Consultation response

Do we have any issues when using towpaths?

For disabled cyclists – many of whom find cycling easier than walking – stepped access for towpaths can cause an issue. Many disabled cyclists use their cycle as a mobility aid and are physically unable to dismount, and so in this regard stepped access can pose a significant physical barrier.

Towpaths offer quiet and safe cycling routes, and so are more likely to appeal to the disabled and elderly, which is why we believe they should be made as accessible as possible. Sufficient lighting should also be provided to ensure that those using the towpath in the evenings, including disabled and elderly people, feel safe and secure.

In principle, what do we think about the towpath improvement programme between Paddington and West Drayton?

We welcome the Trust's commitments to widen the current towpath from 1.8m to 2m, which will give disabled cyclists who use a non-standard cycle (e.g. tricycle, handcycle) additional room and manouverability. We also welcome improvements being made to visibility along the path through the clearing of vegetation and smoothing out of bumps and potholes – the latter being particularly troublesome for users of tricycles who can less easily avoid potholes, as well as recumbent riders for whom uneven surfaces can be a more uncomfortable experience.

Which of the following benefits would we be particularly pleased to see delivered by the planned towpath improvements? (tick as many as apply):

- Wider towpaths (Y)
- Better surfacing (Y)
- No pot holes (Y)
- Neat and tidy hedges (Y)
- The ability to use my wheelchair / mobility aid on the towpath (Y)
- Better access points (Y)
- The ability to use it all year round (Y)
- The option to use a pram there now (Y)

Would we like to give feedback on any of the specific project areas?

Access for mobility aids includes access for cycles and therefore must be step-free and wide enough for non-standard cycles to pass – where an accessible route is unavailable, this should be made clear and an alternative step-free route signposted (with signage put in place at the beginning of the tow path and at every entry point).

Wheel ramps can pose a further barrier to disabled cyclists (many of whom depend on the use of a larger, wider or heavier kind of cycle, and who may also have poor manual dexterity or strength), cargo cycle users and anyone carrying large panniers or shopping. Similarly, cyclists who have children on seats may find it difficult to manoeuvre up/down a wheel ramp safely (i.e. it is unlikely that they will be able to carry their child *and* push a cycle along the wheel ramp at the same time). By their very design, wheel ramps assume cyclists will be using standard, two-wheeled bicycles and will have sufficient upper and lower body strength to dismount and push a cycle – however, in practice wheel ramps may exclude many under-represented groups of cyclist and so the needs of these groups must be taken into account when making changes to infrastructure.