

Visitor Travel

Policy from practice

As people get out more to enjoy our natural and cultural heritage, rural leisure trips have become one of the fastest growing sources of traffic. The distance travelled for day trips in the UK has increased by nearly 30% since 1985. More than seven out of ten day trips, and nearly eight out of ten holiday visits, are currently made by car.

Tourism is one of the largest industries in the UK, worth £74 billion in 2003, and employing 2.2 million people. The industry relies on both a high quality environment and good access for visitors. But our increasing dependence on car use is placing a heavy burden on site managers, and car traffic and pollution can undermine the very assets which visitors come to see.

As well as creating environmental and operational problems a growing reliance on car-based access for visitors creates barriers to the 28% of households which do not own or have access to a car and for whom enjoying a day out can be much more difficult.

Each year, the National Trust manages over 13 million visits to 'pay for entry' properties and over 50 million visits to our coast and open countryside.

Along with other tourism and leisure providers the National Trust depends on car visits. Yet the consequences of too many cars on the road and pressure on car parks are all too clear. For example:

- Visitor dissatisfaction - congestion is cited as a primary reason for declining visitor numbers at some National Trust properties in the South West

- Visual blight - overspill car parking or lines of traffic can spoil the setting of a fine country house or area of wild coastline
- Noise pollution - motor vehicles disturb the peace and tranquillity of the countryside much valued by visitors
- Air pollution – traffic growth is the single largest contribution to greenhouse gas emissions, a proportion projected to increase by as much as 23% by 2020
- Costs of infrastructure - each car park costs the National Trust on average over £11,500 per year and the typical cost of a new car park is around £1million.

Set against this is the convenience which the car provides for the vast majority of visitors. Meeting their needs while seeking new and less damaging approaches is a real dilemma.

In recent years, the National Trust has concentrated its approach on encouraging a greater choice in leisure travel by:

- Participating in over 28 schemes to provide car-free leisure across the country in partnership with local authorities, public transport operators and other attractions
- Investing over £100,000 into setting up and running transport projects
- Marketing and promoting car free leisure journeys with campaigns such as the promotion offering rail passengers 'two for the price of one' admission to National Trust

Breeze up the Downs



The bus service to Devil's Dyke as part of the Breeze up the Downs initiative takes about 72,000 visitors per year to enjoy the South Downs, half of whom do not have access to a car.

properties, in association with the Association of Train Operating Companies

- Making leisure journeys by public transport fun by introducing open top buses, ferries, tour guides and even steam trains
- Encouraging cycling visits to properties, with over 200 National Trust properties now located within 2km of the National Cycle Network
- Developing visitor travel plans to manage pressure, and restricting parking at several of our properties
- Promoting sustainable access to properties by providing information on how to arrive by foot, cycle, bus and train.

Such measures are helping to widen transport choice but the Trust remains heavily dependant on car-based visitors and our visitors enjoy the convenience which the car provides.

Castle Drogo

Castle Drogo and the Teign Gorge receives about 135,000 visitors per year. During school holidays the property typically receives 700-1,000 visitors every day, and on bank holidays numbers can reach 1,700. Almost all arrive by car.

There are two car parks, which between them can take around 500 cars. Access is a major problem with very narrow lanes up to the property, which can become completely gridlocked for up to two hours at a time if large vehicles such as coaches or agricultural machinery meet visitor traffic.

Staff and volunteers trying to sort out the problems regularly get blamed for the traffic chaos. The congestion on the lanes caused two coach tour companies to drop Castle Drogo from their itineraries in 2004. This resulted in a loss of 4,000 visitors.



Learning from experience

At best, National Trust properties have shown that well designed plans for visitor travel can greatly reduce the number of people arriving by car and also deliver a wider range of benefits. Properties such as Greenways in Devon and Prior Park in Bath, demonstrate that visitors will leave their cars at home.

Nevertheless, the challenge of reducing car travel to many other Trust properties remains. In most cases new sustainable travel options have only touched a minority of the visitor market, and have not solved problems of congestion or significantly reduced the need to provide parking.

While incentives such as reduced entrance fees for those who arrive by public transport or cycle can encourage people to leave their cars at home, their main benefit is in providing incentives which attract a new type of visitor, rather than encouraging people to change their preferred means of travel.

Although we have some way to go in changing behaviour, the National Trust experience in providing more sustainable leisure travel shows how can deliver a wide range of benefits. For example:

- Encouraging alternative means of transport such as cycling or walking brings money into the local economy - tourists on cycling holidays spend almost £20 a day more than the average for UK holidays
- Providing public transport access to rural leisure sites helps people without cars to enjoy the nation's natural and built heritage
- Encouraging cycling and walking delivers wider health benefits

- Transport schemes established for tourists can benefit local communities in meeting their transport needs
- Off peak promotions can increase visitor numbers substantially in the low season
- A well run service can add to the visitor experience, as the journey becomes an enjoyable part of the trip.

