used BVPI 178 to determine (at least part of) their “condition of the current network” assessment. Some also included improving the BVPI pass rate as an indicator of progress in their statement of action. Some have also found it a useful mechanism to link with the LTP, for example, Somerset’s ROWIP says :

“Funding of schemes through the LTP is based upon a set of mandatory and local indicators that are largely outcome based. The only PROW indicator at present is Best Value Performance Indicator 178 ‘ease of use’. This is an output indicator that although is included as a Local indicator in LTP2, can only secure LTP funding that will deliver on that indicator. To secure further LTP funding in the future it is necessary to begin the development of outcome based indicators, such as use levels, that will link to securing funds to help with priority actions of the RoWIP but will also be accepted as Local indicators in LTP3 in 2010.”

Somerset’s ROWIP, page 15

4.3.3. Future monitoring

Some highway authorities have already committed in their ROWIPs to continue to collect such an indicator (for example, **Thurrock**, **Durham** and **Sandwell**).

Many authorities still plan to continue to collect BVPI (for consistency) - although perhaps change the standard methodology slightly to reflect local needs. This will effectively make inter-authority comparisons less valid - and yet remain a useful year-on-year benchmark for comparisons between authorities. Other authorities, in particular, the joint **Tyne and Wear** LTP partnership and the joint **Merseyside** partnership are “considering new ways” of collecting information and are working towards developing a more meaningful indicator. Somerset (quoted above) notes an action to develop further outcome-based indicators, to help with LTP integration.

Examples of good practice in monitoring and reporting include :

- Hampshire - clear on monitoring. Test and Itchen page 4 describes how monitoring is to be undertaken, and the annual reporting process.
- Cumbria - arrangements for next steps / monitoring and reporting are clear (page 17)

Work is needed to support authorities to either continue with BVPI 178, or to develop an alternative national standard and to ensure ROWIP progress is reported in a comparative way (see section 7.2)

4.4. Funding

Many ROWIPs need to be more realistic and specific on funding sources. Too many still believe that Natural England will be a funding partner or are vague about where to access funding. Without being more specific the statement of action is just a 'wish list'.

North Yorkshire include an excellent "*what your money buys*" section (page 111) see appendix 7. Redcar and Cleveland ROWIP (page 28) includes a good schedule of average costs and provides indicative costs for individual actions in the action plan.

Examples of good practice in securing funding are given in appendix 8.

4.5. Quick wins / case studies

Few ROWIPs specifically identify quick wins, which is a missed opportunity to show where the work and aspiration of the ROWIP could be demonstrated to have been worthwhile. Warwickshire use a red symbol to identify them, others are less clear for example North Somerset include 'Commitment Category A' action = "*we know we can do it*", which appear to be quick wins.

Some ROWIPs include excellent case studies of projects that are happening to deliver the ROWIP:

- Kent¹⁷ undertook a demonstration project, to illustrate a safer and more pleasant link between two villages. A pre-existing footway between two villages alongside a

¹⁷ See the Kent ROWIP (Countryside Access Improvement Plan) Appendix A (page 103). The example quoted was part-funded by the Countryside Agency ROWIP demonstration fund (in 2005-6 financial year).

busy A-road was not well-used because of safety perceptions. The community and Kent County Council worked together to dedicate a new PROW just metres away, separated from the road by a bank and trees. A pedestrian counter shows the link is already extremely popular. This demonstration project has illustrated to LTP colleagues the valuable contribution that PROW can make;

- **Shropshire** - good case studies from local parishes of existing improvement work (e.g. page 29, 43, 48 and 55);
- **Somerset** - quick wins as projects which are high priority, low cost and short timescale;
- **Nottingham City** - uses case studies to illustrate what is already happening (page 34 - 38).

4.6. Role of the Planning Inspectorate

The ROWIP guidance states that Planning Inspectors should refer to and consider the authority's ROWIP in the course of their work. It is not clear to what extent this practice is already being used to help determine cases at public inquiry.

Guidance is needed for local authorities and the Planning Inspectorate on what is the role of a planning inspector when considering ROWIPs at public inquiry. Any emerging good practice should be disseminated to help both sides understand the process.

5. Role of key stakeholders

5.1. Natural England

Natural England, and before them the Countryside Agency, have been involved in ROWIPs from the outset. Previous involvement includes :

- ROWIP exemplar programme;
- ROWIP training programmes;
- Progress survey;
- Countryside Agency guidance, ROWIP template and examples of good practice;
- ROWIP implementation grants.

5.1.1. Exemplar programme

In 2002 The Countryside Agency funded work on an 'exemplar' ROWIP in each of the eight English regions. This work was designed to help start the ROWIP process by carrying out research into key areas ROWIPs need to cover. The exemplar authorities were :

- Bedfordshire
- Cheshire
- Dorset
- Hampshire
- Northumberland and Tyne and Wear (joint)
- Nottinghamshire
- Shropshire
- York

Each exemplar authority (or group of authorities) was offered a grant to research into key components of a ROWIP, in return for being the first to publish a ROWIP. The research was intended to not only provide information to help the authority but also to provide national good practice which all authorities could use.

The exemplar authorities had a number of challenges, including not knowing how a ROWIP could or should look, and not knowing how to handle the massive amounts of information generated by the grant-aided research. This has resulted in some of the exemplar ROWIPs being long and too detailed.

The outputs from the exemplar project were made available to the other authorities via the IPROW good practice guide website¹⁸, although delays in publishing the information meant that many authorities started their ROWIPs without the benefit of seeing this research.

5.1.2. Training

Natural England (and previously the Countryside Agency) have provided training to help authorities over a number of years, up to and including 2007/8.

- Early training (2002/3) addressed how to get started with a ROWIP, the scope and scale and approach that should be adopted;
- Further training has been run throughout the ROWIP period covering all aspects of writing a ROWIP including consultation;
- The most recent training programme focussed on implementation and was tailor-made to meet the needs of both officers and LAFs within each region. In addition to sharing good practice a range of partners were invited to workshops and training days to improve understanding and encourage joined-up working to achieve common goals.

5.1.3. Support from Natural England / Countryside Agency

There is a lot of good practice in ROWIP implementation using schemes formerly established by the Countryside Agency. In particular, many authorities are using Parish Path groups to help with assessments and to deliver actions (for examples see appendix 1 e.g. **Durham**, or **Shropshire**). A number are also using Parish Plans to help identify local needs, and to help with prioritisation.

¹⁸ http://www.iprow.co.uk/gpg/index.php/Main_Page

Fourteen ROWIPs make reference to the “Milestones” approach. The “Milestones” approach was introduced by the Countryside Commission¹⁹, with the aim of improving the condition and the legal definition of PROW. There were three elements; legally defined, properly maintained and well-publicised.

Some authorities have regarded the ROWIP as a new milestones statement, ten years on. Particularly in authorities where they have continued to produce internal “milestones reports” for elected members, this may help place the ROWIP within a conceptual or strategic framework of understanding in the organisation, particularly in terms of annual reporting. In some ways the logical structure of “legally defined, properly maintained and well publicised” has helped the highway authority structure aspects of their existing network provision and management. The principles are still relevant to users and managers of the PROW network.

