Northumberland
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Northumberland National Park Active Travel Network Plan

Consultation on Ideas

Spring 2025

Contents

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Introduction

What is Active Travel?

Active Travel means you can get from place to place without a car, mainly by walking, wheeling or cycling. *Wheeling includes wheelchairs, mobility scooters and other aids.*

The Purpose of the Active Travel Network Plan

In 2024, Active Travel England announced that National Parks in England would benefit from £1m of funding to develop their own Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans (LCWIPs).

The Northumberland National Park Authority (NNPA) have been working with WSP to produce an Active Travel Network Plan (the Plan) (also known as a Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan – or 'LCWIP') for the Northumberland National Park (the National Park). This will complement the individual LCWIPs recently adopted across 12 of Northumberland's main towns, including:

- Alnwick
- Amble
- Ashington
- Bedlington
- Berwick-upon-Tweed
- Blyth
- Cramlington
- Haltwhistle
- Hexham
- Morpeth
- Ponteland
- Prudhoe

The Plan will provide NNPA with a framework to pursue future funding opportunities when they emerge to improve opportunities for walking, wheeling and cycling, into and within the National Park.

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The key aim of the Active Travel Network Plan is for more people to enjoy the Park, and to access it by walking, wheeling and cycling.

This consultation asks:
"Are we suggesting changes in the right places so that you can access the Northumberland National Park?"

Scope of the Plan

The Northumberland National Park

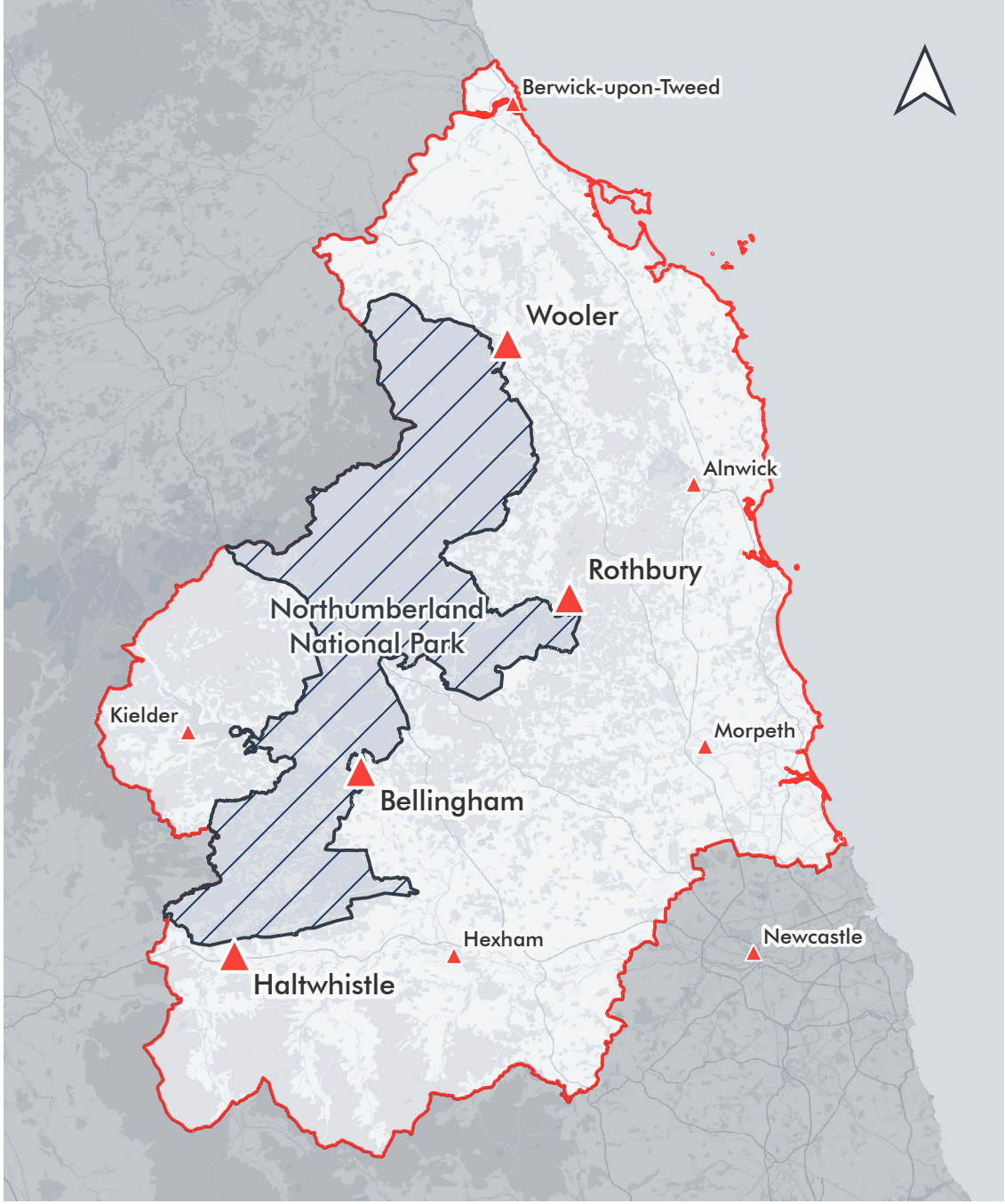
The National Park covers a significant, sparsely populated area of Northumberland, totalling 1049 square miles. The National Park is bounded by the Scottish Borders, the Border Forest Park (encompassing Kielder Forest), and Cumbria to the north and west. The National Park is the most northerly, most remote, least visited, and least populated in England.

