The Fallowfield Loop: “Open-All-Barriers” Trial

Feasibility Study for the trial of opening the barriers along the Fallowfield Loop.
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Executive Summary

Objective
The key objective for this feasibility study report is to explain as well as summarise the key reasons and aims for the proposal - jointly submitted by Sustrans and Friends of the Fallowfield Loop - to trial the opening of the barriers along the Fallowfield Loop in order to enable a greater variety of user groups to enjoy and access the route in its entirety.

The report wants to highlight the benefits of trialling the open barriers in not only ensuring this green infrastructure is accessible to many different people whether walking, using wheelchairs or mobility scooters or bikes that are not 'standard' (trikes, trailers, tandems, cargo bikes, family bikes etc); but that the Fallowfield Loop can develop its full potential as a fantastic community asset offering a valuable means of safe, traffic-free sustainable transport.

The objective of the trial is to test the benefits but also possible issues in removing the barriers, or making them permanently open, and to assess a future scenario of long term fully accessible green infrastructure to all. Moreover the authors of this report believe that a Fallowfield Loop without barriers along it will bring the communities it crosses closer together, rebalancing the different approaches to the barriers between more affluent and more deprived areas (traditionally seen between the West and the East sections of the Fallowfield Loop respectively).

Goals
• To make the Fallowfield Loop accessible, convenient and enjoyable to many different users groups, especially those who are currently, through no fault of their own, discriminated from doing so.

• To promote the Fallowfield Loop as a safe, clean and sustainable green infrastructure to be used as a viable alternative to motor vehicle transport.
• To develop and strengthen the Fallowfield Loop into a community asset for all those residents who live in its vicinity as a place of leisure, health and wellbeing. Including as a site of discovery and learning, from the wildlife it fosters to helping children and adults learn to ride bicycles in safe conditions.

Summary of proposal
Sustrans and the Friends of the Fallowfield Loop are proposing the trial opening of the barriers along the Fallowfield Loop over an initial period of 6 weekends* (*From Sunday AM to Monday PM: 10.04.16 - 15.05.16) followed by a 3 months long period (22.05.16 - 21.08.16).

A series of activities and events will be organised during this time to promote as many people and user groups to use and enjoy the Fallowfield Loop with much improved accessibility.

Only the barriers along the Fallowfield Loop are proposed to be trialled opened as these form the largest barriers to users, while access onto it, although not always easy, does provide alternative entry options for different users: whether on mobility scooters or family-friendly bikes, for example.

It has been ascertained, thanks to the assistance of local Councillors and Council Officers, that trialling the opening of the barriers does not contravene any planning permission conditions.

Greater Manchester Police will be consulted to ensure the trial meets with their support.

The trial period will culminate with a celebratory "Fallowfield Loop Festival" with many activities and events over a weekend, where we hope the legacy of the trial (and the formal evaluation that will follow) will bring the Fallowfield Loop to have its barriers along it retained opened for the long term.
Sustrans is a leading UK charity enabling people to travel by foot, bike or public transport for more of the journeys we make every day. Sustrans’ flagship project is the National Cycle Network, which has created over 14,000 miles of signed cycle routes throughout the UK, and although about 70% of the network is on previously existing, mostly minor roads where motor traffic will be encountered, in urban areas almost 20% of the network is free from motor-traffic.

Friends of the Fallowfield Loop
The Friends of the Fallowfield Loop have been in existence since 2001, with the overall aim of encouraging and supporting all the partners in the Fallowfield Loop route to provide and maintain a first-class community resource and to encourage its use by as many people as possible.

Common aims and collaboration
Sustrans and the Friends of the Fallowfield Loop have many common aims, in the development, maintenance and enhancement of the Loop as a valuable and rich green infrastructure for all its local residents and communities it serves.

Sustrans and the Friends of the Fallowfield Loop already collaborate on many levels, whether to coordinate maintenance of the Loop, to encourage volunteers to join and enjoy the Loop as well as organise many events and activities all year round.