- Both Nottinghamshire and East Sussex note the differences between ROWIPs and the former Milestones approach - notably that wider issues than just statutory ROW duties should be considered and that broader conclusions should be reached, rather than site-specific assessments;
- Slough (page 17 - 20) uses the milestones approach to outline the state of the current local rights of way network, leading to a discussion of outstanding Definitive Map work, the condition of the network and existing or potential promotion for routes;
- The Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead call their annual report “Milestones Statement and Public Rights of Way Improvement Plan Review” - and base the report on the original milestone methodology - dividing the three aspects of the national target into component tasks, setting out what remains to be done, setting targets and monitoring progress (page 4 and 6);
- Warrington (page 29) say, “...*The ROWIP has broadened the remit of the Rights of Way team and it will be necessary to re-appraise the delivery of the Rights of Way function including the impact of the ROWIP actions on the existing Rights of Way*”

¹⁹ In November 1993 the Countryside Commission published “National targets for rights of way: A guide to the Milestones Approach”, which was the recommended way forward for all highway authorities. The target was for all PROW to be legally defined, properly maintained and well-publicised by the year 2000.

goals currently identified in annual "milestones statements". A revised "milestones statement" will be produced during summer 2007...";

- Gloucestershire build on figures from their 1996 Milestones Statement about the number of bridges on the network (page 13), number of years of remaining legal caseload (page 83), and their priority guidelines for dealing with requests for action (page 72).

A number of authorities are expecting a grant scheme from Natural England to implement their ROWIPs - despite all advice to the contrary. This attitude hinders securing ROWIP integration into other schemes and initiatives of the authority or partners.

*"Natural England will have to pay if we are to deliver on this plan", rather than,
"We have to deliver so will have to find a way to make it work, we have worked hard so far, we must now be creative to match our projects with the funding opportunities available"*

5.1.4. The relationship between ROWIPs and Natural England's outcomes

Natural England's strategic outcomes, from "Natural England: Strategic Direction, 2008 - 2013" are:

- Outcome 1 : A healthy natural environment;
- Outcome 2 : People are inspired to value and conserve the natural environment;
- Outcome 3 : The use and management of the natural environment is more sustainable;
- Outcome 4 : Decisions that collectively secure the future of the natural environment.

The ROWIP process, if done well, should result in plans which deliver many actions to meet these outcomes.

5.1.4.1. A healthy natural environment

All authorities have statements of intent to conserve the natural environment (three authorities carried out Strategic Environmental Assessments²⁰ and a one further considered it²¹). Good ROWIPs should include actions which allow access for as many people as possible to enjoy as many places as possible, while continuing to preserve important habitats.

Generally ROWIPs do not include specific references to improving the environment or biodiversity and few refer to the links between the ROWIP and the Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP). Examples of the few that do include :

- Norfolk's ROWIP has a specific objective on protecting and enhancing biodiversity associated with public rights of way, and a useful section setting out processes/standards;
- Gloucestershire's ROWIP (page 46);
- Devon (page 52).

²⁰ This relates to European Directive 2001/42/EC (transposed into UK law by the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004) on the environmental assessment of certain plans and programmes which are likely to have significant environmental effects. It involves a report on likely significant environmental effects, consultation with environmental authorities and the public, and taking account of the results of this before the adoption of the plan. The adopted plan must then show how the environmental assessment was taken into account.

²¹ North Yorkshire County Council completed an SEA (page 68 - 69, plus an additional assessment on the ROWIP impact on Natura 2000 sites) - clearly a lot of work, resulting in strong biodiversity links throughout the ROWIP and an additional policy being developed.

Redcar-Cleveland (page 12) took the findings from the SEA completed for their LTP.

Leicestershire (page 22) undertook an SEA as part of its LTP - noting that greater provision for walking and cycling (with benefits for air quality, health and congestion) will lead to a greater awareness of environmental protection and enhancement.

Joint Tyne and Wear (page 6) considered it to be inappropriate (due to limited environmental impacts compared to major development schemes).

5.1.4.2. People are inspired to value and conserve the natural environment

This outcome best demonstrates the links between the aims of Natural England and those of the highway authorities. Natural England wants people to be inspired by and engage with the natural environment and to understand its importance for economic and social well-being

Through the ROWIP process authorities have gained an increased understanding of what is required to help more people enjoy the natural environment, in particular through consultation they have identified the barriers preventing people exploring the countryside, both physical barriers (stiles, steps etc), and intellectual barriers such as lack of knowledge of where to go and fear of getting lost.

As part of Outcome 2, Natural England is working to develop the evidence base to demonstrate the health and well-being benefits of the natural environment and its contribution to health service provision. The links to health benefits enjoyed a high profile in all ROWIPs, with the exercise potential and benefits of the network well-integrated. Some good practice includes:

- Hertfordshire (page 63) - are committed to working with the health sector, increasing opportunities for people in health deprivation areas to participate in a programme of regular, short health walks. The authority will identify, through mapping, areas or groups of people with the greatest potential for improved health through increased exercise using rights of way or other routes away from roads;
- Medway (page 12) include an example of a successful partnership with the PCT;
- Leicestershire made excellent links to the health agenda throughout the ROWIP (pages 3, 9, 12, 29, 47 - 53) including an excellent overview of the policy framework and links to the Local Area Agreement. The statement of action includes improved coordination of the work of all the agencies involved (page 105);
- Durham (page 22 and page 88) makes good links to the health agenda;
- Oldham identified health benefits as outcomes of an improved network;
- Bury (page 77) are going to offer talks to weight watchers and slimming world groups to promote walking;

- Sandwell (page 108) links specific network improvements to existing health walks.

One of Natural England's objectives includes working with The Health Department, health authorities and health providers to ensure that recreation and access to the natural environment is recognised and funded as a central and cost-effective part of public health. A related target includes expanding the "Walking your way to Health Initiative" (WHI). Many ROWIPs make good references to WHI and are committed to expanding local schemes (for example, **Stoke on Trent** page 6, **Joint Tyne and Wear** page 62, **Warrington** page 25 - 26 and page 34, **Cheshire** page 22).

Shropshire have a "Walking for Life" project in partnership with the PCT, which links to the health and inclusion outcomes in the Access Strategy.²²

One of Natural England's targets is to ensure the provision of an accessible network of places and routes that give people the chance of access and enjoy a high quality natural environment at local, regional and national levels. As key national strategic routes - the 'flag ships' of the rights of way network - National Trails are supported by Natural England and are managed and promoted to a much higher standard than other rights of way. They are internationally-recognised routes and bring tourism and trade to local businesses.

Few authorities have made full benefit of the research and data available on condition carried out on National Trails, and have not made reference to this data as part of the assessment of the quality of the network. An exception and example of a good practice case-study on the economic benefits of National Trails includes:

²² <http://www.theaccesscompany.co.uk/uploads/File/SCCrowipWorkshop.pdf>

Kent (page 48) which makes the point that the wider economic benefits are multiplied in a rural area geographically close to the trail, in this case the North Downs Way National Trail.

Most ROWIPs failed to (at least explicitly) make the most of the economic benefits of National Trails, despite a wealth of data available. Although many ROWIPs made reference to National Trail routes in their area when considering the economic benefits of countryside access, few supported their strategy links with National Trail data. This has only been done well in relation to the South West Coast Path :

- North Somerset: (page 3) *"The South West Coast National Trail has been judged the greatest asset to tourism in the region; research suggests that the total economic value derived from the Coast Path is at least £143m per annum. In Somerset, it is estimated that local households and visiting friends and relatives using the Coast Path account for some £34m in spending each year"* ;
- Somerset (page 30) *"The South West Coast Path National Trail and other regionally promoted trails are a major contributing factor to the economy of Somerset ...research undertaken on the South West Coast Path estimated that it generates £300 million a year for the economy of the region and supports over 7,500 jobs, with over a quarter of visitors to the south west coming solely to walk the trail. Local users of the trail also contribute a similar value as visitors to the local economy."*

5.1.4.3. The use and management of the natural environment is more sustainable

One of Natural England's commitments is to influence all levels of national, regional and local government to ensure that the natural environment is valued for its own sake and for the contribution it can make to economic and social well-being. Natural England has new statutory duties under the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 to work with local authorities and Government Offices to develop

Local Area Agreements for improved community infrastructure to enhance access to high quality natural environments.

Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs) are responsible for developing and driving the Local Area Agreements (LAA's)²³ in each area and are key "place-shaping" mechanisms for addressing cross-cutting sustainable development issues. The success of the ROWIP within this framework may partly depend on having the right representation - where the blend of policies, partnerships and joined up working between local authority departments that ROWIPs encourage, are able to influence key stakeholders. It may be left to the rights of way officer to influence this political agenda which may prove challenging. Some rights of way officers have successfully joined in the LAA discussion, for example Lancashire and Cornwall, others (at the time of this report) have found it very difficult to access, or are unaware of what is happening.

Cornwall County Council have done useful work on linking rights of way with LAA indicators and have identified a list of the new indicators relevant to the ROWIP.

²³ LSP's are multi-agency partnerships matching the local authority areas and bringing together parts of the private, public, voluntary and community sectors with the aim of more effective joint working. All LSPs must work within the context of their LAA's, demonstrating how they are narrowing the gap for deprived areas.

LAA's set out the priorities for a local area, agreed between central government, the Local Authority and Local Strategic Partnership and other key partners. LAA's simplify some central funding, help join up public services more effectively, and allow greater flexibility for local solutions to local circumstances. Through these means, LAA's should devolve decision making, move away from a "Whitehall knows best" philosophy and reduce bureaucracy. New LAA arrangements were included in the White Paper "Strong and Prosperous Communities" in October 2007.

5.1.4.4. A secure environmental future - decisions which collectively secure the future of the natural environment.

Natural England is committed to working with Government to ensure that planning delivers development which includes access to the natural environment close to where people live (see appendix 1 for examples of good practice in linking with the planning agenda.) There is great potential for authorities to benefit from the planning process through S.106 agreements. However, it is apparent that this opportunity is not being grasped in some authorities. Of the 52% of authorities reporting that the ROWIP had resulted in improved access to resources, only fifteen (30%) access funds through S.106 agreements to deliver ROWIP actions. The authorities that have successfully secured S.106 funding report significant opportunities, with one authority reporting this as being up to £700,000 in one year, another reporting receiving six times their annual rights of way budget through S.106 agreements.

The ROWIP process, having identified where gaps in provision exist, should make it easier for authorities to secure improvements through the planning process. Some rights of way staff have made good links with their colleagues in development control, including :

- Herefordshire have integrated the ROWIP into the Local Development Framework;
- Hertfordshire have linked the ROWIP to supplementary planning guidance in the Local Development Framework to ensure non-motorised network improvements are included in all developments (page 65);
- Norfolk include an action to train planners so they better understand rights of way (page 44).

Often it has been the unitary authorities who have made the closest links and benefited most from S.106 opportunities. 53% of authorities reporting additional S.106 benefits are unitary authorities. This is possibly due to it being easier to

find the right people to talk to in a smaller authority, or due to closer working practices.

- In Tyne and Wear a short new bridleway link was secured through S.106 which, while only creating approximately 500m of new route, linked the main access network to key residential areas;
- Nottingham City ROWIP makes good links (page 7 - 10) to their Local Plan, Structure Plan and National planning policies. These are stated in turn and then given local explanation / relevance.

County Councils operating in a two-tier system may be able to benefit from development proposals passing through their own authority, but often find it very difficult to make the links with the district councils. Authorities reported experiencing difficulties knowing what applications are being handled by district councils, and so being unable to identify possible opportunities. Authorities with good internal GIS systems have been able to benefit from S.106 better than those without, a good GIS with global access allows all officers to be able to see what developments are proposed, overlaid with their own information, for example the definitive map, or mapped gaps in access provision. Doing this level of analysis without GIS is much more difficult.

5.2. National Park Authorities

The research included an evaluation of the experiences, successes and barriers that National Parks Authorities (NPAs) faced incorporating their interests into ROWIPs. This was done through informal interviews with officers from the English National Parks.

The relationships between NPAs and local authorities is complicated in many areas by overlapping boundaries. Many National Park Authorities are involved with more than one ROWIP²⁴ :

²⁴ and likewise, some local authorities were tasked with writing ROWIPs that included more than one National Park.

- **Peak District National Park Authority** - involved with seven different ROWIPs (Derbyshire, Barnsley, Kirklees, Oldham, Cheshire, Staffordshire, Sheffield City Council)
- **New Forest National Park Authority** - involved with two ROWIPs (Hampshire and Wiltshire)
- **North York Moors National Park Authority** - involved with two ROWIPs (North Yorkshire and Redcar and Cleveland)
- **Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority** - involved with two ROWIPs (North Yorkshire and Cumbria)
- **The Broads Authority** - involved with two ROWIPs (Norfolk and Suffolk)

Only four National Parks are involved with a single ROWIP :

- **Dartmoor, Exmoor, Lake District and Northumberland National Park Authorities,**

Three authorities worked with two NPAs :

- **North Yorkshire County Council** - North York Moors and the Yorkshire Dales
- **Cumbria County Council** - Yorkshire Dales and the Lake District
- **Devon County Council** - Exmoor and Dartmoor

Although the South Downs has yet to become a National Park, it was treated as one in East Sussex's ROWIP - and was dealt with separately from the rest of the authority area.

5.2.1. Involvement in writing the ROWIP

The level of involvement in writing ROWIPs varied from close relationships with regular meetings and joint working, to merely being offered an opportunity to comment on the draft plan. Some NPAs wrote their own 'chapters' which were incorporated into the ROWIP as a separate section. A positive outcome is that even those who were involved late on in the process found that their comments were taken on board and most are content with the final ROWIPs.

5.2.2. Issues relating to National Parks

The timescales of the ROWIP process have not made integration easy for some NPAs - especially those working with more than one authority and more than one timescale. The New Forest NPA found this difficult as the NPA was created half way through the ROWIP process but have been closely involved.

Most NPAs would have preferred to have written their own ROWIPs, especially those crossing authority boundaries. It has proved difficult to match the management standards of the large county councils with those of the NPAs - what may be an ambitious improvement in management to a local authority may be a backward step to a NPA. For example many NPAs use sustainably sourced timber for fingerposts, whereas the neighbouring highway authority may use a cheaper alternative. Neither would wish to change their specification merely to achieve unity in a ROWIP statement of action.

The process has been challenging for the authorities too, especially for those large authorities covering more than one National Park. Trying to meet the needs of the authority and take into account the needs of the National Parks has led to some ROWIPs becoming very long documents. In some cases the National Park chapter feels very different in style and content to the rest of the ROWIP reflecting the different author.

5.2.3. Effect on relationships between National Park Authorities and their neighbours

Some NPAs already had excellent relationships with the local authorities, others less so. In almost all cases the ROWIP has improved relationships. Comments included:

"... it has improved relationships with all authorities, even those who do not work closely with the NPA"

"It has improved relationships between the 3 of us, given us a common focus, discussion points when we meet up - rather than discussing historic issues that we haven't managed to resolve, we now discuss development projects instead!"

In some cases the ROWIP has not changed working relationships. One NPA reported that the ROWIP has made no difference to their relationships with neighbouring authorities, another that the relationships between individual officers may have become strong but that does not necessarily improve the relationship with the authority - that depends more on how influential the officer is within the hierarchy.

Overall the fact that authorities and NPAs have had to work together on ROWIPs has improved or strengthened relationships between them.

5.2.4. Access to funds

Generally the large rural authorities covering National Parks have found it difficult to link with the Local Transport Plan, for example North Yorkshire, Somerset, Devon and Cumbria County Councils. Exmoor NPA reported that both Somerset and Devon County Councils have been unable to find a way to link their ROWIP objectives of the NPA with those of the LTP.