Whilst the National Park contains no significant settlements, several towns and villages sit close to its boundary, including:

- Wooler,
- Thropton,
- Rothbury,
- Otterburn,
- Bellingham,
- Haltwhistle, and
- Hexham

Of these, the NNPA have identified four "Gateway Towns" as the primary focus of this Plan:

- **Wooler and the Cheviots** – as a gateway to the Breamish, Harthope, and College Valleys
- **Rothbury** – as a gateway to the Simonside Hills and Upper Coquetdale
- **Bellingham** – as a gateway to the North Tyne Valley
- **Haltwhistle** – as a gateway to Hadrian's Wall



Choosing Priority Routes for Investment

The Active Travel Network Plan for the Park follows the first 5 stages and principles of the Department for Transport's LCWIP Technical Guidance but has been tailored to the local ambitions of the National Park, as shown by the diagram (right).

This document outlines the key considerations involved in this process, including:

- The **types of improvements** that can be made
- The **considerations for accessibility and prioritisation**
- The **network of walking, wheeling and cycling routes** into the National Park from each of the four Gateway Towns
- The **routes assessed as priorities for improvement** within each network, that will bring the most benefit to the most people

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Stages of the LCWIP Process

Stage 1 — **Determining Scope**
Understanding the local area and where improvements can be made

Stage 2 — **Gathering Information**
Considering relevant national, regional, and local policy

Stages 3 & 4 — **Network Planning**
Developing a longlist of routes, and understanding possible users

Stage 5 — **Prioritising Improvements**
Scoring each route in the longlist against a set of criteria, then producing high-level concept designs for high scoring routes

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Potential Improvements for Different Needs

Infrastructure Proposals –

What could improvements look like?

A range of improvements can support access to the National Park, improving safety and ease of use for these rural corridors.

Crossings	Safe and appropriate crossings are crucial for ensuring a consistent level of service, particularly on traffic-free routes. The type of crossing provision will depend on traffic volumes, and speeds with reference to anticipated demand to cross the road.
Equestrian	New paths can be designed to accommodate horse riders, such as adjacent paved or unpaved paths.
Wayfinding	As well as standard signposting to mark routes, attractive totems or interpretation boards can add value to public spaces rather than providing additional 'street clutter' in sensitive areas, such as the Park.
E-Bike Charging Locations	Due to the steep gradients within the National Park and the increase in popularity of e-bikes amongst the general public, the National Park could benefit from improved access to charging points.
Speed Limit Reductions	In areas where routes will not be developed, walkers, wheelers and cyclists may benefit from speed reductions where they are required to mix with traffic.

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Infrastructure Proposals –

What could improvements look like?

