

## VIKING COASTAL TRAIL – USE AND ECONOMIC IMPACT

A report by the Area Manager to the Thanet Joint Transportation Board on 23 March 2004

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### Introduction

- 1 Olympic athlete Kelly Holmes MBE opened the Viking Coastal Trail, a 28-mile multi-purpose cycle route around Thanet, on Sunday 10 June 2001. Total investment so far in design, construction and marketing is about £500,000 divided roughly equally between the County and District Councils
- 2 The Viking Coastal Trail is listed on the County Council's website as Kent's "No. 1 cycle route"; it features regularly in national newspapers and the cycling press. The Viking Coastal Trail is listed on the County Council's website as Kent's 'No. 1 Cycle Route'; it features regularly in national newspapers and the cycling press. The Trail website ([www.vikingcoastaltrail.co.uk](http://www.vikingcoastaltrail.co.uk)) received more than 10,000 'hits' in 2003 and it is clear from observation and from anecdotal evidence that there are many more cyclists in Thanet than there were before 2001. Two separate studies have been carried out, as follows:
  - Babbie – use of the Trail, with data from automatic bicycle counters at Ramsgate and Westgate
  - Canterbury Christ Church University College – economic impact, with data from interviews with cyclists using the Trail and a survey of businesses along it.
- 3 The main findings from these studies are discussed in more detail in the following paragraphs.

### Use of the Trail

- 4 Automatic bicycle counters – electro-magnetic devices that continuously count bicycles passing over them – were installed at Ramsgate and Westgate in June 2001. There are limitations on where the equipment can be placed, and the two locations are not necessarily the busiest on the Viking Coastal Trail, but the counters have been counting for 24 hours a day 365 days a year and a great deal of data is now available.
- 5 July was the busiest month at both locations in 2001, possibly due to the Viking Coastal Trail having just opened and the extensive publicity associated with it, but August was the busiest month at both locations in 2002 and 2003 (Figures 1 and 2).
- 6 The total number of cyclists at the two locations in 2003 was as follows:
  - Ramsgate – 27,965
  - Westgate – 39,616
- 7 Weekend flows are higher than weekday flows at both locations, reflecting the fact that the majority of users are cycling for pleasure and exercise (see paragraph 10). Weekend flows at both locations peak in the early afternoon; and at Ramsgate there are weekday peaks in the morning and afternoon, evidence of cycling to work. Weekday and weekend flow profiles for August and September 2003 for Ramsgate and Westgate are shown in Figures 3 to 6. August and September were selected for consistency with Sustrans' monitoring of the National Cycle Network.

### User Profiles

- 8 The majority (66%) of users of the Viking Coastal Trail are resident in Thanet, but it is attracting cyclists from elsewhere in Kent, the UK and Europe (Figure 7). Users of all age groups (Figure 8) enjoy the Trail, with 21% cycling as part of a family group.
- 9 The majority of users were categorised in the C1 socio-economic group (junior managers, owners of small establishments and others in non-manual positions); 89% of local users cycle the Trail at least once a week, with 24% of those from elsewhere in Kent using it at least once a month.
10. 76% of all users are cycling for pleasure, with 57% cycling for exercise. However, the Trail is also seen as an important transport route within Thanet, with up to 58% of weekday users making utility journeys, i.e. journeys to work, school, shopping etc.
- 11 Different user groups have different motivations for using the Viking Coastal Trail:

- Singles and couples like the picturesque surroundings
- Families like the safe, traffic free sections
- Groups like “the cycling”.

12 A quarter of all users cycle less than 10km, with the majority of these making utility journeys; but more commonly users of the Viking Coastal Trail cycle between 10 and 20km (36%). The most popular locations, as defined by users, are Broadstairs, Minnis Bay and Ramsgate.

### **Economic Impact**

13 Cycle tourism has been growing rapidly in the UK and the National Cycle Network, developed by local authorities in partnership with Sustrans, is aiding its growth. Apart from the benefits of improved health and reductions in pollution and traffic congestion, cycling has also been shown to provide substantial economic benefits. Sustrans estimated cycle tourism in the UK in 1999 at £635 million per year and forecasts have suggested that within the next 20 years cycle tourism across Europe could be worth as much as £14 billion.

14 Canterbury Christ Church University College studied the economic impact of the Viking Coastal Trail in 2003. 364 cyclists were interviewed between May and August. The survey was designed to identify the cyclists’ origin, socio-economic characteristics, nature and frequency of participation and motivations (see paragraphs 8 to 12), and also to quantify the level of expenditure of cyclists during their use of the Trail. In addition, 76 businesses returned a self-completion questionnaire designed to identify the importance of the Viking Coastal Trail to local businesses and to quantify the level of income that they perceived cyclists to be spending.

15 The key trend identified is that cyclists tend to stop on their route for refreshments, with 65% using cafes and 20% using pubs (Figure 10).

