

Transport corridors

WHAT ARE TRANSPORT CORRIDORS?

Transport corridors are linear strips of land including roads, railways and cycle routes. Most transport corridors are areas of grassland with trees, where the width of the verge or embankment allows.

The limited amount of semi-natural habitat limits the biodiversity value of many transport corridors but the rough grassland provides valuable habitat for a variety of small mammals. This resource is exploited by kestrels and barn owls amongst others. Badgers can find railway embankments and cuttings ideal for the digging of setts. Hedges provide a valuable food supply for many invertebrates and a number of birds and mammals.

Road verges can be floristically rich, particularly in upland areas. In such places in Durham many plant species of hay meadows and pastures occur including: wood crane's-bill, meadow crane's-bill, giant bellflower, melancholy thistle and sweet cicely, with cowslips and some orchids in more lowland areas.

WHERE ARE THEY FOUND IN THE UK?

Transport corridors criss-cross most of the UK, being most concentrated around the Midlands and the South East of England. Significant axial road corridors also extend northwards, and effectively all UK settlements are connected to at least minor metalled roads.

Rail transport corridors are less extensive than the road network but also extend across the nation.

WHY ARE TRANSPORT CORRIDORS OF CONSERVATION IMPORTANCE?

Transport corridors act as corridors of semi-natural habitat in urban areas. In both uplands and lowlands many plant species found on road verges have undergone dramatic declines in range and numbers following the intensification of agriculture such that their principal habitat is now the road verge, e.g. giant bellflower.

Barn owls are a species of national concern having undergone a decline in population of over 50% in the last 50 years.

TRANSPORT CORRIDORS IN THE DURHAM AREA ?

WHAT IS THE STATE OF TRANSPORT CORRIDORS IN THE DURHAM AREA?

Within the Plan area there is a great variation in roads from small, upland lanes to multi-lane, urban motorways. The main East Coast railway runs through the area with smaller branch lines. Upgrading is planned for some routes, both rail and road.

WHERE DO THEY OCCUR IN THE DURHAM AREA ?

The principal transport corridors in the Plan area, include the A1M, A19, A68, A66 and linking trunk roads, as well as the London-Newcastle rail link and coastal rail line between Sunderland and Hartlepool. They are concentrated in the eastern half of the Plan area with

particular concentrations around the conurbations.

The orientation of the key elements of the area's transport corridors, north-south and east-west, is mainly determined by the geography of the river systems. Notable cycle routes include the easterly portion of the C2C cycle route, which bisects the northern part of the Plan area.

THE BIODIVERSITY OF TRANSPORT CORRIDORS IS AT RISK FROM:

Planting of non-native plants - many areas of semi-natural grassland are planted with species such as daffodils, which removes the semi-natural habitat.

Excessive tidiness - too frequent cutting of road verges, which prevents many species from flowering and setting seed.

Damage to street trees - the laying of cables, work for domestic services such as gas and electricity and road and pavement maintenance can all damage street trees.

Ground disturbance resulting from cable/pipe laying, resulting in damage to grasslands of conservation interest.

Use of excessive or non-targeted herbicides.

Over-use and storage of salt for defrosting roads.

Reseeding following work on the verges where seed is brought in rather than allowing the native seed bank to regenerate.

Inappropriate management of hedges – including cutting, both too regularly and too early in the year, which prevents fruit developing.

Planting of trees – tree planting on areas of grassland which are considered “untidy” may remove areas of high nature conservation interest.

Scrub encroachment on grasslands of conservation interest.

Electrification of railway lines – where electrification is provided through the rails rather than as overhead lines.

Accumulation of litter and rubbish.

THE BIODIVERSITY OF TRANSPORT CORRIDORS BENEFITS FROM:

Development of cutting programmes as part of a targeted scheme that takes into account their wildlife interest.

Choice of disturbance-tolerant street trees.

Co-ordinated street works and the use of hand tools rather than mechanical diggers around street trees.

The adoption of ‘sustainable drainage’ methods in appropriate areas.

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IMPORTANT SPECIES FOR TRANSPORT CORRIDORS:

<i>Wood crane's-bill</i>	<i>Cowslip</i>	
<i>Giant bellflower</i>	<i>Kestrel</i>	
<i>Meadow crane's-bill</i>	<i>Barn owl</i>	**
<i>Sweet cicely</i>	<i>Short-tailed vole</i>	
<i>Lady's mantles</i>	*	<i>Bank vole</i>
<i>Melancholy thistle</i>	<i>Shrews</i>	

N.B. ** indicates action plan produced in 1998.

* indicates action plan produced in 2000.

TARGETS FOR THE CONSERVATION OF THE BIODIVERSITY OF TRANSPORT CORRIDORS IN THE DURHAM AREA :

	DATE
Target 1 <i>Maintain and enhance the biodiversity value of transport corridors.</i>	ONGOING
Target 2 <i>Develop a Plan-wide roadside verge management programme.</i>	2004

OTHER HABITAT ACTION PLANS COVERING ISSUES RELEVANT TO TRANSPORT CORRIDORS:

<i>Urban.</i>	*
<i>The built environment.</i>	*
<i>Upland hay meadows.</i>	*
<i>Lowland meadows and pastures.</i>	**
<i>Hedgerows</i>	**

TRANSPORT CORRIDOR ACTIONS

ACTION	DATE	POSSIBLE PARTNERS	MEETS TARGET NO.
<u>POLICY AND LEGISLATION</u>			
1. Seek designation of floristically-rich road verges as County Wildlife sites	2004	EN, LAs, DWT, HA	1
<u>SITE SAFEGUARD AND MANAGEMENT</u>			
2. Develop a biodiversity sensitive road verge cutting programme.	2004	LAs, EN, DWT, DBAP	1, 2
3. Make LA and Highways Authorities aware of valuable roadside verges in their area.	2004	LAs, DBAP	1, 2
4. Follow guidelines for hedgerow management - see Hedgerow Action Plan.	2004	LAs, CDHP	1, 2
<u>RESEARCH AND MONITORING</u>			
5. Undertake an audit of the biodiversity value of road verges.	2004	LAs, EN, DWT, DBA	1, 2
<u>ADVISORY</u>			
6. Work within existing managing and enhancement schemes to promote the value of semi-natural road verges.	ONGOING	LA21, DBAP, EA, B in B	1
<u>COMMUNICATION AND PUBLICITY</u>			
7. Raise awareness of importance of semi-natural roadside verges.	ONGOING	DBAP, LAs	1