When considering the feasibility of routes, several types of upgrades can be made to support walkers, wheelers and cyclists:

Type	Proposed for	Additional Considerations	Example
Quietway	Country roads with low existing traffic levels	A cheap, easy to implement, low impact solution on roads that do not currently see much traffic.	
Shared Use Path	Country roads where quietway measures are not possible or not desired	A path designed for walking, wheeling, and cycling, separated from vehicles. These could be alongside roads or slightly set back. Landowner permission would be required if outside the highway boundary.	
Greenway	New and existing unpaved bridleways and footpaths	A path designed for walking, wheeling, and cycling, away from roads and vehicles. This might involve upgrading existing paths / Public Rights of Way or creating new routes. Landowner permission would be required.	

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Who are the routes used by?

We considered the different needs and abilities of different users, displayed here. We then considered these "User Types" against the routes that make up the Network Plans for each Gateway Town.

Walking and Wheeling	**Accessible Walker / Wheeler**	User with additional mobility needs - may struggle with steep gradients and long distances. *[Sandals walk]*
	Family Walker / Wheeler	Users with children / those with minor additional needs (e.g. pushchair / powered wheelchair). *[Trainers walk]*
	Everyday Walker	Average walker - occasional walks, but not long distance. *[Has walking boots, but doesn't wear them often]*
	Experienced Walker	Goes out walking every weekend. *[Needs walking boots / poles]*
Cycling	**Accessible Cycle**	Cyclist with additional needs, not able to tackle steep gradients or long distances.
	Young Family	Family with young children. Not comfortable with any stretch on road or steep gradients. Seeks only short distance routes.
	Family Cycle	Family with older children. Somewhat comfortable doing short distances on road but prefers off-road tracks. Comfortable with short distances of mid-steepness gradients. Seeks short to mid-distance routes.
	Everyday Cyclist	Occasionally cycles. Comfortable riding on quieter roads. Aims for mid-distances and can handle short stretches of steeper gradients.
	Experienced Cyclist	Regularly cycles. Confident riding on road. Can tackle further distances and steeper gradients.
	E-Bike	E-Bike user - can tackle further distances and steeper gradients.

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More information about how "User Types" were considered for the Network can be found in the Appendix.

Potential Routes

A longlist of routes for walking, wheeling and cycling was created for each of the Gateway Towns. All routes were then scored against 13 criteria - important factors. The criteria largely align with LCWIP guidance. Some criteria are specific to the rural location of the National Park and to these routes being used for leisure as well as getting to the National Park from the Gateway Towns. The scoring identified Priority Routes for improvement plus the Wider Aspirational Network routes for later improvement.

The criteria considered were as follows:

Route Rationale	a) Public Transport Connections b) Facilities available, such as shops and toilets c) Visitor Attractions d) Onward Connectivity to other Active Travel corridors e) Directness to the National Park
User Type and Accessibility	a) Availability of the route to different user types, based on the user type definition b) Remoteness, based on the time to travel from the route to a road with ambulance access c) Availability of phone reception
Deliverability	a) Whether the route lies on existing Public Rights of Way b) Perception of safety, based on whether the route is off-road / mixed traffic, considering traffic speeds and volumes c) Number of crossings and critical junctions on the route d) The scale of any upgrades required
Interest	a) Levels of visual / heritage / environmental interest

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Aspirational Networks and Priority Routes

Top Scoring Routes

Below is the list of top scoring routes.

The maps on the next pages show the aspirational walking, wheeling networks for each Gateway Town and the colours relate to the top priority routes listed below.

Location	Route	User Type	
Wooler	Humbleton Hill Circular	Experienced Walker	Experienced Cyclist / E-Bike
	Hethpool to College Valley Circular	Everyday Walker	
Rothbury	Rothbury to Thropton River Route	Family Route	Accessible Cycle
	Rothbury to Simonside Car Park	Everyday Walker	Everyday Cyclist
	Rothbury to Thropton Circular	Experienced Walker	Everyday Cyclist
Bellingham	Bellingham Riverside Route	Family Route	Accessible Cycle / Young Family (if off-road upgrades)
	Hareshaw Linn Circular	Everyday Walker	
	Former Border Counties Railway – Bellingham to Tarset	Family Route / Everyday Walker	Accessible Cycle / Young Family
Haltwhistle	Haltwhistle to Cawfields via Haltwhistle Burn	Everyday Walker	
	Haltwhistle to Cawfields	Everyday Walker	Everyday Cyclist

