

The law and management of public access rights vary widely between the four countries of the United Kingdom. Practical elements of the following advice apply in all of them but the legal requirements in Scotland and Northern Ireland may differ from those in England and Wales.

Riders and drivers of horses are referred to generically as equestrians.

More advice is available on www.bhs.org.uk/accessadvice.

IMPORTANT This guidance is general and does not aim to cover every variation in circumstances. Where it is being relied upon, The Society strongly recommends seeking its advice specific to the site.

Contents

Background	1
Walking, Cycling and Horse Riding Assessment and Review	3
Horse riding as active travel	3
Riding as physical activity	4
Health benefits	5
Plans which include horses	5
Parliamentary reference to equestrian inclusion	6
House of Commons debate on Road Safety, 5 November 2018	6
Active Travel debate Westminster 9 July 2019	6
Cycling and Walking, question by Dr David Drew 15 July 2019	7
Transport Links: Nottinghamshire debate 23 July 2019	8

Background

Following the Infrastructure Act 2005, the government developed its Cycling and Walking Investment Strategy to promote 'active travel', and required local authorities to create their own Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans in response.

Walking and cycling are naturally the majority use and therefore the focus of the Strategy and Plans. Other active travel modes, including horse riding, are not excluded but unfortunately are only included in some government publications and provisions. The inconsistency leads to confusion and unnecessary omission of horse riders as active travellers.

The House of Commons Transport Committee '*Active travel increasing levels of walking and cycling in England Eleventh Report of Session 2017–19*', together with formal minutes relating to the report (London, 2019) para.6 states that:

Active travel covers any journey that is made by **physically active means**, and covers such diverse activities as **horse riding**, skateboarding, roller skating, and riding a scooter.

The Active Travel England (ATE) 'route check tool's user manual includes that reference on page 29.

The Report points out that walking and cycling are the most common forms of active travel, and focus is therefore on those modes, which is accepted by the BHS, but exclusion of riding is not accepted as Parliament (below) clearly intends horse riding to be included.

It is sometimes said that riding is not active, only the horse is active, and that riding is always recreational and never replaces a motor journey. Both views are not true, see Horse riding as active travel below.

The BHS anticipated that councils would focus on foot and cycle schemes to the neglect of other users and campaigned vigorously for more clear inclusion, unfortunately without success, with the result that many council schemes actively exclude equestrians or disadvantage them, such as by:

- Changing the surface of bridleways or byways from horse-friendly to undesirable
- Increasing speeds and number of cyclists on routes previously used safely with horses
- Inferring, through inaccurate and inappropriate signs, that cycling has priority¹ which it does not

¹ No highway user has priority on any highway, except that on a bridleway a cyclist must give way to a pedestrian or horse rider (Countryside Act 1968 Section 30)

The government's Cycling and Walking Investment Strategy Safety Review says:

1.2 But safety has particular importance for vulnerable road users, such as walkers, cyclists and horse riders. All road users have an equal right to use the road, and safety and the perception of safety are key factors in determining how far people use these modes of transport.¹ The safer they feel, the more they will use these active modes of travel. The more people who use Active Travel, the fitter and healthier they will be, and the more their communities will benefit from lower congestion and better air quality, among a host of other benefits (Jesse Norman, p 4)

Unfortunately, Government guidance on '*Active Travel, Working Together to Promote Active Travel A briefing for local authorities*' is one of the resources which is inconsistent and does not mention horses.

Ministers' responses to questions in Parliament (below), demonstrate that the Government did not intend equestrians to be excluded.

Walking, Cycling and Horse Riding Assessment and Review

A Walking, Cycling and Horse Riding Assessment and Review (WCHAR) is required as part of any changes to trunk roads. It is logical that the same approach should apply to all roads except motorways where vulnerable road users, including equestrians, have a right to travel safely.

Horse riding as active travel

There are four reasons why horse riders must logically be included in active travel provisions.