It is clear, however, that individual organisations like the National Trust are unable to tackle the challenge of providing access while reducing car dependency in isolation. Our experience shows that successful schemes require sustained funding and support. In an increasingly difficult funding climate the opportunity to maintain existing and develop new schemes is in jeopardy.

Start up grants for transport schemes are helpful, but we need longer term funding in order to allow a service to develop and establish itself over several years. For example, the Shropshire Hills Shuttle Bus is only

now starting to become self sufficient after 3 years, and yet its grant support is under threat putting at risk this much valued scheme.

Services are most likely to be successful if they meet the needs of both visitors and the local community. The Pembrokeshire Greenways transport service is used as much by the local community to get to the beach as by visitors.

Effective and targeted marketing and advertising is also needed to promote these schemes. This too requires time and money.

We have found that partnerships with local authorities and public transport operators are usually critical in attracting funding and achieving viable services. Partnerships involving different agencies can also help by pooling funding from a variety of sources.

The scope for partnerships is especially good in protected areas where agencies are increasingly taking an area-wide approach to car-free visitor access, such as in Pembrokeshire and along the Jurassic Coast World Heritage Site.

There are also benefits in restricting access by car to certain sensitive sites and varying parking fees according to the season or time of day. In future, this kind of measure is likely to become increasingly important.

In our experience the business risks of lower visitor numbers can be reduced by providing practical alternatives to ensure that visitors can still visit, and supporting wider cultural change in attitudes to car use.

Fal River and Trelissick



In Cornwall the National Trust has worked in partnership with both the private and public sector to promote water transport on the River Fal and to create a new landing for ferries at Trelissick.

Prior Park

Prior Park Landscape Garden was opened in 1996 by the National Trust. The garden is in the south of the city of Bath, about 30 minutes walk from the city centre.

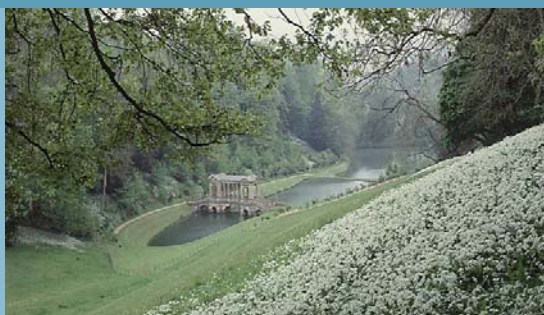
When the Trust first looked at opening the garden, local residents were concerned that the area would be overwhelmed with traffic.

In response the Trust decided to provide parking only for the disabled. The Trust has taken

various actions to make it easy for visitors to reach the site without a car.

We subsidise established Sunday bus services passing the site ensuring they are synchronised with opening and closing times.

The property has successfully negotiated with an open-top tour bus company (Bath Bus Company) to start a new Bath Sky Line tour route via Prior Park.



This allows visitors to explore Bath in a new way and gives them access to the popular 6 mile Bath Sky Line walk .

Widen the Choice

Widen the Choice is a regional partnership between the National Trust and RSPB in the East of England. It promotes greener ways for visitors to reach over 60 National Trust and RSPB properties.

Managed by just one partnership officer, the scheme has installed cycle stands at 28 locations and works through other networks to improve and promote local transport options.

One such scheme is CoastLink, a creative way of responding to visitors' and locals' needs by means of a dial-a-ride service. This provides access to

some of Suffolk's finest coastline.

The partnership costs £35,000 per year with 75% of the funding coming from the Countryside Agency. Real savings have been made through operating on a regional scale, including the cost of producing leaflets such as 'Birds by Boat' and 'Journey into Lifetimes'.

With the funding due to end in March 2006, the National Trust is looking for ways for the partnership's work to continue whilst tackling challenges such as a tight funding budget both internally and externally.



Future challenges

Our experience has highlighted there are a number of challenges to delivering real change in visitor travel.

Improving the infrastructure

There are significant infrastructure problems to overcome: poor public transport, especially on Sundays; train and bus services which do not connect; excessively high speed limits and no pavements or cycle paths on many busy rural roads. All act to discourage alternatives to the car.

Even where there is adequate provision of alternatives, a lack of well targeted information and marketing means some services have failed to attract the expected levels of use.

