

PE2154: Ensure planning consideration for equestrian accessibility

Petitioner written submission, 3 June 2025

This petition was submitted because too often we see equestrian access ignored or left behind as local authorities prioritise more popular modes of transport, and do not seek out or fairly include the opinions and needs of equestrians.

Equestrian access is labelled "where possible" instead of considered from the start. This means current or potential equestrian access is being lost. Local authorities are not meeting their legal responsibilities in creating or upholding equestrian inclusion, safety and access.

These problems are most evident where local authorities focus on expanding transportation and infrastructure on developments encroaching into rural areas or linking smaller communities with active transport links. The majority of these fail to provide or preserve off-road and on-road routes that uphold equestrian access rights. Developments on greenspace or severing links to them are done without seeking to ensure that local equestrian facilities have alternative and sufficient land plus, planned access thereto, for equestrian use within reasonable distances.

We are asking the Scottish Government to provide safeguards to ensure that equestrian accessibility is promoted and enforced correctly and fairly within local authorities.

The British Horse Society (BHS) reported that "having safe places to ride and carriage drive is particularly important for equestrians as horse riders have access to only 22% of the public rights of way network and carriage drivers to just 5%. With the increasing volume and speed of traffic on our roads they are often not safe places for equestrians to be, so bridleways, byways and other multi-user routes, that equestrians can access, are more vital to enable equestrians to get off the roads.

Being outdoors and in contact with nature is an important motivation for the vast majority of horse riders. With ever increasing rates of obesity, stress and declining mental health in the UK, we are uniquely placed to make a significant contribution to improving the wellbeing of two hard to reach groups when it comes to exercise namely younger and older females."

According to the statistics from the BHS, Indoor Carriage Driving UK, and Cycling UK, equestrians are 80-90% female with carriage drivers being 45% aged 55 and older and include less mobile and disabled people. Cyclists are 70-75% male.

All statistics from the British Horse Society shown below are from 01.01.2024 – 31.12.2024.

- 3,118 road incidents involving horses have been recorded with The British Horse Society
- 58 horses have died and 97 have been injured
- 80 people have been injured because of road incidents

- 81% of incidents occurred because a driver passed by too closely or too quickly

The written submission by the Scottish Government states, “Local Development Plans should safeguard access rights and core paths and encourage new and enhanced opportunities for access linked to wider networks.”

A recent survey by Stirling Council and Sustrans (survey.natcen.ac.uk/travel) was posted through the letterbox of residents, asking for active transport and recreational transport needs within the local and neighbouring communities. The answers to questions in the survey were premade and mentioned nothing of equestrian needs.

Equestrian access is a legal obligation for local authorities to include and provide for equestrian participation regardless of the level of demand in an area. What is concerning, is that Stirlingshire has a vast equestrian community, some of which are within a 15 minute drive from the city centre.

The method of distribution and wording of this survey excluding equine use are detrimental to equestrian access requirements and set a dangerous precedent of us not being adequately represented within the general population and when encroaching into rural communities.

Sustrans also recently signed a memorandum of understanding in August of 2024 (<https://www.bhs.org.uk/media/gwkcqdke/bhs-and-sustrans-mou-202408.pdf>). The stated aims for both parties are to be found on page 5 titled Areas of Collaboration.

Though the Memorandum of Understanding is not legally binding, the fact that we have been omitted from such information gathering by both a local authority and a charity, with great influence over many urban transport links within expanding cities, is concerning. This goes directly against Scottish values of accessibility for all.

The National Planning Framework states that “Planning requires great responsibility - decisions about development will impact generations to come.” The state of equestrian accessibility is in need of better implementation and security if these aims are to be achieved.

The Impact of Active Travel Plans and LTN 1/20 on Equestrians, published May 2025 (<https://www.bhs.org.uk/media/Octbwapd/202505-the-impact-of-active-travel-plans-and-ltn-120-on-equestrians-british-horse-society.pdf>) by the British Horse Society, has reported on the many instances when equestrian access and safety have been excluded from Active Travel Plans in England. We find that they reflect similar issues within Active Travel Plans in Scotland. Scottish Core Access and Land Use Act (2003) should be helping to pioneer these projects to a better standard and to not discriminate against equestrian users from safe and enjoyable access.

I contacted the Scottish Government regarding my concerns about the lack of equestrian inclusion. The response highlighted that many of the Scottish Great Trails (SGT) were designed solely for pedestrian usage and that catch up has been needed to open suitable areas of the trails for other uses.

I had also contacted my Local Access Forum when I became aware of the lack of equestrian inclusion in my local area and raised my concerns that signage and current core access lacked proper advertisement of horse use. Their response on this matter was:

“Regarding signage, while it might seem like a straightforward solution, the reality is more complex. Since the core path network was established in 2009, the signage has not been replaced or updated. Replacing even a single sign would consume one-eighth of my annual budget. This budget must cover the maintenance of 623 signs, 403 gates, 125 bridges, and 356 km of core paths, including the West Highland Way. The network is under significant strain due to limited funding and the impacts of climate change, so my budget is primarily used to keep routes clear of obstructions and to replace aging assets like bridges and gates.”

With many established and new core access routes proposed alongside Active Travel Plans focusing specifically on cyclists and pedestrians, the British Horse Society report shows the dangers of allowing planning to go ahead without correctly budgeting for, or consulting on equestrian needs.