

£50,000 awarded to test Arnside viaduct walkway and cycle crossing

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.

Find out more <https://www.morecambebay.org.uk/coastal-community-team-morecambe-bay>

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Notes to editors:

In 2015 Morecambe Bay Partnership launched the award winning Bay Cycle Way. As well as exploring a foot and cycle crossing of the Arnside viaduct we have plans to extend the Bay Cycle Way and develop new walking and cycling offer for visitors and local families.

Morecambe Bay Partnership celebrates and conserves; connects and collaborates. From birds to beach cleans, from cycle ways to the history that shaped us, Morecambe Bay Partnership delivers projects that make great things happen for our communities and economy.

Alongside this, our work has involved thousands of local people have got in learning about and conserving local history and nature, we've created new habitats, removed tonnes of beach litter, trained teachers, collected 100s hours of oral histories, improved access for disabled people and commissioned great art projects, by internationally renowned artists to celebrate the landscapes of the Bay.

We know Morecambe Bay is amazing. We see the landscape, nature and heritage as a driver for economic growth. We are the only multi-sector partnership working across the Bay to capitalise on the potential of the area.

Our vision is for a thriving Bay rich in heritage and wildlife – a place where culture and history is celebrated, appreciated and understood and which inspires and attracts visitors and local people.

Morecambe Bay Partnership hosts the Morecambe Bay Coastal Community Team. Morecambe Bay Coastal Community Team is working with communities to unlock the economic potential of the Bay's nature, heritage and culture.

Almost £1 million of Coastal Revival Funding has been awarded to 25 projects to restore coastal landmarks and bring economic growth to communities up and down the Great British Coast. The Morecambe Bay Coastal Community team has been awarded a grant. The fund, now in its third year, provides grants to coastal heritage sites to fund repairs and restoration. It also supports large scale projects which are important to local communities but have not yet reached their full economic potential or are facing neglect.

Arnside Viaduct: Connecting Coastal Communities – A fund of £50,000 will move a step closer to connecting coastal communities through feasibility and economic studies for a new foot/cycle bridge across Arnside Viaduct; the foot/cycle bridge will extend Arnside Promenade across the viaduct, forming an iconic link in a long-distance coastal route from Morecambe to Barrow.

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