

# Position Statement

## Transport



England's National Parks are huge assets for the nation, attracting millions of visitors every year. The vast majority of visitors arrive by car. This level of car usage can create considerable management problems and has the potential to damage the very qualities that visitors seek. This, the first collective policy statement on transport by the English National Park Authorities (NPAs), focuses mainly on surface transport. England's NPAs aim to be at the forefront in supporting sustainable leisure transport networks that provide opportunities for everyone to experience the special qualities of our National Parks, whether they have a car or not. Our goal is to see a significant shift where a higher proportion of visitors and residents use alternatives to the car to travel around the National Parks. The numerous roads, railways, and other transport infrastructure within National Parks need to be managed carefully given the sensitive nature of these environments. ENPAA wants to see transport policies reinforce, not undermine, a sense of place. Major developments like roads should be avoided, and overhead, our skies should remain tranquil

### **England's National Parks**

Our National Parks are a truly national treasure. The nine National Parks in England are managed by National Park Authorities. These are independent bodies funded by central Government and have the following two purposes:

- to conserve and enhance the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of National Parks; and
- to promote opportunities for the understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities of National Parks by the public.

In carrying out these purposes, they also have a duty to seek to foster the economic and social well-being of local communities within the National Park.

### **The Transport Challenge in National Parks in England**

The National Parks are exceptional environments that attract millions of visitors a year, and are home to over 209,000 people. The vast majority of visitors arrive by car. 85% of visitors to the Lake District in 2006, for example, arrived by some form of motorised vehicle. Visitor surveys, undertaken by National Park Authorities (NPAs) and tourism bodies demonstrate that traffic and congestion are considered a threat to the special qualities of National Parks, and do damage the visitor experience.

The sheer volume of traffic can undermine the special qualities of National Parks, like their tranquillity, and conflict with aims to conserve and enhance the natural environment, heritage, and local character. Given the nature of the areas affected, ENPAA believes Government and other policy makers need to address transport problems in National Parks as a priority.

Across England, leisure transport accounts for more mileage than any other single use. This adds to emissions that are leading to climate change. The English NPAs are committed to working towards achieving carbon neutral National Parks (see ENPAA's Policy Position Statement: *Climate Change*). We therefore believe this trend needs to be tackled. Providing sustainable leisure alternatives to the car can and should help to reduce emissions. Yet, NPAs frequently experience a lack of priority for funding rural transport projects.

Poor public transport and a lack of safe walking/ cycling routes is detrimental to the residents of National Parks - as well as to visitors. Nationally, 25% of people don't have access to a car. Policies and initiatives that reduce car dependency and promote alternatives are more socially inclusive.

With the growth in the use of the car and lorry to move people and freight, comes pressure for new road building. The Government's Transport White Paper 2004 said that there continues 'to be a strong presumption against schemes that would significantly affect environmentally sensitive sites or important species or landscapes'. Planning policies for protecting National Parks go further. Despite this, plans for new road building in National Parks continue to be promoted. In addition to the obvious damage caused by large new transport infrastructure, National Parks can be affected indirectly too. Mineral extraction, used for the building and maintaining of transport infrastructure, can damage beautiful landscapes.

A number of National Parks are under commercial flight paths. With the growth in air travel this means more vapour trails and potential concerns over noise. The tranquillity for residents and visitors alike can also be disturbed by helicopters and other general aviation.

### **National Parks are promoting solutions**

The powers and resources of NPAs are few in this area. Yet they are behind a lot of initiatives to promote alternatives to the car – some of them award winning for their innovation. Many NPAs have supported the work of the Car Free Leisure Network that helps share good practice.

*Marketing and information* - NPA maps and literature, visitor centres and notice boards promote behavioural change through highlighting the networks that exist and encouraging people to walk, cycle or take public transport. By demonstrating what people can do at a personal level, NPAs can raise awareness about wider transport trends and the effect on the environment. An example includes the 'Give the Driver a Break' series of leaflets in the Lake District.

*Events* - NPAs try to ensure (where possible) that their events programmes are accessible by public transport.