Small achievements were cited by Northumberland NPA through the County Council's proactive approach in securing money from the LTP to repair a path.

Some NPAs feel hampered in not being able to directly influence the LTP, but a majority trust local authorities to do all they can on their behalf.

5.2.5. Outcomes for National Parks

The NPAs are content that their aims and priorities have been included in the ROWIPs - the Peak Park Authority, despite the complexity of being covered by 7 different ROWIPs, are very happy with all of these ROWIPs as all include NPA priorities. To the National Park Authority this is a major achievement and improvement on the previous position.

Most (91%) NPAs consider the process has been very beneficial in some respects. One officer reported *"Initially I was sceptical. I thought 'not another strategy to write', but now I think it really useful. It is much better than it was before"*. One authority found it less positive - an officer reported being *"indifferent - it has neither been positive nor negative."* Contributing to the ROWIP has taken up time, and the end product does not always fit well with the other strategies and policies of the National Park. The NPAs are already working well and have their own management plans and access strategies which are more important to the authority than the ROWIP.

Several officers reported that they think the ROWIP process has worked better in smaller areas - large county areas are just too big to be covered by one plan.

Positive outcomes include :

- Clearer prioritised focus on activity as a result of comprehensive consultation;
- Consensus on what is needed;
- Work is better planned and more strategic;
- It has encouraged the NPAs to broaden their agendas and look at health links etc;
- It has increased access to resources, in particular through the Local Transport Plan.

“So far so good, a very useful working programme of improvements to strive towards ... because we have been quite prescriptive it has been a solid foundation to apply for funds either within authority or externally.

We are now project-driven for seeking funds, as opposed to seeking funds without thinking about projects first.

We now have a clear framework for linking well into LTP / LDF ...”

“There are no negative aspects - it is much better than it was before.”

5.3. Local Access Forums (LAFs)

Generally we have been disappointed at the low profile of LAFs. Too many authorities have missed the opportunity to fully involve their forums from the start. It should have been a chance to promote and advertise the LAF's work as well as to use their connections and expertise. It appears that a high proportion of LAFs have taken, or been given, a back seat.

Most, but not all, authorities reported working with their LAF during the writing of the ROWIP. Three-quarters of authorities work with one LAF, a number work with two LAFs, and two authorities work with three.

Outer London Boroughs are not required to have a LAF, and none reported that they had set one up.

In total only fourteen authorities reported that they have not been involved with any LAFs

- 11 of these are London Boroughs which are not required to establish a LAF
- 2 outside London yet to work with a LAF include :
 - Southend-on-Sea which has struggled to establish a LAF;
 - Hull City Council which has only just started work on the ROWIP but has plans to work with the LAF;
 - York where the LAF was disbanded, York is now covered by North Yorkshire LAF.

5.3.1. Attendance at meetings

Most LAFs meet 4 times per year; some meeting as often as every 1 or 2 months, and some as little as twice per year. Generally, frequency of meetings has reduced as the ROWIP neared completion, and work relating to open access has reduced.

Attendance at meetings varies, with LAFs in rural areas better attended. LAFs in unitary authority areas have more problems retaining members. Only 3% of LAFs in rural areas are 'poorly attended', whereas 16% of LAFs in unitary areas are.

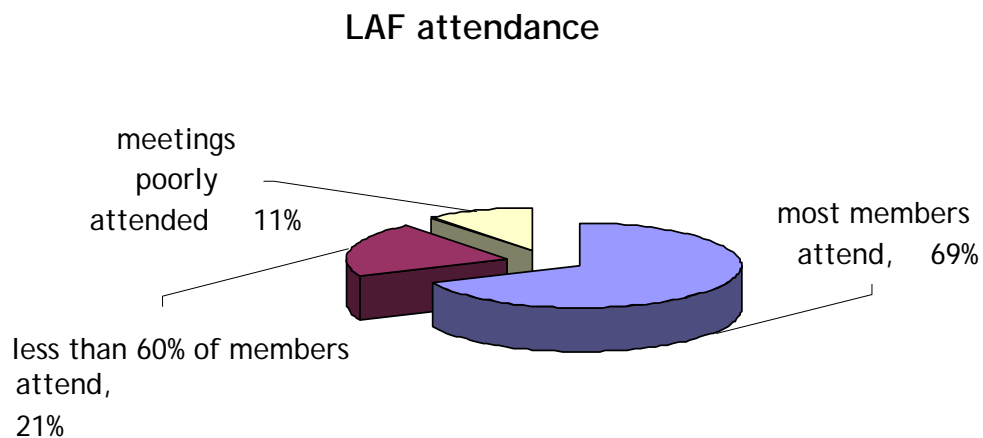


Figure 6 - LAF attendance at meetings

Comments from LAF members and officers suggest that LAFs in some unitary areas are not clear what their role is and the members become disillusioned and stop attending meetings. In particular landowners are unlikely to continue to attend meetings if they cannot see any benefit. Many landowners were particularly interested in open access implementation, and no longer feel they can commit time to the LAF.

"The more you put in to the LAF the more you get out"

This comment was made by more than one LAF officer. But unfortunately not all authorities have the resources to put enough in; this is particular problem for small authorities where the ROWIP and LAF are only a small part of an officer's job.

It is generally recognised that LAFs require a lot of support - officers spend a lot of time preparing for meetings and answering requests for information. In some cases up to half of an officer's working week is spent servicing the LAF. Some LAFs work well and local authorities get more back than they put in. The majority feel that they do not benefit from the LAF, given the time invested.

One commented that "*The only benefit of the LAF is that it makes me think*", another said "*Our LAF is increasingly valuable, much more so than could have been predicted*".

Where LAFs do not feel valued, and that their views are not taken into account, attendance generally falls.

Good practice examples of LAF involvement in the ROWIP include :

- **Staffordshire** good involvement with the joint LAF throughout the document, for example page 11 and appendix E. Setting themes (page 139), priorities and linking these to LTP objectives (page 93-4);
- **Lancashire** (page 34 - 35) documents the LAF involvement throughout the process;
- **Cumbria** (pages 8 and 15) describes the involvement of the LAF early in the document;
- **Isle of Wight** (pages 11 - 12) - lists advice from the LAF in the ROWIP.

5.3.2. LAF involvement with writing the ROWIP

The level of involvement varies widely across the country with some LAFs involved at a peripheral level and others closely involved with the development and implementation of the ROWIP.

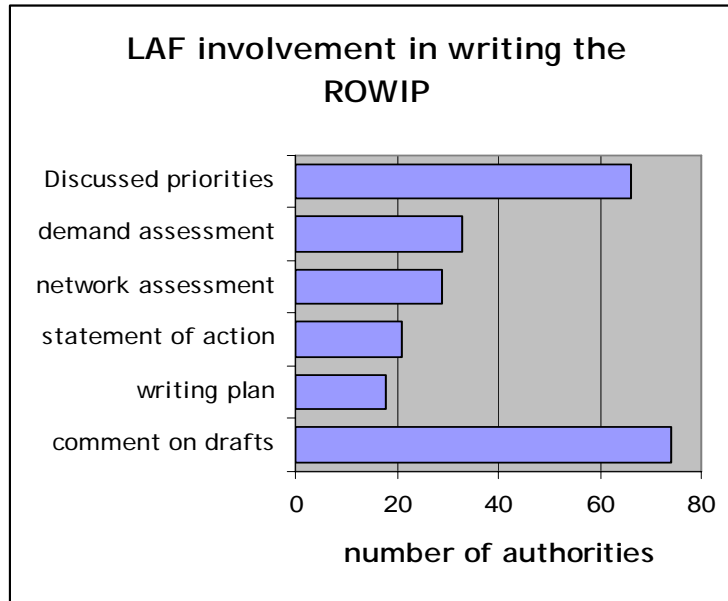


Figure 7 - how authorities responding to the questionnaire are involving their LAF

Almost all LAFs (98%) have been asked to comment on draft ROWIPs. However unless this has been preceded by discussion on priorities and the assessment stages, this does not demonstrate full engagement with the LAF.

