

Feasibility of a new Active Travel route between Tweedbank and Reston Railway stations

Survey report

Introduction

Scottish Borders Council have received funding from the South of Scotland Enterprise for a feasibility study of a new 53km active travel route between the existing Tweedbank Railway Station and the new Reston Station Scottish Borders.

The route is to be based generally on the alignment of the former railway line that originally linked the stations and runs through the heart of the region connecting towns and villages such as Earlston, Greenlaw, Duns and Chirnside.

A survey was undertaken to understand how the potential route could meet the needs of the community or landowners and who could benefit or be affected by the proposed scheme. The survey was hosted by Atkins on the Microsoft Forms Platform and promoted through Scottish Borders Council consultation hub. The survey did not collect personal information, unless people expressly provided it and any information provided will only be shared with Scottish Borders Council and SOSE. The survey was promoted by Council officers who emailed it out through their lists of contacts. An email list compiled from the internet of Community groups, businesses and organisations was also emailed directly. The survey was live from 6 – 31 March 2022, with 1340 survey responses were received in total.

“I think it is one of the best ways we can invest in our future. It delivers on so many levels to people and businesses across the Borders. We should do it sensitively though, retaining tree shelter and greenery.”

Each question will be taken in turn and the results discussed.

Question 1 Image of the existing railway alignment

Route Map



This first question on the survey showed the above image of the existing railway alignment that is likely to form the spine of the route. The final alignment options will emerge from the consultation and engineering feasibility work being undertaken.

People were asked to provide an email address if they would like to engage throughout the development of the route or keep up to date on the project. 777 respondents provided email addresses to this question. 17 comments were received in addition to the email addresses.

The comments ranged from, given the unlikelihood that the railway will be restored as a railway in the near future, that active travel would be good utilisation of an existing resource; the route's suitability as a path because it is level and requests to consider all users, ages and abilities, including horses. One person would like to use the route to teach people to cycle and take led rides.

Other comments were made that this would benefit communities and boost and rejuvenate the local economy, benefitting everyone to be able to take a more healthy lifestyle especially people with different levels of mobility. Some felt it would be great way to promote the beautiful countryside and may provide competition for the Southern upland way, without the hills.

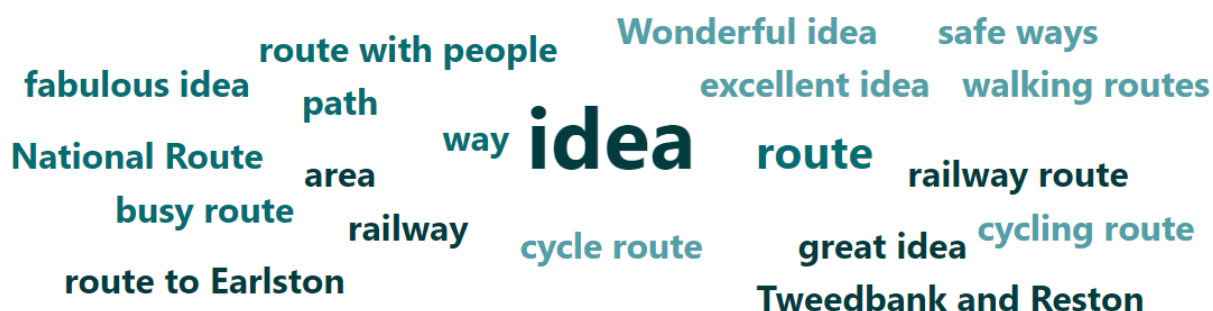
There were particular concerns about where the path should and should not go:

- Darnick Community Woodland Association are particularly worried that this small woodland could be considered a suitable part of this cycling route. There is already a suitable cycle way from Tweedbank Station running along the black path or Tweedbank Drive to Tweedbank Roundabout crossing the A6091 at this point before following the designated route directly to Melrose Station. From here one can continue the cycle route to Earliston and onwards to Rest on or choose to follow Sustran National Route 1, the Border Loop or the Tweed Cycle Way. They offered input into this study, to assist in finding the best off road solution.

- That it would be great to link into paths feeding into it from the coast. Walking from Cairncross to Reston is not far but walking on the road from A1 to Coldingham is a scary experience as it is a busy route with people commuting and tourism. It would be amazing if you could consult with local land owners in this area also. Lots of people from the surrounding area go to the Reston larder by car due to lack of safe walking routes. It would also give children living rurally the chance to walk/cycle to nursery/primary school if there was an off road option.

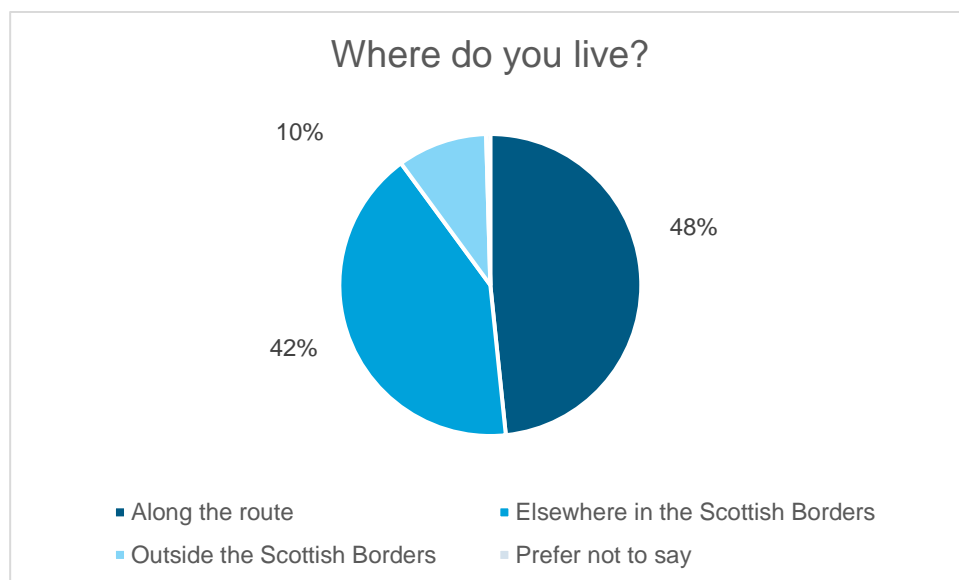
There were two comments from this section about having the railway line reinstated as a railway, one suggested via either Duns and/or Kelso.

9% of respondents answered with the word “idea” to this question, all of these were positive.



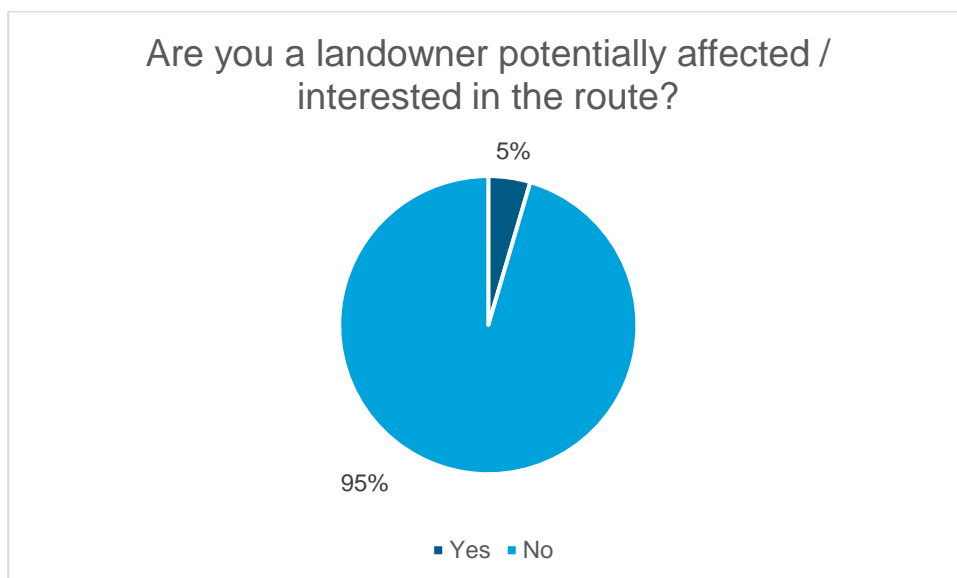
Question 2 Where do you live?

48% of respondents live along the route and almost 42% elsewhere in the Scottish Borders.



Question 3 Are you a landowner potentially affected / interested in the route?

Just under 5% of people were landowners, or affected/Interested in the route.



