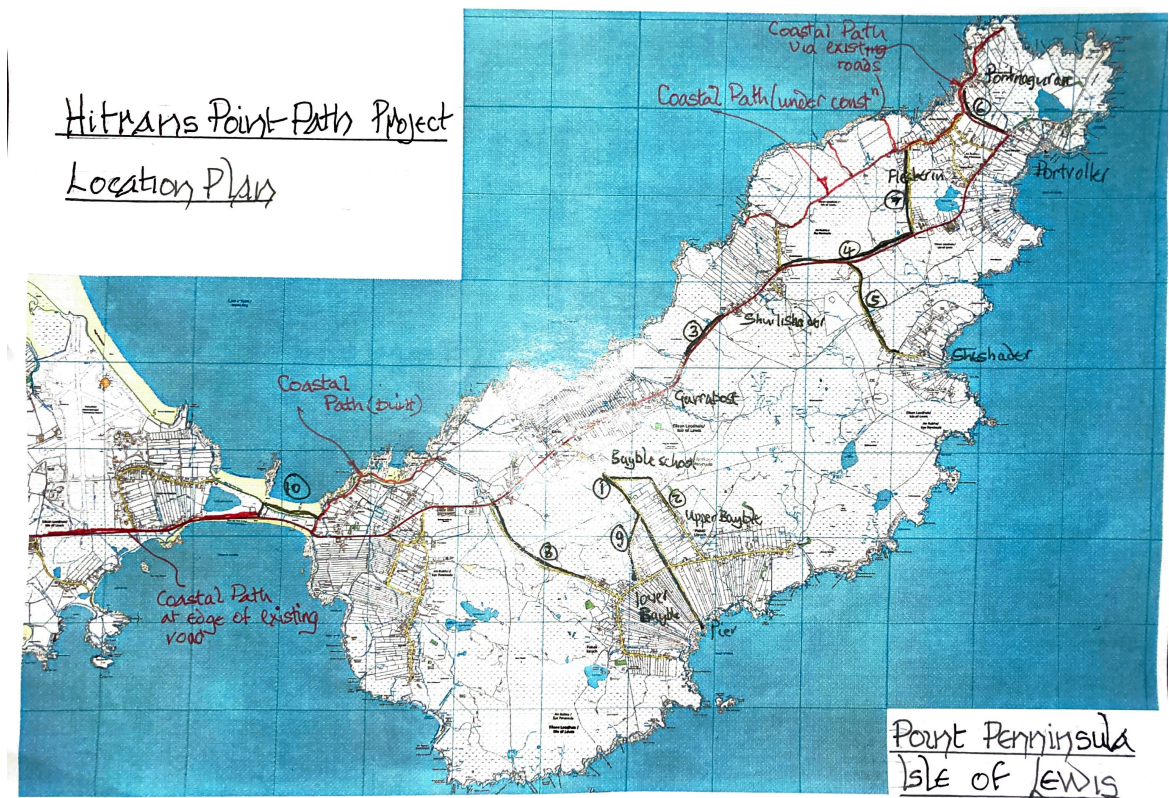


# Point Path Project



## Part One Report

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## POINT COMMUNITY COUNCIL ACTIVE TRAVEL PLAN

HITRANS, in partnership with Point Community Council, wish to commission the services of a consultant to assist the Community to draw up a detailed plan of what the Community Council are envisaging for active travel in the Point Community Council area, with public safety in mind.

### **BACKGROUND**

Comhairle nan Eilean Siar is currently developing an Active Travel Strategy to guide and prioritise future investment in active travel infrastructure. The aim of the Strategy is to enable more short local journeys to be made actively, and to introduce placemaking improvements to make communities more inviting, attractive, and safer for those choosing to walk or cycle. Active travel refers to transport using physical activity for everyday journeys (eg. to school, work, shopping), and can include leisure or exercise if the alternative would be to drive somewhere in order to walk, cycle or run etc.

The objectives of the Active Travel Strategy, which should be reflected in the Point Community Council work, are:

#### ***1. Within Communities***

- a. Safe routes to school are established in settlements with schools so local children have the opportunity to safely walk or cycle to school.
- b. A holistic approach is taken in settlements with community hubs to ensure there is appropriate infrastructure to travel safely by foot or bicycle.
- c. A place-based approach to high quality infrastructure and a review of speed limits make it easy and safe to choose walking and cycling for everyday journeys within communities.
- d. Safe active travel routes to access attractions and trip generators within or near settlements.