- Ten (12%) authorities encouraged the LAF to be involved in all stages including writing the ROWIP;
- Twenty (24%) only asked the LAF for advice on priorities and to read drafts;
- Eleven authorities (13%) have only asked the LAF to comment on the draft plan and have not involved them in other stages.

Many LAFs would have preferred to be more involved, but lack of resources coupled with the frequency of meetings meant that this has not been possible for some. Trafford stated *"We are having our ROWIP written - we cannot afford to involve the LAF, if we did we would not have enough money to pay the consultant"*.

5.3.3. LAF involvement with implementing the ROWIP

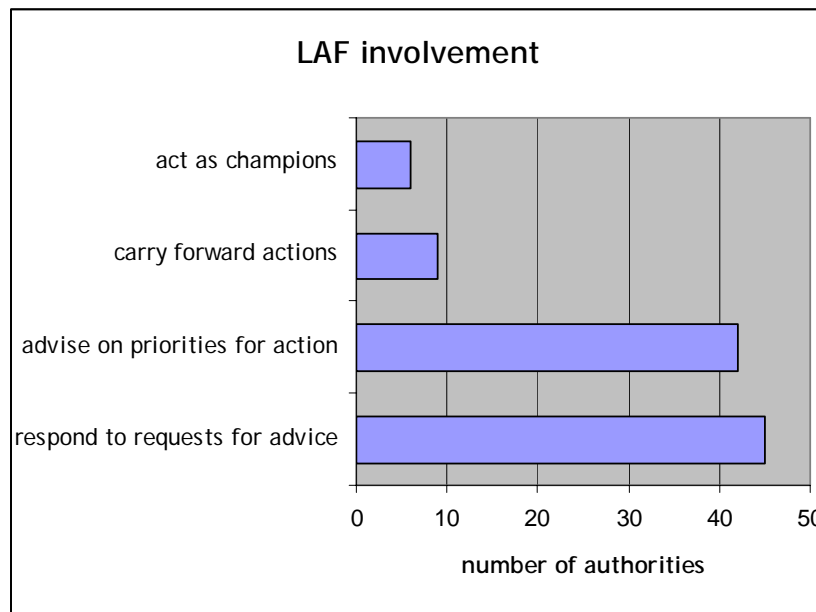


Figure 8 - how authorities involve the LAF in implementation

As with writing the ROWIP there is a wide variety in the level of involvement of the LAF in implementing the ROWIP. Of the fifty-three ROWIPs which were being implemented when the questionnaire was sent out :

- Only two involve the LAF fully, with LAF members acting as champions for themes in the action plan, taking an active role in carrying forward actions and advising on priorities for action
- Five have LAF members taking on 2 of these roles :
 - Four LAFs take an active role in implementing actions and advise on priorities;
 - One LAF advises on priorities and members act as champions for themes in the action plan.
- Only 50% of LAFs advise the authority on priorities for action;
- 36% authorities implementing the ROWIP are not involving the LAF in any active roles.

As LAF members gain confidence a division is appearing between those willing to take an active role, and those wishing to retain a strategic role. The LAFs which are being more active tend to be in areas with little access land, where the LAF was unsure of what it

could do and has developed its own role. A good example is **Peterborough** where LAF members are actively identifying gaps in the network and meeting landowners to discuss creating new links. Not all LAF members want to take on practical work, in some cases due to time constraints, or due to the awareness that LAFs were set up to be strategic advisory groups. However as access land ceases to require less work some LAFs are unsure of exactly what their 'strategic' role is - they do not envisage merely commenting on consultation documents.

For some LAFs both approaches are embraced, with the main LAF meeting remaining strategic, but smaller sub groups addressing specific issues, for example **Northumberland LAF** where a sub group is looking at severance of the network.

A small number of LAFs expressed interest in supporting the authority in funding bids, either by providing evidence of community support, or even by acting as partners to access funds not available to local authorities. The majority however do not feel that their role should involve fund raising.

LAF's have a key role in ensuring the delivery of the ROWIP progresses. Few ROWIPs specifically mention how they will report on progress to their LAF, although **Bury** do this on page 136.

5.3.4. LAFs not taking an active role

In nine cases the LAFs appear to take a less active role - their involvement confined to commenting on draft reports and responding to requests for advice. Two-thirds (6) of these report that the LAF is poorly attended, or that less than 60% of members attend, suggesting these LAFs are not functioning well.

A number of authority's questionnaire responses suggest the LAF has not been very involved. We identified twelve such authorities. Of these, six have yet to publish a final ROWIPs, the others are :

- **Bracknell, Medway and Rochdale**, all of which produced ROWIPs which did not demonstrate full LAF engagement with the process;
- **Bury, Stoke on Trent and Swindon** were fit-for-purpose, but lacking in detail or content. **Stoke on Trent** made no mention of the LAF although they plan a forum of partners / stakeholders to develop and review the plan - which would appear to be the role of the LAF;

- Bracknell does mention an action relating to the LAF - to link ROWIP reporting to the LAF annual report;
- Bury includes information on the LAF role in monitoring and review despite an overall low profile in the ROWIP (page 136).

5.3.5. Volunteers

Less than half (45%) of ROWIPs have any involvement from volunteers outside the LAF.

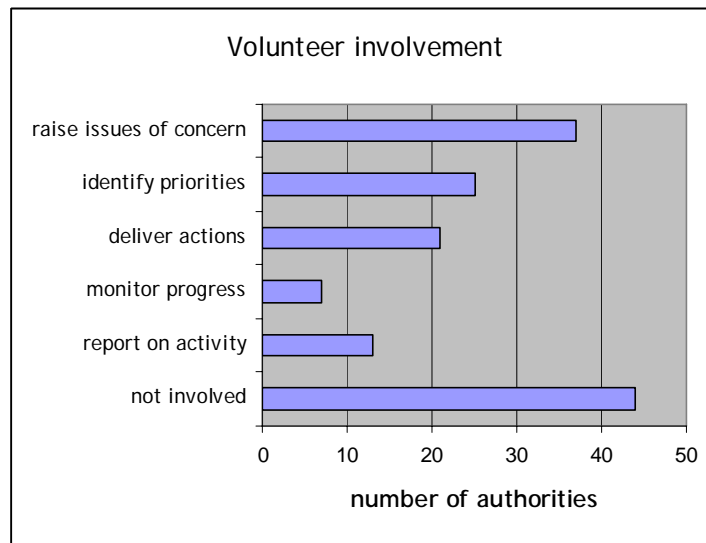


Figure 9 - how authorities responding to the questionnaire involve volunteers

The level of involvement varies but :

- 38% authorities report that volunteers report issues of concern to them;
- 26% involve volunteers in identifying priorities;
- In 21% of local highway authorities preparing ROWIPs volunteers actively help to deliver actions;
- In 5% volunteers report to the authority on activity they undertake which contributes to ROWIP delivery.

Four authorities report that the LAF is poorly attended, and that volunteers are not involved with the ROWIP. This raises concerns about community involvement in the ROWIP and authority commitment to the ROWIP process. Three of these authorities have finished their ROWIPs, all of which scored well in our assessment. This suggests that despite the

lack of LAF involvement the authorities are committed to the ROWIP process, and have ensured that local opinions have been sought through other channels.