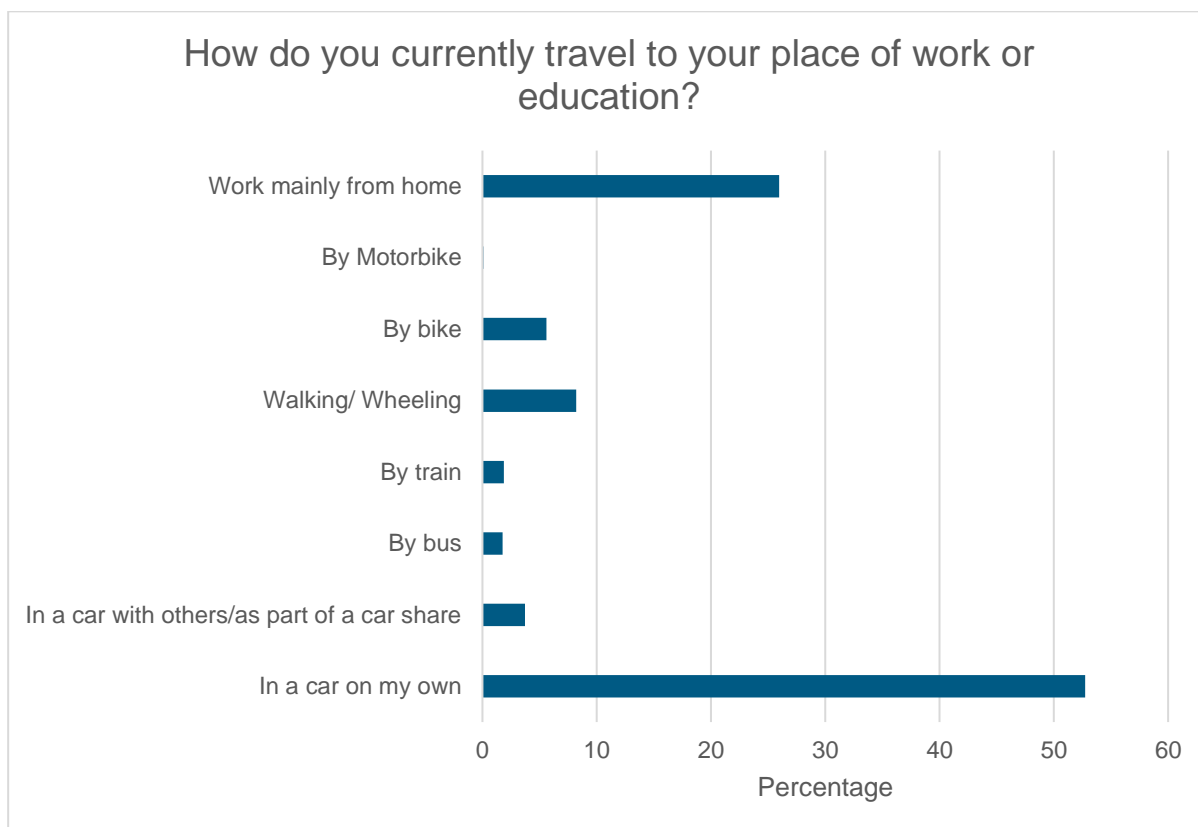
Many respondents stressed the need to speak to landowners regarding the route. One landowner was concerned that they hadn't been contacted first in consideration of the route. One month was spent, prior to the survey going live on land searches, obtaining address and landowner details but not all landowner details were obtained, so other means were used to try and obtain information on people who live along the route including social media.

It is felt that the survey isn't be best way to communicate with landwoners and so they have been contacted individually to discuss the proposals by phone, by letter or in person. One landowner voiced concerned in the survey about the impact on grazing livestock, along with any disruption through remedial works to the old track bed and permanent fixtures for housing animals.

There was also concern that National Rail regularly send letters to say nobody is allowed to pass under the existing railway bridge.

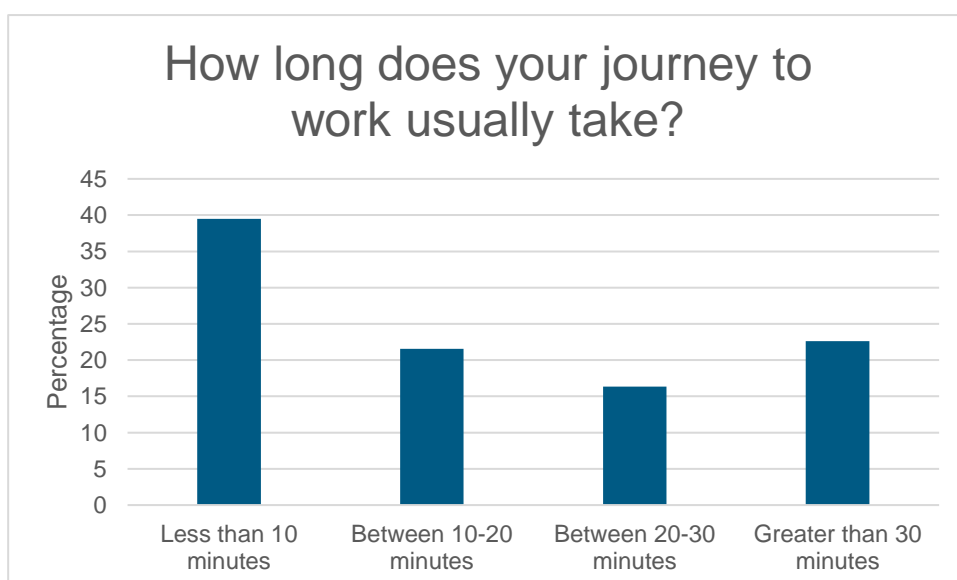
Question 4 How do you currently travel to your place of work or education?

The graph below shows that over 25% of people work from home. Over 13% of people already walk, wheel and cycle to work. 3% car share and over 52% drive their car on their own.



Question 5 How long does your journey to work usually take?

The graph below shows over just under 40% of people take less than ten minutes to get to work, with over 61% making their journey within 20 minutes and 77% within half an hour.



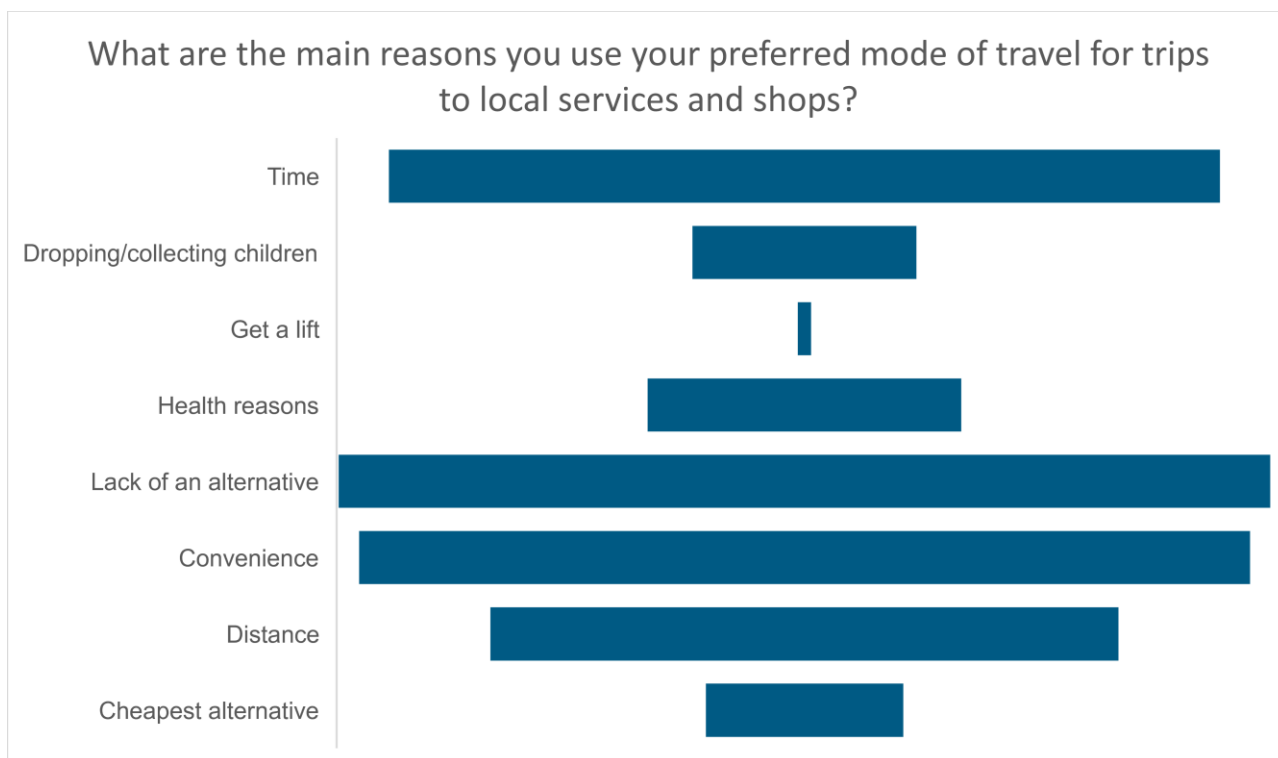
Question 6 How do you currently travel to local shops, services and other attractions? please select all that apply

47% of people drive to local shops, services and attractions. A surprising number of people, over 31%, walk, wheel and cycle to the shops and over 11% car share.



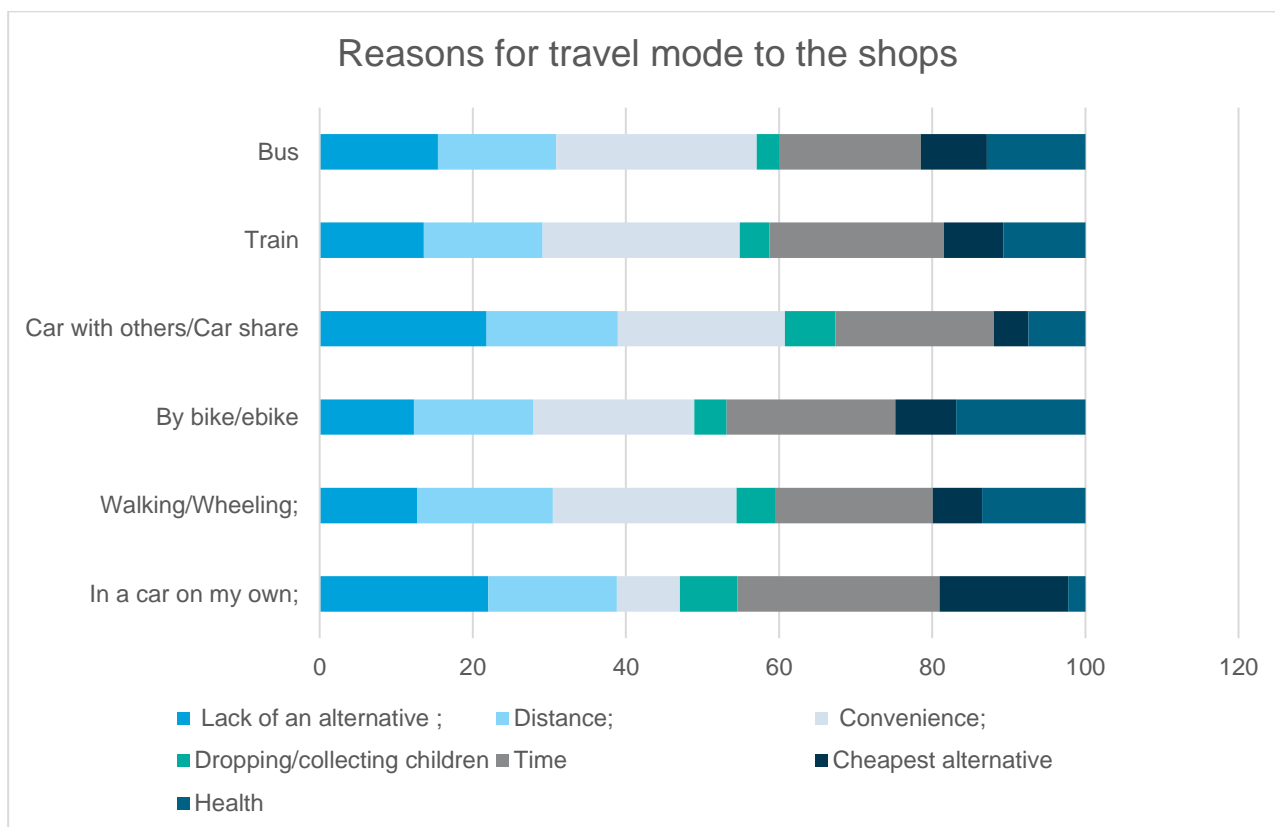
Question 7 What are the main reasons you use your preferred mode of travel for trips to local services and shops?

