

The North Dorset Trailway Network is a registered charity working closely with Dorset Council to establish an uninterrupted off-road route (the Trailway) along the course of the old Somerset & Dorset Railway line, through the centre of Dorset between Stalbridge and Corfe Mullen, eventually to connect with the Castleman Trailway at Broadstone. The section of Trailway between Sturminster Newton and Spetisbury is of course now well established, and we are encouraged by the fact that the recent joint Dorset Council and BCP Council Local Transport Plan consultation included specific reference to completing the Trailway as a strategic objective. The Somerset & Dorset Railway once linked Bath and Poole and its closure in 1966 was one of the most controversial cuts of the Beeching Plan. Its repurposing today as an accessible cross country trailway could potentially be transformative. Most of the station sites may have been redeveloped, but the route of the old railway between the urban areas remains to a very large extent free of obstruction. The cost of repurposing a derelict railway route as a trailway for inclusive community use is significantly less costly than comparable travel schemes.

The Dorset Council Greenspace Service team, and all officers and councillors we meet or speak with are very supportive of our aims and appreciate the tremendous amenity and value to public health and wellbeing that a completed Trailway would provide. Proactive extension strategies are in place, both northwards from Sturminster Newton and southwards from Spetisbury. Completion of the southern extension to Sturminster Marshall would leave a tantalisingly 1.4 mile short gap to the A31, south of which the old railway trackbed is already Dorset Council owned and now used as a permissive path. Completion would also enable a far safer traffic free link between Wimborne and Blandford than the existing NCN 25 through the Stour Valley which utilises country lanes via Cowgrove, White Mill, Shapwick and Tarrant Crawford. This route can often be intimidating due to speeding traffic using the narrow lanes as a 'rat run'.

We welcome the proposed approval of the Active Travel Infrastructure Plan at today's Cabinet meeting. However, we are disappointed that the North Dorset Trailway, and its extensions north and south, have low, or non-existent profiles. With the increase in developments (and residents) in Stalbridge, the impetus to link with Sturminster Newton is overwhelming, yet this is not included. Spetisbury to Sturminster Marshall, where extensive new housing developments are proposed, and the new off-road section from Blandford St Mary to Wards Drove are both included as '**Long**' timescale schemes in the Blandford Forum delivery plan. We would therefore respectfully request that the priority of extending the North Dorset Trailway be increased. Thank you.

(447 words)

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