

Report to Partnership Meeting 24 April 2020

RESEARCH AND STRATEGY DELIVERY

National Cycle Network Review

Purpose of Report

To provide Members with an update on Sustrans' review of the National Cycle Network, and implications of this for the Network in the HITRANS area.

BACKGROUND

The National Cycle Network (NCN) in Scotland is currently a network of walking and cycling routes covering the whole country from the Borders to the Shetland Isles. It runs through Scotland's two National Parks, and connects all of Scotland's seven major cities. It carries 104million trips a year spread equally by people travelling by foot or bike.

As custodians of the Network, Sustrans' vision is to shape a network of traffic free paths that can be used by a sensible 12-year-old travelling alone. Sustrans receives funding from Transport Scotland for the development and improvement of NCN routes in Scotland.

Following a UK-wide assessment of the quality of the Network in 2018, a total of 38.4% of the NCN in Scotland is set to be reclassified or removed from NCN routes during 2020. Of this:

- 37.2% (976.2 miles) will be reclassified and promoted as part of dedicated named routes which make use of the Network but don't run wholly on the Network.
- A further 1.02% (20.2miles) will be removed from the Network and will cease to be promoted.

Sustrans believe this decision will:

- Create a smaller, but safer network
- Present a more accessible Network for everyone to use.
- Give people a more consistent experience when they are travelling across the Network.
- Allow people to make an informed choice when using different routes on and off the Network

Sustrans' long term aim is to re-route on-road parts of the NCN to new traffic-free sections, or create new segregated infrastructure. They will continue to promote cycle tourism in Scotland by introducing and promoting a minimum of five named routes which make use of the Network, but are not wholly on the NCN. These routes are intended for use by leisure cycle tourists and local users.

Sustrans intend to work with relevant partners to agree names for these routes and a strategy for future promotion and support.

RECLASSIFICATION AND REMOVAL OF SECTIONS FROM THE NETWORK

On-road parts of the Network were identified where motor traffic speeds exceeded a median speed of 40mph, or 35mph in the case of A-roads (where a high volume of traffic could be assumed). These thresholds were significantly higher than best-practice design guidance, and Sustrans considered that sections of Network route which exceeded this speed threshold were too fast to recommend as safe routes for cycling for all users.

In some cases, the removal of sections of the NCN will isolate parts of the network from each other. Sustrans have classified the impact of this as follows (Tiers 1 and 2 combined are the practical minimum for removal):

- Tier 1: sections of the NCN to be removed due to exceeding speed thresholds.
- Tier 2: sections of the NCN that are cut off or isolated from the network due to the removal of Tier 1 sections.

In many cases, speed limit reductions could be a possible solution to making on-road sections safer and more accessible. However, simply reducing the speed limit may not have the desired effect in reducing the actual speed at which people drive. It would likely be necessary for local and road authorities to consider additional measures to reduce vehicle speeds and/or volume.

Where Sustrans has identified an on-road section for removal, they intend to work with local partners to see whether alternative improvement arrangements can be made. That could include encouraging a local authority to seek funding for a new traffic-free section. In the HITRANS area, the responsible roads authority is often Transport Scotland as the section to be removed is currently on a Trunk Road.

Over time Sustrans anticipate that the Network will grow again as sections are brought up to standard and new off-road routes are added.

IMPLICATIONS FOR HITRANS AREA

The full detail of which routes will be removed and which ones reclassified has not yet been shared by Sustrans. All four numbered NCN routes in the HITRANS area will be affected: NCN1, NCN7, NCN78 and NCN780. Although Sustrans states that their aim is not to remove routes from the Network, this seems to be the effect that removal and reclassification will have in the HITRANS area (see appended map).

The changes due to be implemented in 2020 are:

- Sections of NCN will be removed from the network if they are on-road in places where traffic speeds are a median of 40mph or above, or 35mph or above in the case of A roads or other high traffic roads. Sustrans considered that sections of Network route which exceeded this speed threshold were too fast to recommend as safe routes for cycling for all users.
- Where a route is removed from the Network but is of importance to local tourism *and* of a significant distance and scale, it will be reclassified as a named route. This decision means that whilst these sections will no longer be part of the NCN or appear on NCN mapping, the entirety of the route will continue to be mapped by Ordnance Survey and appear on their publications and app. They will also continue to be promoted by Sustrans and Visit Scotland as a dedicated named route which makes use of the National Cycle Network but that does not run wholly on the Network.

- Sustrans will work with partners along named routes to agree names, if no formal existing names are in place.
- Where sections of Network are removed from existing named routes, such as the Caledonia Way (NCN78), and the Hebridean Way, the route names will remain, in agreement with relevant local partners. These routes will, in most cases, make use of the NCN but not run wholly on the Network. These will be mapped and promoted as such by Sustrans and Ordnance Survey.
- Where a section of route is not of significant tourist value or are too small to be judged as a standalone route product, the selected section will be removed. This in some cases may amount to the removal of an entire route.

NCN1 will be disrupted by the removal or reclassification of the entire route from Tain to Scrabster, and all of Orkney.

NCN7 will be disrupted by the removal or reclassification of on-road sections between Perth and Inverness.

NCN78 (Caledonia Way) has significant on-road sections highlighted for removal or reclassification between Campbeltown and Oban, and from Fort Augustus to Inverness.

Route 780 (Hebridean Way) will be entirely reclassified or removed from the NCN.

Recommendation

Members are asked to:

1. Note this report
2. Consider how HITRANS and partners can best engage with Transport Scotland and Sustrans given the implications of the proposed changes to the National Cycle Network within the region.

Risk Register

RTS Delivery

Impact –

Comment – Encouraging more walking and cycling is essential to support key objectives within the National and Regional Transport Strategy objectives.

Policy

Impact –

Comment – HITRANS recognises the need to ensure that the National Cycle Network offers a high quality, consistent and safer experience for users if we are to encourage active travel but there is an urgent need to address the outcome of this review that will result in the either the removal or reclassification of almost all the NCN within the HITRANS area

Financial

Impact –

Comment – There is no direct financial impact on HITRANS. However, there is potentially a negative impact on cycle tourism and associated wider economic benefits derived from this within the HITRANS

area. Significant funding will be required to reinstate sections which have been removed or reclassified as a result of the review.

Equality

Impact –

Comment – HITRANS support for active travel helps eliminate the barriers to travel for all and removes a number of physical accessibility barriers. The proposed changes to the NCN will ensure that the remaining network is safer but has the potential to discourage cycling in those areas which will no longer have sections of route promoted near to their community.

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Date: 14th April 2020

Appendix: Map of NCN in Scotland

National Cycle Network sections identified for reclassification or removal

