

Executive Summary

1. This is Cumbria's draft Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP). It is available for public consultation until 30th September 2006. At this stage, the Statements of Action are in draft format, are general and do not include specific projects, targets and costs. A full ROWIP will be produced in spring 2007 taking account of any comments received as well as additional details on the Statements of Action.
2. **Please send any comments on this 'Draft ROWIP' by 30th September 2006 to:**

The Countryside Access Development Officer
Cumbria County Council
The Courts
Carlisle
Cumbria
CA3 8NA

Or e-mail them to:

countryside.access@cumbriacc.gov.uk

Chapter 1 – Introduction

3. Highway Authorities have a duty under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act to publish a Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP). The Cumbria ROWIP is being produced in partnership with the Yorkshire Dales and the Lake District National Park Authorities, and with the full involvement of the Local Access Forums for each of these areas.
4. This draft ROWIP is open for consultation until the end of September 2006. A full, final ROWIP will be published in spring 2007, with finalised Statements of Action. By 2010-11, the ROWIP will be integrated into Cumbria's Local Transport Plan.

Chapter 2 – The existing access resource, its quality, and the opportunities it offers

5. Cumbria is a unique area, rich in landscape and natural beauty. Cumbria also boasts one of the longest networks of public rights of way in England and Wales – over 7441 km – complemented by rural lanes, unclassified roads, large tracts of open access land and a wealth of wider access opportunities, including designated cycle routes and permitted access. The bodies involved in the management of local rights of way and wider countryside access are listed and mapped.

6. The opportunities available to different user-groups of the network are assessed, including those for people with limited mobility. While opportunities for the more 'independent' user groups, such as mountain bikers and long-distance walkers or cyclists are considerable, and while there is best practice to draw on in terms of barrier-reduction projects and access to information, there is still considerable scope for improvements.
7. The quality and condition of existing countryside access is assessed with 'use and condition' research. This shows that while some areas the resource is in good condition, there remains demand for improvements; such as signage, the maintenance of access furniture and upgrades to existing routes. Annual targets to improve the percentage of paths 'easy to use' are already included in Cumbria County Council performance plans.

Chapter 3 – Policy framework and integrating access

8. The Cumbria Countryside Access Strategy was published in 2005 as the policy framework supporting the ROWIP. The vision statement includes a commitment to partnership working to deliver improvements that will bring a wide range of benefits. The aims include encouraging people to explore and enjoy the countryside and to make sustainable travel choices.
9. The ROWIP has a number of key links to the Local Transport Plan. Local rights of way have an increasing contribution to make to non-motorised travel, especially for short, local journeys and to access goods and services. In particular, the ROWIP can help deliver shared objectives, such as:
 - Greater use of sustainable transport modes,
 - Reduced congestion,
 - Improved air quality,
 - Road safety,
 - Accessibility planning (mobility) and
 - Other quality of life targets.
10. The Joint Cumbria Structure Plan and Yorkshire Dales Local Plan are also noteworthy documents as they identify 'Key Service Centres'. These towns are used later in the ROWIP to help prioritise potential projects.
11. Links to other policy areas and emerging agendas are presented here; in particular, the framework behind improving access for people with limited mobility, and the benefits of integrating countryside access with wider agendas, such as health and the local economy. Of particular note are:
 - The valuable contribution that countryside access can make to meeting targets for increasing the amount of exercise that people take, and
 - Tourism in Cumbria generated £1.12 billion in 2004¹. Tourism, countryside recreation and the local economy are inextricably linked - illustrated during the foot and mouth outbreak of 2001.

¹ Cumbria Tourist Board. The figure for 2005 will be available shortly.

Chapter 4 – Research

12. Two elements of research were undertaken. The first identified the needs and preferences of fourteen 'key audiences' in order to determine how well local rights of way and wider countryside access opportunities meet the present and likely future needs of the public. A 'need' was defined as critical to the activity taking place, and a 'preference' was defined as something that would enhance the experience. The fourteen 'key audiences' are:

- Land or property owners or countryside managers
- Urban residents
- Rural residents
- Passive visitors or tourists
- Latent users
- Serious walkers
- Casual walkers
- Serious cyclists - mountain biking and other cycling
- Casual cyclists
- Equestrians
- Other users – recreational vehicle users
- People with limited mobility
- People from Black and Minority Ethnic groups
- Young people

13. The needs and preferences research involved focus groups and interviews with members of the public as well as workshops with the Local Access Forums. A number of needs and preferences were common to several key audiences, for example, improvements to signing, to information, and integration with sustainable transport. The results of the needs and preferences research are presented.

14. The second element of research was to devise a scoring system to enable project ideas (in other words, proposals for developing local rights of way) to be placed in an initial priority order. The scoring system was devised with the help of the Local Access Forums and user group representatives.

15. The adequacy of countryside access was then measured by inviting over 400 consultees and the public to submit project ideas between December 2005 and the end of February 2006. Over 1200 suggestions were received and mapped – the results are presented in chapter four. The amount of responses received suggests considerable demand for improvements to the network.

16. All the suggestions were scored and mapped. The conclusions from the needs and preferences research, together with the suggestions, form the basis for the Statements of Action.

Chapter 5 – Statements of Action

17. There are two Statements of Action; one for the Lake District National Park and one for the remainder of Cumbria, including the Cumbrian part of the

Yorkshire Dales National Park. Statements of Action are in draft form, structured by the user-group affected. Further detail (targets, projected costs, priority projects and potential partners) will be added for the final ROWIP, to be published in spring 2007.

18. Examples of improvements that appear in the Statements of Action include:

- Improving and upgrading existing routes,
- Creating new links to form new linear and circular routes,
- Maximising the effective use of information about the network and its opportunities,
- Integration with and adding value to the designated quiet lanes network, and
- Seeking to ensure the provision of public transport services and transport hubs are integrated with the current and future use of the network.

19. There is no statutory duty to implement ROWIPs. The statements of action are aspirational five-year plans, to be delivered in partnership, with funding sought from a variety of sources. Local Access Forums will be the key providers of advice and guidance on how best to implement the statements of action. Improved joint-working through 'Countryside Access Cumbria' will also help deliver the implementation of improvements.

20. In addition to working in partnership to deliver improvements, Cumbria County Council will seek to delegate powers to each National Park Authority to implement the statement of action within their respective National Park boundaries.