The wish and objective to see the Fallowfield Loop grow into an invaluable and environmental as well as transport infrastructure for a sustainable future is held highly by both parties and this feasibility study report together with the commitment towards the trial of the open barriers is testament to that.

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1 The Fallowfield Loop (National Routes 6 & 60) being an example of this. http://www.sustrans.org.uk/ncn/map/route/fallowfield-loopline
The Fallowfield Loop: A community asset

The Fallowfield Loop / Greenway / F. Loop

The Fallowfield Loop (referred from hereon as F. Loop) runs from Chorlton in the South-west of Manchester, through Fallowfield and Levenshulme to Gorton and Fairfield in the South-east of the city. The green and traffic-free route threads it way through numerous communities and neighbourhoods. The protected path runs under roads and railways; in-between houses and schools; and connects local businesses and leisure facilities to a growing population seeking ways of moving around the city without a car.

As well as being a functional piece of physical infrastructure, the F. Loop can also be considered as social infrastructure in how it is a space used by a diverse cross-section of society. As a shared community asset that links people and place in an environmentally responsible way, this is perhaps its greatest but largely invisible virtue.

Despite much of its length being uninterrupted and fully protected from motor-traffic, the F. Loop has suffered some setbacks and four key aspects remain to explore its full potential:

1. A route of two halves

The Fallowfield Loop is a misnomer, it is neither a loop or based exclusively in Fallowfield, with the word 'loop' remnant of the old railway line from central station which was called the Fallowfield Loop Line. In fact nowadays the F. Loop is primarily two stretches of continuous footpath, cycleway, and bridleway: a Western section stretching from one edge of Fallowfield to Chorlton; and an Eastern section stretching from the opposite edge of Fallowfield to Fairfield, via Levenshulme and Gorton. The central hub (beside the Sainsbury’s store in Fallowfield) is severed by Wilmslow Road. Travel is continued along Sherwood Street and beside the Sainsbury’s carpark. Previously the route was continuous but the tunnel underneath Wilmslow road, because of perceived anti-social behaviour, had its access removed.
2. A hidden gem
Despite running through many neighbourhoods, the F. Loop remains off many peoples’ mental radar as it is mostly well hidden out of view, either behind hedges and fences or beneath blank faced bridges. Many people still do not know of its presence or how it connects to the rest of South Manchester. Moreover several studies of the flora and fauna of the F. Loop have demonstrated relatively rich biodiversity, and Sustrans are working with community partners to further enhance this.

3. Traffic-free route
The F. Loop has 9 overly restrictive steel barriers along its length (from the West at St. Werburghs in Chorlton to the East at the new residential area of Bootle Road/Boothdale Drive). Installed as a deterrent to motorbikes when the F. Loop was first opened, the barriers have not prevented those who are determined to access the F. Loop on motorbikes and worse have made it impossible for any non-standard bikes, cargo-bikes, child-trailers or mobility scooters to access the entire length. New and improved timber posts installed at the Slade Lane entrance suggest a more accessible way to retaining a traffic-free route without compromising safety or accessibility.

4. The Metrolink expansion
The F. Loop should be considered as a key component of an integrated transport plan for Manchester. Whilst future expansion of the Metrolink remains a threat to the existence of the F. Loop, closer integration of sustainable travel modes should remain a longterm ambition. St Werburgh’s Road Metrolink station bookends the entrance to the western side of the F. Loop. Fairfield train station bookends the eastern side. Whilst hurdles remain in legally carrying bicycles on Metrolink and some train services; this may change in the future for the benefit of sustainable transport.
Current users and current barriers to potential users

The Fallowfield Loop (F. Loop) is approximately 8 mile long linking the suburb of Chorlton (West) to Fairfield/East Manchester. Currently the F. Loop is in part a well used greenway by local residents towards the West section, but activity and users presence drops when heading East - towards Gorton Reservoirs and beyond - once passed the Quadrants point (Crayfield Road, Levenshulme).