*Public Transport* - Good quality public and demand responsive transport services can help hard to reach groups access National Parks – and provide real benefits to the local economy. While local authorities are responsible for public transport, some NPAs (like New Forest, Northumberland, and Exmoor) do provide services, and the Peak District is involved in two rail corridor partnerships. The *MoorsBus* provided by the North York Moors NPA is an extensive network, and has been estimated to bring in an additional £300,000 into the local economy. Sometimes the journey can be made part of the visitor experience. The *B4 Network* in the Lakes combines boat, boot, bus and bicycle and has generated commercially viable services.

*Walking and Cycling* - Providing safe opportunities for walking and cycling is important and NPAs are working with others to support the development of suitable networks. These can combine local authority cycle networks, the designation of Quiet Lanes, and the National Cycle network promoted by Sustrans. NPAs are also supporting the provision of secure cycle facilities at key public transport locations. In Dartmoor, the Freewheeler initiative is making cycling even more attractive through an integrated cycle/ bus service.

*Safety* - NPAs have been behind innovative projects to introduce area wide reduced speed limits - over a Moor, for example, as opposed to individual stretches of road. These create a safer environment for walkers, cyclists and riders, and reduce the number of animals and livestock killed.

*Policy* –NPAs like the Peak District engage with a wide range of policy makers on transport, seeking to ensure their policies support National Park purposes and meet the needs of the remote rural communities found within the National Parks. This engagement includes with those developing Regional Spatial Strategies, Local Transport Plans, and Rights of Way Improvement Plans.

*Management* – Some NPAs work with Highway Authorities to reduce the impact of indiscriminate parking, traffic, and congestion on National Parks. This includes distributing coach driver handbooks, and leaflets on responsible driving. They also seek through guidance and workshops to ensure high quality design in rural traffic management that enhances distinctiveness.

*Funding* - And through the Sustainable Development Fund, NPAs have been supporting a range of initiatives designed to improve the take up of walking, cycling and public transport.

## **ENPAA's Position**

National Park Authorities are not Highway Authorities, and therefore have limited actual control over the road network found in the National Park. Establishing productive partnerships between the NPAs and the Highway Authorities is vital, as is working with bus, rail and community transport operators. The Agreement between the County Surveyors Society and NPAs is beneficial in this respect and needs to be replicated at local level too.

The pressure from traffic varies between National Parks. Within some, particular areas suffer considerable stress. It is important that policies and initiatives by highway authorities, planning authorities, and transport operators are able to manage this effectively. This will require a combination of:

- providing high quality public transport that is reliable, integrated in timing and ticketing, accessible (in terms of physical access), well marketed, and good value;
- well serviced hubs to assist in the provision of this public transport network;
- attractive routes for walkers and cyclists safe from traffic; and
- tools to restrict traffic when necessary in order to avoid damage to the special qualities of the National Parks.

The HM Treasury commissioned Eddington Study on Transport highlighted how walking, cycling and small scale public transport improvements can bring real benefits. ENPAA looks to Government to provide secure and increased spending on transport in National Parks through the Transport Innovation Fund, a new National Parks Transport Fund or other funding streams, to enable these sorts of initiatives to prosper.

### Encouraging visitors while reducing damage

NPAs welcome visitors to the National Parks, but need to manage the effects of significant volumes of traffic. Restricting vehicular access does not equate to restricting access for people to the National Park, and the NPAs will encourage highway authorities and public transport operators to promote alternatives.

Overall, our goal is to see a significant shift where a higher proportion of visitors and residents use alternatives to the car to travel around the National Parks. We aspire, in the longer term, to also see a higher proportion of visitors arrive in a National Park using those alternatives. This will:

- provide an enhanced quality of life and transport options for residents as well as visitors;
- lead to the take up of more healthy activities like walking and cycling; and
- reduce emissions from transport that are contributing to climate change.

NPAs aim to work with others so that transport in national parks represents good practice, and can be shared to the benefit of rural areas more generally.

### Getting the policy framework right

ENPAA wants to see transport policies reinforce, not undermine, a sense of place. We aim to ensure that tackling traffic and promoting sustainable alternatives to the car will be addressed in National Park Management Plans, Local Development Frameworks, and particularly through the engagement by NPAs with other bodies responsible for the Regional Transport Strategy and Local Transport Plans. We urge transport authorities to consult NPAs at an early stage in developing policy and programmes.

