



**Isle of Man
Government**

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PUBLIC RIGHTS OF WAY POLICY & STRATEGY 2018 – 2028

DEPARTMENT OF INFRASTRUCTURE



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INTRODUCTION

This document summarises the Department of Infrastructure’s draft policy and strategy plan and identifies its approach to improving the Island’s public rights of way and green lane network over the next 10 years.

The Department is required to maintain all public rights of way and green lanes on the Island. There is currently a limited budget available for maintenance work and standards of maintenance are inevitably linked to available funding. Due to these constraints, the Department has been unable to meet the public’s expectation for the standard of maintenance on the network.

This policy and strategy identifies the approach that will be followed by the Department of Infrastructure over the next 10 years.

POLICY

The Department of Infrastructure will demonstrate leadership in delivering the ‘Programme for Government 2016-2021’. This will contribute to the ambition of ensuring our Island is a special place to live and work. One of the main outcomes for the Department to achieve this ambition is to ensure that “we have infrastructure which supports social and economic wellbeing”.

The Manx footpath network is recognised as being an underused, undervalued and under-maintained asset. The Department will seek to work with key people in the community to utilise this valuable national asset to the benefit of the widest possible community, giving particular care and consideration to the needs of the ageing population and those with limited mobility or other disabilities.

The Department supports maintaining our Island as a special place to live and work.

VISION

The Department’s vision is to:

- increase accessibility on the network for the aging population, people with limited mobility or other disabilities;
- encourage more people to use the public rights of way and the green lane network, working towards a healthier Island, supporting the Programme for Government’s “Sustainable Island” and “Healthy and Safe Island” themes. The outcomes of these themes are to promote “an Island where people choose to live and visit” and to assist in ensuring that the Island’s residents “live longer, healthier lives”.
- this will benefit social and economic wellbeing; and
- create a more attractive Island to increase the numbers of visitors who come to use the public rights of way network.



STRATEGY

In support of the Programme for Government 2016-2021, Our Island: A Special Place to Live and Work, the Department has developed a five point strategy to help achieve this vision.

1. Categorisation of Public Rights of Way:

Public rights of way fall into these classifications:

- public footpath – a path that the public has a right to use on foot only;
- public cycle-path – a path that the public has a right to walk and use pedal cycles on;
- public bridle-path – a path that the public has a right to walk, use pedal cycles and lead or ride horses on; and
- green lane – an unsurfaced road through the countryside open to all traffic.

To further classify, public footpaths on the Island can be split into four categories:

Premier Routes

The Premier Routes are the Island's four most prestigious long distance walking paths, made up of sections of public footpaths, green lanes and other areas. They are used by both residents and visitors and are an asset to the Island. Ensuring these routes are maintained to high standards will support the Programme for Government's policy statement for a "Sustainable Island" and help to "grow the visitor economy in the Isle of Man".

The Premier Routes are:

- Raad Ny Foillan (Coastal Footpath) - 95 miles;
- The Millennium Way – 45 miles;
- The Heritage Trail (Douglas to Peel) – 10½ miles;
- Bayr Ny Skeddán – 14 miles; and
- The Old Railway Line (St John's to Sulby) – 12¾ miles (updated February 2021).

There is an aspiration to create a path along the old railway line to Ramsey.

Green, Amber and Red Routes

The remaining public footpaths on the Island are categorised using a traffic light colour system, based on the amount of use they receive:

- Green routes receive high volumes of use;
- Amber routes receive frequent levels of use; and
- Red routes receive low levels of use;

Maintenance standards for these four categories have been set, with the more popular and frequently used paths receiving the highest standards of maintenance, most resources and allocation of budget.

In addition, maintenance standards appropriate for green lanes have been established.



2. Promote Access for All, Access for Many, Access for Some:

When planning upcoming works and improvement schemes to the network, the Department is aiming to increase accessibility opportunities for users with disabilities or limited mobility, and this will be the top priority, when possible and practical. Many flat areas of the network would be suitable for people with disabilities or limited mobility, if the surface quality and width of the paths were improved. However, there are some areas of the Island where "Access for All" may not be possible, due to steep gradients or other reasons.

Accessibility is split into 3 categories:

- **Access for All;** shall be accessible for people in self-assisted wheelchairs and pushchair users. These paths will have no gates or stiles, will be non-slip and have a smooth, level surface. These paths will have a gradient of 1:20 or 5%.
- **Access for Many;** shall be accessible for people in assisted wheelchairs and those with robust, all-terrain type buggies. These paths will have no gates or stiles and a rougher surface than paths that are Access for All. These paths will have a gradient of 1:20 or 5%.
- **Access for Some;** these paths will have no stiles, but may have low steps. Any gates on these paths will be replaced with wheelchair-friendly kissing gates (where required for animal management purposes) with a rougher path surface than the Access for All and Access for Many paths. These paths will have a gradient of 1:20 or 5% and an absolute maximum of 1:12 or 8%.