6. The impacts of the ROWIP process

6.1. Aims of the ROWIP process

The duty for Local Highway Authorities to prepare a Rights of Way Improvement Plan is in section 60 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000²⁵ (the CROW Act). The CROW Act aims to improve access to the countryside for everyone, and ROWIPs are part of that process.

The overall aim of a ROWIP is :

- to provide local highway authorities with a mechanism through which they can assess how well their rights of way network serves the current and future needs of the public;
- and to propose improvements to meet these needs.

ROWIPs provide authorities with the opportunity to :

- change the management of rights of way;
- provide a first opportunity to consider access in its broadest sense;
- seek changes to the historical network and work proactively.

Many authorities have embraced these concepts, some with great enthusiasm and boldness using the ROWIP process to not only re-evaluate the network, but also to assess the workings of the authority and to propose changes in procedures and restructuring in order to better meet the needs of the public.

Inner London Authorities and “4 star” or “excellent” authorities (as rated by the Audit Commission) do not have to prepare a ROWIP or follow the DEFRA guidance. We are not aware of any inner London Boroughs which have chosen to write a ROWIP, and at the time of this report we are only aware of two final ROWIPs from an outer London Borough, although Natural England are working with the boroughs to complete outer London coverage. Most “excellent” authorities have chosen to produce a ROWIP, recognising the

²⁵ http://www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts2000/ukpga_20000037_en_5#pt2-pb3-l1g60

benefits to the authority and the public of taking a positive proactive look at access provision in their area.

Two ROWIPs mention their decision to produce a ROWIP even with “4 star” or “excellent” status:

- Leicestershire (page 19), *“... Ironically, this removed the formal requirement to produce both a Local Transport Plan and a Rights Of Way Improvement Plan. The authority recognizes the importance of both documents to properly plan and manage the service and has therefore chosen to continue with the process. It also provides opportunities for seeking external funding aside from the county rate payer....”*;
- Durham (page 9), *“...Durham County Council, as a four star authority (Audit Commission) could opt out of the process of producing a Plan, but felt this was too good an opportunity to miss!”*

“Excellent” rated authorities face a further challenge in terms of improving the countryside access network. By implication, they are likely to be authorities where there were already a number of good-practice or access development projects regularly underway. For example, Kent’s ROWIP appendix showcases this type of work. This however, doesn’t mean that such authorities had nothing to gain from the ROWIP *process* - reaching out to understand the needs of local people and non-users, making links with other strategic documents; wider agendas and external partners, and raising the profile of countryside access politically.

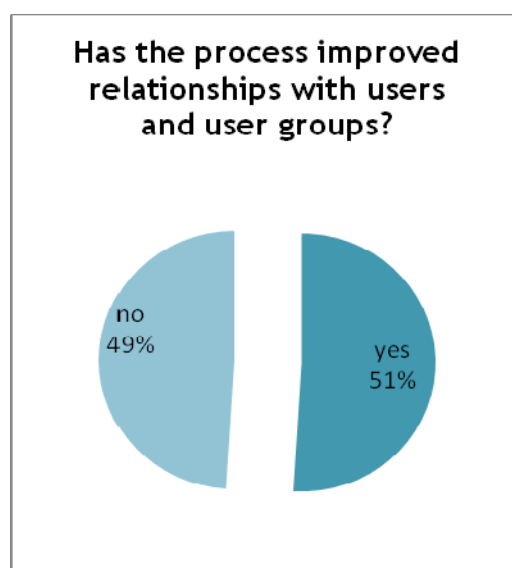
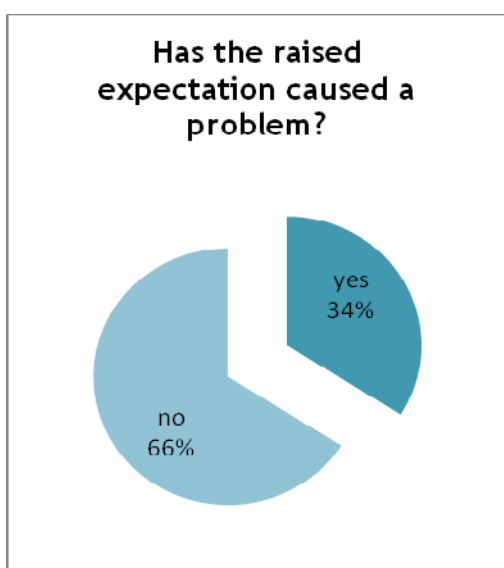
Overall the ROWIP process has been successful with 96% of authorities responding to the questionnaire identifying at least one positive benefit.

The comment “It has been painful, but worth it!” was made by more than one officer - and sums up the process.

At the outset many authorities were concerned about the resources required to carry out the research, and to write the report. They also expressed concerns about raising

expectations through the consultation process which could not be met, which could result in frustration and disappointment.

34% of authorities responding to the questionnaire reported that this raised expectation has caused them a problem; having brought issues to the attention of the authority the public are keen to know when they will be resolved and in turn puts pressure on officers already struggling with a busy workload. Despite this more than half of the authorities responding report that the ROWIP process has resulted in improved relationships with users and user groups.



Figures 10 and 11 above illustrate these impacts of the ROWIP process

6.2. Changes to authority culture

A main aim of the ROWIP process was to integrate the work of the rights of way team into that of the rest of the authority. This is a big cultural shift for many authorities. Smaller, unitary authorities have generally achieved this better than the larger, better resourced authorities. Where unitary authorities have been able to embrace the ROWIP concept they have generally been very successful in making the links and in using these to access resources.

Sandwell have made excellent links with other agendas to access funds; the rights of way team recognise that the work of a rights of way officer involves more than an understanding of the law and the complexities of the definitive map; they do have to engage with the public and understand what the network means to them.

Initiatives include increased emphasis on accessing S.106 funds, health benefit links and a close relationship with the Primary Care Trust and a “Walk to Beijing” project to encourage children to walk to school (the project adds up the distances walked by children in each competing school, rewarding those that do best, with the aim of jointly walking enough miles to reach Beijing).

In addition, the rights of way team are working more proactively to deal with problems before they arise, reducing the number of complaints and improving the efficiency of the team. Initiatives include examining complaints and identifying patterns, for example identifying all paths which receive regular complaints about vegetation growth and including them in an annual strimming or spraying programme.

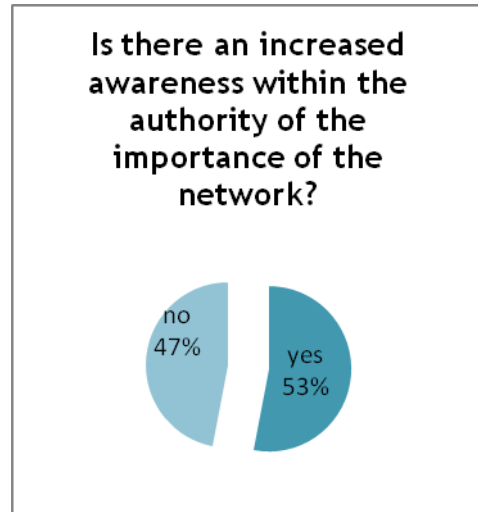
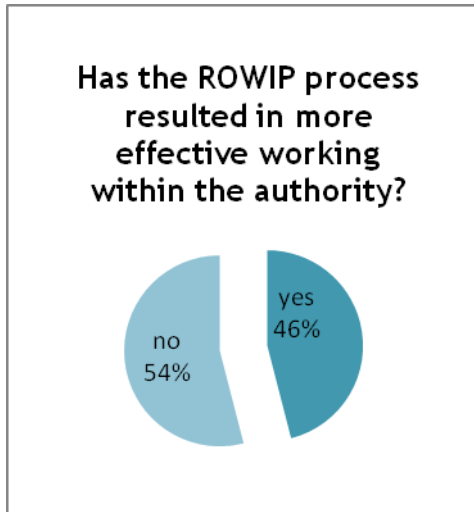
Some of the larger county councils have worked hard and achieved this integration; in others it is less apparent. In some cases one officer is tasked with ‘delivering’ the ROWIP, and can feel isolated.