NPAs can use their planning functions to:

- protect local services and thereby reduce the need to travel and retain the vitality of villages and remote rural communities; and
- support the use of Travel Plans.

While these measures will help, ENPAA believes these must be complemented by national policy and economic instruments geared around reducing the overall growth in traffic. A priority should be to ensure that existing Government policy and guidance is consistent in this regard.

### Managing traffic levels

The volume of traffic, its size, and its speed can all contribute to the National Park feeling different. Government, Regional and local authorities should recognise that the damaging effects of traffic on a National Park can arise long before gridlock materialises. The impact of traffic on countryside character and visitor experiences can be subtle – but are nonetheless very real.

Many of the smaller roads and country lanes found in National Parks are part of their heritage and should be conserved. This requires road maintenance and traffic management policies, and crucially practices by highway authorities, to reflect the sensitivities of the environment. There is a need for sensitive and appropriate design solutions that further the distinctiveness of each National Park. Road-side clutter should be reduced. The aim should be to tailor the traffic to the existing road network in each National Park – rather than damaging the character of the area through tailoring the road network to the traffic.

The small country lanes encountered in National Parks also places a responsibility on those organising large recreational events to ensure congestion and damage is avoided by proper routing strategies that stop large volumes of traffic using unsuitable roads.

NPAs look to Highway Authorities to engage with them on the establishment (where they do not already exist) of a rural route hierarchy that properly reflects the sensitive character of the National Park. This should be based on the physical and environmental capacity of the route, its future intended function; and be integrated with the wider road network beyond the National Park boundary. The quiet character of minor

roads should be maintained, and the Quiet Lanes network extended. Coach and lorry operators, motoring organisations, caravan and other recreational bodies should be encouraged to support this hierarchy.

Highway Authorities should work with NPAs in the development of advisory routes for National Parks where particular types of traffic are a problem. Consideration may need to be given to strengthening the status of these advisory routes, should current measures prove insufficient.

Highway Authorities (and some NPAs) are responsible for parking provision in National Parks. The type of facilities provided, the charging regime used, where the proceeds are invested, and the use of car parks (including seasonal closures) should all reinforce national park purposes. Consideration should be given to their potential to act as hubs, from which high quality public transport networks can emanate.

NPAs will also examine the merits of using their Visitor Surveys to judge the impact of traffic on people's enjoyment of living in or visiting the National Park.

### Taking action in-house

NPAs are relatively small organisations, but they are committed to doing their bit through looking at their own operations. NPAs aim to continue to take actions to reduce car mileage, including through Travel Plans.

### Monitoring and review

ENPAA will review this Position Statement, and progress towards achieving it, on an annual basis.

## **Supporting Action**

Within Government, we look to:

- Ministers in DfT to support the mainstreaming of NPA concerns so they become a higher priority for regional and local transport bodies (eg. in the tasking framework for local passenger transport authorities), and ensure transport strategies respond to those concerns;
- Ministers in CLG, DfT, Defra, and DCMS to ensure their policy and guidance is consistent, reflects the need to protect the special qualities of the National Parks and furthers the aims of this statement;
- the Secretary of State for Transport to make a statement to Parliament that explicitly recognises the status and special qualities of National Parks and the need to better reflect countryside character when managing roads in protected areas;
- DfT to streamline the arrangements enabling Highway Authorities and the Highways Agency to be exempted from prescriptive national standards when managing and maintaining roads in protected areas;
- DfT, working with Defra, to help NPAs and Highway Authorities introduce area wide lower speed limits in National Parks from the national default limit of 60mph;
- DfT to establish a rural transport policy forum chaired by a Minister to give sufficient 'air time' to these issue within the Department and overcome existing barriers to implementation;
- DfT to review all current and proposed major road schemes within or affecting National Park qualities and people's experience of them;
- DfT to commission research to examine the positive and negative effects of road user charging, and its feasibility for those National Parks where they feel it might be appropriate;
- DfT to ensure its decisions over rail franchising, timetabling and routing lead to improvements that support the use of rail by potential National Park visitors;
- DfT to recognise that some National Parks contain waterways and consequently will be effected by navigational issues, and ensure this is reflected in how DfT develops policy and who it consults;

