

£50,000 award to test cycle and walkway along Arnside Viaduct

Striding towards a new route across Morecambe Bay

An award of £50,000 to Morecambe Bay Partnership will cost and explore the opportunities of a walking and cycling route alongside Arnside viaduct.

The idea has been around for years. A community Group Arnside to Grange (AToG) have been working with Morecambe Partnership and others to see how this could happen. The idea comes from the local community who had looked forward to walking across the viaduct on Christmas Day. 10 years ago the tradition was stopped for safety reasons and the idea to build a new footpath/cyclepath along the side of the viaduct was born.

Susannah Bleakley, Chief Executive of Morecambe Bay Partnership said: “We are excited to be leading this project, working closely with the local Arnside to Grange community group, investigating whether or not it’s possible to cross the Bay on foot and by bike using Arnside viaduct, linking communities along the coast. We will be exploring where the route could go, if it’s worth the investment and whether there would be more positives than negatives. If the studies show it’s a good investment we’ll have everything we need to fundraise to build the route.”

This connection will create a vital link in the English Coastal Path, and offer a new route for the Bay Cycle Way creating a new circular route starting from either Grange or Arnside stations. At 2,800 miles, the England Coast Path will be the longest managed and waymarked coastal path in the world when it opens fully in 2022. The present plans are for the Coastal Path to have a halt between Grange and Arnside with the railway forming the link. This footway link could plug that gap.

Evidence from other long distance cycling and walking routes suggest that more walkers and cyclists could bring a very significant boost to the local economy.

Susannah added, “We need to know how much the crossing would cost, what the challenges are, and what the additional benefits would be in terms of visitor spend. Take a scenario where the cost of the crossing is estimated at £3M, and the increase in spend from cyclists and walkers is estimated at over £0.5M annually. In this case, the crossing looks like a reasonable investment and it may be possible to make this case to attract the finance. Until we do further studies we really don’t know – these are just educated guesses.”

What is clear is that the idea has a groundswell of local support. There have been numerous messages of support and encouragement on social media since the announcement. In 2011 a survey in Arnside showed that 80% were in favour of the idea and 100% of the school children.

The award will mean that studies can be done – studies critical to find out if the bridge and route should go ahead, to find out how much it will cost, what benefits and challenges it will bring and how it should be designed to help manage visitors positively. Several studies will be carried out over the winter to see how we can make this idea real.

Network Rail has supported initial feasibility and will work with us and other partners to evaluate and test the route, economic impact and costs.

Partners include: Morecambe Bay Partnership, Arnside to Grange Community Group, Arnside & Silverdale Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, South Lakeland District Council, Cumbria County Council, Lake District National Park, Natural England, Sustrans, Cumbria Rail Partnership, Dallam Estate, Holker Estate.