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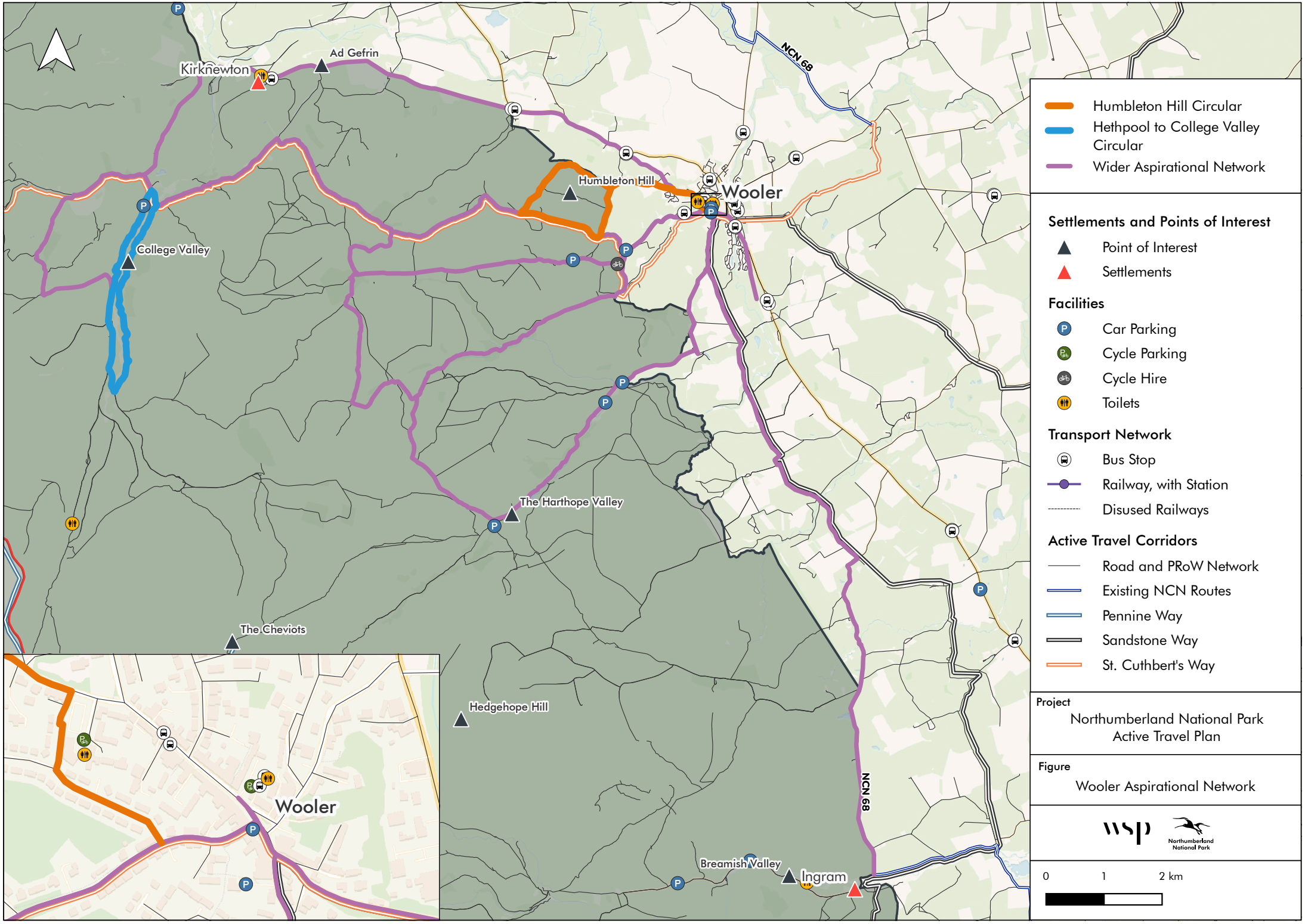
Kirknewton
Ad Gefrin
College Valley
Humbleton Hill
Wooler
NCN 68
The Harthope Valley
The Cheviots
Hedgehope Hill
Breamish Valley
Ingram
Humbleton Hill Circular
Hethpool to College Valley Circular
Wider Aspirational Network
Settlements and Points of Interest
Point of Interest
Settlements
Facilities
Car Parking