16 Detailed analysis of expenditure by user group (Figure 11) shows that:

- Couples spend more per head (£7.57) than any other user group and are more likely to stop at a café or a pub
- Family groups spend slightly less per head (£5.67), are less likely to stop at cafes and pubs but more likely to use picnic sites. Although spending less per head, by the very nature of the group size families spend more overall than couples
- Members of cycling clubs or groups spend an average of £4.88 per head and are more likely to use pubs
- Cyclists travelling alone are more likely to be making utility journeys, are less likely to stop and, as a result, their average spend per head (£3.62) is less than any other group.

17 Average spend varies by location (Figure 12) and is 21% higher on weekend days compared to weekdays.

18 Other businesses to benefit include local attractions, i.e. museums and historic houses, and accommodation providers such as hotels, B&Bs, camping and caravan sites and youth hostels.

19 The Viking Coastal Trail is well known amongst local businesses with 93% aware of it and 35% of respondents having used it. 68% of all businesses felt that cyclists are important customers, and 77% agreed that the Trail benefits the local area.

20 The perceived importance of cycle tourists in Thanet has led to some businesses altering their products and services to cater for the needs of cyclists. 23% had already made changes; 65% of accommodation providers now provide sheltered cycle racks and stores; and many respondents now stock maps, snack foods and cold drinks.

21 These changes imply that local businesses are aware of the value of cycle tourism to the Thanet area and that they are eager to capitalise on the growth of the industry.

22 Using data from the cyclist interview surveys and from the questionnaires returned by businesses, together with data from the automatic bicycle counters and other manual counts elsewhere, Canterbury Christ Church University College has estimated the overall economic impact of the Viking Coastal Trail.

This figure equates to £293,297 per year. However, the study only considered the coastal sections of the Trail and there could be expenditure along the south-west section (St Nicholas-at-wade and Minster) that was not included. Thus the overall figure could be higher.

## **Conclusion**

23 The Viking Coastal Trail is Kent's "No. 1 cycle route". The majority of users are local people, but the Trail is attracting cyclists from elsewhere in Kent, the UK and Europe. A study by Canterbury Christ Church University College in 2003 showed that the Viking Coastal Trail is generating nearly £300,000 per year for the local economy, a good return on the total investment of about £500,000. Businesses along the Trail are aware of the value of cycle tourism and 77% agreed that the Trail benefits the local area.

## **Recommendation**

**24 I recommend that Members note the report**

### **Contact Officer**

Phil Pittock 01227 825362 (KCC Area Office)

### **Background documents**

*Appendix 1 attached*

*"The Economic Impact of Cycle Tourism in relation to The Viking Coastal Trail in Thanet", Canterbury Christ Church University College, December 2003*

VIKING COASTAL TRAIL – USE & ECONOMIC IMPACT

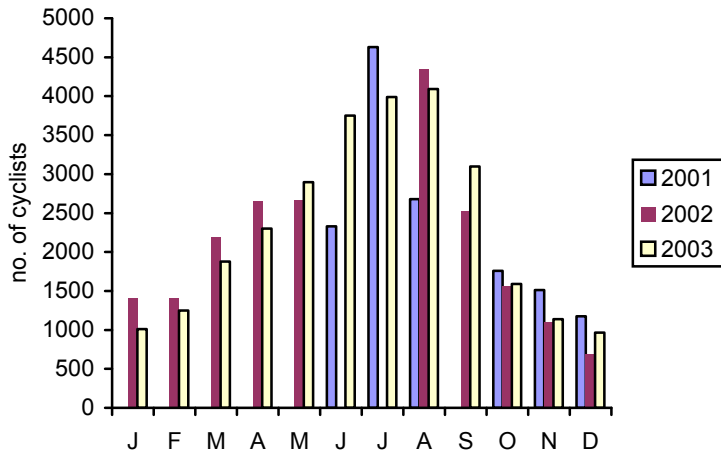


Figure 1 – Monthly Flow Profile, Ramsgate  
(Note – some data is missing or incomplete)

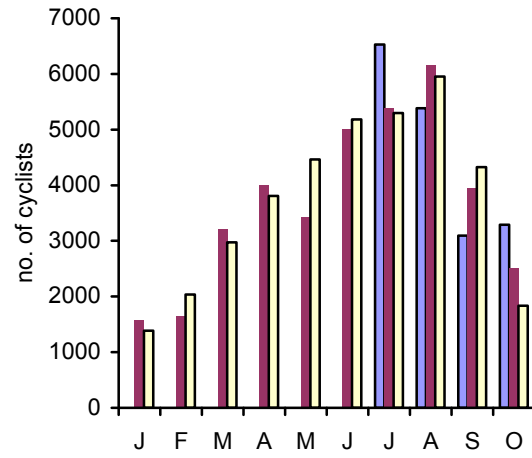


Figure 2 – Monthly Flow Profile, We  
(Note – some data is missing or incomplete)