Two of the exemplar authorities, **Dorset** and **Bedfordshire**, identified the need to restructure their internal systems in order to deliver the ROWIP.

Bedfordshire commented :

“The ROWIP has had a BIG influence on the work of the authority - we have restructured everything to fit in with it. It has resulted in a massive cultural shift away from network management and onto managing for people.”

Almost half (46%) of authorities reported that the ROWIP process has resulted in an improvement in effective working within the authority, reflecting the work done by officers to understand how their work fits in, and the effort they have made to build relationships and explain to others within the authority the relevance and importance of their work. 53% report that there is increased awareness within the authority of the importance of the network.



Figures 12 and 13 above illustrate the impact of ROWIPs within the authority

Warwickshire County Council produced one of the early ROWIPs, but despite this the ROWIP is good and has changed the authority's way of working from reacting to complaints to working proactively and positively. Warwickshire have linked the ROWIP to the Transport Asset Management Plan (TAMP) to help fund day to day maintenance.

6.3. Impact of the ROWIP process on the definitive map

Prior to the ROWIP process, authorities prioritised maintenance, responding to complaints and definitive map work - in varying orders. The ROWIP process has enabled them to look beyond these tasks, and reprioritise their work. This has impacted on how authorities are working on their definitive map. Approximately a third (30%) still allocate top priority to work on the definitive map and legal orders. However, an increasing number are moving away from this approach and prioritising practical improvements that users can see, in response to the ROWIP consultation and raised profile. From the questionnaire, 17% of authorities awarded definitive map work the lowest score, indicating it had no priority.

For example, Lancashire County Council have identified clear policies relating to the definitive map and are not giving any priority to legal event orders. The policies in the ROWIP ensure that any changes to the definitive map benefit as many people as possible, and meet as many of the aims of the ROWIP as possible. The example below is an extract from their ROWIP.

Policies under Theme DM - Definitive Map and Statement

Policy DM1: In deciding the priority we will give to researching Definitive Map Modification Order applications, we will take into account:

- the extent to which they will help **deliver other policies identified by the Plan**;
- the potential gains provided to the accuracy, **quality and extent of the network** available for public access;
- the extent to which they **help meet the needs of those with reduced mobility or impaired vision**.

Policy DM4: In assessing the proportion of diversion costs which we seek to recover, we will take into account whether or not the applicant:

- is prepared to alter the proposal to **further the other policies identified by the Plan** or to **add value to the network** in some way;
- agrees to divert paths to reduce potential for conflict between public usage and agricultural interests;
- provides adequate benefits to the public.

Policy DM6: We will not allocate additional resources to processing Legal Event Modification Orders and not prioritise consolidation of the Definitive Map within the life of this plan.

Many ROWIPs include an action to review the way definitive map modifications are made, and to develop a priority system to deal with requests for diversions and other applications.

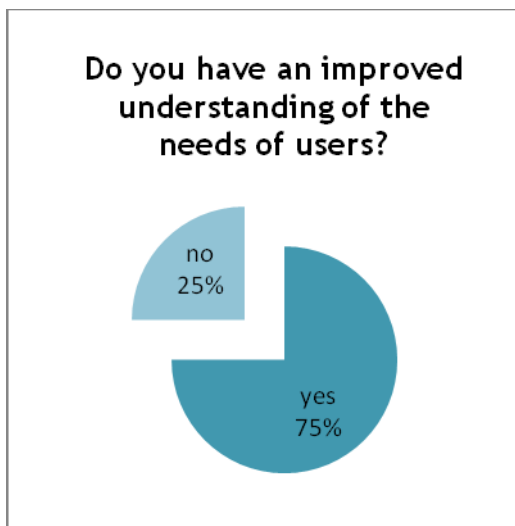
- Bradford identify that *"users and landowners expect a definitive map for the whole district that accurately reflects the location and status of public rights of way. They also want the information to be kept up to date and to be easily available for inspection."* To meet this need the statement of action includes : a commitment to give priority to applications where there is a potential strategic

value resulting from the application, or lack of action could result in permanent loss of a route. (page 70);

- Cheshire (page 93) are going to use examples of best practice from other authorities to develop and implement a system for prioritising legal work in consultation with the LAF.

6.4. Impact on relationships with users and others

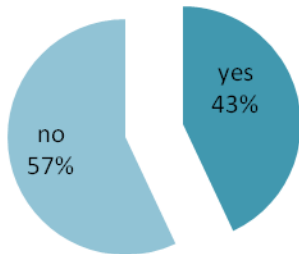
In order to properly understand use of the network, and what changes are needed authorities need to speak to a wide range of people including users and non-users of the network. In order to make the required changes they need to talk to a range of other people including people within their own authority, neighbouring authorities and external bodies. This process, which takes time and resources, has been particularly beneficial to improving relationships with users.



Figures 14, 15 and 16 illustrate the impact on relationships with users, neighbouring authorities and external bodies.

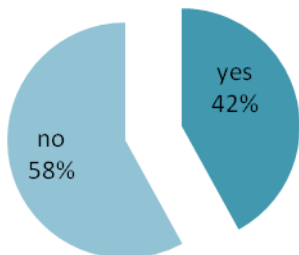
- 75% reported an improved understanding of the needs of users;

Has the ROWIP process improved relationships with neighbouring authorities?



- 43% reported improved relationships with neighbouring authorities;

Has the ROWIP process improved relationships with other external bodies?



- 42% have improved relationships with other external bodies.

6.5. Access to resources

An important benefit of the ROWIP process has been to integrate rights of way into the wider work of the authority. This has begun to achieve another key benefit - increased access to resources.

Leicestershire

"You don't get something for nothing - the ROWIP really does contribute to the wider picture and has been a significant help as a funding generator."

Many authorities have only just published their ROWIPs and have yet to start work on securing resources, however already a third of all authorities (whether implementing their ROWIP or not) report that the ROWIP has resulted in increased access to resources.

Generally (79%) authorities that have an adopted ROWIP and started implementation have secured additional funds:

- 45% have accessed funds through the LTP (sums of up to £300,000 per annum);
- 30% through S.106 agreements (one authority reported this as £700,000 in one year);
- 39% have benefited from the ROWIP releasing additional internal authority funds - often a significant increase on the previous budget.

But this hasn't been the case for everyone, 48% of all authorities reported they had secured no additional funds to implement their ROWIP.

Two authorities; **Cornwall** and **Bedfordshire**, have written ambitious ROWIPs and, recognising the need to attract additional resources, have employed dedicated funding officers. This has worked well for both authorities enabling them to deliver projects which would not have been possible in any other way.

There are many examples of good practice and case studies relating to funding - a number are given in appendix 8.

6.6. Increased awareness and familiarity with rights of way

Over half (53%) of authorities report increased awareness of the condition of the network having written their ROWIPs. Having taken time to identify their network, where it goes, and the condition it is in, many authorities are now able to work more proactively and to predict where problems may arise and pre-empt them. For example, **Sandwell** have demonstrated increased familiarity by establishing a spraying regime for urban paths to avoid weed growth and a strimming contract to keep the more rural paths open. Implementing these actions has reduced the number of complaints and work is planned to take place at the most appropriate time, instead of in an ad-hoc manner.