Cycle Parking
Cycle Hire
Toilets
Transport Network
Bus Stop
Railway, with Station
Disused Railways
Active Travel Corridors
Road and PRoW Network
Existing NCN Routes
Pennine Way
Sandstone Way
St. Cuthbert's Way
Project
Northumberland National Park Active Travel Plan
Figure
Wooler Aspirational Network
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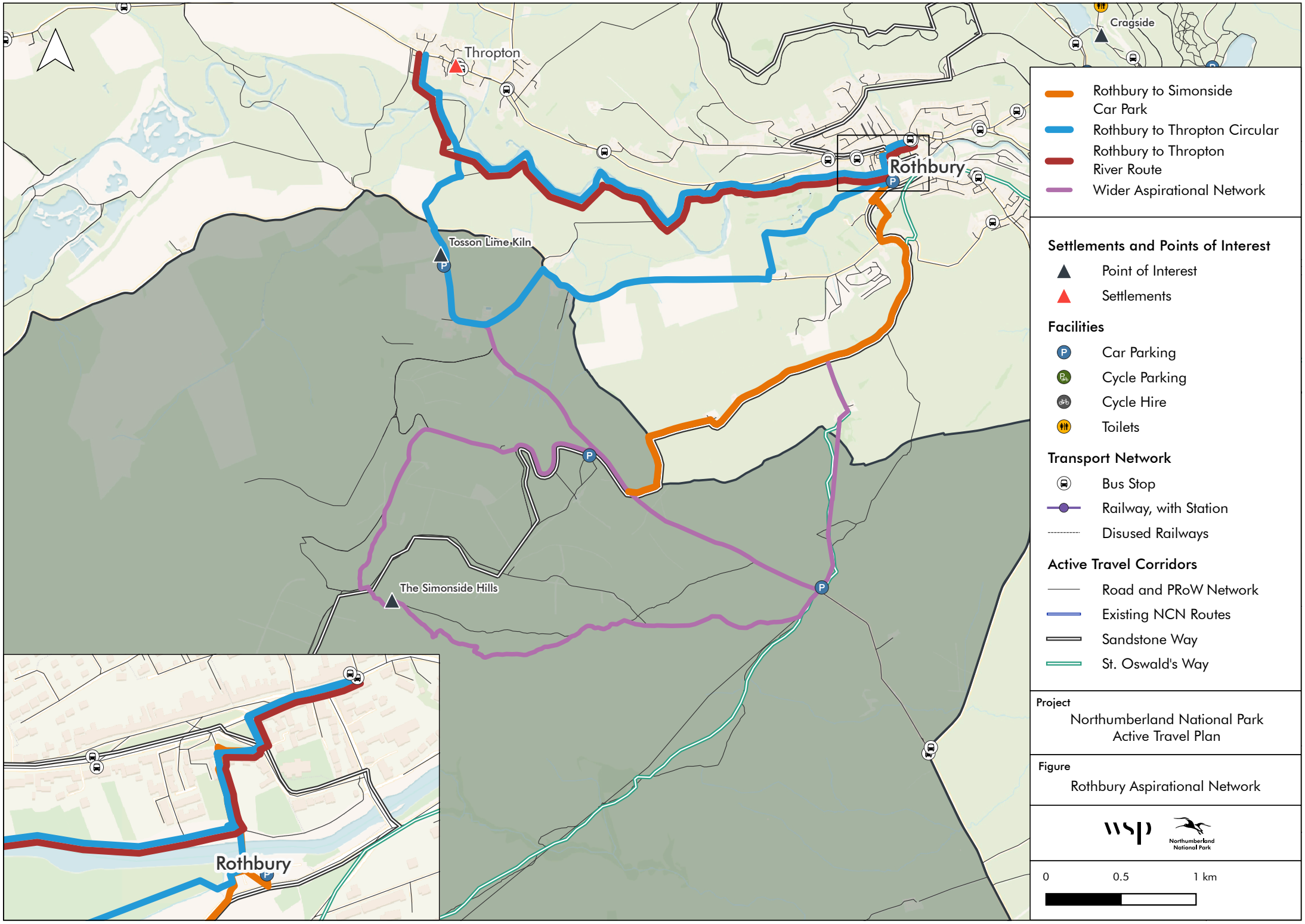
2 km