The graph below shows most people chose their preferred mode of travel because they have a lack of alternative (23%) next was convenience (22%) and time (20%).



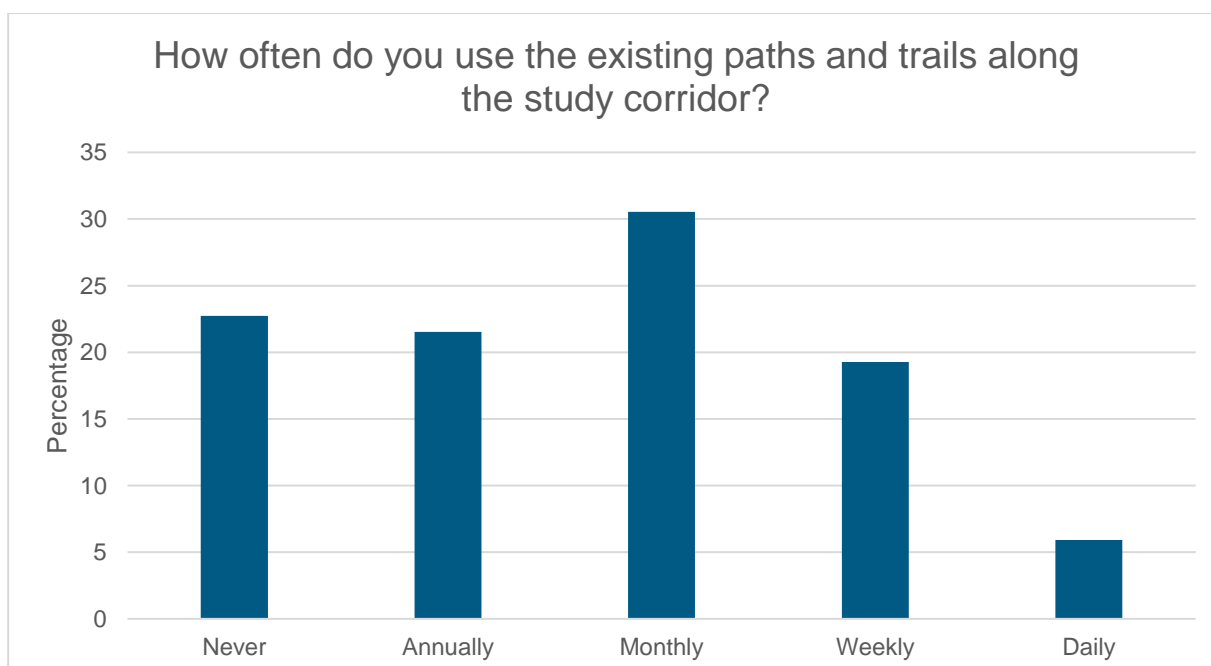
Looking deeper into each mode of travel in the graph below, it is surprising that only 8% of car drivers, drive to the shops because of convenience, understandably time rated highest for this group at 26% and next was lack of alternative at 22%. 22% of car sharers felt this mode was convenient, but also that they had a lack of alternative, next for them was time (21%). It is interesting that only 5% of this group mentioned “cheapest” for this car sharing, since car sharers traditionally share the cost of the journey. 26% of bus user’s reasons were convenience and next was time (18%).

With just under 40% of people traveling 10 minutes (Q5) and 47% traveling by car to work or study (Q6), it would be plausible to think that a ten minute journey by car could potentially be swapped for walking, cycling or wheeling if people are close to the route and it goes in their direction of travel, especially since question 7 reveals that 23% of people feel they have a lack of alternative.



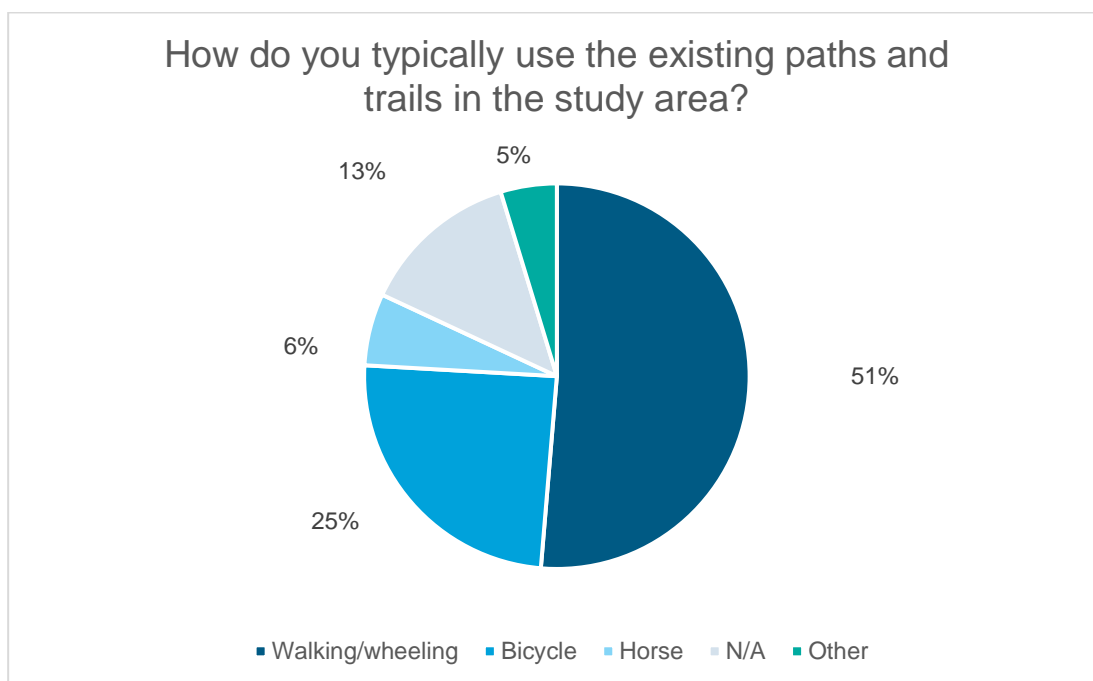
Question 8 How often do you use the existing paths and trails along the study corridor?

A surprising number of people (22%) never use the paths, however, currently much of the route is inaccessible and as we read on, question 11 reveals that awareness of routes, lack of signing, not enough route connections or links to towns and villages, may help understand this. Over 30% use the paths monthly and over 19% on a weekly basis and almost 6% daily.



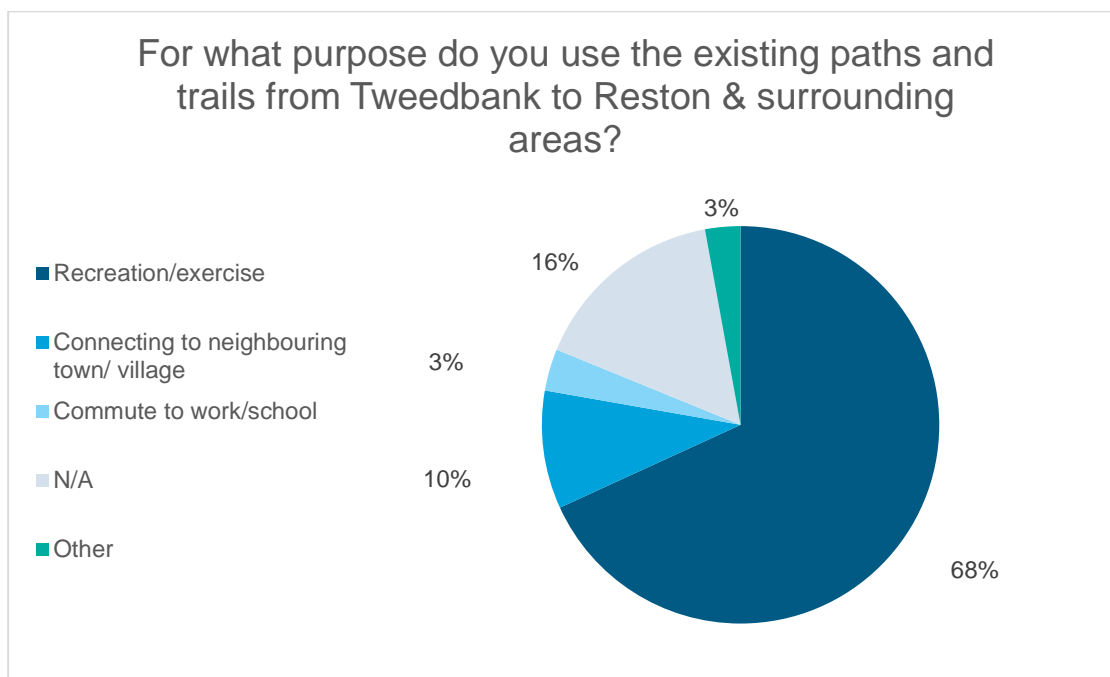
Question 9 How do you typically use the existing paths and trails in the study area?

