

Hope Valley Climate Action

Travelling Light

Transport, tourism and leisure in rural areas roundtable

Roger Clarke, HVCA travel and transport convenor

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What's the vision?

By 2030, the Hope Valley is a tranquil place, enjoyed by local people and visitors because the pressure of traffic has been dramatically reduced. Changed travel patterns into, and in the Hope Valley have helped tackle the climate crisis. The Hope Valley experience is shared widely across the UK.

Where's the Hope Valley?

The Hope Valley is in the heart of the Peak District National Park. Home to around 9,000 people spread across eight villages, it is one of the most popular rural visitor destinations in the country, with an estimated three to five million visits a year. People come to places such as Edale and Castleton to enjoy the landscape, walk on the hills including Mam Tor and Kinder Scout, and explore the limestone caverns. Most visitors are on day trips from surrounding conurbations including Manchester and Sheffield. 80-90% of them arrive by car. The Valley is served by the Manchester-Sheffield rail line and buses to Sheffield and Bakewell.

What's the problem?

Transport is one of the biggest contributors to global overheating. HVCA's surveys of the views of visitors and residents have identified 'traffic' as the top concern, along with issues about parking, speeding and inadequate public transport. Reducing vehicle use, while facilitating travel, is a key priority for HVCA.

What is HVCA?

Hope Valley Climate Action was created in 2019 because of local concern about the climate crisis. It now has over 1000 supporters. It is a Charitable Incorporated Organisation led by a trustee board. Three action groups focus on the main local contributors to greenhouse gas emissions: energy, travel and land. HVCA recognises that its activities can only make a tiny contribution to a huge global challenge. HVCA's 'theory of change' is based on awareness, action and advocacy. HVCA aims to make people aware of the issues, demonstrate possible solutions through practical activities, and, based on local experience, advocate for policies which will bring about long term change.

What is Travelling Light?

Travelling Light is the public face of HVCA's travel and transport action. It aims to transform the way people travel in, and into, the Hope Valley. It is guided by a steering committee which comprises HVCA representatives along with officers from Derbyshire County Council [the transport authority] and the Peak District National Park Authority. Working within HVCA's theory of change, action is carried out by a blend of volunteer and paid effort. Travelling Light's analysis is that there is no single route to sustainable travel, but that an integrated approach is required to achieve the long term vision. The main components of the integrated approach are:

- Active travel for short journeys, based on a safe, attractive network of on-road and off-road routes
- Public transport which is good quality, reliable, affordable, easy to use and joined-up, with the ambition 'one network, one timetable, one ticket'
- Reduced private vehicle use, through shared mobility and switch to electric vehicles
- Community based, through understanding the aspirations of residents and visitors and working with them to co-create solutions, while being inspired by best practice elsewhere in the UK and Europe.

Travelling Light was supported in its initial stage by the Foundation for Integrated Transport. This was a springboard to obtaining backing from the Department for Transport for the first year of what was expected to be a five-year programme. DfT views the project as a 'national beacon' for sustainable rural travel. However DfT's budget for this project was transferred to Active Travel England. ATE's funding was then reduced by 60%, with the result that further DfT support is currently unavailable. Travelling Light has also won a contract from Midlands Connect for work on shared mobility, and small grants from local authorities for work on active travel.

What has Travelling Light achieved?

Travelling Light has put Hope Valley travel on the map. The ambitious vision has inspired the imagination of many people. It has raised awareness of the issues with decision-makers and local communities. Through surveys and community conversations, HVCA has built a picture of issues and aspirations as seen by residents and visitors. More specifically, Travelling Light has:

Active Travel

- Promoted the use of e-bikes through community-based 'Try an e-bike' events
- Organised a 'cycling for all' rally to highlight issues involved in on-road cycling
- Introduced a 'walking for all' pilot in Bradwell in partnership with Walk Derbyshire
- Campaigned for 20 mph speed limits in and around villages to make roads safer for active travel
- Worked with the Community Rail Partnership to develop and promote active travel from Bamford station
- Worked with the sustainable travel team at Derbyshire County Council towards an Active Travel Masterplan for the Hope Valley

Public Transport

- Campaigned successfully, with others, for an 'every station, every hour' clock-face train service on the Hope Valley line
- Persuaded Northern rail to introduce Advance tickets, halving the cost of train travel to Manchester and Sheffield
- Run two 'Use the Bus' campaigns, which have, among other things, highlighted shortcomings in the current services, mainly around unreliability and lack of information
- Assisted the creation of a community-based bus campaign group in Castleton
- Played an active part in the Bus Service Improvement Plan for Derbyshire and, as a result, persuaded the County Council to install real time information displays at key locations
- Persuaded the County Council to research the potential for mobility hubs at Hope Valley stations, with a hub at Bamford now being developed

