

# Devon and Torbay Devolution Deal and the case for investment in the Teign Estuary Trail

## The benefits of multi-use trails

One of Devon's main strengths is its diverse and stunning natural beauty which includes two spectacular coastlines, two national parks with wild moorland scenery, numerous attractive fishing harbours and river estuaries, and an abundance of Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty with biospheres, geoparks and nature reserves throughout the county.

Devon is therefore the perfect holiday destination for those who love being outdoors and tourism makes a major contribution to Devon's economy. In 2016 the tourism industry provided 12% of all employment in Devon and total visitor-related expenditure was estimated to be nearly £2.5 billion from 35.6 million day and overnight visits to the county<sup>1</sup>. Many tourism-related jobs are provided by small businesses which play a critical role in Devon's economy.

Walking and cycling are healthy and sustainable ways for visitors to explore and enjoy Devon's many natural attractions. Recent research commissioned by the Heart of the South West Local Enterprise Partnership found that more people are now seeking holidays which involve outdoor activity and that cycling is one of the fastest growing activities people wish to partake in whilst on holiday<sup>2</sup>. A Department of Transport study found that people on cycling holidays spend 9% more on average than other tourists<sup>3</sup>. This is due in part to limits in how much cyclists can carry so they shop locally and frequently and are more likely to eat and drink in cafes, pubs and restaurants.

Devon's recent investment in its network of multi-use, traffic-free cycling and walking trails throughout the county is paying dividends in attracting more visitors and generating more income for the county. In 2015 an economic analysis of the impact of the Drake's Trail, Exe Estuary Trail and Tarka Trail found that walkers and cyclists using these trails spent £9.3 million per year, with the multiplier effect generating a further £4.1 million per year. This expenditure led

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<sup>1</sup> The Economic Impact of Devon's Visitor Economy 2016, South West Research Company Ltd, February 2018

<sup>2</sup> Building resilience in the heart of the south west visitor economy, National Coastal Tourism Academy March 2020, updated November 2020

<sup>3</sup> Economic benefits of cycle tourism, Cycling UK, June 2020

to the creation of 269 additional jobs. In addition, health-related benefits were found to be £3.6 million per year<sup>4</sup>.

However, Devon's network of multi-use paths is currently incomplete. At present, getting from Devon's south to north coast, between coastal towns or between the coast and the moor involves sections where the only option is to cycle or walk on busy and dangerous main roads or steep and equally unsafe country lanes. This is clearly unsuitable for families with children, less experienced or less confident cyclists, pedestrians, wheelchair users or users of mobility scooters.

Very significant economic, environmental and health benefits would be achieved if the gaps in Devon's network of multi-use trails are closed. Providing safe, traffic-free routes for people to get between all the main coastal resorts and from the south to the north of the county via Dartmoor would make Devon a top UK destination for multi-day cycle holidays as well as shorter leisure trips. The network would be a major tourist attraction on a par with the South West Coastal Path which attracts over 9 million visitors, brings in £500 million in visitor spend and supports 11,000 jobs across the South West<sup>5</sup>.

Closing the gaps in the network of multi-use trails would have the following impacts:

- spreading the economic benefits of the tourism industry to the whole county by increasing visits to towns and villages that are not normally regarded as tourist destinations in their own right but can be easily reached via a multi-use trail;
- attracting people who have already walked on the South West Coastal Path to return to explore more of the Devon countryside on a walking or cycling holiday;
- increasing year round tourism as people can still use the trails in the winter months when footpaths may be too muddy and slippery to use;
- improving access to the countryside for many older and disabled people who have difficulty walking but can get around using various types of wheeled transport;
- providing a safe environment for children to learn to ride a bike and develop a lifelong healthy and enjoyable exercise habit;

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<sup>4</sup> Devon cycling and walking trails, SQW, November 2015

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.southwestcoastpath.org.uk/love-the-coast-path/everymilematters/economy/> downloaded on 8.2.24

- enabling more people to make the healthier and cheaper choice of commuting to work, going shopping or making other local journeys by walking or cycling rather than using the car;
- creating a wide variety of new business and employment opportunities in areas such as cycle sales, hire and repair, cycle safety training, cycle touring holidays, luggage transfer, hospitality and overnight accommodation;
- creating opportunities for new social enterprises such as the provision of adapted cycles for disabled people or recycling schemes for secondhand bikes which would reduce waste going to landfill and could provide training and employment opportunities for people at a disadvantage in the labour market such as ex offenders;
- improving the physical and mental health and wellbeing of Devon's residents by making it easier for them to exercise regularly in the fresh air in an attractive environment and by reducing road traffic accidents and pollution caused by vehicle emissions.