The graph below shows that over half (51%) typically use the existing paths for walking and wheeling and a quarter (25%) for cycling.



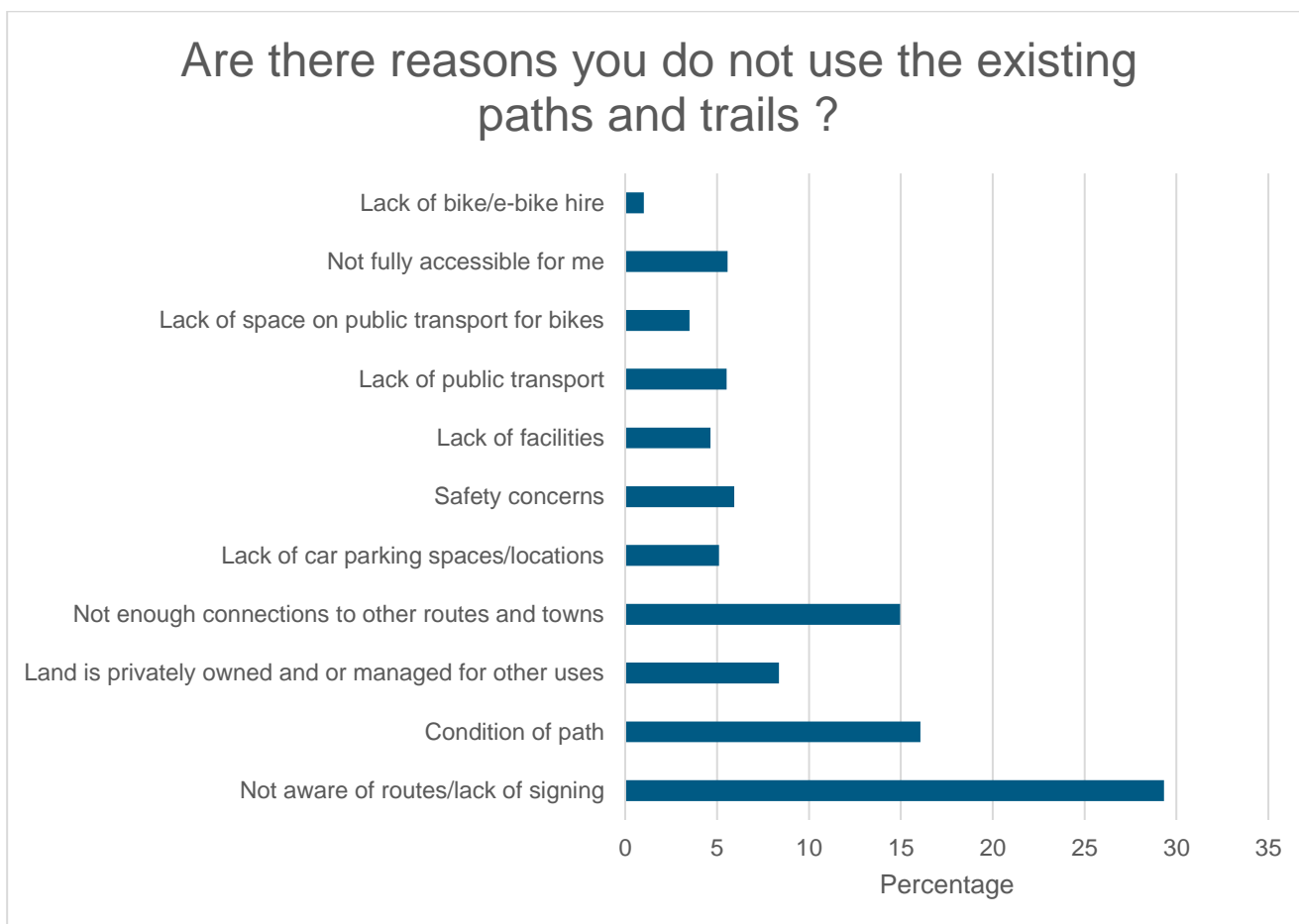
Question 10 For what purpose do you use the existing paths and trails from Tweedbank to Reston & surrounding areas?

The graph below shows 68% currently use the existing paths and trails for recreation and exercise and 10% of people currently use them for commuting.



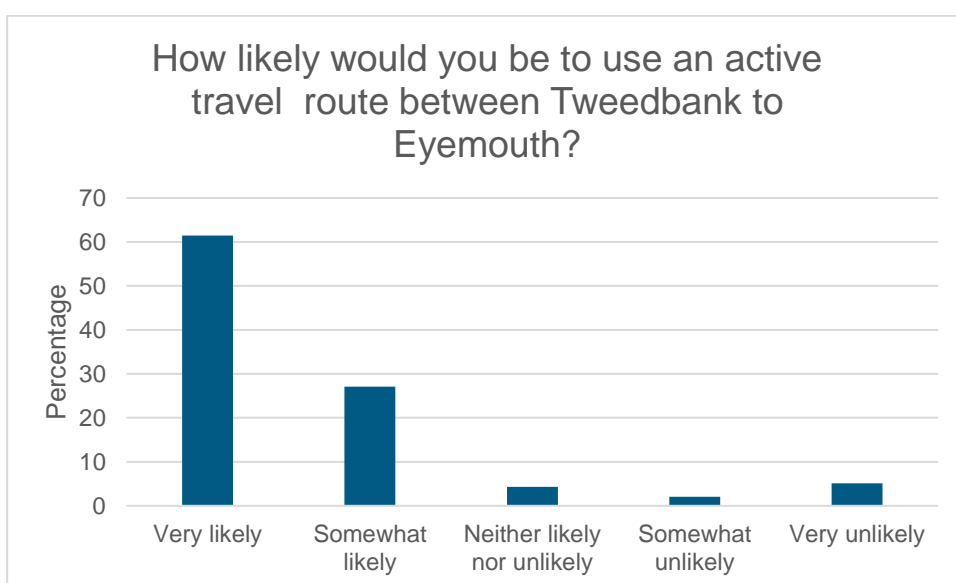
Question 11 Are there reasons you do not use the existing paths and trails ?

The graph below shows that the main reasons people don't use existing paths and trails in the area are lack of awareness of routes and lack of signing (29%), 16% of people said this was because of the condition of the paths; 15% of respondents felt that there were not enough connections to other routes and towns.



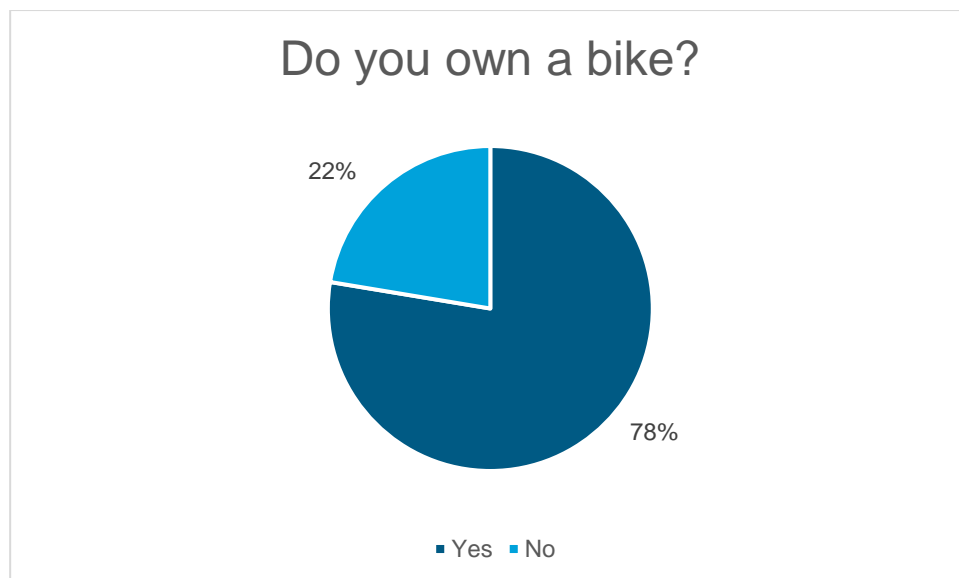
Question 12 How likely would you be to use an active travel route between Tweedbank to Eyemouth?

The graph below shows that almost 62% would be very likely to use an active travel route between Tweedbank and Eyemouth.



Question 13 Do you own a bike?