Vehicle Use

- Organised online roundtables to promote peer-to-peer car sharing
- Promoted community EV charging points, with the first one being installed in Bamford
- Run a shared mobility project 'Moving Together' on behalf of Midlands Connect

Organising for Change

- Collected the views of local people and visitors about travel and transport through a survey using the Commonplace platform, complemented by community conversations
- Run a project with students from Hope Valley College and a Sheffield secondary school to engage young people with sustainable travel issues
- Run stalls at village festivals to promote dialogue about travel and generate support for Travelling Light
- Built excellent relationships with Derbyshire County Council and the National Park Authority at political leader and officer level
- Generated political and practical support from the Valley's two MPs: Derbyshire Dales and High Peak constituencies
- Created links with the main transport providers: bus companies and Northern rail
- Maintained productive dialogue with officials at the Department for Transport
- Collected information about relevant experience from elsewhere in the UK and Europe.

What's next?

Travelling Light's ambitions remain focused on long term transformational change. Much of what Travelling Light wants to do depends on action by others: national government, transport authorities, transport operators. Travelling Light can highlight the issues, suggest solutions, and help to assemble resources. But the project does not have the capacity to build cycle routes, run bus services or create car pools. Travelling Light short term priorities will be influenced by opportunity [political support; funding opportunities] and the resources [volunteers and staff] available to the project.

Within this frame, next steps are likely to be to:

Active Travel

- Work with the County Council on an Active Travel Masterplan, and help secure resources for implementation
- Promote active travel locally, within the constraints of the current route network
- Campaign for low speed limits in settlements

Public Transport

- Press the new East Midlands Mayoral Authority to adopt an ambitious approach to public transport planning and delivery, based on the best experience from the UK and the rest of Europe, and to work with the combined authorities in Greater Manchester and South Yorkshire. Travelling Light's ambition: one network, one timetable, one ticket
- Press for better buses: frequent, reliable and with accessible real time information

Vehicle Use

- Complete the Moving Together project, and develop the potential for community-based shared mobility [peer to peer sharing, community car clubs, transition to electric vehicles, shared EV charging]
- Explore the potential for traffic management and road pricing as a means of managing visitor access to the National Park

Organising for Change

- Develop community conversations in each of the villages, with a view to creating self-sustaining local transport campaigns [dependent on extra resources]
- Create a Hope Valley Movement Plan, building on the community conversations
- Engage with General Election candidates from all parties to ask them to support climate-friendly policies, and work with the two local MPs after the election
- Maintain productive working relationships with transport authorities and providers and with organisations and businesses concerned with visitors
- Extend and renew the Travelling Light volunteer base
- Secure funding for Travelling Light projects and activities

What is the learning from Travelling Light?

- There is widespread public recognition of the issues involved in travel in rural areas, including visitor travel: negative climate impact, congestion, parking problems and associated conflicts
- People want to continue to enjoy the National Park, as visitors and residents. Private cars offer freedom to travel. A substantial minority of people in the cities who would like to visit the Peak District do not have access to a car
- Many local people and visitors, and tourism organisations, are open to alternatives to car use, but find it difficult to see how these might work in practice
- Widespread cycling on the safe, quiet roads during the first Covid lock-down demonstrated suppressed demand for active travel

- Transport authorities have focused attention and resources on urban areas, partly because they have a larger resident population, partly because 'travel to work' is a higher priority than travel for leisure, and partly because rural sustainable travel issues are seen as particularly intractable
- Measures which appear to restrict car use are contentious and divisive, even when [as with speed limits in settlements] they enjoy strong local support
- Good quality alternatives to car use, such as the now-upgraded Hope Valley rail service, attract high levels of use
- This is confirmed by experience from other European countries, such as Switzerland, with better rural sustainable travel provision than the UK
- Substantive change is slow, and takes a lot of determination and continual pressure
- Projects such as Travelling Light can highlight issues and solutions, generate community interest and support, and mobilise support and resources, which can pave the way for action by transport authorities and providers
- Tangible gains [like real time information displays] are important in demonstrating achievement and boosting morale
- Volunteer and community engagement is a distinct and valuable part of the project, but maintaining momentum can be a challenge. More people are interested in practical projects than in strategic transport planning. And people want to invest scarce time and energy when there is a visible outcome in the near future.
- Paid staff, including part-time, require good management and support, but can bring extra capacity, creativity and energy to project delivery.