#### ***1. Between Communities***

- e. Develop a coherent network of routes connecting communities within comfortable walking or cycling distance of each other.
- f. Improve safety of Hebridean Way cycle route to enhance tourism offer and connect dispersed settlements.

### **TASKS**

Point Community Council have discussed concerns around safe walking and cycling within the community on numerous occasions during the past few years and have identified the roads in Point which are of greatest concern. Increasing amounts of traffic, especially heavy traffic, are a particular concern, particularly regarding the safety of children walking and cycling to school and people cycling to work. Since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic there has been a marked increase in the number of people shopping using bicycles as well as walking.

Although there are a limited number of pavements in some areas of Point alongside the main roads, there is a desperate need for improved infrastructure in the absence of pavements on the minor roads. The single track roads within the community have become as busy, if not busier than, the main roads, with public transport and heavy lorries to and from the quarries.

The outputs of this commission will include:

1. Engagement with Point Community Council and key local stakeholders to establish a vision for active travel within the Community Council area, in line with the aspirations of the draft Outer Hebrides Active Travel Strategy;
2. Identify key local destinations which could be reached by active travel; eg. school, public transport links, employment centres, shops within a 5 mile radius of the community;
3. Assist the Community Council to develop a footpath strategy and priority list for key active travel routes within the Community.

### **Methodology**

In November 2021 Tony Robson and Alasdair Nicholson were approached by Point Community Council with a view to undertaking the above brief for a Community Council/ HiTrans Footpath Strategy. An Initial meeting took place with Tony Robson and PCC; Vikki Trelfer from HITRANS subsequently confirmed the brief.

By mid-December the consultants informed the clients that they were planning the work, carrying out initial examination of verges and footpaths and looking at engagement strategies bearing in mind Covid restrictions at that time and avoiding the Christmas/ New Year period. Further progress would be factored in between February and March, taking into account any changes in regulation over January 2022. The aim was to complete the exercise by end of March.

Tony Robson undertook to schedule the following technical reviews, starting on February 3rd:

1. Bayble School to Pier
2. Bayble School junction to Upper Bayble
3. Garrabost to Shuilishader
4. Shuilishader to Flesherin Road End
5. Main Road to Sheshader
6. Portvoller to Portnaguran
7. Main Road to Flesherin
8. Lower Bayble to Main Road
9. Bayble Road to Lower Bayble
10. Cemetery Bypass.