Thropton
Cragside
Rothbury
Tosson Lime Kiln
The Simonside Hills
Rothbury
Rothbury to Simonside Car Park
Rothbury to Thropton Circular
Rothbury to Thropton River Route
Wider Aspirational Network
Settlements and Points of Interest
Point of Interest
Settlements
Facilities
Car Parking
Cycle Parking
Cycle Hire
Toilets
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Sandstone Way
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Northumberland National Park Active Travel Plan
Figure
Rothbury Aspirational Network
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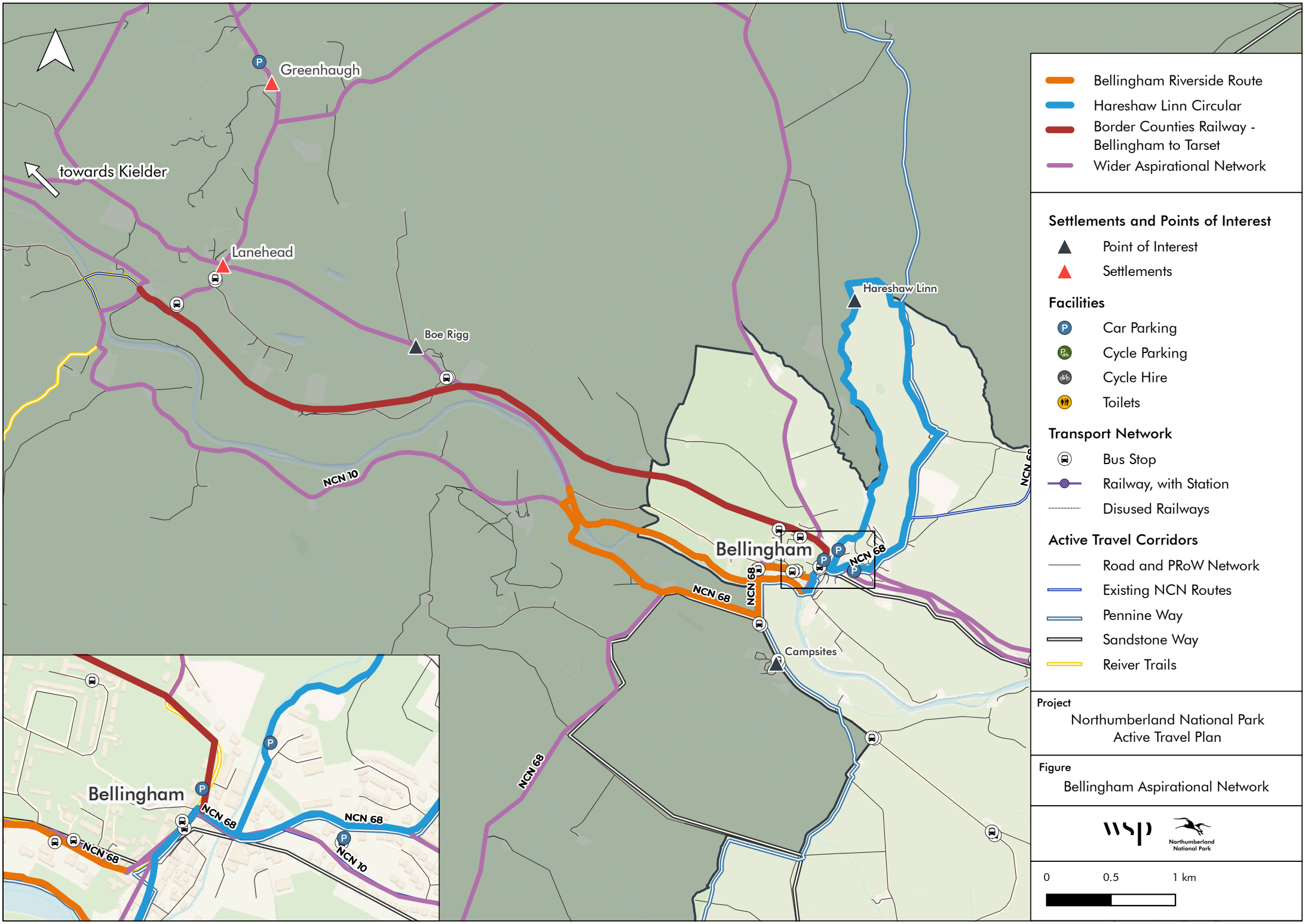
Greenhaugh
towards Kielder
Lanehead
Boe Rigg
Hareshaw Linn
NCN 10
Bellingham
NCN 68
Campsites
Bellingham Riverside Route
Hareshaw Linn Circular
Border Counties Railway - Bellingham to Tarset
Wider Aspirational Network
Settlements and Points of Interest
Point of Interest
Settlements
Facilities
Car Parking
Cycle Parking
Cycle Hire
Toilets
Transport Network
