



What do cyclists, pedestrians and equestrians want from National Highways?

– Kent and Sussex
September 2022

Introduction

Transport Focus is the independent consumer watchdog representing the interests of those using the roads managed by National Highways. That includes cyclists, pedestrians and equestrians travelling on, alongside or across England's motorways and major 'A' roads, where permitted to do so. Our latest research looks at what cyclists, pedestrians and equestrians want from National Highways in Kent and Sussex.

As with our previous work on cyclists, pedestrians and equestrians, the research on this occasion concentrated on the experience of road users in a small number of specific locations. In this case:

- 1 the A26 Beddingham – Newhaven 'Egrets Way' cycleway
- 2 the A27 between Falmer and Lewes
- 3 the A249/M2 Junction 5
- 4 the A27 at Arundel
- 5 the A21 Tonbridge – Pembury cycle link.



Map data @ Google

Summary of findings

The research produced a large number of specific findings at each location. These are covered in this report and more fully in the accompanying research agency report available on our website. There are also some overarching issues consistent with previous research.

Cyclists, pedestrians and equestrians often feel that their needs are overlooked. There are opportunities to assist them to use paths that run alongside or on the carriageway of busy roads more effectively. It is important to note that cyclists, pedestrians and equestrians understand that the National Highways' network is primarily for the use of cars and lorries. However, they do want to be able to make journeys safely.

As with previous research we found that where infrastructure is provided specifically for cyclists, pedestrians and equestrians, users expect it to meet their needs. When infrastructure for the use of cyclists, pedestrians and equestrians is inadequate or not maintained, these road users feel deprioritised and frustrated. For this reason, introducing or improving infrastructure which is to their benefit - and then maintaining it - can go some way to

demonstrate that managing authorities are listening to the needs of these road users.

By speaking to cyclists, pedestrians and equestrians we identified some overarching themes that impact these road users across each of the locations. Broadly, these themes can be divided into two groups; issues that limit their ability to make journeys effectively and those which make them feel unsafe while making journeys. Things like limited access to bridleways and cycling/walking locations and poorly maintained infrastructure away from the main carriageway can fall into the first category. Poor separation from busy traffic and unsuitable crossing points can fall into the second.

While there are common experiences, some of the frustrations highlighted by the research are specific to the type of road user. For example, equestrians are more likely to note the lack of driver education and awareness of them as road users. Cyclists have concerns which relate to them being more likely than others to be travelling on the carriageway with traffic. Pedestrians have issues with the lack of connectivity between walking routes.

Area-specific findings

A26 Beddingham – Newhaven ‘Egrets Way’ cycleway

Overview of the location

The ‘Egrets Way’ is a purpose-built cycleway which aims to give cyclists, pedestrians and equestrians a link between Newhaven and Lewes, and provides access to the South Downs National Park. The route is primarily used by those making leisure journeys and is not generally used as a direct alternative to travelling on the nearby A26.

Positive aspects of the route

Users of Egrets Way note that the route runs through very attractive countryside and that it is an uplifting and inviting place to exercise and enjoy being outside. They also say that the route is easily accessible and that it allows many safe routes across the South Downs. Cyclists point out that the surface of the route in some places is good for riding their bikes on.

Key issues mentioned by cyclists, pedestrians and equestrians

- Cyclists, pedestrians and equestrians making journeys along Egrets Way feel that signage is limited. They would like signs which identify/promote the cycleway, indicate those routes which connect with the South Downs Way and show that Egrets Way is a shared path used by cyclists, pedestrians and equestrians.
- On some sections of the Egrets Way, the proximity to fast-moving traffic is off-putting. This is particularly the case at the Piddinghoe end of the route which connects with the busy ‘C7’ route.
- Cyclists, pedestrians and equestrians using the route note that its potential is not being maximised. Better signage, promotion and better maintenance of some sections could encourage greater use.

Suggested improvements

- Promote awareness of the route by providing more signage and indicate links with other routes across the South Downs.
- At some places along the route improve or maintain the surface where it can become waterlogged/muddy.
- Complete the Egrets Way project so that a joined-up route is provided between Newhaven and Lewes. Users noted that there was a possible opportunity here to encourage people to use the route for commuting journeys between the towns rather than driving on the A26.

“I took the car to Southease and parked to walk to Egrets Way. It was really hard, to cross over the road safely as the road curves out of sight and I had my dog and a bag and the cars were rushing past me at 60 miles an hour. I felt unsafe.”

Pedestrian

“Having used this path hundreds of times, I don’t know where the start is. We found this finger post with Egrets Way after a while of searching.”

Cyclist



A27 Falmer – Lewes

Overview of the location

The A27 is a busy road between Brighton and Lewes. There is a path to cycle or walk along the whole length of the route between Falmer and Lewes, though cyclists and pedestrians tend to use it in shorter sections. The South Downs are accessible from the A27 and this is the key end destination for many walkers using it.