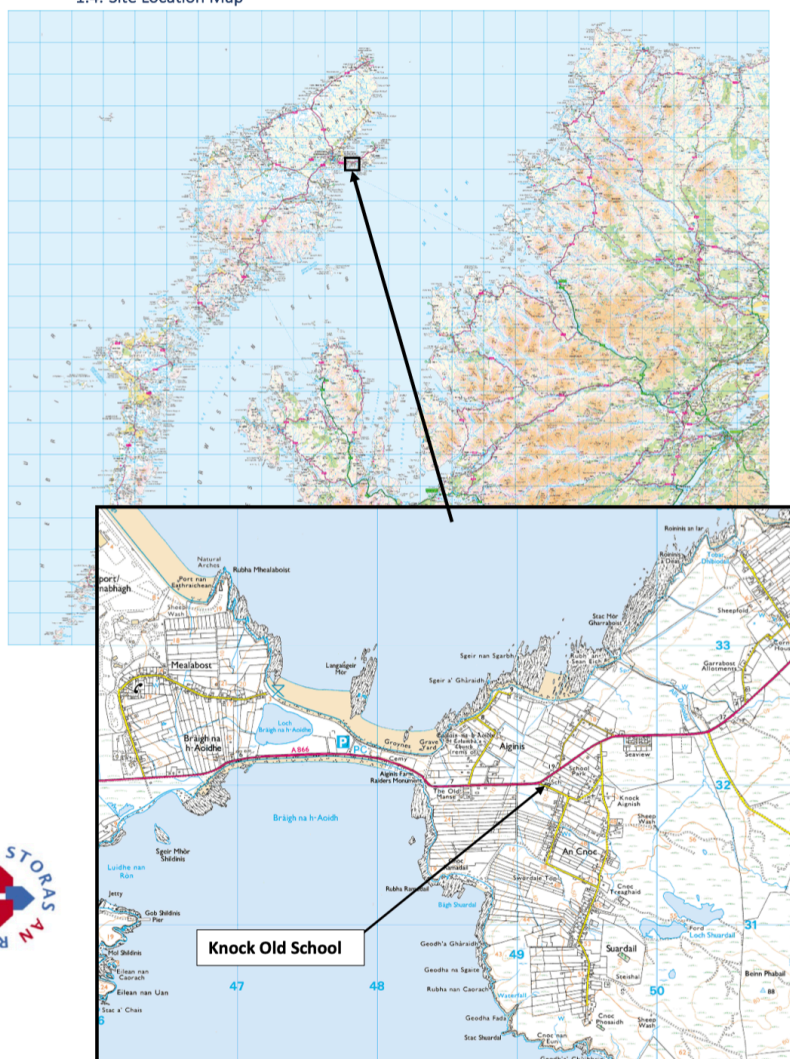
In January, a draft on-line Monkey Survey was prepared and PCC consulted on the question set. This was confirmed on 2nd February and went out on Point Community Council Facebook, Point and Sandwick Coastal Trail and Point and Sandwick Trust Social media. It was e-mailed by Point and Sandwick Trust and Point Community Council to their community stakeholders. 112 responses were received, which was a positive return rate. 29.36 % of respondents were senior citizens, 6.36% had some form of disability and 12.8% were a care giver to someone with a disability in the community. A meeting was held with the Community Council on 1st March to submit an interim report. They were informed there was a spread of returns from across the post code areas of Point. A

### **Path Survey**

further Community Council meeting was planned for end of March but an increase in Covid rates meant an additional public meeting was not able to be called. Two further live meetings with the Community Council took place, on 21st March and on 28th for the specific purpose of exploring options and priorities. Two reports would be produced, one on the survey findings and the second with technical appraisal and costs. This is part one of the report.

***Map showing site of the development of Aros Centre by Urras Storas An Rubha just beyond the Braighe isthmus and the A866***

1.4. Site Location Map



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USAR Knock Hub Stage 1 V1.04

The centre houses Bùth an Rubha and Cafe Roo. Bùth an Rubha is the sole grocery shop on the peninsula, while Cafe Roo has an important social function for older people and Community Groups. The Aros centre is close to the football club, the Garrabost Mill, The Ui Church and the Point part of the Coastal Path.



