

A Sustainability Assessment Process for Trail Management

prepared by

The Motoring Organisations' Land Access and Recreation Association

Early in 2004 the Minister for Rural Affairs issued a consultation paper, "The use of mechanically propelled vehicles on Rights of Way." In his foreword the Minister wrote: *"... I have been approached by many individuals and organisations who are deeply concerned about problems caused by the use of mechanically propelled vehicles on rights of way and in the wider countryside. I share these concerns, having seen for myself examples of damage to fragile tracks and other aspects of our natural and cultural heritage in various areas of the country ... Because of this I have resolved to take a fresh look at the whole issue of the use of vehicles on rights of way and in the wider countryside and this paper sets out some proposals for dealing with the problems that can arise from that use. In doing so I am seeking to achieve the right balance between the interests of the various organisations and individuals concerned and the interests of maintaining the tranquillity and conservation value of the countryside."*

The recreational motoring organisations responded to this challenge by engaging in a long process of internal and external consultation and review. A response was made to the Minister's consultation paper that advocated a new approach to the 'claiming' and use of rights of way for and by motor vehicles, centred on an assessment of the 'sustainability' of each route, rather than its bare historical status. This process – called the 'Sustainability Assessment Process' (SAP) was initially drafted so as to bite on each definitive map modification order at or near the time of confirmation. As the process evolved the Government expressed the view that the SAP process must come in at an earlier stage, in order that unsustainable routes simply do not get claimed as BOATs. There was also a widely held view that the successful lessons in formal management of existing trails in the Lake District (and, largely informally, elsewhere) should support an integrated management package with the assessment of potential BOAT claims.

This document is that integrated approach to trail management. It provides an assessment process whereby any person or organisation engaged in rights of way research can assess, on consistent criteria that will accommodate local variations, the merits of a 'claim' and, if a claim is justified, the level and type of use management that is appropriate in all the circumstances. This is a working document. It will be refined and developed through practice.



Geoff Wilson
Chairman,
Motoring Interests Time Limited Advisory Group.

The Pre-emptive Sustainability Assessment Process (P-SAP) in advance of DMMO Claims.

Land Access & Recreation Association

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Ref: P-SAP7b

Stage 1 SAP – in advance of DMMOA - Background		Action
Routes that have traditionally been ridden or driven which are not definitive byway.	SAP-1 Routes that are, or have been, metalled / hard-based for all or a substantial part of their length (although some drainage work may be needed), over which a motor vehicle may pass with relative ease and with minimal intrusion / disturbance to the surface of the route. . In some places these routes may well be well-compacted dirt, or across bed-rock, rather than metalled. NB: Some routes that may be primarily SAP-1 class, may be constrained by sections of SAP-2. In which case good management should presume to return the route to SAP-1.	These routes would be claimed as BOAT except in unusual local circumstances – e.g. they pass through a national nature reserve. Where such routes have become urban feeders, TROs may be appropriate.
	SAP-2 Routes that have never been metalled, or have suffered from lack of adequate maintenance, and which may be susceptible to becoming soft in/after wet weather, or routes that have some characteristic / feature that raises an initial presumption against MPV use, e.g. through an SPA, or on land that is naturally boggy. NB: Some routes that may be primarily SAP-1 class, may be constrained by sections of SAP-2. In which case good management should presume to return the route to SAP-1.	These routes would be claimed as BOAT, but the applicant would also submit a condition assessment report with the DMMOA. Limited TROs may be appropriate – weight, width, weather, etc. Permit access may also be appropriate.
	SAP-3 Routes that have significant presumption against MPV use and for which ongoing use may be indefensible.	These routes would not be claimed as BOAT, but would be identified for further research and possible future recording as RB or bridleway.
Other Lost ways	Routes “revealed” by the DLW process to have possible byway status, but which have not traditionally been ridden or driven.	Make qualitative assessment and pursue action as SAP-1-2-or 3.

Where maintenance may be an issue involve the highway authority. Where Nature conservation may be an issue involve English Nature.

..... and for retrospective trail route management (SAP).