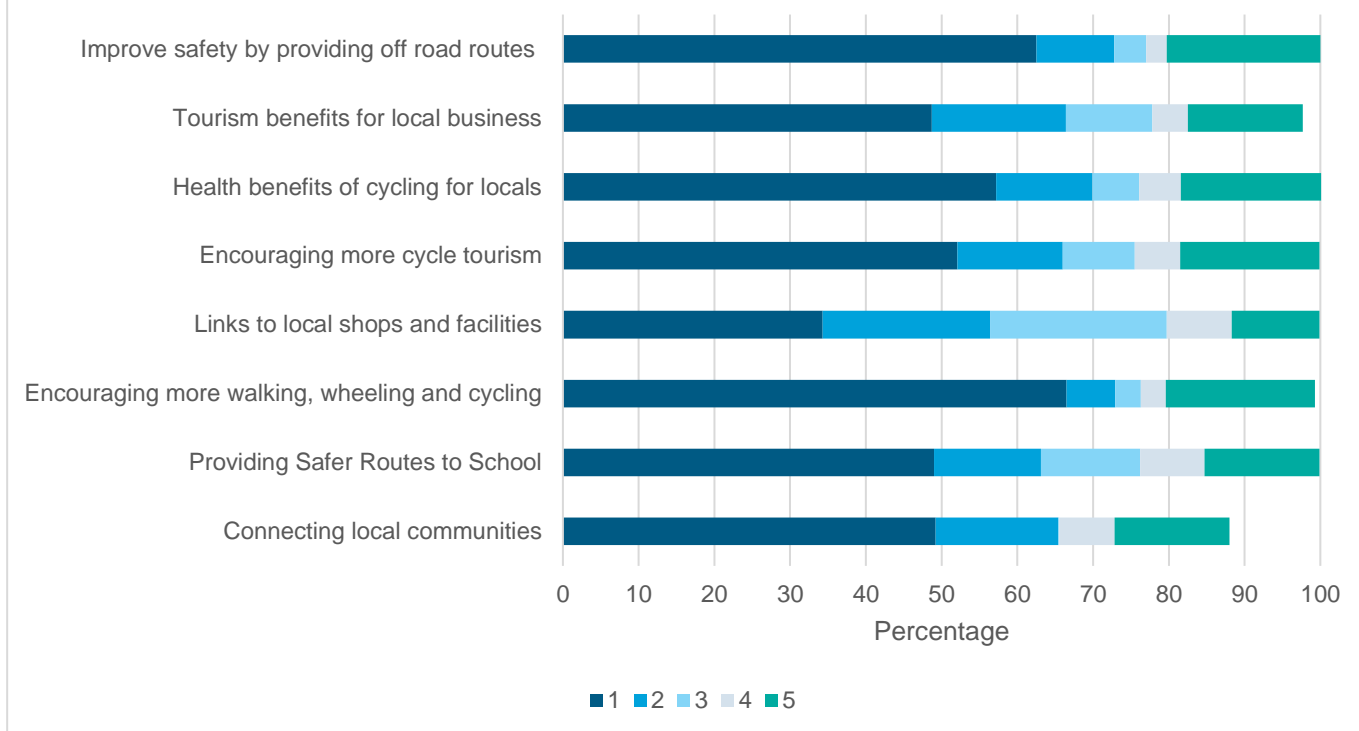
78% of respondents own a bike.



Question 14 How important do you think the following are in connecting Tweedbank to Eyemouth with an Active Travel route? Please rate below 1 very important to 5 not important at all

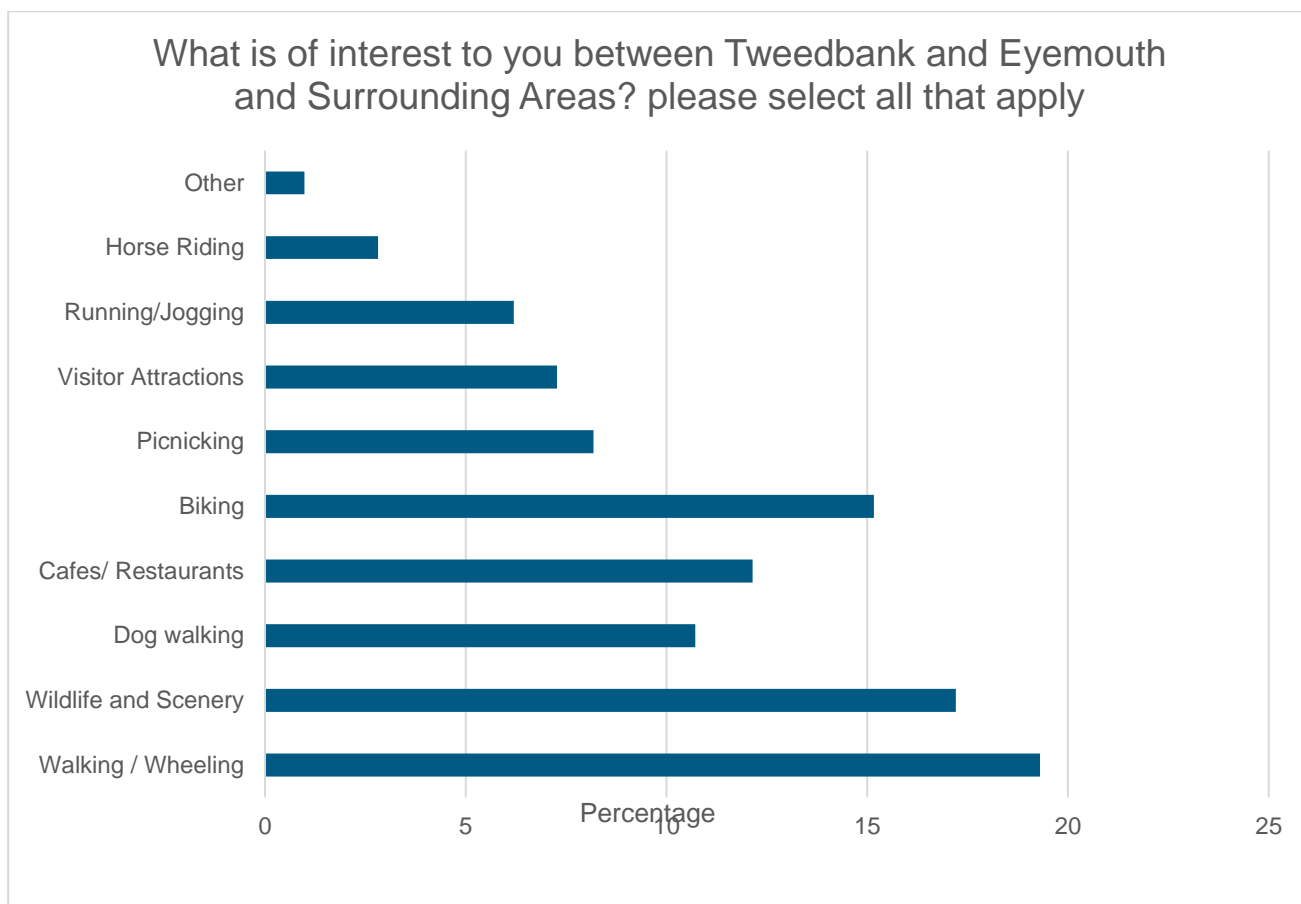
The graph below shows that encouraging more walking wheeling and cycling rated most highly, with Improving safety with off road routes rated second with health benefits and tourism coming next in importance.

How important do you think the following are in connecting Tweedbank to Eyemouth with an Active Travel route? Please rate below 1 very important to 5 not important at all



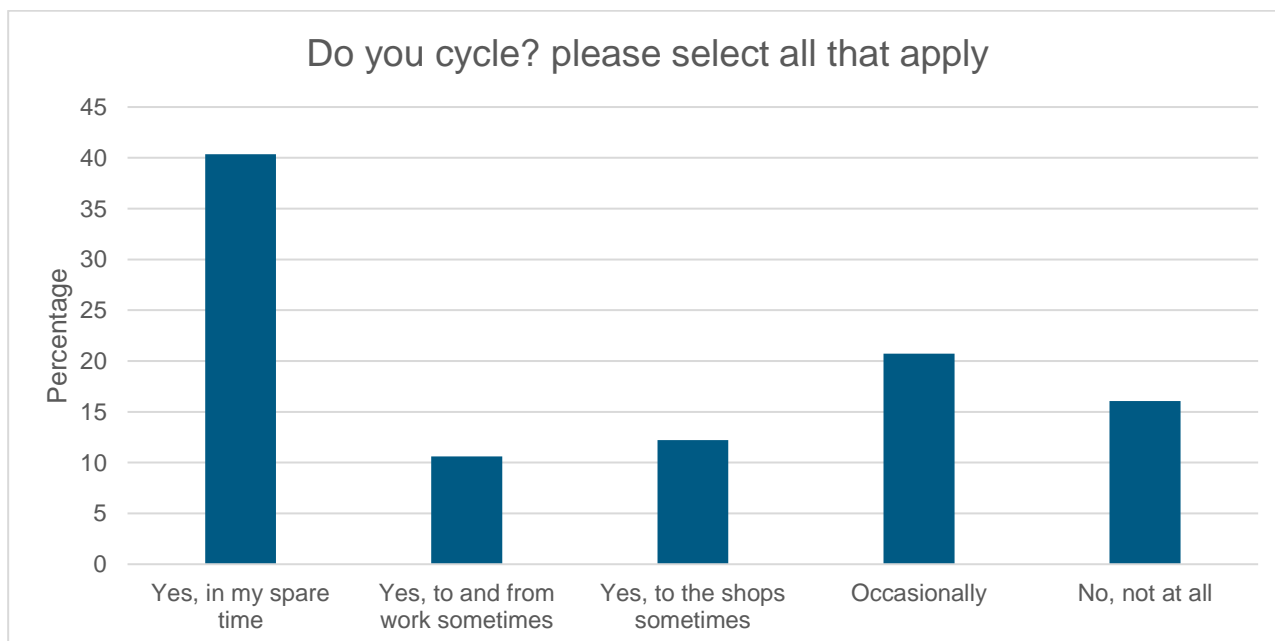
Question 15 What is of interest to you between Tweedbank and Eyemouth and Surrounding Areas? please select all that apply

19% of respondents were interested in walking and wheeling, with 17% interested in wildlife and scenery and 15% interested in biking. In other questions wildlife came up, some with concerns about the impact route development will have on the numerous flora and fauna and numerous badger setts along this existing wildlife corridor which has developed in the relative peace and quite since the railway closed.