Positive aspects of the route

By Housedean Farm there is a section of the route alongside the A27 which is separated from the busy road by a line of trees. Cyclists and pedestrians say this is the safest and most pleasant part of the route. Users also note that there is good signage directing walkers into the surrounding countryside and that there are a few dedicated crossing points.

Key issues mentioned by cyclists, pedestrians and equestrians

- The proximity of the route to fast-moving and heavy traffic is a concern and makes them feel unsafe.
- Users of the route feel that the infrastructure is insufficient and that what exists is poorly maintained. They note there are of many potholes and lots of debris on the path which is used by walkers and cyclists.
- In places the route is narrow which increases the perception that it is unsafe and makes sharing it with other users a challenge.

Suggested improvements

- Better barriers between the path and the A27 carriageway to offer some protection to cyclists and pedestrians and make them feel safer



“The path feels far too narrow in places. The oncoming cyclist here feels too close. We could barely get past each other.”

Cyclist

- Improved maintenance to ensure a consistent and good standard of surface quality as well as improved lighting to make cyclists and pedestrians feel safer
- Widening the path and, if possible, providing separate walking and cycle lanes to encourage shared use of the route.

A249/M2 Junction 5

Overview of the location

The A249 is a busy road. National Highways manages the junction with the M2 and the A249 north of the motorway. The research explored this junction because it is close to locations that cyclists, pedestrians and equestrians use.

Positive aspects of the route

Cyclists and pedestrians particularly note the access that the A249 gives to the local countryside. Also that some sections of the footpath close to the A249 are protected from the road by trees and vegetation. Cyclists particularly note the existence of some dedicated cycle lanes which keep them separate from the traffic.

Key issues mentioned by cyclists, pedestrians and equestrians

- The most obvious issue with the intersection of the A249 and the M2 is that the junction effectively creates four ‘quadrants’ divided from one another. This limits how routes around the area can be used by cyclists, pedestrians and equestrians.
- Cyclists, pedestrians and equestrians feel that in places there is a lack of infrastructure around the junction to help them navigate it. These road users also feel that some of the paths in the area which are open to them are poorly maintained.
- In some places cyclists, pedestrians and equestrians feel that the paths they use are very close to the busy A249 and M2 and that this detracts from their enjoyment.



“As I head towards the M2 crossing I have to be quite close to the motorway and the noise of the traffic is very loud.”

Pedestrian

moving traffic. Dedicated cycle paths would be beneficial, particularly at and near the junction of the A249 and M2.

- The provision of more crossing points at the location to provide links between the existing footpaths and routes within each of the four ‘quadrants’ created by the A249/M2 junction.
- Increased collaboration with equestrians in the local area, consideration of new bridleways and installation of raised parapets on existing crossings to make them suitable for horses.

Suggested improvements

- The provision of an increased number of wider and well-maintained paths with measures to separate cyclists, pedestrians and equestrians from fast-

A27 Arundel

Overview of the location

The A27 is a busy road which passes through the town of Arundel to the south of the South Downs. Currently, the section of the A27 which passes through Arundel is a single carriageway and this becomes very congested. A new road is planned to bypass Arundel but construction has not yet started. The research at this location explored the impact of the A27 on the ability of cyclists, pedestrians and equestrians to make journeys in and around the location. We also looked at what the opportunities might be when the bypass is constructed.

“This crossing [Poling Corner] has been avoided by horse riders for years. It’s not been used as a bridlepath, occasionally and very rarely do cyclists use it; also for the same reasons stated, it’s dangerous, and you’re unable to see oncoming fast volumes of traffic. It would be nice to see an underpass on the A27, this would be safer than any bridge or road crossing that could be provided.”

Equestrian



Positive aspects of the route

The ability to use the A27 to access and enjoy the countryside nearby is viewed positively by cyclists, pedestrians and equestrians in the area. For cyclists the proximity between the countryside and the town centre makes the route suitable for different types of journeys, while for equestrians there is a well-connected bridleway network both north and south of the A27.

Key issues mentioned by cyclists, pedestrians and equestrians

- The A27 currently forms a barrier to accessing the South Downs. This particularly impacts those on the south side of the road, where there are limited bridleways and a desire to access the extensive bridleway and footpath network on the north side.
- Cyclists, pedestrians and equestrians note that there is often heavy traffic on the A27 and that there are limited

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crossing opportunities. They mention issues with the existing crossing points and hope that the construction of the bypass will result in more places they can cross safely.

- Some are worried that the bypass will impact negatively on local wildlife and increase traffic and pollution in areas which are currently unaffected. They suggest that changes to the road will simply shift the current issues southwards. Others, however, see that there may be some opportunities to improve provision as part of building the bypass.