Currently the main user groups of the F. Loop can be categorised as:
- Walkers/ Dog walkers
- Cyclists on standard bikes
- Runners

However the type of user groups could be even more wide, but the current conditions of the barriers along the F. Loop are proving to be an hindrance to the use of the F. Loop in its entirety by those other user groups who could benefit the most from the safe and pleasant settings of this greenway, namely:
- Users in wheelchairs or mobility scooters who can access the F. Loop only at certain points and then are limited to the length they can travel/use before a non-navigable barrier is encountered.
- Users who ride different kind of bikes: whether trikes (for mobility needs or personal preference), family bikes such as trailers, long cargo bikes and tandems, or other bespoke bikes and trailers (made for and by small local businesses, for example).

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2 Where ‘standard’ refers to two wheeled, standard adult sized bikes with no attachment for family-carrying or cargo carrying capacity set up, or alteration for mobility-impairment suitability.
The barriers along the F. Loop are all different in type, design and condition. This has lead, over time, a slightly different use pattern on different sections.

For example, through observation it has become apparent that on the West section of the F. Loop from Chorlton to the Crayfield Road entrance (at The Quadrants) the barriers have been adapted over the last few years to enable a better accessibility. Some users and members of the Friends of the Fallowfield Loop who own larger, family bikes have found they are able to use the F. Loop in its entirety (although with great difficulty and a high level of chicaning around the barriers) from The Quadrants to Chorlton. While at the opposite end of the scale, the barriers from The Quadrants heading East towards Gorton and Fairfield are far tighter, more obstructive and impossible to overcome for those already discriminated user groups.

This disparity in the treatment of the barriers strengthens the reasons and need to trial the opening of the barriers to enable all possible and interested user groups to use the F. Loop but also to provide equality on how the different communities the F. Loop traverse are treated.

Through observation and anecdotal evidence gathered from various current users the original purpose of the barriers, as deterrents to antisocial behaviour by young people on cross motorbikes and scooters, is no longer valid as the antisocial behaviour that happens, it does so regardless of the barriers being there. Encouraging and enabling more users to use and be on the F. Loop will act as a natural deterrent for this kind of antisocial behaviour. More eyes and bodies on the F. Loop, using it throughout the day and week will provide passive natural surveillance.

The interest and ability to enable a more varied user groups access and enjoyment of the F. Loop with a temporary opening of the barriers (for the daytime only) was tested on two occasions in late 2015. Two family friendly bike rides - Kidical Mass rides - were organised by fellow users of the F. Loop (parents themselves) on the 15 September 2015 and again on the 31 November 2015, in conjunction with celebrations for “International Kidical Mass Day” and for Halloween.

These two events proved very popular, attracting users with different mode of transport (non-standard bikes mostly) and was also positive in encouraging an increased use of the F. Loop during those ‘test’ events days. The proposal to trial the opening of the barriers over a longer period of time will support the organisation and running of more activities of this kind.
Photographs from the event “Manchester Kidical Mass” on 19 September 2015.

Photos by Manchester Friends of the Earth, copyrights reserved.
Trial proposal

Through discussions and meetings between Sustrans and the Friends of the Fallowfield Loop (FotFL) a programme of trialling the barriers open has been established:

- Open the barriers over 6 weekends starting on Sunday 09.04.16. During these weekends, the barriers are to be opened from Sunday morning until dusk on the Monday, this is so both leisure and commuting use of the F. Loop are enabled.

- Following these initial 6 weekends, the barriers will be opened for a period of 3 months, spanning from May to August 2016.

- During the trial period events and activities to encourage more users to use and enjoy the F. Loop will be organised and run by Sustrans, Friends of the Fallowfield Loop and other volunteers/users.

- Volunteers and representatives of both Sustrans and the FotFL will engage with key local stakeholders - such as GMP as well as primary and secondary schools which have an access (or has the potential to) from the F. Loop, to enhance and encourage the connection and promotion of sustainable school runs, as alternative to the car for local families.

- Within the trial period, towards the end of it, a “Fallowfield Loop Festival” will be organised to celebrate the wonderful and valuable asset that the F. Loop is to all the communities it belongs to.