(See also section 2.11 for the benefits of the ROWIP process to large and small authorities).

7. Summary of key findings, issues and recommendations

7.1. Key findings

7.1.1. Progress

Two thirds of authorities met the deadline - and most others are well on the way to producing ROWIPs²⁶. The questionnaire was timed to coincide with the statutory deadline, and while the statistic above was true at that time, further ROWIPs were published during the writing of the report. The London Boroughs are generally further behind in the process, which impacted on the overall national statistic.

7.1.2. Quality

- Overall 85% of ROWIPs are fit for purpose;
- There are numerous examples of good practice in writing ROWIPs including in style, presentation, readability, scope and innovation;
- Two-thirds (66%) meet the requirements of section 60 of the CROW Act and the DEFRA guidance and include all required detail;
- 5% are excellent;
- 15% do not demonstrate full engagement with the ROWIP process, or do not fully meet the requirements;
- 80% of ROWIPs went beyond the statutory guidelines, 8% followed the guidelines precisely, and a further 12% barely exceeded them;
- 18% were excellent in this respect.

7.1.3. Overall impact

The ROWIP process has been beneficial. It has resulted in a change in the culture of authorities, and changed their way of working from being largely reactive to taking a proactive approach. A number of authorities have reorganised their internal structures as a direct result of the ROWIP, to better deliver the aims and objectives of the ROWIP. Network improvements are being made, benefiting users across the country. Many

²⁶ Section 2 and appendix 2 for more detail

authorities are committed to improving accessibility for all; to improve their understanding of the needs of disabled people; to remove barriers and open more easily accessible routes; and to provide good quality information to help all users enjoy the network.

7.2. Issues and recommendations

7.2.1. Rights of Way Improvement Plans

Accessibility and readability

- A small number of ROWIPs are difficult to access, suggesting that they are either not being made available to the public, or are not being used regularly by the rights of way staff;
- A number are overly complex and presented in a style which is not readily accessible to the public;
- A number include too much background information resulting in long documents.

Guidance is needed to help authorities ensure the ROWIP is accessible, either by improving the internet access, removing unnecessary details, or by publishing a summary when the ROWIP is reviewed.

Research

- A small number of ROWIPs appear to have been written as a desk exercise (without genuine engagement of local people) or have relied on national data;
- Some authorities didn't undertake enough outreach with some of the user groups, including blind and visually-impaired people, Black and Minority ethnic groups, potential users, MPV users, carriage drivers and dog walkers.

Regional officers should work with these authorities (identified in the regional summary reports) to ensure that these gaps are filled during the life of the ROWIP, in preparation for review.

Unrecorded routes

All except the very recently published ROWIPs make reference to Discovering Lost Ways and how this project will help them to achieve the aims of the ROWIP. With the ending of this initiative most ROWIPs are now unclear on how they will address unrecorded ways.

Guidance is needed on how ROWIPs should refer to unrecorded routes. Many authorities have not tackled this subject as they were waiting for the outcome of the Discovering Lost Ways project.

Cycle Tracks

Less than half the ROWIPs incorporate fully the cycle track element of the assessment. This is partly because the relationship between cycle tracks and bridleways is unclear - especially in terms of legal status, surfacing improvements and in the urban fringe.

Guidance and clarity is needed on the legal and practical differences between cycle tracks and bridleways - how to integrate the two, particularly in the urban fringe. This should include dissemination of good practice²⁷.

7.3. Links with other initiatives and organisations

Environmental Stewardship

Few ROWIPs make strong links to the existing environmental stewardship network or consider how they might integrate with stewardship (both in terms of filling identified gaps in the PROW network, accessibility of stewardship routes, and public awareness).

Natural England officers should work with local authorities to ensure that network gaps identified in ROWIPs are related to targets and priorities within environmental stewardship.

²⁷ Possibly through regional training sessions for PROW and LTP officers.

Links to LTP

- Not all ROWIPs have been successful in integrating their ROWIP with their LTP - or to convince their transport team colleagues of the ROWIP's relevance.
- More helpful guidance on Strategic Environmental Assessments (SEA) in relation to the ROWIP has been requested. SEAs are carried out to assess the impact of plans and projects within LTPs (see also section 5.1.4.1).

Natural England must promote the relevance of ROWIPs to other government bodies. For example, Natural England should use their influence to persuade the Department for Transport to issue guidance on merging ROWIPs and LTPs in the near future. This could include clarity on the relevance of Strategic Environmental Assessments.

Monitoring and reporting

Few authorities are monitoring or reporting on ROWIP implementation. There is no consistency of approach, even within joint ROWIPs and joint LAFs. This is a missed opportunity to demonstrate to the public and to politicians how effective and beneficial the ROWIP process is. With little evidence it will be difficult to prove what has been achieved nationally despite the excellent work being done by many authorities.

Guidance is needed to encourage authorities to monitor and evidence their progress, and to report on this in a systematic, comparable way.

Clarity is needed on the reporting relationship between the LTP monitoring framework and the ROWIP.

BVPI 178

All but the most recent ROWIPs refer to BVPI and many use this as the only indicator of the condition of the network and measure of progress. As authorities no longer have to carry out BVPI surveys there is now a gap in reliable statistics on rights of way, and many authorities are unable to demonstrate their progress towards meeting their targets.

Further research is required on the implications of the loss of BVPI 178 and the impact this is having on ROW teams. Our research identified a number of authorities who are continuing to use the indicator and others who are developing new ones - but without the benefit of national guidance.

Initial work to identify what is being done and share this with all authorities will save much duplication of effort.

7.4. Implementation

Funding and resources

Many ROWIPs are vague on identified funding, with many identifying Natural England as a key funding body. Many are failing to maximise the opportunities that exist to tap into S.106, and other key sources of income.

Provision of support and advice (including examples of good practice) for authorities in order to secure S.106 funds²⁸ and generally gain skills in evidencing improvements. Funding training events have been run in some regions - the good practice identified through these and other examples should be widely disseminated, and authorities encouraged to take up training opportunities where they exist.

Reviewing how legal work is undertaken and prioritised

Many authorities have recognised through the ROWIP process the need to change the way they handle applications to change the definitive map. Many include an action to review their internal process and develop new working systems.

While priorities vary across the country it would be beneficial for authorities to be able to work to clear, agreed guidelines for prioritising applications. It is likely that a number of the authorities who have been implementing their ROWIP for a year or more will have addressed this and developed systems for prioritising - these could be collated and

²⁸ Possibly through regional training sessions for planners and ROW staff.

compared to draw up a standard recommended approach which would be of benefit to the authorities just starting on implementation.

There is an opportunity here to prevent re-invention of the wheel - and to share emerging good practice. This could be done by regional contacts identifying who is working on this task and sharing the information either regionally or nationally via the Institute of Rights of Way officers (IPROW) good practice guide website.

Integration with the planning process

Many ROWIPs include in the statement of action a commitment to work more closely with planners and developers. Many identify the need to write guidance for planners and developers on rights of way.

There is an opportunity to share emerging good practice on guidance for planners and developers. This could be done through regional staff and disseminated nationally through the IPROW Good Practice Guide.

Role of the Planning Inspectorate

The ROWIP guidance states that Planning Inspectors should refer to and consider the authority's ROWIP in the course of their work. It is not clear to what extent this practice is already being used to help determine cases at public inquiry.

Guidance to local authorities and to the Planning Inspectorate should be published to clarify the role of the planning inspector when considering ROWIPs at public inquiry - and dissemination of any emerging good practice.

Natural England should encourage and support Highway Authorities with their ROWIP process, and the remaining ROWIPs should be reviewed using the same system as and when they are completed.