Suggested improvements

- Provide more, appropriate crossing options. For cyclists, this includes crossings at busy roundabouts on the A27 to encourage journeys into and around Arundel. For equestrians, this includes underpasses or pegasus crossings.
- Improve footpaths along the A27 and provide wider dedicated cycle lanes on the road.
- Provide ways to separate pedestrians from the busy traffic using the A27 so that they feel safer using it.

A21 Tonbridge – Pembury cycle link

Overview of the location

The Tonbridge – Pembury cycle link is a relatively new mixed-use path provided as an alternative to travelling on the A21 itself. The route is particularly aimed at cyclists, pedestrians and equestrians who are making journeys between Tonbridge station and Tunbridge Wells Hospital at Pembury. Users travel on parts of the route for their work commute or for leisure.

Positive aspects of the route

Cyclists say that they feel safe using much of the route. They indicate that in some places the path is wide and occasionally there is a clear separation between them and the A21 carriageway. Many cyclists feel safe enough to cycle with children along the route. Pedestrians say that it is easy and convenient to walk along while equestrians appreciate the effective waymarking and separation from traffic.

Key issues mentioned by cyclists, pedestrians and equestrians

- Cyclists, pedestrians and equestrians like using the route overall, but they mention that the link between it and the North Farms industrial estate is much less pleasant due to the high volume of traffic. Junctions at the Tonbridge end are felt to be complicated and make the experience more challenging for cyclists.
- Parts of the path are narrow, making it hard for pedestrians and cyclists to share the route.
- Some cyclists and equestrians feel that the signage on the route is not adequate. Specifically, some feel that signs do not indicate that the route can be used by cyclists, pedestrians and equestrians. Others would like to see better signage at the North Farms industrial estate to warn car drivers of their presence.

Suggested improvements

- Cyclists, pedestrians and equestrians who use the route are generally positive about it, but they feel that the cycle link is relatively unknown and they'd like to see a push to raise awareness that it's there.



“At the start of public bridleway WT 429 the bridleway sign is not particularly obvious behind the cycle track sign and it is quite difficult to see exactly where it is pointing to. It would be helpful if the cycle track sign also had a ridden horse symbol on it.”

Equestrian

- Users of the cycleway think that the signage could be improved, particularly in terms of making the route easy to follow, being clear that it is a shared path that may be used by cyclists, pedestrians and equestrians and that alerts car drivers to the presence of these road users.
- Some users of the route cited maintenance issues, including the need to remove debris which accumulates on the surface.

Summary of improvements suggested across all locations

- Through signs on the carriageway, raise awareness among drivers that cyclists, pedestrians and equestrians may be using a particular road.
- Provide more crossing opportunities for cyclists, pedestrians and equestrians.
- Generally, improve the maintenance of paths provided for these road users.
- Provide better markings and wider paths on routes to enable cyclists, pedestrians and equestrians to share these spaces.
- Consider initiatives which provide dedicated routes for cyclists, such as the Tonbridge to Pembury cycle link and Egrets Way. These are viewed positively by pedestrians and equestrians as they don't have to interact with traffic on busy roads to make journeys.



How we plan to use this research

In this research, we aimed to explore in detail the experience of cyclists, pedestrians and equestrians making journeys which involved interaction with the roads managed by National Highways. In doing so we sought to provide specific insight to National Highways to help

it improve the experience of these road users. We will continue this work, looking at other areas of England. We will continue working with National Highways so that it can consider the design of its roads with cyclists, pedestrians and equestrians in mind.

How we did this research

In December 2021 Transport Focus commissioned the independent research company 2CV to help us to explore the views of cyclists, pedestrians and equestrians making journeys which interacted with National Highways' roads in five locations in Kent and Sussex. The research adopted a staged approach, consisting of four interlinked elements:

- 1** Five online 'roundtable' sessions with stakeholders in the locations to get their perspectives on the local issues. The stakeholders included the British Horse Society, Cycling UK, Ramblers, representatives from local authorities, and chairs of bridleways groups and access forums.
- 2** Site visits with cyclists, pedestrians, and/or equestrians who are familiar with making journeys at the locations. 12 accompanied visits were made, and photos and video footage were collected to build the case studies.
- 3** After making accompanied visits, 2CV recruited 36 cyclists, pedestrians and equestrians who make journeys at the case study locations and asked them to complete a series of online tasks. These tasks involved participants providing details about what it is like travelling through the case study locations and uploading photos and videos of the journeys that they make to illustrate their experiences.
- 4** After the digital tasks were completed, 25 of the recruited participants were invited to online in-depth interviews with the research team. They talked in greater detail about the information that they had given previously and the material that had been uploaded to the online tool.

Contact Transport Focus

Any enquiries about this research should be addressed to:

Toby Cotton

Senior insight advisor

toby.cotton@transportfocus.org.uk

www.transportfocus.org.uk

Albany House

94-98 Petty France

London

SW1H 9EA

Transport Focus is the operating name of the Passengers' Council