

Friday 31 July 2009

Public bridleways - petition response

We received a petition asking:

“We the undersigned petition the Prime Minister to provide funding and use legislation for creation of new public bridleways.”

Details of Petition:

“Horse Riders have access to less than 25% of the current public rights of way network, and face danger when using today’s busy roads. To ensure appropriate funding is in place and legislation (Highway Act 1980 S26) to be used by local authorities for new bridleways to be shown on definitive maps and ordnance survey maps. To ensure the Highway Agency develops a national programme of re-instating severed crossing points by creating new dedicated bridle bridges or underpasses as safe crossing points for motorways or trunk roads. To ensure Local authorities and parish councils develop local joined up community riding circuits of 5-15 miles to rebuild the national bridle route network.”

Read the Government’s response

The Government is committed to improving off road access for equestrians, as it has shown through its support for the Strategy for the Horse Industry published in 2005 and its work with the Equestrian Access Forum, which represents the main equestrian access organisations around the country. The Government recognises the difficulties that horse riders face on the roads, and the needs of equestrians, who are not well served by the current access network. The Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 required that all local highway authorities prepare rights of way improvement plans, setting out how they intend to achieve a network fit for the 21st century. Guidance issued also encouraged local authorities to take specific consideration of horse rider needs in drafting their rights of way improvement plans and many local authorities have done so.

Rights of way improvement plans have already helped many authorities in getting local transport planning funding for their rights of way sections. Natural England has provided detailed advice and guidance on funding opportunities that are open to local highway authorities and it has also provided best practice examples of local authorities’ successful funding bids. We hope that other authorities are able to learn from this best practice so that they too can be successful in their own funding bids, and we expect Natural England to continue to provide support to all authorities where needed. The allocation for rights of way funding is included in the general Environment Protection and Cultural Services block received from the Communities and Local Government Department. Therefore, a local authority has to decide on the degree of funding for its rights of way responsibilities balanced against its other priorities.

Finally, during the development of the Vulnerable Users’ Crossings Improvement Programme (VUCIP) in 2002-03, which was undertaken with input from the British Horse Society, Cyclists’ Touring Club and the Ramblers’ Association, requests were made that severed crossing points of public rights of way be reinstated. Proposals for such reinstatements should be directed through Local Access Forums and submitted to the Highways Agency for consideration and possible development.