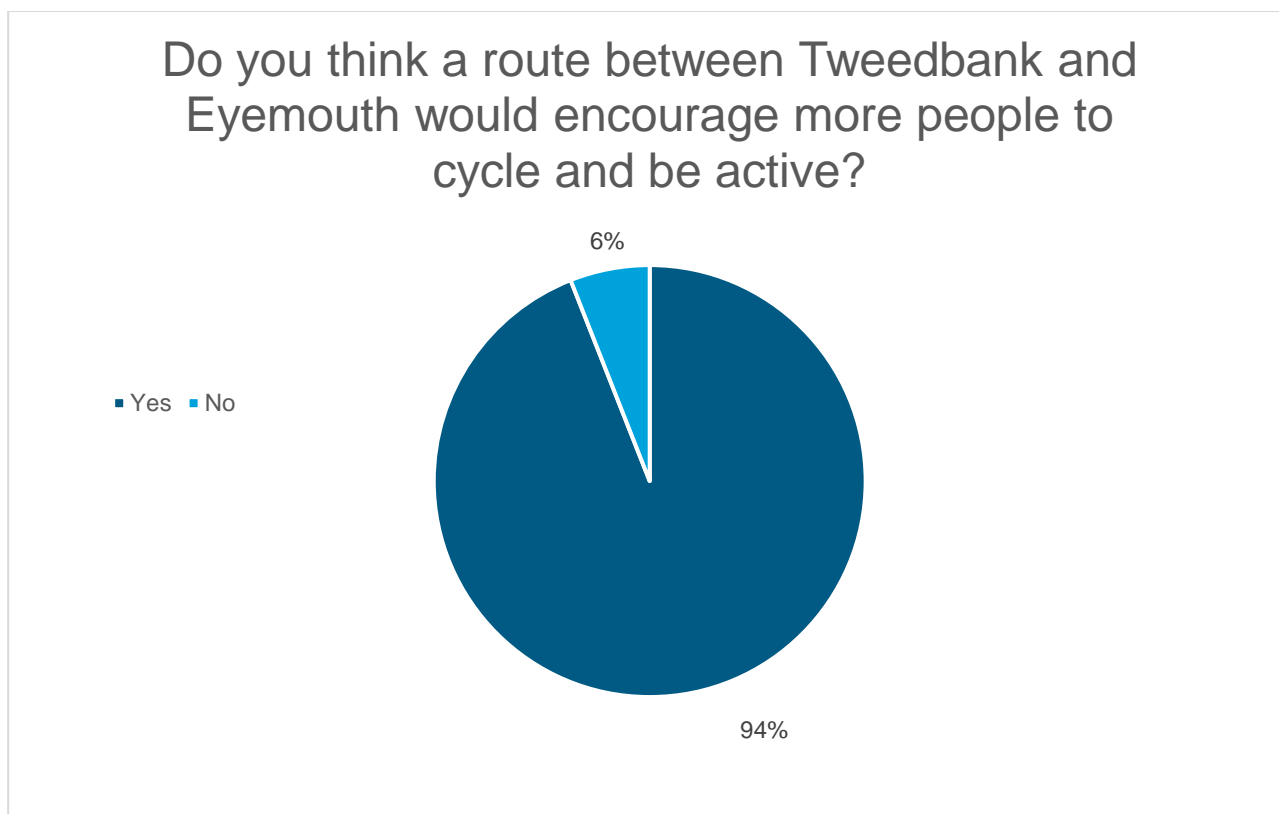
Question 16 Do you cycle? please select all that apply

40% of people cycle in their spare time, with only 16% of people cycling not at all.



Question 17 Do you think a route between Tweedbank and Eyemouth would encourage more people to cycle and be active?

94% of respondents thought the route would encourage more people to cycle and be active.

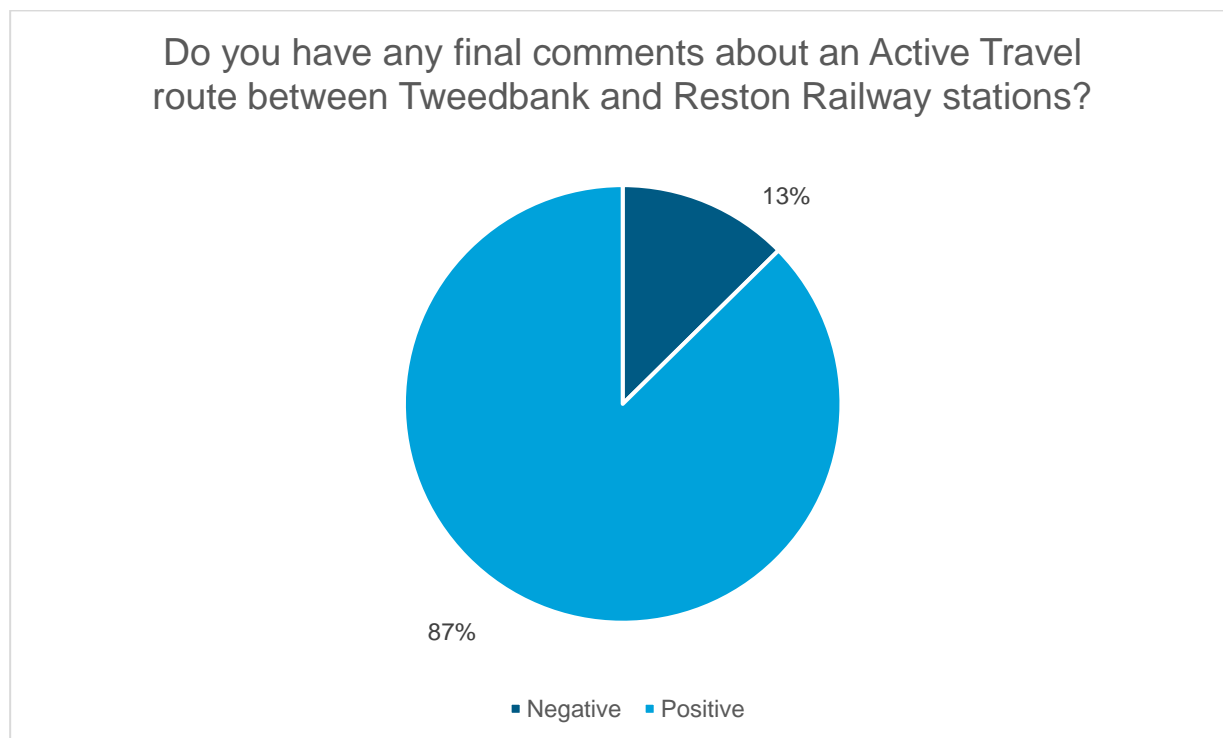


Question 18 There is a suggestion of linking businesses and other attractions, do you know of any that would benefit from a route between Tweedbank to Reston. Please specify

There were 350 responses to this question. 41 respondents (12%) answered **route** for this question. The words that were most used from the 350 responses are enlarged in size. A leaflet identifying all the various attractions / facilities along the Route was suggested.

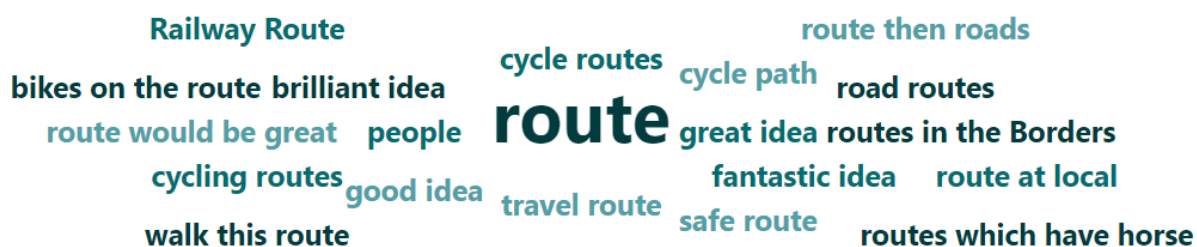
Question 21 Do you have any final comments about an Active Travel route between Tweedbank and Reston Railway stations?

There were 609 responses to this question. 87% of comments were positive and 13% negative.



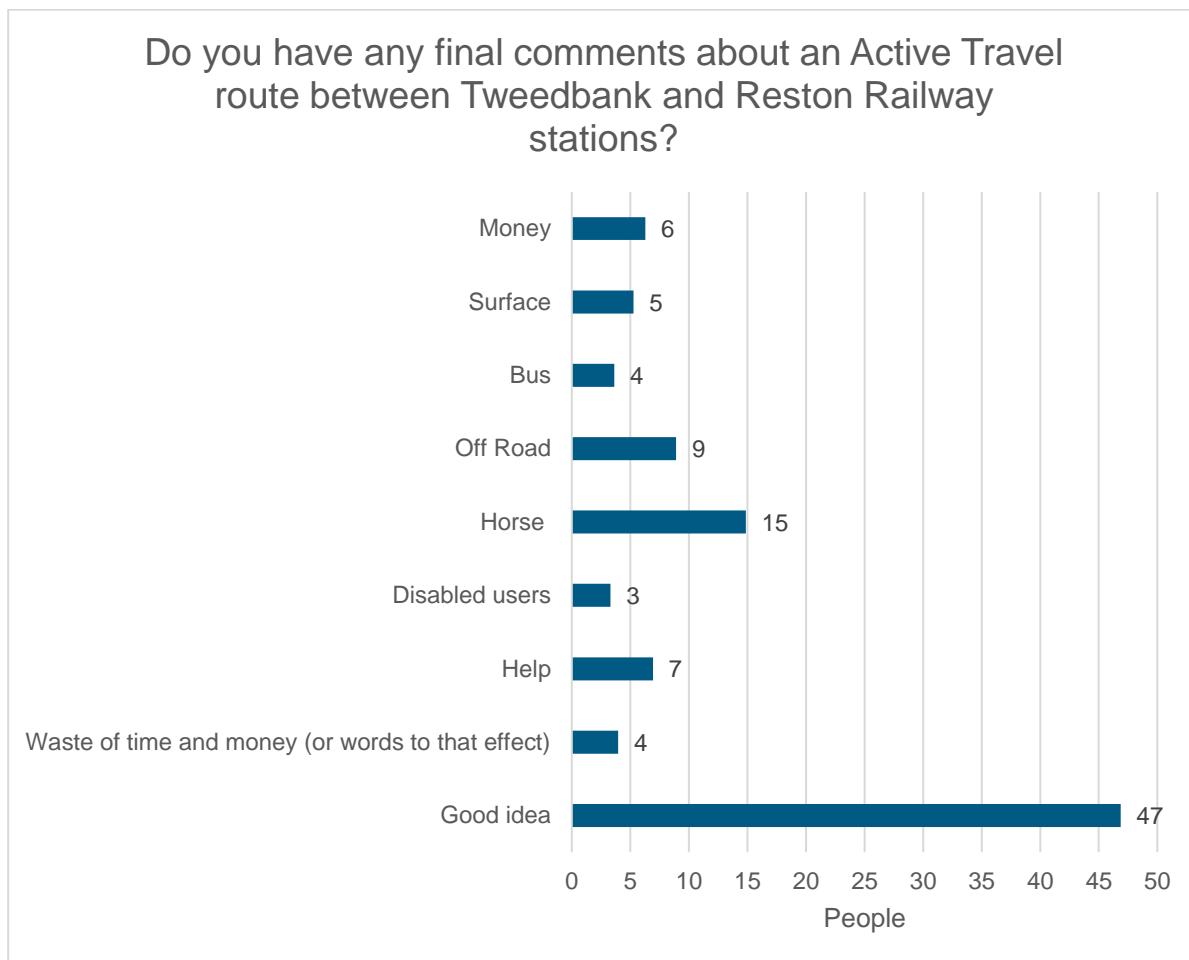
Words used to describe the proposal were:

168 respondents (28%) answered **route** for this question.



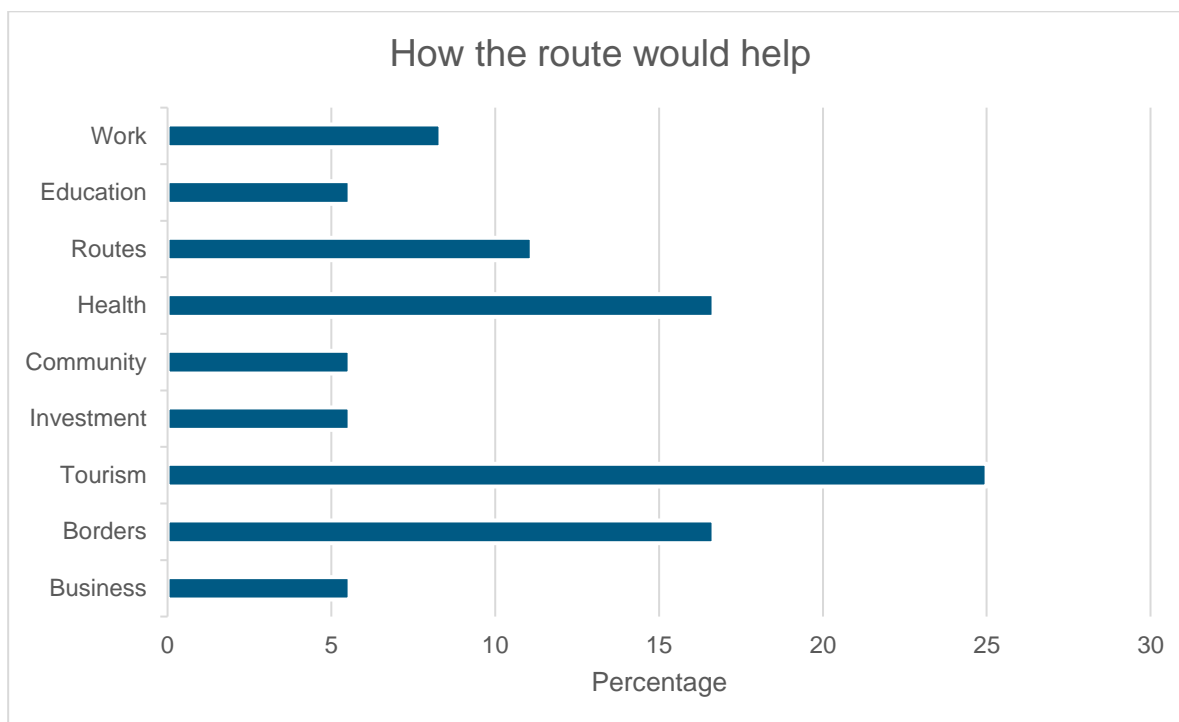
The topics people brought up are shown above. The responses were categorised and the chart below reflects the number of people who brought up similar themes and topics. 44% of respondents used the term, Good, great, Brilliant or fantastic Idea. 15% of the people had comments about horses these are detailed in the next section of this report.

Four people stated that the route would be more convenient and flexible than existing bus services/time tabling. Two stated that the money would be better spent on improved bus routes, with one person suggesting that the railway line be used by trains again. Two people suggested it would be advantageous to have a good bus service that also lifts bikes.



21 people used the term “help” with reference to the route helping in some way, all of these comments were positive and were followed with the words in the graph below. A quarter of the people (9) who used the term help, referred to the route helping tourism; followed by 17% saying the route would help the borders and health. 14% of people thought the route could help them get to work or education. 12% of people thought the route would help business and investment.

6% of people said that the route would help link the communities, some stressed the important realisation of this during COVID and how important outdoor links and routes were for physical activity, recreation, access, physical and mental wellbeing and being able to support each other and maintain a physical connection during lockdowns.



To get most value people felt there was a need to link recreational routes to routes people can use for utility reasons, so they can get to work and education and gain better access to Borders General Hospital.

Many felt that the route will allow access to goods and services and encourage access for all, walkers, wheelers, cyclists and horse riders. Providing a variety of travel options also provides choice and especially in the context here would provide greater and opening up real commuter options and increase cycle tourism.

Many recognised the need for the provision of much needed infrastructure and connectivity across towns and saw this as important, to improve wellbeing especially for those without access to a car. There was a feeling that the importance of this may increase due to increasing fuel prices and fuel poverty and that this can cut rural people off. Lack of public transport, especially in the evenings was seen as a further barrier to rurality that the route might be able to overcome.

Days out

People are already planning days out in the hope that the route is completed:

- A rail ticket allowing bike carriage from Edinburgh to Reston then Tweedbank to Edinburgh would be excellent and would become a very popular day trip, especially if local cafes etc on route were set up to be pro-bike.
- Train to Tweedbank, cycle to Reston, train back to Edinburgh, or continue cycling back up NCN route to Edinburgh.
- Imagine being able to do a 3 day riding holiday working your way along this route, staying at local accommodation, eating in local pubs at night, adding loops onto existing trails (such as the Eildons, up Greenlawdean, around the beautiful rolling countryside between Auchencrow/Chirnside). That would be an attractive option for many of us that are located in the south of Scotland and the northeast of England.

Comments relating to re-instatement of trains on the railway

There were 21 comments expressing sadness that this might signal the end of trains on the railway line, some asking could rail or light rail be considered alongside an active travel corridor. Many of the 21 felt that the development of active travel routes along these would preclude the future opening of railway lines for railway use in future. Many of these respondents felt that rail links would be more beneficial than active travel links and one mentioned the need for more rail in consideration of future housing growth.

Requests additional routes

There were a large number of requests to look at routes on other old railway lines, which could link with this one or public transport connections around the Scottish Borders:

- Tweedbank to Hawick
- Around St Boswells, Kelso, Jed, Hawick an onto Wooler.
- Between Hawick and Berwick using the old railway line as most of the development is around Galashiels and Hawick often misses out
- Please connect Ayton. There is desperate need for better rail and cycle networks.
- Link up with sections of active travel between Galashiels and Peebles
- This route could be connected to the old railway line running between Galashiels and Peebles and connect into Glentress and its bike trails which is known nationally. You also need to get on with the Borders rail line which would link up with Kielder forest bike tracks. So much potential.
- Edrom part of the old railway between duns and Chirnside.
- A few of these questions mentioned Eyemouth, yet the study states it's between Earlston and Reston. There was a railway line running from Eyemouth to Burnmouth, it would be good to know if there will be any consideration to improve links between Reston, Coldingham, Eyemouth, Ayton, St Abbs, and Burnmouth at some point as this area of the borders is already overlooked when it comes to transport links.
- Why not consider the other railway lines around St Boswells, Kelso, Jed, Hawick an onto Wooler
- This route is a key part of a strategic off road access network linked to railway stations. Ultimately this route should be complemented by finishing the Clovenfords to Walkerburn link and also Eddleston to Edinburgh. Generational opportunities for public transport led tourism opportunities.
- I hope it can eventually extend all the way to Eyemouth too.
- Could also link it to the Peebles valley path and have a long distance trail through the borders
- Look at the old rail trails in the Peak District they were brilliant for family rides when we visited the area.
- Connect via the old railway paths from Melrose - Newstead - Leaderfoot - then onto Earlston. Open up Leaderfoot Viaduct as part of the route. It would be a massive draw to people who would love the opportunity to cross it on a route.
- A railway walk from Tweedbank to Reston along the old Berwickshire railway would not be complete without crossing those 19 spectacular arches.
- Do the same from Teeedbank via St Boswell's & Kelso to the national boundary.
- Adding loops onto existing trails (such as the Eildons, up Greenlawdean, around the beautiful rolling countryside between Auchencrow/Chirnside).
- we also need safe routes between Ayton and Eyemouth and between Reston and Ayton to allow the community to access Rail via active travel and avoid cars for short trips to Eyemouth
- Next proposal should be same for old Edinburgh to Peebles rail line and continue to Gala / Tweedbank.
- I think a route from Reston to Coldingham/Eyemouth to the coast would be a fantastic addition.
- Any chance you could also link it to the Peebles valley path and have a long distance trail through the borders.... ps look at the old rail trails in the Peak District they were brilliant for family rides when we visited the area.
- Presumably the route would link up with sections of active travel between Galashiels and Peebles?
- would be good to see links created to the Destination Tweed project
- It would be of great benefit to the proposed C to C route from Stranraer to Eyemouth and help encourage tourism.
- This route is a key part of a strategic off road access network linked to railway stations. Ultimately this route should be complemented by finishing the Clovenfords to Walkerburn link and also Eddleston to Edinburgh. Generational opportunities for public transport led tourism opportunities.
- I think a route from Reston to Coldingham/Eyemouth to the coast would be a fantastic addition.
- I think it is a brilliant idea that should be extended between ALL borders towns. It's unsafe to cycle or walk between Hawick and Selkirk, Selkirk and St Boswells, Hawick and Denholm and so on. All of these routes should be invested in to create active travel routes for walkers, cyclist and horse riders.