The timeline of this trial period is illustrated in the following page.
The Fallowfield Loop railway line opened in 1892

The line closed in 1988 and remained derelict until the late 1990s

The Fallowfield Loop was born as well as the Friends group in 2001. Barriers on the route were installed as request by GMP to appease security concerns regarding antisocial behaviour.

Pre-trial Open-All-Barriers day events. Both events were well attended with no incident 19.09.15 & 31.10.15

We are here! March 2016 - Barriers remain along the Fallowfield Loop with some having been added to or slightly adapted since 2001.

Period in which to engage with stakeholders and prepare locking points for securing barriers along the Loop open

Open-All-Barriers Trial commences: 6 Weekends (Sun-Mon) 10.04.16 - 15.05.16

- Social events organised by Sustrans, FotFL and users to encourage access and discovery of the Fallowfield Loop by as many user groups as possible.

- Volunteers, as members of the local communities, to engage with key stakeholders of the F. Loop such as primary and secondary schools, accessed off the F. Loop, in preparation of the 3 months long opening

Open-All-Barriers Trial: 3 Months 22.05.16 - 21.08.16

Examples of events:

- Social bike rides

- Social family-friendly bike rides (“Kidical Mass” rides)

- After-school cycling activities, engaging local schools located along the Fallowfield Loop

- Breeze-rides and other commuting/leisure cycling activities to encourage the F. Loop as a sustainable transport infrastructure

- Walking events: Discovering The Fallowfield Loop and the wildlife it fosters

- Mobility events “Open-All-Access”: Encouraging as many varied user groups to use and enjoy the Fallowfield Loop

- Share & Care events: Sustrans led events to encourage all users to share with care the Fallowfield Loop

- Maintenance events: FotFL led events to encourage as many people to care for, maintain and enhance the Fallowfield Loop

Fallowfield Loop Festival. (date TBC) A weekend-long celebration of the F. Loop as an asset for the whole community and all users, as well as the “Open-All-Barriers” trial.

Formal evaluation of the trial

Moving forward: Beyond the trial... Maintaining a barriers-free F. Loop
Moving forward

It is the hope and aspiration of both Sustrans and the FotFL that this proposed trial will provide a positive experience for all so that the barriers along the F. Loop will remain open for good. To ensure this is evaluated objectively and reliably it is important to set a benchmark against which to evaluate whether the trial can be considered a success, as well as pick up possible issues which can then be addressed.

This benchmark can be set using a couple of key methods:

1) By taking a snapshot of the current usage of the F. Loop, recording data of users on the F. Loop during various times of the day and of the week. This can provide very helpful data that can be used for comparison when a new count snapshot can be taken at the end of the trial, to see whether a F. Loop with improved accessibility can attract more users.

2) By undertaking an initial sample survey (using a simple, ‘low-tech’ questionnaire) at the end of the initial 6 weekends periods (beginning on Sun 03.04.16) and then again at the end of the 3 months-long opening period.

Evaluation and assessment of the success of the trial can then be discussed objectively against such benchmark with key stakeholders, such as:

- Sustrans
- FotFL
- Greater Manchester Police
- Key local community groups

The aspiration of Sustrans and FotFL is that the F. Loop can continue to grow and flourish as a green infrastructure asset for all its communities it serves, and accessibility is a key requirement for this to happen. UK precedent studies that have proven this to be possible are illustrated in the next section.
Key precedent studies

The ambition to adapt, open up or even remove altogether barriers along greenways is shared by many groups and users across the country (a). Many of Sustrans’ national routes provide safe and pleasant greenways that have the potential to also become real sustainable transport infrastructure for many users beyond the traditional or ‘standard’ walker and cyclist. The following are just some examples of where adaptation or removal of the barriers have already taken place. They do not represent benchmarks, but are instead included in this document to provide support to the aspiration (and to show what is possible to be achieved) for this proposed trial on the F. Loop.

(a): Small sample of responses on Twitter by users upon request (by the report’s author) of help to find relevant examples, on 27.02.2016.
Sustrans National Route 4 & 8: Caerphilly - Taffs Well

The Taff Trail is located along a popular Caerphilly <> Cardiff trail. The journey is about 18.5km (12 miles) each way, 3 miles of which on the road and the rest on the Taff Trail.