1. Riding or driving a horse on a journey is travel
2. Riding or driving a horse is physically active
3. No active travel route is reserved exclusively for commuting or utility journeys; they are used for recreation and exercise by pedestrians and cyclists, therefore to exclude equestrians on the basis that they are not commuting is discrimination
4. Increasing the motor-free facilities for equestrians means reducing transporting a horse to facilities

To ride a horse is to travel actively, for the rider as well as the horse, see Riding as physical activity (below). Riding is less common than walking and cycling, and riders are less likely to commute by horse, but riders are active travellers who are equally vulnerable road users seeking routes to travel which are free from motor traffic and therefore safer and more pleasant environments, encouraging a greater number of journeys without a motor vehicle, whether for exercise or utility.

Where active travel has been defined by a council as only for a utility journey, inclusion of equestrians has been refused in the belief that they are only undertaking recreational journeys. Riders do undertake local journeys for errands, or to take a horse to a vet or farrier: travel which would otherwise require a vehicular journey. They could undertake more local utility journeys if there were more safe facilities to do so.

Equally, pedestrians and cyclists use those 'active travel for utility journey' facilities as much, if not more, for recreation and exercise, but that non-utility use is not monitored or considered.

To reserve a travel facility for use only for commuting/utility would be to create a new class of highway, which defies the definition of highway, which is use for *any purpose* at any time. It is not practical or desirable to draw that difference, but equestrians are deliberately excluded from active travel facilities purely on the grounds that their use might be recreational. This is highly discriminatory.

Providing for equestrians to ride or drive from their doorstep reduces the need to transport horses to a place to ride or drive which is free from motor traffic.

Equestrians may have impaired mobility and their horse or horse-drawn vehicle provides their mobility, in the same way as an adapted cycle.

Riding as physical activity

Some studies and policies for active travel exclude riding as, "*horse-riding is active travel for the horse, not the human.*"² This view is demonstrably untrue and could only be stated by someone who has not attempted to ride a horse. Should a rider not be active, the horse would not be in motion—proven by novices whose horse stands, fidgets, sleeps or eats in preference to moving—or would be in uncontrolled motion. It is only "*the sustained physical exertion of the traveller [i.e. the rider, which] directly contributes to [the horse's] motion*"³ exactly as for a

² [Science Direct](#) (the authors were contacted with the offer to assist in rectifying the error)

³ *ibid*

cyclist. An observer being unaware of the effort required is simply the mark of the rider's skill and the observer's lack of knowledge.

Riding a horse is a continuous effort of balance and uses every muscle in the body, a fact discovered by even fit people unused to riding when they experience the level of post-activity muscle soreness. The level of effort is evident to those who use a heart rate device which shows greater exertion to ride than to walk the same route at an equivalent pace.

Health benefits

There are considerable health benefits of horse riding,⁴ both physical and mental, just as from walking, running or cycling. Driving a horse may be less physically demanding, but preparing the horse for travel, balancing, and constant vigilance all around while driving the horse require effort, and the mental benefit is as great as for any outdoor activity, particularly for those whose mobility is so impaired that this is their only opportunity to be outside and independently mobile.

Plans which include horses

Active Travel Plans, Local Plans and Local Transport Plans can all improve access of equestrians to travel facilities by ensuring that they are included in any Plan that mentions cycling or walking. The following examples do so.

- [West Northamptonshire Local Transport Plan](#) repeatedly includes equestrians
- [Lewes District Council draft Local Plan January 2025](#) has multiple references to horse riding
- West Berkshire Council has horses written into its [Transport & Active Travel Strategy](#)
- [West Sussex Transport Plan](#) has several references to horses
- [Peterborough Local Transport Plan](#)
- [East Leeds Orbital Route](#)
- [Essex Local Transport Plan](#)
- Cambridgeshire [Local Transport and Connectivity Plan](#) refers to non-motorised users and the need to protect their amenity.

⁴ [The health benefits of horse riding in the UK — The University of Brighton](#)

Parliamentary reference to equestrian inclusion

House of Commons debate on Road Safety, 5 November 2018

Jesse Norman:

We should be clear that the cycling and walking strategy may have that name but is absolutely targeted at vulnerable road users, including horse-riders.

And:

Horse riders are vulnerable road users — there is no doubt about that, and there never has been — and they have been included in the work we are doing.