Creating viable services

We cannot expect people to leave their cars and venture into the countryside by alternative means if they perceive this will be difficult, dangerous, expensive or uncomfortable.

Achieving the critical mass to make quality alternative services viable is key. Well marketed bus services, affordable prices and on line information such as TransportDirect.com could attract large numbers of passengers. Where demand is too low to sustain a regular service, demand responsive transport schemes may offer a better option.

Costs and regulation

Driven both by concerns about climate change and emissions and the need to restrain traffic growth, the Government is turning its attention to fiscal instruments such as road user charging and petrol duty. Such measures could have a significant impact on leisure and tourism providers and it is critical that these are fully considered in any future debate.

The role of land use planning in addressing traffic growth is significant. Planning currently promotes the use of travel plans for workplaces and schools, and could start to require the same approach for leisure and tourism sites. This has already been the case for several National Trust properties and has helped identify opportunities for addressing the impact of car travel and promoting alternatives.

A deteriorating funding environment

Rural services, and particularly recreational services, are currently competing for resources in a deteriorating funding environment. Many existing visitor travel initiatives have involved public transport improvements funded by the Countryside Agency's Rural Transport Partnership scheme and the Government's Rural Bus Challenge fund.

Both these sources of funding have now ended, leaving schemes vulnerable to funding shortfalls.

Whilst some may survive as going concerns, the market alone will not be

sufficient to sustain many of these services.

The switch of resources for rural development to the Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) has created a funding and policy vacuum which is already undermining existing rural transport schemes.

There is a high level of concern within the rural transport sector that the RDAs are reluctant to fund the kind of schemes that have been supported by the Rural Transport Partnership scheme. Lack of mainstream funding for these schemes also continues to be an unresolved concern.

There is a need to help RDAs recognise the contribution of sustainable visitor travel to their wider objectives. This could involve sharing knowledge and experience of current activity better and creating a leisure travel plan training initiative for RDAs and Regional Assembly staff.

Culture change

People are strongly attached to the individual freedom and ease which car use provides. Addressing the culture of car use is an essential part of any approach to encourage people to use alternative means of travel and manage traffic growth.

Alongside changing financial signals and provision of new and better alternatives, sustainable visitor access must be marketed as an integral part of the visitor offer. Schemes with 'fun' components that make the journey part of the visitor experience can also help attract car users.

Cycling

We work closely with Sustrans to promote ways of getting to houses, gardens and the countryside by bike. Cycle provision is now made at the vast majority of the Trust's pay for entry properties.



Surrey Hills Explorer Bus

More than just a green transport service, this popular guided tour of the Surrey Hills AONB, which takes in Polesden Lacey and Box Hill, is dogged by funding issues.



A way forward

- The growing emphasis by the Government on road pricing and 'smart' measures such as travel planning, should consider visitor travel and how these tools can be applied in the countryside as well as congested urban areas.
- Visitor travel planning should be given the same emphasis and promotion by the Government as workplace and school travel plans. Guidance on developing effective visitor travel plans should build upon the lessons already learnt, and visitor travel plans should be required for planning consent for new and expanded visitor attractions.
- There is a need for comprehensive improvements in rural public transport in Britain, with a strong supporting policy framework and permanent stable funding for rural transport schemes. Key issues include improving the reliability, adequate coverage and costs for users.
- There is an urgent need for long term revenue funding to support rural and leisure transport schemes and to integrate them into Local Transport Plans.
- Lead tourism and marketing organisations, such as Visit Britain, should highlight and promote the importance of sustainable leisure travel as integral to their work at a national, regional and local level.
- RDAs should identify priority areas for pump priming and supporting transport investment as part of their new role in delivering DEFRA's public service agreements on improving accessibility in rural areas and improving rural economic performance.
- Local transport authorities, public transport operators, leisure organisations and others should work together to ensure travel needs of sites are taken into account in Local Transport Plans, bus strategies and accessibility planning to secure funding.
- Rural rail has the potential to play a major role in encouraging sustainable leisure travel. We need to extend the network in some areas to provide new and better serviced lines and introduce a 7 day timetable which recognises the importance of weekend leisure travel.

Other topics in this series:

Tourism

Photographs

Page 1 - www.UKStudentlike.com
- NTPL / Charlie Waite

Page 2 - NTPL / Stephen Robson
- Enterprise Boats

Page 3 - Chris Wood

Page 4 - Anna Colls
- Steve Walker

Contact details:

Policy & Campaigns
The National Trust
Heelis
Kemble Drive
Swindon SN2 2NA

Phone: 01793 817400
Fax: 01793 817 401

Email: olivia.morris@nationaltrust.org.uk
www.nationaltrust.org.uk