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Northumberland National Park Active Travel Plan
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Bellingham Aspirational Network
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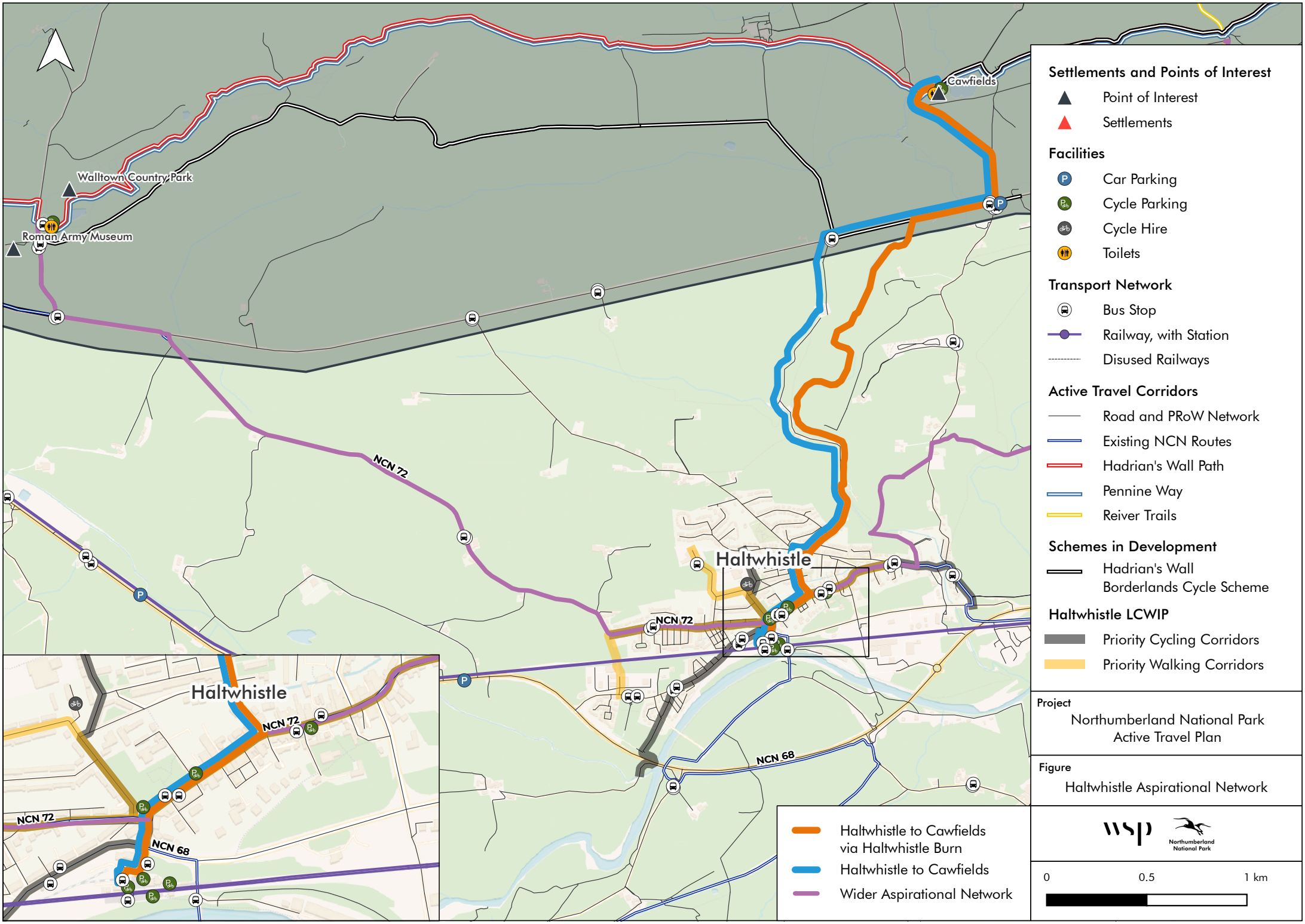
Walltown Country Park
Roman Army Museum
Cawfields
NCN 72
Haltwhistle
NCN 72
NCN 68
Haltwhistle
NCN 72
NCN 72
NCN 68
Settlements and Points of Interest
Point of Interest
Settlements
Facilities
Car Parking
Cycle Parking
Cycle Hire
Toilets
Transport Network
Bus Stop
Railway, with Station
Disused Railways
Active Travel Corridors
Road and PRoW Network
Existing NCN Routes
Hadrian's Wall Path
Pennine Way
Reiver Trails
Schemes in Development
Hadrian's Wall Borderlands Cycle Scheme
Haltwhistle LCWIP
Priority Cycling Corridors
Priority Walking Corridors
Haltwhistle to Cawfields via Haltwhistle Burn
Haltwhistle to Cawfields
Wider Aspirational Network
Project
Northumberland National Park Active Travel Plan
Figure
Haltwhistle Aspirational Network
wsp
Northumberland National Park
0
0.5
1 km