Route Class / Category	Assessment	Action
Existing definitive byways & UCRs.	The Low (Green) Category Routes are those routes where there is minimal recorded use and / or are judged sustainable and where no problems or valid complaints have been observed.	No action necessary.
	The Middle (Amber) Category Routes are those where moderate level of use is known / recorded and that are more sensitive for various reasons (popularity with other users, proximity to dwellings or stock etc.) and where change in level of use could lead to deterioration in condition or an increase in conflicts with other users. Inspection of the routes would take place biannually.	Keep under regular review.
	The High (Red) Category Routes are those where significant use is known / recorded and have the greatest number of valid complaints. They are under the greatest pressure and are subject to the greatest conflict between different classes of user and between users and the environment. Some of the routes cross the high fell, peat moor or wetland and are badly eroded. For these reasons red routes need more active management. Inspection of the routes would take place biannually.	Apply retrospective SAP as above and apply appropriate management.

Only those BOAT claims which can be ‘justified’ should be submitted. To help with this decision, ask the following questions, and chose the one best-fit answer in each case:

Your Claim reference: _____

A: Current Usage?

Frequent	= 5	<input type="text"/>
Usable if obstruction removed.	= 5	<input type="text"/>
Infrequent.	= 3	<input type="text"/>
No current use	= 0	<input type="text"/>
Dead end	= 0	<input type="text"/>

B: Surface?

Sustains current use over most of length.	= 5	<input type="text"/>
Could sustain use with minor work by volunteers.	= 4	<input type="text"/>
Could sustain use if repairs were done.	= 3	<input type="text"/>
Cannot sustain use without costly restoration.	= 1	<input type="text"/>
No current use.	= 0	<input type="text"/>

C: Sensitivity / Conflict

No apparent sensitivity / conflict issues.	= 5	<input type="text"/>
Impacts on AONB / SSSI / SAC / SPA /Monument	= 2	<input type="text"/>
Route already heavily used by other users.	= 2	<input type="text"/>
In a national park	= 0	<input type="text"/>

D: Network Value?

Route would create a useful link in existing network.	= 5	<input type="text"/>
No other green lanes in the area.	= 5	<input type="text"/>
Route will provide a useful alternative route.	= 4	<input type="text"/>
Minimal value to network	= 1	<input type="text"/>
Minimal value to network	= 0	<input type="text"/>

Grand total

Over 10 points– submit the claim

Below 11 points – keep the evidence on file.

Sustainability Assessment Process for Trail Management – Examples of Assessment & Classification

Post-SAP management designation.

SAP potential for definitive map modification order assessment.



Grid reference 99/108603, looking west-northwest.

Background

The Forest Road/Park Road, across Pockstones Moor (between Harrogate and Pateley Bridge), North Yorkshire. The through-route is 5.4 miles long, with a ‘Y’ fork to Skyreholme three-quarters of the way along, and was set out in the Forest of Knareborough Inclosure Award of 1770 as a public carriage road for all types of traffic. There is also documentation to show that the road pre-existed the inclosure award. The road is on North Yorkshire County Council’s list of streets as an unclassified road.

The road surface is well-laid stone metalling, now varying in quality through the passage of time, and with some recent repairs still visible as stone of a different kind to the original. There is a properly engineered drainage system of side ditches and stone culverts under the road at the highest point, where water running off the higher fell (to the left in the photograph) makes the ground marshy.

The road has been used by MPVs for over 80 years - it is documented as being part of the route of the early Scott Trials in the 1920s.

Assessment

The road surface is durable - only short lengths have required maintenance during the last 30 years, and this was due to the ditches and culverts choking and eroding the metalling from beneath. Apart from two badly water-scoured short sections (now repaired), the road has been, and is, readily usable by all classes of traffic.

The south-easter two-thirds of the route lie in the Nidderdale AONB, and the northerly third in the Yorkshire Dales National Park. The moorland to the north is a valuable habitat for birds, and in part wetland, but apart from localised deviation before the repairs, vehicles have no need to, and do not, depart from the made-up carriageway.

The south end is quite popular with walkers, but most soon leave the road to walk on access land and footpaths up onto, and over, Simon’s Seat and beyond. Cyclists and, to a lesser extent, equestrians, use the through-route.

Sustainability Assessment Process for Trail Management – Examples of Assessment & Classification

Post-SAP management designation.

SAP potential for definitive map modification order assessment.



