

**Slighe an Iochdar
Iochdar Cycling, Walking & Wheeling Route
End of Project Report**

Project Overview



730m new shared use path



1.5km of route connecting community facilities

Project Cost: £1,030,006

Funding from Transport Scotland: £955,016

Community Match funding: £74,990

Background

The Slighe an lochdar project was initiated by lochdar Community Council in 2015, and from 2019 went through rigorous design, engagement and review processes with Sustrans under stages 0-4 of the Places for Everyone Funding between 2019 and 2024.

The aim of the project was to integrate the community, offering a safe and secure alternative to the private car for short local journeys; connecting the local shop, post office, crofters store, social housing, community hall and football pitch. The new path is sensitive to the local environment, including a rest area overlooking the loch where people can gather and socialise or pause and reflect.

The new path enables people to travel from the east side of Sgoil an lochdar (lochdar Primary School), following the Bualadabh road to the junction with the A865, which is the main spinal route through the Uists. The new path provides a 3-metre-wide shared use path, separated from vehicles and accessible to all those travelling on foot, wheeling or cycling. From the junction the route follows the old single track road which became disused when the A865 was upgraded to two lanes.

Sections of the path are constructed from recycled plastic boardwalk to guard against the risk of flooding from the lochs on either side of the road, and to enable the route to be built within the road boundary over drainage ditches. The path allows users to safely access facilities such as the local shop, community hall, care home, football pitch and the school, truly integrating this rural island community. It also allows users to explore an area of the island which is less often visited due to the nature of the terrain and road conditions, and provides an important and attractive addition to the Hebridean Way long distance route.

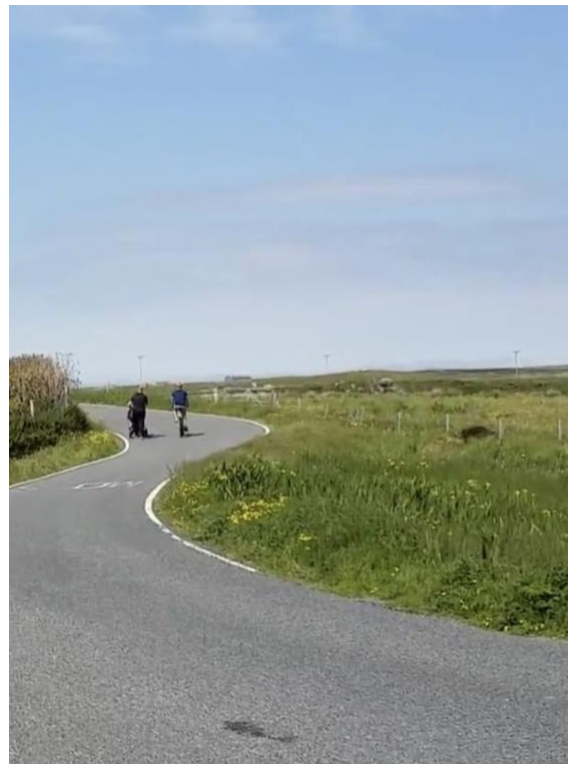
The project was supported by the Local Development Plan as it presents an improvement to active travel infrastructure with associated benefits for climate change, health and wellbeing, and road safety.



There was no footway through lochdar, on a national speed limit road

Objectives:

- Providing a safer route around the whole community and its facilities;
- Encourage people to become more physically active;
- Children and others can learn to cycle and cycle safely;
- Children cycling to school and other destinations;
- Enhancing the health of children and adults;
- Help children to gain independence and confidence;
- Help parents to have confidence in children's ability to use bicycles within a safe space;
- Reduce traffic congestion and pollution around the school;
- Improve community spaces;
- Allow school children access to a safe route to carry out their "mile a day" exercise;
- Provide an inclusive all abilities segregated walking, wheeling and cycling route.