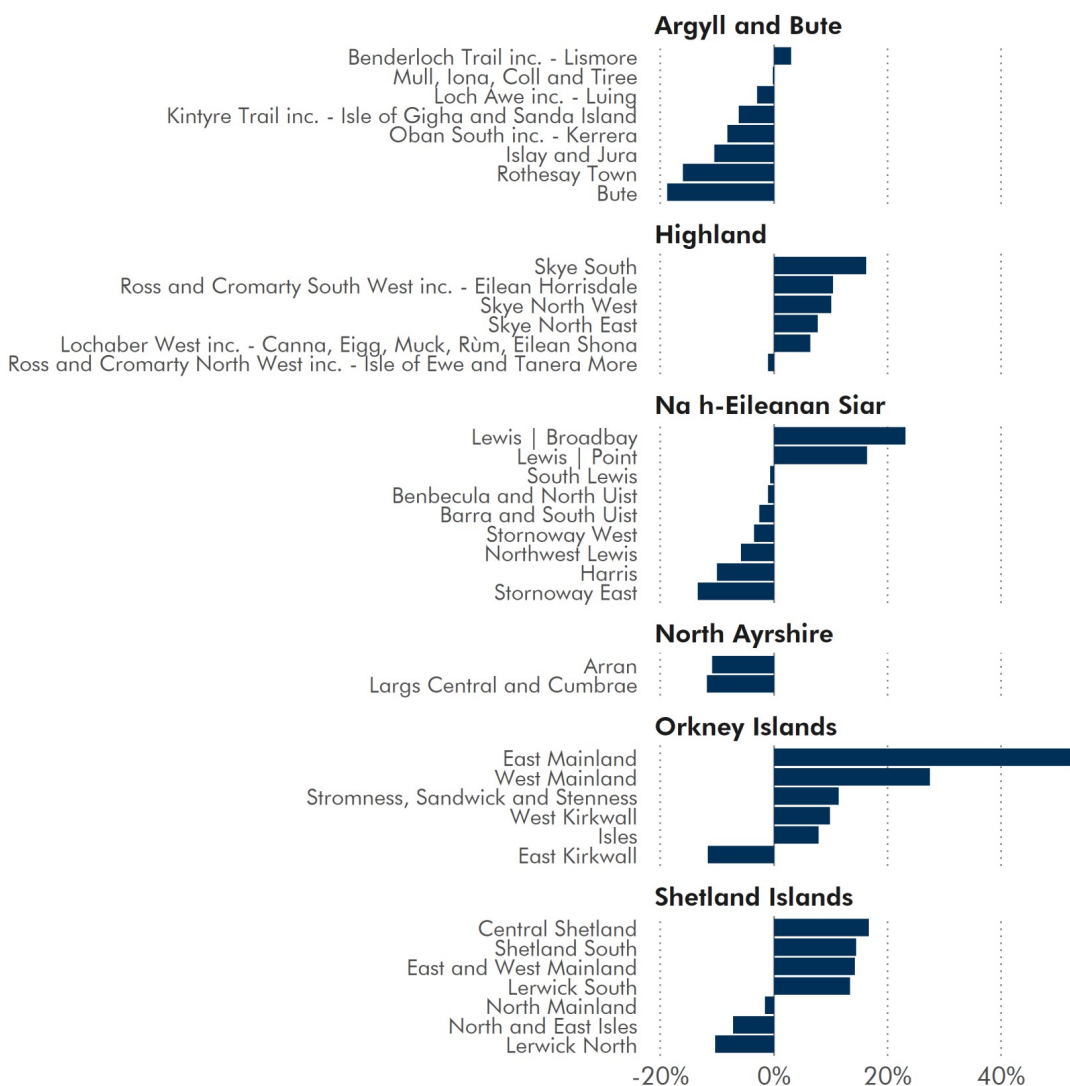
## Demographic Factors

Recently published demographic information indicates a population shift upward in both Broadbay and Point. This reinforces the view that road and path infrastructure needs increased investment to take this trend into account and encourage more active travel for the future.

*“Data is available for individual islands, areas within islands or island groupings, and this allows us to see population changes at a fairly localised level. The following chart shows that almost all island datazones in Argyll and Bute saw reductions in population over the past 20 years, with the Isle of Bute seeing the most dramatic reduction. On the other hand, almost all island datazones in the Highland Council area – mainly areas on Skye – saw increases in population. The most striking increases since the turn of the Century have been in the East and West Mainland areas of Orkney, and in the Broadbay and Point areas of Lewis in Na h-Eileanan Siar.”*

## How have populations changed below local authority level?

Population growth by intermediate zones which contain island populations between 2001 and 2020



Source: NRS

Please take care when interpreting the data as some of the islands are included in data zones which have mainland population.

## Policy Issues and context

In the introduction to the ***OHCPP Active Hebrides Strategy (2019-2030)*** Colin Gilmour, Head of Health Improvement, NHS Western Isles, refers to WHO targets of seeking a 15% reduction of physical inactivity in adults and in adolescents by 2030. Activities includes everyday walking or cycling to get from A to B, active play, work- related activity ... ensuring that the Outer Hebrides becomes a place “where everyone is active every day”.

Outcomes sought include,

We encourage and enable the inactive to be more active i.e. ***by supporting people to walk more and by providing opportunities for Active Travel***

We encourage and enable the active to stay active throughout life: **physical activity will reduce the risk of premature death, can prevent and that more than 20 chronic diseases and improve mental health and wellbeing. Paths and Green spaces are part of the solutions identified.**

We improve our active infrastructure -people and places. Indicators include: ***number of way-marked paths installed; % increase in number of paths trails/promotion of trails; funding for investment in infrastructure; making use of natural assets and making use of active travel opportunities.***

***Key development areas include-improving paths and safe routes to school in targeted communities to increase ability to walk or cycle to school and increase the usage and length of cycle path networks.***

The Outer Hebrides Community Transport Strategy (2020-2030), notes that “it seems to be clear that it is important for a child to be able to walk and cycle safely in Western Isles as it is for a child in the central belt or on an NCN route”. They also say (p.33) “Active travel can be a challenge in rural parts of the Outer Hebrides where many villages have no footpaths and instead have high grassed verges and deep ditches...funding can be challenging, however, with most sources of active travel funding at 50% towards capital cost.” The report observes that more people work from home and that bus usage has declined.