Grid reference 185/318324 looking north-northeast

Background

This road is part of the ancient principal route to Stockbridge, in Hampshire, from the south. Stockbridge (GR 185/3635) was, and remains, a major crossing point of the River Test and its complex network of channels and flood plains.

This section is recorded as unclassified road, and runs from just south of Broughton (GR 185/3132) northeastwards for just over half a mile, whereupon it changes status to BOAT (a former RUPP) for a further 1.8 miles.

The only section with conditions problems is where the local authority dug trenches to exclude ‘new age travellers’ some years ago, and never repaired these when the ‘NAT threat’ diminished.

Assessment

The surface is very durable chalk and flint, self-draining, and able to withstand considerable heavy agricultural use. The passage of vehicles helps prevent the hedges and verge greenery encroaching too far into the lane. There is plenty of width to allow different types of traffic to meet and pass safely.

Sustainability Assessment Process for Trail Management – Examples of Assessment & Classification

Post-SAP management designation.

SAP potential for definitive map modification order assessment.



Grid reference 174/487835 looking west-northwest.

Background

The Ridgeway at Gore Hill, just west of the A34(T). The Ridgeway is part of an ancient route system, linking the crossing of the River Thames at Streatley, with the Vale of Pewsey, and connecting beyond into the southwest peninsular of England. There is a network of these ancient trans-Wessex routes, including the upper and lower Icknield Ways, the Inkpen Ridgeway and the Harroway.

‘The Ridgeway’ as it is now generally understood is not wholly based on the ancient route (sections of which were themselves significantly altered by parliamentary inclosure), but is more defined by being a ‘National Trail’ with its attendant improvements, publicity and promotion for non-motor-based recreation.

Like most wide ancient roads in this area, much of the Ridgeway is used for access to farms and by heavy farm traffic. Experiments have been tried to get motor traffic to use a metalled strip, but experience shows that cyclists and walkers immediately colonise this instead.

Assessment

In terms of route resilience, recoverability, width, links with other routes, and sheer length, the Ridgeway would normally fall into Pre-SAP category 1, and Post-SAP category green. The fact that it is part of (or, in this case comprises) a National Trail affects that normal assessment. The Ridgeway has been subject to several investigations, reports and at least two public inquiries into possible traffic regulation. In 2004 the Minister instructed the various highway authorities along the route to impose a seasonal restriction on recreational motor vehicle use, primarily to prevent ground damage in and after wet weather. This prohibition is intended to run from the end of September to the end of May each year. There will be varying arrangements for feeder and cross-Ridgeway routes. Similar management arrangements may be necessary on other vehicular routes that have been incorporated into National Trails.

Sustainability Assessment Process for Trail Management – Examples of Assessment & Classification

Post-SAP management designation.

SAP potential for definitive map modification order assessment.

1	2	3



Grid reference 80/857890, looking northeastwards. The route ran over the saddle to the right (south) of the rounded hill.

Background

Brigg Road is set out in the Corsenside and West Woodburn inclosure award of 1795 as a public carriage road. It currently has no recorded status and enquiries suggest that no recreational motor users, equestrians, or cyclists, know that the public right exists, or use the alignment.

“Brigg” as a name may refer to the farmstead ‘The Brigg’ at the eastern end of the route, but ‘brigg’ means ‘bridge or causeway’, so it is possible that the settlement took its name from the road and not the other way around. Although the public carriage roads are all set out at forty feet in breadth, Brigg Road is shown in the plan as being considerably narrower than the others (all of which exist as well-defined physical roads) which may indicate a route of lesser importance even 210 years ago.

Assessment

Other than some vaguely ‘linear marks’ on the ground, approximately on the course of Brigg Road, there is now no clear trace of the route, although county maps of 200 years ago suggest that it was once visible and used. The ground is reedy and prone to dampness and it would be inappropriate to introduce MPV use.

The route should certainly be made available to equestrians, for whom it would be a valuable link in the network. Cyclists would generally find it hard going, even in summer.

Sustainability Assessment Process for Trail Management – Examples of Assessment & Classification

Post-SAP management designation.

SAP potential for definitive map modification order assessment.



Grid reference 86/755528, looking northeastwards.

Background

‘The Long Bank’ – an ancient route that was improved under a turnpike act in the late 1700s, then this section was bypassed by further turnpiking works in 1823. There is a proper stoned surface under soil and grass deposits of almost 200 years, and the route is very resilient and capable of taking most traffic in all weathers.