The Taff Trail (http://www.tafftrail.org.uk) is “[…] is a multi-purpose route between the Cardiff waterfront at Cardiff Bay in the South and the Market Town of Brecon in the North. 55 miles (88km) in length, it passes close to Pontypridd and Merthyr Tydfil and through a wide variety of urban and suburban landscapes of those towns and the open moorland of the Brecon Beacons. […] A large proportion of the Taff Trail is designated "Traffic Free" which has been achieved by using the routes of former tramways, railways, canals and present day canal towpaths, including the original rights-of-way, embankments, cuttings and viaducts. Many of these routes have important historical significance to the industrial heritage of South Wales.”

It covers, at least, 3 different council areas (Cardiff, RCT, Caerphilly). It is a popular trail used by walkers, cyclists, horse riders etc. However, since its resurfacing and marking (around 2002), barriers had been installed. But most recently following campaigning from local activists and users these barriers have been successfully removed, thus greatly improving its accessibility to a greater variety of numbers and users type.

Proposal for the Fallowfield Loop “Open-All-Barriers Trial” - Prepared by the Friends of the Fallowfield Loop - 27.02.16

All information and images kindly provided by cycling activist Alistair Gibbs, @BikeCommuter2 (Twitter handle)
Sustrans National Route 8: Mawddach Trail - Dolgellau

The trail located in Wales, is 9 miles long and very similar in length to the F. Loop.

“Forming part of Lôn Las Cymru (National Cycle Network Route 8) which runs from Holyhead to Cardiff, the Mawddach Trail is one of the most scenic railway paths in the country, running along the spectacular and atmospheric Mawddach Estuary below the foothills of Cadair Idris. The trail follows the course of the old railway line from Barmouth to Ruabon which was open between 1869 and 1965 and was popular with Victorian holiday makers visiting the fashionable resort of Barmouth.”

The barriers along this route have recently been removed.

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Information shared by Twitter user: @hank_chief on 27.02.2016

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3 http://www.sustrans.org.uk/ncn/map/route/mawddach-trail-dolgellau
Proposal for the Fallowfield Loop “Open-All-Barriers Trial” - Prepared by the Friends of the Fallowfield Loop - 27.02.16
Appendices
Appendix I

Correspondence with Local Authority Council Members regarding permission of opening the barriers as not contravening any existing planning conditions.
Hello again

Just received confirmation from planning:

Dear Councillor Paul,

Julie has asked that I confirm that officers confirmed in a meeting with you in September that there were no conditions found on file or recalled by officers requiring that gates and barriers be kept closed.

I trust that this is of some assistance to you.

Kind Regards

Jen

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Transport for Greater Manchester Committee
Cycling and Active Travel Champion

Centre for Local Economic Strategies
On 20 Nov 2015, at 10:02, Beverley Budgen <Beverley.Budgen@sustrans.org.uk> wrote:

Hi all,

After meeting with the Friends of the Fallowfield Loop; we have come up with this proposal for the potential of opening up the barriers on the Fallowfield loop, We will be conducting a controlled trail to see the outcome of opening the internal barriers on the loop during 2016.

Suggested timeline

1. Feasibility study conducted by the Friends between October 2015- February 2016
2. First Barriers Trial, 6 Weeks (opening the Barriers on Sunday morning and closing them Monday night). April 2016-May 2016
3. Meeting to assess the trail and iron out any niggles before a 3 month trail.
4. Second Trial, 3 months of them fully open. July-September 2016
5. Assess the impacts of the trail and future Long term plans.

We would appreciate if you could confirm that there is no Planning conditions set on the Fallowfield loop that we would breach if we did open the barriers.

We also need to have discussions with Manchester Police, to ensure that they are happy with this proposal also. I was wondering if the Manchester Police have been involved in your prior discussions and what was their initial thoughts.

Kind Regards

Beverley

Beverley Budgen
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Sustrans

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Hi David

Beverley Budgen is the Sustrans officer responsible for the Loop having taken over from