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Appendix – User Types

User Type Matrix for Walking and Wheeling

Walking and Wheeling		Distance			
		1 mile / 1.6km (~20 minutes)	2 miles / 3.2 km (1 hours)	4 miles / 6.4km (2 hours)	8 miles / 12.8km (4+ hours)
Max. Gradient	<3%	Accessible Route	Family Route	Family / Everyday Walker	Everyday / Experienced Walker
	3-5%	Accessible Route	Family Route	Everyday Walker	Experienced Walker
	>5%			Everyday Walker	Experienced Walker
	>10% (inc. steps)			Everyday Walker	Experienced Walker
On-road (quiet way) vs. Off-Road	90-100% off-road	Accessible Route	Family Route	Family / Everyday Walker	Everyday / Experienced Walker
	75-90% off-road	Accessible / Family Route	Family Route	Everyday Walker	Experienced Walker
	50-75% off-road	Everyday Walker	Everyday Walker	Everyday Walker	Experienced Walker
	<50% off-road	Everyday / Experienced Walker	Everyday / Experienced Walker	Experienced Walker	Experienced Walker

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Matrices were developed by the Project Team to understand the likely walking and wheeling / cycle user type for each route, with the worst-case scenario adopted.

Example User Type

If the "Distance / Gradient" section of the matrix outputs "Family Route" but the "Distance / % On-Road" indicates "Everyday Walker", the user type would be "Everyday Walker"

User Type Matrix for Cycling

Cycling		Distance			
		4 miles / 6.4km (~20 minutes)	8 miles / 12.8 km (1 hour)	16 miles / 26km (2 hours)	32 miles / 51km (4+ hours)
Max. Gradient	<3%	Accessible Cycle / Young Family	Family Cycle	Everyday Cyclist	Experienced Cyclist / E-Bike
	3-5%	Family Cycle	Everyday Cyclist	Everyday Walker	Experienced Cyclist / E-Bike
	>5%	Everyday Cyclist	Experienced Cyclist	Everyday Walker	Experienced Cyclist / E-Bike
	>10%		E-Bike	E-Bike	E-Bike

On-road (quiet way) vs. Off-Road	100% off-road	Accessible Cycle / Young Family	Family Cycle	Everyday Cyclist	Experienced Cyclist / E-Bike
	>75% off-road	Family Cycle / Everyday Cyclist	Family Cycle / Everyday Cyclist	Everyday Cyclist	Experienced Cyclist / E-Bike
	>50% off-road		Everyday / Experienced Cyclist	Experienced Cyclist / E-Bike	Experienced Cyclist / E-Bike
	50-100% on-road		Experienced Cyclist / E-Bike	Experienced Cyclist / E-Bike	Experienced Cyclist / E-Bike

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Matrices were developed by the Project Team to understand the likely walking and wheeling / cycle user type for each route, with the worst-case scenario adopted.

Example User Type

If the "Distance / Gradient" section of the matrix outputs "Family Cycle" but the "Distance / % On-Road" indicates "Everyday Cyclist", the user type would be "Everyday Cyclist"

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