The reason for the 1823 bypass was that the northern end of this section is very steep – too steep for efficient horse-drawn traffic – but the surface is quite capable of taking the traffic that can cope with the gradient.

Assessment

This is a durable route, flanked by a wall, thus reducing the visibility of users to others, and providing weather protection. It is known to have been used by MPVs for decades. It does not pass close to habitation, and the grazing sheep on the open fell are not alarmed by vehicles – and have ample space to move away. The route is in the North Pennines AONB, but not in a part that is heavily visited.

Sustainability Assessment Process for Trail Management – Examples of Assessment & Classification

Post-SAP management designation.

SAP potential for definitive map modification order assessment.



Grid reference 80/477087, looking northeastwards.

Background

Gatescarth Pass links two of the Lake District’s most beautiful and remote valleys, Longsleddale and Mardale. The name itself implies a route: *gate/gata*, meaning street, way or path; and *scarth* implying a gap. It is generally regarded to be the old road north from Kendal to Scotland before the later turnpike routes were developed over Shap Fell. It climbs from both valleys in a series of well-defined dramatic zig-zags from heavily glaciated valley heads. Sections of the route are pitched and/or paved – a legacy from mining days. Summitting at 570 metres, it is one of the highest fell-top roads in the area, and is favorite route for walkers, mountain bikers and the bravest of horse riders.

Assessment

After many years of no maintenance, during which sections of the route over peat became impassable and undefined, the route underwent extensive repair and maintenance in 2002. The route is now looked after by club volunteers. Following the repairs, the route has been used as a pilot exercise for a series of possible programmes for managing recreational motor vehicle activity in partnership with recreational motor vehicle clubs locally. The result of this collaboration is that use of Gatescarth Pass is now regulated by means of a permit system to use by a limited number of trail motorcycles and 4x4s on just one day each month. The regime acknowledges the sensitive nature of the location, the heavy use of the route by other users, and the historic nature of the route as a highway.

Sustainability Assessment Process for Trail Management – Examples of Assessment & Classification

Post-SAP management designation.

SAP potential for definitive map modification order assessment.



Grid reference 86/596403, looking north-northwestwards.

Background

Viol Moor Public Carriage Road is a classic tree-lined forty-foot-wide green road in the Vale of Eden, Cumbria. The trees appear to be the natural evolution of the enclosing hedges planted when the road was set out. In parts, there are small trees and bushes blocking part of the width, but voluntary work by MPV users has cleared and drained the route to the point where it is now readily usable by walkers, cyclists and equestrians.

The centre strip of surface seems to have a sunken layer of stone, now with centuries of grassy deposit on the top. There is considerable agricultural use – which the road withstands, bar some localised rutting – and agricultural litter as evidenced in the photograph.

This lane forms part of a compact and durable local network of green roads legally usable by MPVs, and in the past 25 years there has been no recorded complaint about such use on any of them.

Assessment

This route is well-made and durable. The voluntary work in recent years has improved the ability of the route to dry out by ‘sun and wind’, but the untrimmed treelines do inhibit natural drying. Because of this, users should inhibit use when the surface is very wet, and consider a joint management initiative with the highway authority to carry out some further trimming and clearance work.

Sustainability Assessment Process for Trail Management – Examples of Assessment & Classification

Post-SAP management designation.

SAP potential for definitive map modification order assessment.



Grid reference 86/596403, looking north-northwestwards.

Background

Monket Bank unclassified road in the North York Moors National Park, near Hutton-le-Hole. Pictured in 2000, the road had suffered from severe water erosion, a partial landslip, and wheel erosion by farm vehicles at the foot of the bank.

North Yorkshire County Council imposed a traffic regulation order prohibiting all vehicles (later revised to prohibit only MPVs) for safety reasons, and undertook a limited programme of repairs, allowing the TRO to be lifted altogether.

Assessment

This route is based on part bedrock and part well-consolidated road stone. It is durable and does not get waterlogged in or after wet weather. It is therefore extremely durable for all types of traffic, but its location in a national park – albeit in a part that tends not to attract a lot of visitors – indicates a need for some sensitivity in use by MPVs.