Access to the outdoors is also recognised as important for cognitive health, particularly for Covid recovery as highlighted by the statement below.

***“The Covid-19 pandemic has highlighted how important local community services are for supporting people where they live. Dementia Friendly Health Walks can play a role in both preventing dementia through encouraging regular exercise and providing direct support to those living with dementia.”***

The 2021 Islands Communities Fund report (p40) notes, **“Through the Islands Communities Fund, £80,920 was provided to support Point and Sandwick Coastal Community Path SCIO in delivering the fourth phase of a coastal path linking the crofting communities of Shuilishader and Flesherin that will improve access across the peninsula”**. In addition, the Healthy Island Fund supported the Iolaire-Stornoway route, recognising the importance of walking and cycling infrastructure to mental health prevention or mitigation.

The recently formed Scottish Community Tourism (SCOTO) organisation has also used the Iolaire Path development as a case study for community-led tourism development highlighting the wider social economic links between path development and wider holistic benefits. In Point the redevelopment of the Aros Centre, the further path development in proximity of the Knock site, the upgrading of the sports facilities at Ionad Stoodie, and the potential community acquisition of Garrabost Mill all create opportunities for additional active travel development. The nearby Steinish and Iolaire paths create connecting links between Stornoway towards the Braighe and already contribute towards better interconnections for walkers although not yet entirely for cyclists. The proximity of Point to Stornoway airport, the Ferry terminal and Stornoway Harbour - with plans for an Iolaire Centre - create synergy for added value for active tourism in addition to community benefits referred to.

What seems clear is that there is more that can be done and that there is a clear fit between community aspiration, need and local and national policy goals. The demographic trend mentioned above underlines that areas like Point should receive further support from the statutory agencies in order to meet common goals and shared objectives. CNES has a leadership role in helping to facilitate this if it wishes its strategies to be realised. There is a further imperative from climate change and future rise in sea levels to address in order to meet access issues over Braighe Isthmus.



*Women's walking group on Point. Photography by Sandie's Photos*

## Survey Findings

10% of respondents said they had experienced difficulty in finding transport. Comments included:

“When looking for public transport this is always few and far between.”

“Sometimes family and friends are not available to help because of other commitments.”

“Buses do not always come as far down as my village and it takes 20 minutes to walk to a main road. As I work very early and finish late, this is not ideal.”

It seemed logical to ascertain something about the existing pattern of travel in the area to act as a base sample that could assist with future changes. Therefore questions asked about both primary and secondary travel. Under **primary travel** it is perhaps no real surprise that just below 90% used a personal vehicle for travel. It should be borne in mind that in rural areas vehicles are often a necessity rather than a luxury item and the price of fuel on disposable incomes is likely to bear a disproportionate element of household budget than that of someone in urban areas where there are more transport options and where fuel prices may be more competitive. The following table shows comparative figures between primary and secondary travel and the tables below (Figs. 2 a and b) give indicative seasonal variation between typical summer and winter months for walking and cycling.

Travel types	Primary %	Secondary %
Personal vehicle	89	13
Bus	5	22
Family/friend	5	14
Bicycle	7	16
Walking	22	31
No source	1	1
Depend on community group	0	0
Other	3	2 (taxi)

Fig.1



Walking	Typical summer week %	Typical winter week %
Every day	56	42
Few times a week	31	18
About once a week	5	19
Few times a month	5	9
Once a month	1	5
Never	2	6

Fig. 2a

Cycling locally	Typical summer week %	Typical winter week %
Every day	5	2
A few times a week	21	3
About once a week	7	3
A few times a month	12	3
Once a month	6	10
Never	49	80

Fig. 2b

Reason for Transport	%
Food	53
work	50
School/education	20
Healthcare	28
Visit family/friends	47
Participate socially	36
Recreation/exercise	50
Enjoy nature	38
Attend local events	35
Take part in community events/volunteering	26
Other	6

Fig. 3

In the next section we seek to explore further what both discourages walking and cycling and get some indication of measures that would increase walking and cycling for local journeys generally before asking about specific routes mentioned above.