- DfT to require manufacturers of satellite navigation systems to demonstrate their systems will not lead to increased volumes or inappropriate traffic using roads within National Parks;
- DfT to prioritise the provision of support for Travel Plans for generators of traffic located within National Parks and publicise the results so other rural areas can benefit;
- DfT, DCMS and Defra to work together on expanding the Accessibility Planning tool so it can obtain data for leisure destinations;
- DfT to review public transport service funding so as to overcome the capital rich/ revenue poor scenario that hampers the delivery of integrated transport networks;
- Defra to stand firm in defending the special qualities of the National Park where these are threatened by transport trends or infrastructure; and
- Defra to assist and resource NPAs to produce maps assessing tranquillity, to help inform transport, visitor management and other policies.

We also look to:

- **Regional Assemblies** to ensure Regional Transport Strategies include policies and programmes to improve public transport, walking and cycling within protected areas, with a clear strategy and access to resources for their implementation;
- **Planning Authorities** (regionally and locally) to research the implications on National Parks from the trips generated by proposed new development, particularly housing allocations;
- **Highways Agency** to include prominently within the Design Manual for Roads and Bridges (DMRB) a specific policy for managing roads in protected areas, practical proposals for applying them, and a clear action plan to assist staff, contractors and local authorities understand them. This should draw on existing rural road character guidance that exists;
- Highways Agency to ensure new road building in National Parks is an option of last resort, clearly demonstrated as such, and national tests stringently applied;
- Highways Agency to demonstrate that new infrastructure in National Parks should be an exemplar of how to integrate conservation objectives into transport planning and design;
- **Highways authorities** (in keeping with their duties under the *Environment Act 1995*) to proactively support National Park purposes and the policies in the National Park Management Plan through the development of their own Local Transport Plans and Accessibility Strategies. This to include through providing high quality walking and cycling routes and facilities;
- Highways authorities to review signage and street furniture so as to reduce its visual impact, and consult NPAs regularly on its proposed activities (such as road maintenance);
- Highways authorities to examine the potential for Local Area Agreements (and in particular Multi Area Agreements that cross administrative boundaries) to further the proposals above;
- Highways Agency and highway authorities to declare that they will not use aggregate extracted from National Parks in the construction of new roads;
- **Natural England** to act as a champion in tackling the environmental and other problems associated with leisure traffic in sensitive environments;
- Natural England to publish a national map of congestion hotspots caused by leisure destinations and press for action by DfT, DCMS, Local Authorities, the owners, and others in developing tailored solutions;
- Natural England to robustly defend protected areas from policies or infrastructure projects that could undermine their qualities and people's experiences of them;
- **Health Authorities** to work with NPAs on Active Health Programmes that promote physical health and well being through increased walking and cycling;
- **Association of Train Operating Companies (ATOC)** to work with NPAs on marketing strategies and integrated ticketing initiatives that support sustainable transport choices by visitors to and within National Parks, and to support a growth in rail services too;

- **Civil Aviation Authority** to consult NPAs on all proposals for air space change over a National Park, and to report on the implications for National Parks of the forecast growth in air traffic;
- **VisitBritain** and **Tourist Boards** to promote the use of public transport in marketing holidays to National Parks;
- **Landowners, businesses, and owners** of large traffic generating properties to work with NPAs and Highway Authorities on reducing their impact, including through the use of Travel Plans;
- Those responsible for producing Motoring Guides and Maps to consider how they can reflect the need to protect National Park qualities in their material.

The English National Park Authorities Association (ENPAA) provides a collective voice for the National Parks. This statement sets out their shared position on Transport. Each Authority works to implement the Management Plan for its area and so each National Park Authority will need to implement this and other policies in ways that are compatible with this plan and appropriate to local circumstance.

*ENPAA*

*English National Park Authorities Association*

*Address: 1<sup>st</sup> Floor, 2-4 Great Eastern Street, London EC2A 3NW*

Tel: 020 7655 4812 Web: [www.enpaa.org.uk](http://www.enpaa.org.uk)

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