

Yeo Valley Trail: Active Travel Infrastructure

Proposal

The proposal is for the Yeo Valley Trail to connect the towns and villages in northwest Dorset and south Somerset area that are economically and socially dependent on each other. The trail is a high quality, mainly rural, traffic-free route that is accessible for all abilities and ages. The scope of the proposal will, as a minimum, benefit the populations of Milborne Port, Sherborne, Thornford, Bradford Abbas and Yeovil.

Outstanding Issues

1. There is a lack of low traffic or traffic-free direct routes that would enable people to use active travel options to move safely between these settlements.
2. Unlike many similarly sized towns there is no network of minor roads that lead in and out of Sherborne. Most of the through routes carry high volumes of traffic without any mitigation for cycling. They are perceived to be unsafe and act as a deterrent to cycling on these routes.
3. The villages have no safe routes for active travel journeys to other towns in the area.
4. Our immediate environment can be improved by replacing journeys, that would previously have been made by car, with active travel options. This will reduce the CO₂ and NO_x emissions, vehicle noise, traffic congestion, accidents and help to prevent climate change.
5. The health of the population can be improved by encouraging active travel, both for utility and leisure journeys, that will consequently lower the burden on the GP surgeries and the NHS.
6. The scope for including traffic-free routes in and out and around the town are constrained by the existing topography, road layout and land ownership.
7. There is no space provided for children to learn to ride or practice riding a bicycle nor is there any provision for young families to go for a cycle ride in a safe environment.
8. There is no provision for people with mobility aids, motorised or otherwise, to either travel into the countryside or to other local settlements at will.
9. We are in a low investment area for active travel initiatives.
10. Active tourists are disincentivised from visiting the area because of a lack of safe route options.

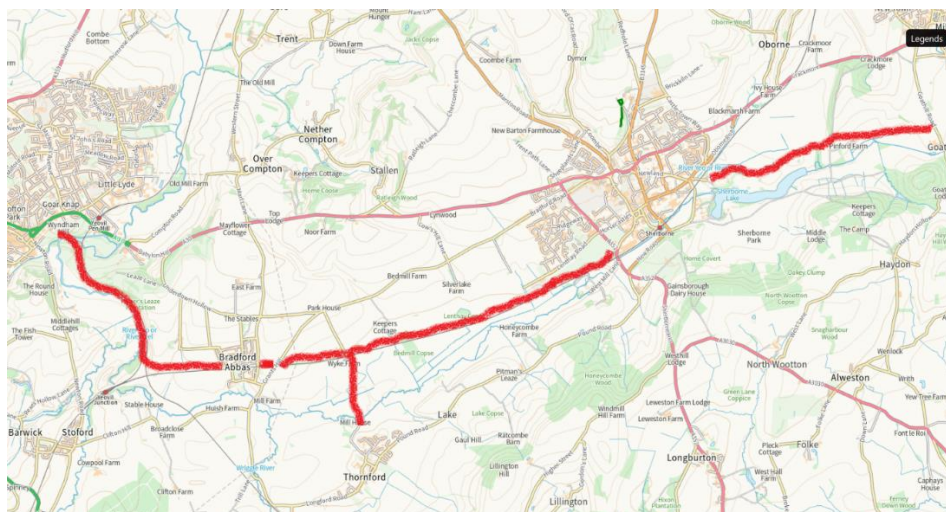


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Route

The route proposed here is subject to survey. It is made up of three sections connecting the populated areas to the east of Yeovil along the Yeo Valley and then onto Milborne Port with a mileage of ~7.1m

1. Pinford Lane from Milborne Port to Sherborne (~2.2m)
2. From Sherborne alongside the railway line to Bradford Abbas (~2.9m) with spur from Wyke Farm to Thornford (~0.5m)
3. From Bradford Abbas, following the railway line towards Pen Mill to meet the existing off-road route, Yeovil Country Park, at Wyndham Hill in Yeovil (~1.5m)



Sections 2 and 3 follow the railway line for the easier gradients and to limit the agricultural impact. To gain the greatest return on investment the route should have a high-quality metalled surface and gentle gradients to attract all abilities. The surface will be sufficiently wide for two-way traffic and safe overtaking. A feasibility study will be required to confirm the viability of the route or provide alternatives.

Benefits

The health benefits from encouraging and supporting an active lifestyle are well recorded (cf. *The Role of Active Travel in Improving Health. Sustrans 2017*). It provides the ability to complete everyday tasks such as commuting to work or college, shopping, appointments without using a car. This modal shift between towns and villages will reduce traffic congestion, pollution, accident rates and enhance wellbeing. Also, the rural nature of the route provides an opportunity for people to connect with nature, an aim which is consistent with that of the Dorset Nature Recovery Strategy.

The tourist potential cannot be underestimated and, similarly to the Tarka Trail in Devon, it will encourage the active tourist to visit the area with its hotels, cafes and heritage sites or to hire bikes just to use the trail itself. Artworks and information boards on the trail along with The Sherborne will support the area as an art trail too.

Economic benefits accrue partly from the hospitality sector servicing the greater visitor numbers, but also job creation for bike servicing and hires and in the retail sector. The other benefits for business include a healthier workforce, lower rates of absenteeism/presenteeism, and the ability to attract and retain staff who can cycle safely to work as well giving their family a better quality of life.

Similar cycleway schemes have returned average benefit-cost ratios of 6.3:1 (cf. *Active Travel and Economic Performance. Sustrans*).

Conclusion

An investment in the Yeo Valley Trail active travel infrastructure will not only repay the investment many times over economically but also bring social rewards in terms better health, wellbeing and enhanced quality of life. There are no other alternatives in this area for a high-quality traffic-free, and away from traffic, route that, properly executed, brings so many other benefits to this part of Dorset and Somerset. This proposal answers the issues raised above and highlights the many opportunities that will arise consequently.



Monifieth to Carnoustie cycleway (Copyright Angus Council)

Approvals

STAG Sherborne Travel Action Group (Pending)
Sherborne Town Council (Pending)
ThornHackett Parish Council (Pending)
Bradford Abbas Parish Council (Pending)
Milborne Port Parish Council (Pending)
CPRE

References

[The Role of Active Travel in Improving Health. Sustrans 2017 \(Web view\)](#)

[Active Travel and Economic Performance](#)

<https://www.ippr.org>

Population Served

Wikipedia. [List of Settlements in Dorset by Population](#)

The principal beneficiaries of the trail can be drawn from these town and villages who are in the economic orbit of Yeovil.

Centre	Population
Milborne Port	3,200
Bradford Abbas	970
Thornford	900
Yetminster	890
Sherborne	10,370
Yeovil	50,170
Total	66,500