<b>What discourages you from walking/cycling?</b>	<b>%</b>
Wet/windy weather	18
Fast Traffic	20
No room to walk on the road	11
No paths or shoulders on the road side	35
No hard verges	8
Condition of Road	1
Health issues	1
Other	6

Fig.4

#### **What encourages walking/cycling?**

Vehicle speed reductions	8
Hard verges	8
Creating paths and shoulders	55
Identify other safer routes	0
Infill roadside drains	1
Create walking and cycling paths	23
Other	6

Fig.5

What improvements would encourage you to walk more local journeys? The public were asked to indicate what type of measures they preferred for improving walking and cycling over various specific areas of Point and these are indicated as follows.

Specific Areas	Hard Verge %	Alternative Path/Hard Shoulder %	Other %
Bayble School to Pier	74		26
Bayble School jn to Upper Bayble	48	46	
Garrabost to Shuilishader	60	19	21
Shuilishader to Garrabost Rd End	35	65	
Main Rd to Sheshader	40	60	
Portvoller to Portnaguran	33	57	10
Main Rd to Flesherin	85		15
Lower Bayble to Main Road	77		23
Bayble Rd to Lower Bayble	54	37	8
Cemetery at Braighe		Hard shoulder with white line is narrow and stops short approaching Aoidh Church end of Main Rd	Emergency Bypass to rear would be alternative when Braighe is shut due to storms.

Fig.6

Although there is a 40 mph speed limit on part of this road, the Braighe section of the A866 often witnesses comment on excessive speed. The high cemetery wall at the Point end has a narrow strip of tarred path, separated from the carriageway by a white line. However this stops and becomes a grass verge and represents an unsafe section for walkers, cyclists or individuals with children or pushchairs and should be remedied by CNES. The council should also revisit the creation of an emergency route to enable access between Point and Stornoway when the existing main road is closed or at risk of closure.



As a respondent said, *The A866 is the only land link between the Eye peninsula and Stornoway. Road closures result in considerable disruption to residents commuting for work and children attending school in Stornoway. Road closures also affect the provision of emergency services to the communities on the Eye peninsula.*

Additional comments reinforced this.

*Provide a surfaced path running from the car park (with toilets) to the shore and above the beach to both Aignis/Ui Church and to Melbost in the opposite direction.*

*Vehicles travel at speed, lorries, plenty of areas where drivers do not see you until the last minute.*

*Is there anywhere for bike parking in key locations or tourist areas? Be good to have cycle routes posted.*

*Driver re-education/awareness of cyclists and walkers.*

*Alternative routes to busy roads needed.*

*Cycle/footpath away from the main road-cars do not give pedestrians/cyclists the space/respect they require.*

*Cycle paths away from vehicles-the Braighe is dangerous to cycle over, if windy especially, vehicles do not give sufficient room.*

*Improvements to peat roads in Lower Bayble which have become impossible.*

*A path from Bayble School to Bayble should be a priority.*

*Pavement from Bayble School to Bayble Beach would be appreciated.*

*The road from Football pitch to Garrabost needs widening.*

*Create a path where the speed limits end on Garrabost main road.*

*Create safe path ways to share with walkers and cyclists alike.*

*The police need to enforce current speed limits more vigorously. I have to cycle because of a bad knee. A large number of people who drive have no respect for cyclists. Every day I go out I sometimes think I'm playing Russian roulette. After being knocked off my bike, and on police advice, I bought a Go Pro camera and mounted it on my bike. On every cycle from town there are at least 3-4 incidents. I don't report them for the simple reason I'd never be out the police station.*



Cyclist on the Braighe A866

## Related Development

The ongoing parallel coastal path works by Point and Sandwick Coastal Path charity is an example of Community-led development which is also supported by Point and Sandwick Trust. This has been cited by Scottish Government in recent case study good practice examples. It does however add, not detract, from the case for improvements along the A866 and side roads. Improved pedestrian and cycle routes not only serve the interests of Active Travel in general, they connect to the developing path network to meet the goals espoused by the OHCPP and NHS Western Isles and visa versa. Thus locals and visitors who want to explore new walking routes will use pavements, where they exist, and existing footpath sections. If these can be better connected and expanded then, potentially, substantial progress could be made over a designated timeframe.