## Why the Teign Estuary Trail is needed

The Teign Estuary Trail would be a scenic, traffic-free, multi-use trail<sup>6</sup> connecting the communities of Newton Abbot, Kingsteignton, Bishopsteignton, Shaldon, Teignmouth and Dawlish, which have a combined population of around 74,000<sup>7</sup>.



<sup>6</sup> Artist impression taken from TDC report to full Council on 28 November 2023

<sup>7</sup> [https://www.citypopulation.de/en/uk/southwestengland/E10000008\\_devon/](https://www.citypopulation.de/en/uk/southwestengland/E10000008_devon/) downloaded 8.2.24

At present, there is no provision for cycling in what is one of the most highly populated parts of the county. The only way of getting from Kingsteignton to Teignmouth or from Teignmouth to Dawlish is on busy, narrow, steep and dangerous main roads as illustrated here<sup>8</sup>:



A381 Kingsteignton to Bishopsteignton



Bitton Park Road, Teignmouth



A379 Teignmouth to Dawlish

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<sup>8</sup> Screenshots taken from Googlemaps street view 8.2.24

Plans for the Teign Estuary Trail have been in development since the 1980s and command overwhelming and unprecedented levels of public support:

- When DCC carried out a first consultation on its plans for the Teign Estuary Trail in 2001 98% of respondents expressed support;
- Nearly 6,000 local residents signed a petition in 2014 calling for more progress to be made with the delivery of the Trail;
- When Sustrans carried out a consultation on missing links in the national cycle network in 2018, more people commented on the need for the Teign Estuary Trail than any other trail in the whole of the UK<sup>9</sup>;
- When DCC carried out a second consultation on its plans for the Trail in 2021 (20 years after the first consultation) over 3,000 people responded with 98% again expressing support for the Trail;
- Local people frequently use social media to comment on the urgent need for the Trail and to express frustration at the slow progress.

A wide range of local factors mean the need for the Trail is becoming even more pressing:

- The town centres of Newton Abbot, Teignmouth and Dawlish have many empty shops and failing businesses and are in urgent need of the economic boost which increased visitor numbers from people using the Trail would bring;
- Congestion, long journey times and a shortage of car parking deter many people from visiting Teignmouth – enabling people to cycle or walk would also benefit car drivers and make their journey easier;
- People brave enough to cycle on the main roads in and out of Teignmouth are putting their lives at risk - 82 collisions were recorded on the 7 mile stretch of road between Dawlish and Kingsteignton in the last 5 years including 2 fatal accidents and the A381 between Teignmouth and Kingsteignton has three collision blackspots<sup>10</sup>;
- Overtaking cyclists using the main roads is unsafe and so traffic can only move at the same speed as the cyclist causing longer journey times, driver frustration and lost productivity for businesses;
- The main road in and out of Teignmouth (Bitton Park Road) is particularly hazardous with cyclists having to navigate traffic turning in and out of

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<sup>9</sup> <https://nationalcyclenetwork.commonplace.is/comments>

<sup>10</sup> Data for the period 1.1.18 to 31.12.22 published on 12.10.23  
<https://vzsw.traffweb.app/traffweb/1/PublicMap> downloaded on 8.2.24

many side roads, parked cars and large lorries travelling to and from the docks;

- Bitton Park Road was declared an Air Quality Management Area in 2005 and remains one of the most polluted roads in Devon;
- Thousands of new homes are being built in this part of Teignbridge which will inevitably lead to further increases in traffic and make the situation even worse.

The Teign Estuary Trail would help to address these challenges and be a fantastic facility for local people to use and enjoy.

Filling this critical missing link in Devon's network of multi-use trails would also benefit Devon's economy more widely and boost tourism throughout Devon and Torbay. The Teign Estuary Trail would connect eastwards to the Exe Estuary Trail and Exeter and westwards to the Stover and Wray Valley Trails via Newton Abbot. This would result in a safe, mainly traffic-free, scenic long-distance trail all the way from Budleigh Salterton to Moretonhampstead – a distance of some 37 miles passing through several coastal resorts, market towns and villages on the edge of Dartmoor as well as beautiful countryside. Rather than heading north to Dartmoor, people reaching Newton Abbot would also have the option of using existing cycle routes to head south to Torbay or west to Plymouth where they could join the Coast to Coast trail to Ilfracombe via Okehampton.

