

Case Study

Cycling Ambition

Background

The success of our athletes in the Tour de France, Olympics and Paralympics inspired many people to rediscover, or discover for the first time, the benefits of cycling – both for their pockets and their health.

Many people find cycling a great way to enjoy England's countryside, wildlife and rich cultural heritage, spend time with family and friends and, above all, have fun. For some people, what starts as an occasional ride for pleasure can lead to cycling becoming the natural choice for making many of their daily journeys.

Currently only 2% of trips in the UK are made by bike, compared with 14% in Germany and almost a third in the Netherlands. This is despite the fact that 43% of people own or have access to a bike in Britain and 38% of people could just as easily cycle for short trips than use a car.

However, in places that have consistently invested in cycling there have been significant increases in trips by bike. This is most obvious in London where cycling increased by 79% in the decade from 2001 to 2011.

The current Government wants to make it easier and safer for people who already cycle as well as encouraging more people to take it up. In February 2013 the Government invited National Parks in England to submit infrastructure proposals that would enable more people to cycle to and within their boundaries. (Ref: 12th August 2013, Government shifts cycling up a gear, Government press release.)



The project

In 2013 the 'Transforming Cycling in the South Downs National Park' bid to the Department for Transport (DfT) was successful in securing multi-million pound funding to design and deliver an ambitious package of proposals to create new and improve existing cycle routes in the National Park. The DfT awarded funding of £3.8m to add to the £1.3m provided by local partners.

The scheme focussed on improving access to the National Park from major railway stations, including Chichester, Lewes and Petersfield, and aimed to build 55km of new or improved routes across England's most visited and densely populated National Park. Thereby increasing opportunities for leisure cycling and walking for the 5 million people who live within an hour of the South Downs National Park.

SDNPA was the lead authority for the project, known as Cycling Ambition, and worked closely with key partners Brighton & Hove City Council (BHCC), East Sussex County Council (ESCC), Hampshire County Council (HCC), West Sussex County Council (WSCC), as well as major landowners (who gave permission to create routes across their land), local communities, Sustrans, local cycling organisations and transport bodies.

The project which commenced in September 2013, included 13 new or improved cycle routes – of these a total of 10 have been carried out using the DfT funding, the remaining schemes have been transferred to another funding programme or deferred for inclusion in future programmes of work.

“The Cycle Ambition partnership enabled us, as the Highway Authority, to work with the SDNPA and other partner organisations. This meant that we have been able to share expertise and influence as well as attracting funding that otherwise would not have been available to us.”

Partner Highways Authority, September 2015

The outcome

Key project outputs/outcomes include:

- Extended and realigned the Centurion Way and the creation of new lengths of the Egrets Way (SDNPA led projects)
- Refurbishment of the Meon Valley Trail(HCC led)
- Creation of Lewes to Ringmer shared use path (ESCC led)
- Creation of Ditchling Road and Drove Road shared-use paths (BHCC led)
- New Downs Link crossing at Bramber and Arundel Station shared use path and the Barnham to Bignor route (WSCC, led)

In 2014 the DfT published an assessment of the Value for Money of the Cycle Ambition grants programme. Analysis for the South Downs programme of schemes assessed the estimated benefit cost ratio (BCR) as 4.6.

This means that for every £1 of public money spent the schemes are considered to deliver £4.60 worth of social benefit. The social benefit includes factors such as:

- the health benefits of increased physical activity,
- improved journey ambience,
- reduced congestion.

Overall the report concludes that the investment in cycling infrastructure in this way is considered to deliver exceptional value for money.

The future

Cycling Ambition has demonstrated that SDNPA and partners are capable of successfully delivering cycling infrastructure projects on a park-wide scale.

Moving forward, sustaining and developing the partnership will mean that SDNPA and partners are in a strong position to respond quickly to new funding opportunities and further progress the original vision.

The end of project evaluation highlighted 3 key learning points that the partnership can take into future projects and programmes, namely:

1. Having schemes ‘shovel ready’ means that when funding becomes available the partnership is ready to ‘hit the ground running’ avoiding potential delays.
2. Having effective internal project governance in place ensures that the project delivery will go smoothly, planning in advance for how to overcome any potential risks
3. An individual project communication plan would set the standards for how and when communication takes place, and provide for consistency of messages amongst partners.

For further information contact;

Allison Thorpe
Strategy Lead Access and Recreation
South Downs National Park Authority
South Downs Centre, North Street
Midhurst, GU29 9DH

Tel: 01730 819243

Allison.thorpe@southdowns.gov.uk