In collaboration with Mossend Residents Association, a section of pedestrian family friendly accessible path was completed, at Steinish village, Sandwick, in 2021 and a further loop around Steinish headland is expected to extend this further in 2022. Two new sections of path are due for completion soon: a link path between Shuilishader and Flesherin with a floating path to a chambered cairn and another to wreck of the Wyre Law, and, in Sandwick, the Iolaire to Stornoway section of the coastal path. Both those should benefit locals and visitors and survey results indicate that they are likely to be used by the community. Previous sections completed included Shuilishader steps and in Aignish, the section past the Ui Church.

Coastal Path use	Shuilishader-Flesherin %	Iolaire-Stornoway %
Very likely use	52	48
Likely use	25	24
Neither likely nor unlikely	11	14
Unlikely	7	6
Very unlikely	6	8

Fig. 7

## E-Bikes and E-Vehicles

This next section canvassed interest in EV charging points, E-vehicles and E-bikes. There is substantial support for provision of e-charging points in the area. This is not suggesting that many locals are ready to invest in e-vehicles in the short term but with petrol and diesel fuel prices accelerating from an already high level then long term planning is required to begin a process of preparing for less reliance on carbon fuel. Visitors too will want to be aware of where public charging points are located.

Urras Storas an Rubha at Knock, Point are currently developing their Hub at the former school and as part of this major development have recently gained support from the Energy for Tomorrow programme, from Centrica. This should enable fast e-charging to be established there for Aros Centre projects, users and the public. It is not unrealistic to anticipate that an electric minibus could be part of the resources available for local use over the next 24 months and the survey indicates that the local public would be interested in this.

<b>If an electric minibus were stationed at the Aros Centre, would this encourage you to use it for local transport?</b>	<b>%</b>
Definitely would	17
Probably would	34
Probably would not	44
Definitely would not	5

Fig. 8

There are 7 e-bikes of various sizes and they will be on free loan from Point and Sandwich Coastal Path to low-income residents and for local volunteers as part of a trial project. There are currently no Tricycles in the package but there is sufficient interest to merit acquisition of some specialist bikes to help overcome access issues for those who require it.

	<b>Local e-bike scheme %</b>	<b>Electric Tricycle %</b>
Extremely interested	25	15
Very interested	18	13
Somewhat interested	28	19
Not so interested	11	22
Not at all interested	19	32

Fig. 9



## **Summary**

The development of two new sections of Coastal Path, one creating a linked section between Shuilishader and Flesherin townships, the other a pedestrian and cycling way from outside Stornoway to Iolaire monument, will benefit locals and visitors alike. They are also examples of community led interventions which should encourage further initiative. These developments alongside the Steinish village path in 2021 demonstrates what can be achieved in phased timescales. Point Community Council and Sandwick Community Council have been valuable collaborators in these initiatives, as has Point and Sandwick Trust. This underlines the importance of improving walking and cycling infrastructure for reasons of physical and mental health for all ages. Further hard verges, shoulders and roadside enhancement and new paths would make safer active travel connections and for wider community development purposes. The survey showed good levels of interest in this agenda especially in a post-Covid environment. There was also support for more Crown Estates Funding for this type of work.

## **Recommendations**

1. That Point Community Council continues to press for action to review speed limits and the police should enforce speed restrictions on A866 and village feeder roads.
2. That discussions be sought with CNES on how the Active Travel Strategy and Transport Plan will be delivered in Point.
3. That discussions around (2) above explore opportunities for match funding including from CNES budgets and HITRANS.
4. That CNES be asked to look again at options for emergency access across the Braighe.
5. That shovel-ready projects be developed with partners to create a programme for action.

## **Path Survey**

## **References**

Outer Hebrides Community Planning Partnership (2019) Active Hebrides Strategy 2019-2030

Path and improvement Survey (2022), A.Nicholson

Outer Hebrides Community Transport Strategy (2020-2030)

National Islands Plan Annual Report (2021)

Islands and Scottish Population (2001-2020) SPICe(NRS data) Online, We love Stornoway (March 2022)