Active Travel debate Westminster 9 July 2019

The Active Travel and local walking and cycling infrastructure plans debate contained the following statements in respect of equestrian access:

The Minister of State, Department for Transport (Michael Ellis)

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Witney (Robert Courts) on securing this popular debate about active travel, local walking and cycling infrastructure. I am delighted to have had the opportunity to hear the contributions of hon. Members from across the House, who spoke about how cycling improves productivity, health and even one's love life, according to the hon. Member for Totnes (Dr Wollaston). I need to do more cycling for all those reasons, all of which are acknowledged. I was also pleased that my hon. Friend and the hon. Member for Stroud (Dr Drew) mentioned equestrianism. Active travel includes horse riders and bridle paths—this debate includes them.

Robert Courts

I am grateful to my hon. Friend and neighbour for making that point. He is right. Those of us who are lawyers know that expunging a footpath is, rightly, one of the hardest things to do in the law. Footpaths are protected, and I agree that they must remain so when new developments are built, to ensure that our latticework of footpaths continues to exist. I would extend that to bridleways as well, which similarly have an historical provenance. I ask the House to bear in mind that, although we tend to think of cycling and walking in the context of the strategy I mentioned, horse riders in areas such as mine

and my hon. Friend's are also vulnerable, and ought to be thought about in the context of active travel as well.

Dr David Drew (Stroud)

It is a delight to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Bailey. I congratulate the hon. Member for Witney (Robert Courts) on securing the debate.

Let me start by mentioning horse-riding. I have to say this, because my horse-riders have been on to me. Pat Harris of the Mid Cotswolds Tracks and Trails group tells me that there are 2.9 million regular horse riders and half a million carriage users. They do not like being left out of debates about cyclists and pedestrians, because they feel they are an important part of the group of non-motorists.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Witney (Robert Courts) on securing this popular debate about active travel, local walking and cycling infrastructure. I am delighted to have had the opportunity to hear the contributions of hon. Members from across the House, who spoke about how cycling improves productivity, health and even one's love life, according to the hon. Member for Totnes (Dr Wollaston). I need to do more cycling for all those reasons, all of which are acknowledged. I was also pleased that my hon. Friend and the hon. Member for Stroud (Dr Drew) mentioned equestrianism. Active travel includes horse riders and bridle paths—this debate includes them.

I welcome the contributions from hon. Members during our all too brief debate. I welcome the ideas proposed. As I stated at the outset, the Government are committed to increasing cycling and walking and to making our roads safer for vulnerable users such as cyclists, pedestrians and equestrians. As we start to develop the next phase of the cycling and walking investment strategy, I welcome all ideas for how we can achieve our collective ambition. In my view, there is a cross-party, non-political, collective ambition to make cycling and walking the natural choice for short journeys, or as part of longer journeys, across the country.

Cycling and Walking, question by Dr David Drew 15 July 2019

To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, whether he plans to include (a) horse-riding and (b) horse-drawn carriages in his Department's support for the development of active travel and local walking and cycling infrastructure plans.

Answered by Michael Ellis

The Government's Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan Guidance notes that local authorities should consider the needs of equestrians where they have access to walking and cycling infrastructure such as off-carriageway routes. However, the Government does not intend to specify that all measures to support active travel must include a horse-riding or horse-drawn carriage element: decisions on this are a matter for local authorities. Nevertheless the Government does encourage local authorities to support equestrians in their active travel plans.

Transport Links: Nottinghamshire debate 23 July 2019

Minister of State (Department of Transport) Michael Ellis

Her Majesty's Government—this Government—are investing vast sums in cycling, pedestrian access, equestrianism and all forms of active travel, and have invested many billions of pounds in road maintenance. When this Government created the national pothole action fund and invested in it some years ago, I played a part in that. This Government have made significant investments in transport, because good transport links are a key enabler of growth, employment, access to education—all aspects that are doing extremely well in this country—skills training, and seeing our friends and family. Transport is a key link in all those areas.

If this is a saved or printed copy, please check www.bhs.org.uk/accessadvice for the latest version (date top of page 2).