These categories are laid out as a guideline only, and confident wheelchair users may feel comfortable on access for many routes, but others may not.

3. Secure Increased Funding and Resources:

The Department wishes to undertake numerous high profile schemes on the network over the next ten years. A programme of improvements has been developed, taking into account the Premier Routes and Access for All policy. The Department intends to apply for increased funding on a yearly basis to be able to deliver these schemes.

Provided increased funding is made available, additional resources and contractors will be brought in to help with the routine maintenance and improvements schemes. This will support the Programme for Government's "Responsible Island" theme by working towards the outcome of being "financially responsible while providing services that meet the needs of our community".

The Department aims to work with local authorities and encourage them to maintain certain sections of the network. Additionally, the Department strongly encourages corporate volunteers to assist with the maintenance of the network. This supports the Programme for Government policy statement for being an "Inclusive and Caring Island", whose statement promises "we will work together with local authorities and other partners to deliver the right



services in the right place at the right time, making sure national priorities are funded accordingly”.

4. Conversion of Public Footpaths:

Most public rights of way on the Island are simply public footpaths, with very few public cycle-paths or bridle-paths. When improvement schemes are undertaken, the Department will look to convert some of the paths to cycle-paths and bridle-paths, where possible, in accordance with the Highways Act 1986.

Some public rights of way may be converted into bridle-paths and still fall into the Access for All category; however this will not be the case for all bridle-paths. Some bridle-paths may have too steep a gradient and be unsuitable for users with limited mobility, regardless of the quality surface of the path.

All public rights of way will be signed accordingly, indicating whether the path is a footpath, cycle-path or bridle-path and will state if the path is recommended as Access for All, Many or Some.

The conversion of these public footpaths supports the Programme for Government’s “Sustainable Island” outcome and policy statement of making “the best use of our Island’s land and seas for leisure and work through food, agriculture and fisheries strategies, plus tourism and recreational use that work together with our environment”.

5. Address Concerns:

By increasing the user groups who can access the network, the Department appreciates many current users may have some concerns or fear of conflicts on the paths. The Department will consult with the public on these matters and advertise any conversion of paths at the locations affected.

KEY PEOPLE

In order to achieve this vision, it is vital that the Department works in partnership with key people and organisations. Some of these are:

- Volunteers;
- Local Authorities;
- Manx Footpath Conservation Group;
- Manx Footpath Task Force;
- Department for Enterprise (DfE);
- Department of Environment, Food and Agriculture (DEFA);
- Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC), and;
- Green Lane User Group (GLUG).

During the development of the Public Rights of Way Improvement Plan, the Department has worked with some of these key people. During the implementation of the plan, this joint work will become even more essential.



The Department currently works with the Green Lane User Group (GLUG). GLUG makes frequent use of the Island's green lane network and members of GLUG currently undertake nearly all of the surveys on the green lanes. Additionally, it assists the Department when planning upcoming works or schemes and contributes to the routine maintenance of this section of the network.

The Department has recently begun working with Beach Buddies, which is a very successful beach cleaning charity on the Island. Beach Buddies has agreed to help with routine maintenance and improvement schemes on the public rights of way.

KEY PROCESSES

The Department's key processes for achieving this vision are:

- to categorise public rights of way based on usage;
- to undertake high profile schemes on the premier routes, upgrading path quality and improving accessibility;
- to consult with the public, local authorities and users of the paths, to gather their views on the network;
- to implement an inspection regime, allowing the Department to properly plan and schedule upcoming works;
- to address users' concerns to making the network accessible to additional users; and
- to review the Cabinet Office's Social Attitudes Survey on a yearly basis, which will aid the monitoring of the amount of use the paths receive.

RESULTS AND BENEFITS

Our People, Our Community, Our Society

By implementing this plan, the public rights of way and green lane network will improve. The Department hopes that by carrying out improvements, the amount of use and user groups (cyclists, horse riders etc.) accessing the paths will increase.

An aspirational outcome of this plan is to impact the way our society views the public rights of way and green lane network. The Department will encourage use of the network and promote the health benefits linked to being active. This will contribute to our society working towards a healthier Island.

Performance Measures

In order to demonstrate that the Department is achieving positive results and benefits as an outcome of the improvement plan, performance indicators must be established.

These indicators will be based around satisfaction surveys and monitors placed on certain paths.

- Direct Measure: Certain sections of the network will be tracked with monitors. Monitoring should take place both before and after any high profile improvement



schemes, to assist the Department in gauging the amount of additional use the improvements have encouraged.

- Indirect Measure: A customer satisfaction survey will be undertaken annually to assess the Department's performance, which may also identify any areas of the network that require specific attention.
- Indirect Measure: Additionally, the Department will review the Cabinet Office's Social Attitudes Survey on a yearly basis, to ascertain whether the amount of annual users to the public rights of way has increased, and continues to increase yearly.



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