The close proximity of the Teign Estuary Trail to Devon's main railway line would bring additional benefits by enabling people to cycle one way and do a return journey by train. The opening of additional stations in Torbay, Exeter, Okehampton and the new railway line linking Tavistock to Plymouth will increase the range of options available to people wishing to access a multi-use trail for a cycle touring holiday or shorter leisure trip.

For these reasons, investment in the Teign Estuary Trail makes sound financial sense and would help to make Devon and Torbay a greener, healthier and more prosperous place to live.

### **How the Devon and Torbay devolution deal could help**

Both DCC and Teignbridge District Council (TDC) have already demonstrated their commitment to the Teign Estuary Trail by securing the required planning permission, taking steps to acquire the land not already in their ownership and committing significant financial resources to its delivery. £650k is allocated in the current DCC capital programme and TDC has committed to spend £1m of Community Infrastructure Levy (subject to an Outline Business Case evidencing

an outcome of at least 2:1 Benefit Cost Ratio). However, the total cost is estimated to be in excess of £40m and so a significant level of Government grant funding will also be required.

Although a significant level of capital expenditure will be required for the Teign Estuary Trail, it will be money well spent. The Department for Transport's own analysis has shown that previous investment in walking and cycling infrastructure has generated an average benefit of £5.50 for every £1 spent<sup>11</sup>. This analysis also identifies other benefits that cannot be monetised and concludes that cycling and walking infrastructure provides high or very high value for money.

It is hoped that the devolution deal will enable the Devon and Torbay local authorities to make a strong case to central Government for investment in Devon's network of multi-use trails and the Teign Estuary Trail in particular. Investment of this nature could help to showcase at a national level what the impact of devolution and 'levelling up' could be in the context of a rural county in contrast to large cities and conurbations which face very different challenges. Giving Devon a national profile in this way would also provide positive publicity for Devon's network of multi-use trails and help to attract more visitors to the county.

Para 92 of the devolution deal sets out the government's requirements and expectations for funding active travel schemes. Reference is made to the need to ensure compliance with Local Transport Note (LTN) 1/20. However, when members of the Teign Estuary Trail Campaign Group and Bishopsteignton Parish Council met the DCC Cabinet member for highways and DCC officers in July 2022 we were informed that DCC had made the case to the Government for these urban-focused standards to be supplemented by a set of standards that were more relevant to multi-use trails in rural areas. We were led to believe that the Government had accepted this and was due to publish new standards. Many of Devon's existing, highly successful trails fail to meet the standards set out in LTN 1/20 such as segregation of cyclists and pedestrians, gradients of less than 3% and routes which don't add any additional distance to existing routes by road.

It is therefore hoped that LTN 1/20 will not be a major stumbling block to securing funding for the Teign Estuary Trail and other multi-use trails in the future.

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<sup>11</sup> Investing in Cycling and Walking: the economic case for action, Department for Transport, March 2015

It is also hoped that the devolution deal will provide the opportunity to negotiate with local rail companies to make better provision for cycles on trains. At present, GWR requires cyclists to book their journey in advance on long distance trains and cycles must be hung vertically on hooks. This is very difficult or impossible for cyclists who are less strong or have heavier bikes, thicker tyres or luggage. Some local trains have no dedicated space or are too crowded to accommodate cycles. The potential for bus companies to carry cycles should also be considered following the examples set in other parts of the UK including Scotland and the Peak District. The greater use of ferries to transport people and cycles between Devon's coastal communities and from Devon to other parts of the country such as south Wales could also be explored.

Investment in the Teign Estuary Trail and other gaps in Devon's network of multi-use trails, combined with further improvements to Devon's public transport network, will make a significant contribution to many of the objectives set out in the devolution deal including a stronger local economy, progress towards the 2050 net zero target and the further growth of sustainable tourism and increases in domestic and international visitor spend.

## **Conclusion**

The importance and advantages of the Teign Estuary Trail cannot be emphasised enough in terms of the benefits it will bring to local residents including cyclists, pedestrians, disabled people, parents with pushchairs, children learning to ride a bike, dog walkers, runners, commuters, and car drivers. In addition, it will attract more tourists to Devon, encourage local residents to visit other parts of the county and have a positive impact on the economy, the environment, road safety and health and wellbeing.

The Level 2 Devolution Deal for Devon and Torbay should provide a unique opportunity to deliver this vital scheme and in turn demonstrate the value of the devolution deal by providing a lasting piece of infrastructure with so many benefits for Devon.

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