



Although we at the Somerset Rail to Trail Project, like everyone else, have had to pause for thought during these unprecedented times, we have still been moving forward doing what we can behind the scenes. We are happy to report that we have achieved a considerable amount!

We asked the people for their opinions on what we are doing:

- 98% of respondents across the county were in support of our project.
- Asking about phase 1 only, 92% of respondents said they currently use their car to travel to/from/between Wincanton and Bruton and 91% said they would use their cars less if there were a safe off-road route between the two destinations.
- 54% said that such a route would make a significant difference to someone in their household who would otherwise be completely dependent on their car - such as someone elderly or disabled.

In June, we took part in a consultation with DEFRA regarding the Agriculture Bill (now enacted) and the proposed Environmental Land Management Scheme for providing public money in return for providing public good. In brief, we requested that landowners providing access across their land should be remunerated under this scheme which would encourage more landowners to come forward who may not be in a position to simply donate land.

The Somerset Rail to Trail Project has also been spearheading negotiations with the Department for Transport to update the protocol regarding the Heritage Railways Estate which currently means that many of the disused structures are simply being infilled or demolished rather than preserved for the nation and maintained to provide the much needed safe, off-road active travel routes that are fit for 21st century purposes.

Our feasibility study along with the environmental impact and flood risk assessments for phase 1 all had to be postponed due to the pandemic, not

least because fundraising was particularly hard this year. However, with generous support from both Bruton Town Council and South Somerset District Council, we will hopefully be able to make a start on that in the New Year. Luckily, whatever parts of the studies that could be completed from a desktop, we have managed.

We have begun the process of checking land ownership and contacting landowners for the section of the old S&D line running north of Pitcombe all the way to Glastonbury and have started enquiries into transforming the section which runs from Bridgwater to Shapwick Heath National Nature Reserve (where there is already a length of completed trailway running from Glastonbury). The lovely folk at the North Dorset Trailway also got in touch to let us know that they have plans afoot to expand their efforts both north and south, making a coast to coast route all the more tangible as a prospect.

There is a lot of work that needs to happen behind the scenes for this project to truly gain momentum and for that we are very grateful to have been able to recruit some new volunteers who are able to commit some regular time each week. Looking forward to working with our new team as we move into 2021.

Not only will this trailway help Somerset to reduce carbon emissions and improve public health, but it will also bring in hugely increased tourism revenue and provide opportunities for new local businesses. As we head into a recession, this will be more important than ever. The help we receive from the public, from private landowners and businesses or from government bodies, whether through volunteering, financial donations or allowing access across private land, will contribute to the well-being of the community in a way that will be appreciated for generations to come.

Wishing you all a wonderful Solstice, and merry Christmas and a very happy New Year.

All the best,

The team at Somerset Rail to Trail Project