Blind corners made walking on the road feel unsafe

Delivery

Funding for construction of the route was confirmed by Transport Scotland in November 2025, with a requirement for the project to complete by the end of the financial year in March 2026. This presented multiple challenges to the 6-month (summer) construction period outlined in the funding bid, with risks including delays caused by poor or extreme weather conditions and ferry cancellations – both of which increase between November and March. However, after consultation with the Community Council, who were keen to take the opportunity of funding, and with the boardwalk manufacturer and local contractors, who felt confident that the project was deliverable within the timeframe allowed, the project went ahead.



Path under construction – January 2026 – looking towards school (top left)

Impact

The impact of a project like this, providing dedicated infrastructure for walking, wheeling and cycling in a rural / island context, is difficult to describe to those living in more urban areas where things like footways and road crossings are taken for granted.

It's not just about how many meters of path were constructed, but also about how it enables people to move freely around the place they call home, not having to use the car for short journeys because walking on the road doesn't feel safe. It's about the small unplanned social interactions had with other users of the route, which bind a community together. It's about not having to step onto the verge every time a vehicle comes past, standing in long wet grass and trying not to fall into the ditch. It's about

children having the freedom to roam, and parents not needing to worry about them being on the road, because there's no footway and everyone drives too fast on the small roads.



On a beautiful day at the end of May, Sgoil an lochdar got in the mood for Mòd Ionadail Uibhist, with singing, dancing and a picnic.



Testimonials from lochdar Community Council Facebook page provide an insight into how the project has been received locally:

New pathway has certainly given the youngsters a new lease of freedom 🥳 thank you everyone who worked hard to make it happen - lovely to see it being used by all ❤️ x

The path looks great. Well done to all involved - a great community effort 🙌

The walkway is great I use it for a safer walk up and round the road, the seating area was lovely in the nice weather last week.

*Well done lochdar Community Council. 🙌🙌
Safe for young and old to be able to enjoy a walk through lochdar.*

Absolutely brilliant, well done lochdar Community Council. A demonstration of positive change, working for and with the community.

Learnings

We have taken a number of learnings from this project which we can apply to future infrastructure projects across the region.

1. Partnerships

The partnership with lochdar Community Council worked really well; they were able to engage with and communicate progress to the local community. The project had a strong community grounding because it was led by a local organisation who had done all the hard work of engagement, planning and design before we joined. This comes with a caveat for future projects though, as the Community Council is extraordinarily proactive and capable, and it should be recognised that not all local volunteer-based organisations will have the same capacity or ability to progress projects, and they should not be expected to when active travel is a core policy issue for local authorities, RTPs and the Scottish Government.

2. Materials

The recycled plastic boardwalk material is a solution which could be applied to other projects across the region, providing a lower-impact design for boggy or constrained areas. This deviation from urban-centric design nevertheless provides a high Level of Service for users. Providing a 3m wide path adjacent to a 3m wide single track road could look strange and confusing to drivers, but the different material makes it clear that it is a dedicated active travel space.

3. Challenges - Funding

It was challenging to deliver the project within such a short delivery window – with the funding award being made in November, we were into the Christmas holiday period by the time procurement for construction was complete. We were extremely fortunate with the weather through January and February with a long spell of unusually calm, fine weather which enabled the contractor to progress the work rapidly. Often at this time of year it's so windy that it's difficult to even step outside in the Western Isles. Completion within the time available was largely down to the determination of the Community Council and their good relations with a local contractor who rose to the challenge.

4. *Challenges – Transport Network and Capacity*

One key issue and worth noting for future projects was ferry cancellations. There is no tar manufacturer on the Uists so material for the short tarred section had to be shipped in from the mainland, and this was delayed due to cancelled ferries.

Supply and contractor capacity in island and rural highland locations is something which needs to be factored in, and there is no certainty that future projects could be completed within such a short timeframe.

5. *Rural Lens*

There is a great resilience in island and rural communities for creative problem solving and innovation which we will certainly tap in to for future infrastructure projects.