Constructive comments on the suggested approach

The following constructive comments were made on the suggested approach that should be taken. Many felt, as above that the route should be linked into existing public transport routes and that more routes should be developed.

Two other projects were suggested to look at:

- This should be linked to a transport network similar to that of the Cambridge Busway. New technology (greener than cat 5 or 6 diesel engines) with electric/hydrogen fuelled buses would have the advantage of running on both road and the existing disused rail network. It would also then be able to link where appropriate the villages of Ayton and Coldingham to the network and where appropriate be diverted into villages where the disused station is a considerable distance for the conurbation it serves.
- We have been doing some work regarding East Berwickshire's Light-railway Link to Central Borders which is An Innovative Proposal to Reinststate the Disused Berwickshire Railway Route. It is now vital that the presentation is looked at by as many folk as possible as each visit is counted. Now we are getting to a more firmed up proposal and before we progress it further, we need as many "LIKES" as possible and comment if you wish (comments specific to the proposal please) so that we can further demonstrate Borders Community support for the idea. Because of the Pandemic we cannot pull together a public meeting which as you all know would be the normal method of demonstrating such support. <https://www.coldingham.info/railway/>

Others, mentioned above warning of damage and disruption to the flora and fauna that now exist on the route and asking for careful, mindful construction. One person warning that the route should be built adjacent to the existing a6105, saying that no parent will allow their child to cycle this remote route.

There was one offer of help on route clearance:

"Worked in Rail Industry for 40 years, happy to volunteer help clear / prepare route!"

Carbon

4 comments were made on the project's ability to make carbon reductions:

- This will contribute to eco tourism and build on the experience of Lockdown to encourage people to enjoy the outdoors, improving health both physical and mental. Also will reduce carbon footprint by reducing reliance on cars
- A link to Reston station especially would be a great move. We are constantly reminded that our travel habits are having a negative impact on the planet. Living in the rural borders and working in Edinburgh, I feel I have to option but to use my car to link me to a train station. The lack of public transport and links such as the active travel route removes the option of low carbon travel.
- This is a very good idea, it should be supported by all parties as another way of de-carbonising all necessary travel and offering safe ways for the general population to get exercise and become fitter.
- This would be a great start to connecting other villages and towns around the borders in a similar way to encourage people to use their cars less and reduce their carbon footprint

Path use, surfacing, route and branding

There were various comments about who the path is for, with respondents keen that no one is precluded from use of the path, by barriers, incline, surfacing and marketing and branding, or name, with some people quoting examples of when a route is called a 'cycle route' it can make people think it is for one group and not treat others who use it, well. Some comments follow:

- I think it's an excellent idea but be careful not to place all the emphasis as a cycle route. Cyclists can think the route is only for their use and could be less tolerant to other users eg walkers, horse riders, children etc. In Edinburgh , where I used to live, the old railway pathways which became walkways for various users became busy with aggressive impatient cyclists who thought the paths were solely cycle paths.

- It would be wonderful if it could genuinely be a multi-user route, not one set up predominantly for cyclists.
- The right surface, the right access methods (no kissing gates or stiles!), appropriate parking areas could open up this whole corridor to walkers, horse riders, wheel chair users, pram pushers,
- People made suggestions about signage and supporting infrastructure such as appropriate gates, drinking points eg tap at regular rest areas and purpose built parking area. Horse riders asked for parking for cars, trailers and lorries, to come to the borders or travel to the route to join and ride with family and friends, continuing on to say that any local café's would do well out of the arrangement afterwards.

Maintenance

There were a few comments about maintenance;

- Our paths here are too unkempt for my level of activity and I am always.
- A small number of people expressed concern about the routes they were currently using to walk and ride on becoming impassable and in terms of the surface and fear over tripping and falling.
- Concerns over the formation of the surface, tarmac or gravel. Please take care with choice of surface of the path -tarmac would not be good for facilitating horse use.

Access for all

People gave insight as to what it is like to live in the area without transport and with a disability. There are no options, other than very expensive taxis after around 6pm if you want to go out. Disabled people MUST have their own transport, as the only option for powerchairs is Berwickshire Wheels and similar services which get booked up quickly or are already contracted and are very expensive to use if you do manage to book.

Other comments were:

- Any proposed route should be made accessible to all. This includes wheelchair users, prams/buggies, and a variety of bike types including cargo and adapted bikes. This means any barriers or access restrictions should accommodate these user needs without the requirement for dismount or additional assistance.
- Any new walking routes will be great for physical health and mental health and making these good paths would make them accessible for wheelchair users too.
- As someone with visual impairments who can't drive this will give me freedom

Horses

There were 46 horse specific comments to the request for final comments (Q21) which have been summarised here. Many people mentioned endurance riding and rides that they already attend in the Borders and the potential for this to grow and expand from a day to a few days. Many felt it would be fantastic to have a riding route like this for horses, to get horses off road and away from cars, preferably with accessible parking for horse trailers and boxes along the route. Also horse friendly gates which are also suitable for those using bikes, mobility scooters, prams for buggies and wheelchairs. Many pointed out that Kissing gates are a real problem for all these groups.

Respondents asked that consideration be given to the surface, that horses are better with a more forgiving surface and it should not be slippery, like tarmac. Although a path similar to the one at Kelso which provides a grass track for horses alongside a tarmac path for cycles etc. would be good. A few felt that using tarmac on the routes can not only make them not conducive to horse riding but make them more urban and take away the rural feel of the route. Some were concerned about sharing the route with horses from a "horse poop never gets collected" perspective, path damage and horses and cyclists/walkers and wheelers meeting on the path.

Some horse specific comments from the survey have been grouped in some cases below:

- The Scottish Borders is known as 'Scotland's Horse Country'. Please include horses in your planning, so that you create more safe off road riding for locals and attract more equestrian tourism to the Borders. Under the Land Reform act 2003 Scotland horses riders have right of responsible access.
- The focus should not just be on cyclists, horse riding is just as important and especially riding like this for people who cannot afford expensive equestrian activities like dressage and jumping. Ordinary people from all walks of life and society hack out with very ordinary horses in the countryside for exercise and mental health benefits, we don't need fancy gates and mounting blocks just a gap that is 2' wide if the fence or barricade is below your knee height and 4' wide if the fence of barricade is higher than your knee height.
- Please consider horse riders access as a very experienced rider who has helped many into the sport of endurance horse riding we often cater for those people who need a little extra help to cope in the world. Hacking out on a horse in an off road place is essential therapy for many humans.
- This would help tourism and the economy if there were places to stay on route for walkers and riders, with their horses. It would be fantastic if the improvements made would take into account horses (their riders) too. People very much enjoy visiting the Borders for holidays and to attend Endurance rides with our horses and more suitable off road routes which have horse friendly gates etc would be hugely appreciated. The route would attract horse holiday riders who would stay locally and contribute to cafes, airbnbs etc
- This is a wonderful idea that would definitely encourage me to come to the area to horse ride and walk, currently we head further west as there are more routes available! We're just over the border in North Northumberland so close enough to make regular use of it. Suitable parking is important, not only for walkers / cyclists and at train stations, but also for horse trailers. Cafes always benefit from being near the end point of a walk / ride!

Summary

1340 survey responses were received in total with 48% of respondents live along the route.

A surprising number of people (22%) never use the existing paths, however, currently much of the route is inaccessible with question 11 revealing that awareness of routes, lack of signing, not enough route connections or links to towns and villages, help understand why people don't use the routes. Of those respondents who do use the existing paths, just over half (51%) typically use them for walking and wheeling and a quarter (25%) for cycling. 78% of respondents own a bike and 40% of people cycle in their spare time and almost 62% would be very likely to use an active travel route between Tweedbank and Eyemouth. 94% of respondents thought the route would encourage more people to cycle and be active.

Just under 40% of people travel just 10 minutes to work or study and 47% travel by car. It would be plausible to think that a ten minute journey by car could potentially be swapped, some of the time, for walking, cycling or wheeling, if people are close to the route and it goes in their direction of travel, especially since question 7 reveals that 23% of people feel they have a lack of alternative. 87% of comments were positive to open question 21 asking for any final comments.

People were keen to stress the need for the route to be access for all, and not for use, of branded or named in such a way that would make one particular kind of user feel that it was not for others. Surfacing, gates and the need for parking that accommodates horse trailers and car parks was mentioned frequently.

Quotes

Some respondent quotes that highlight the difference the path could make to people's lives:

"I am thrilled to hear about this cycle path - a great leisure opportunity that should benefit tourism. I am 75 years old, live in Edinburgh, cycle locally almost daily, LOVE long rides, especially when I can connect to a rail station."

"This whole project excites me."

*“Give locals and tourists the opportunity to walk/cycle one way and get the train back!
This worked a treat where I used to live. Completely transformed the local area -
tourism skyrocketed and locals use the route regularly.”*

*“I think it is one of the best ways we can invest in our future. It delivers on so many
levels to people and businesses across the Borders. We should do it sensitively though,
retaining tree shelter and greenery.”*