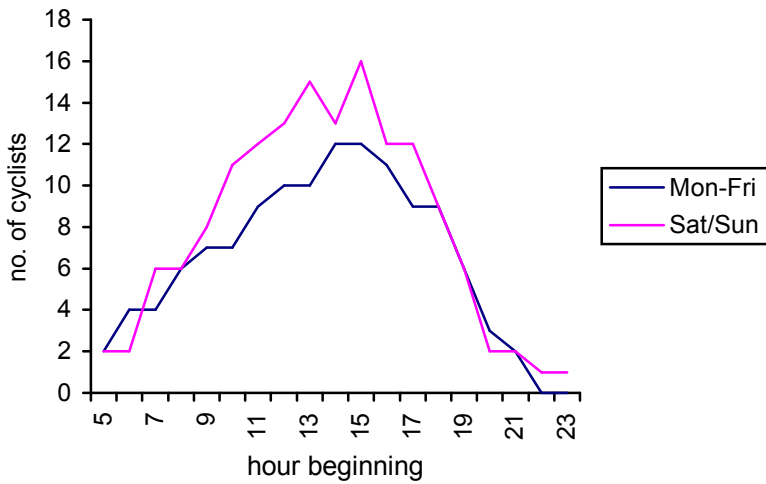


Figure 3 – Daily Flow Profile, Ramsgate August 2003

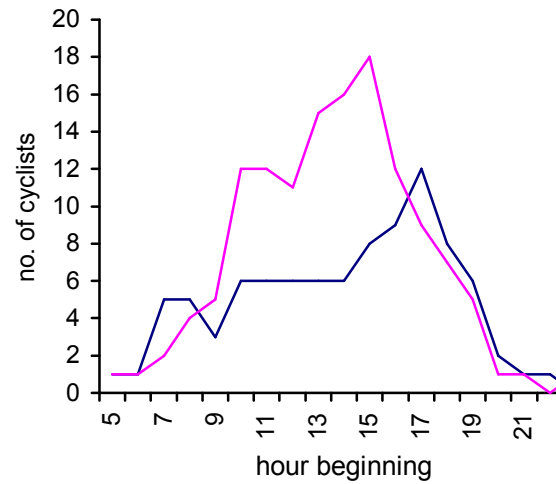


Figure 4 – Daily Flow Profile, Ramsgate September

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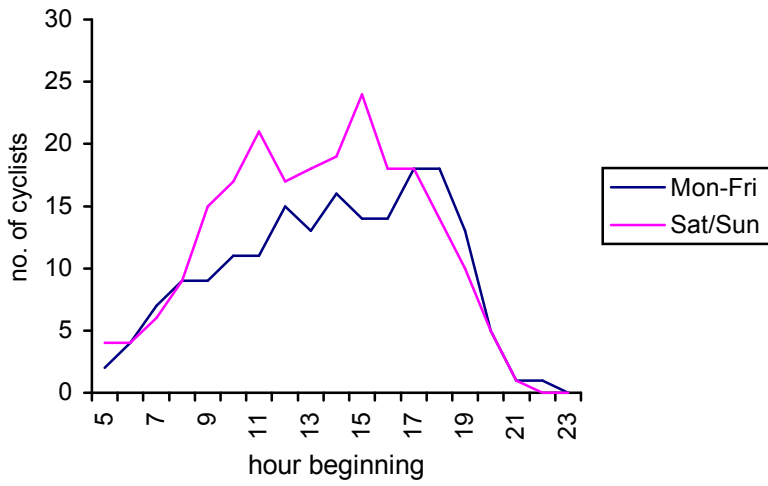


Figure 5 – Daily Flow Profile, Westgate August 2003

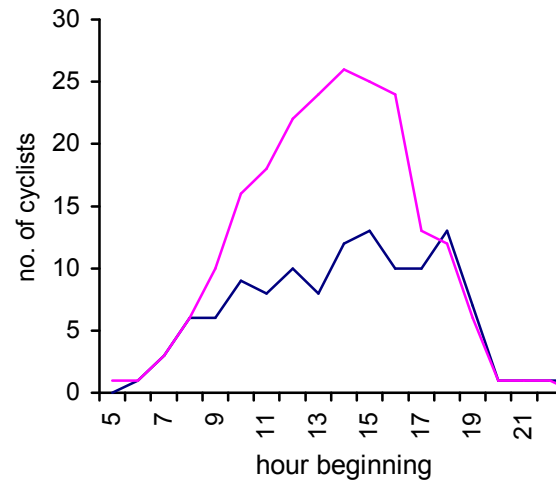


Figure 6 – Daily Flow Profile, Westgate Sep

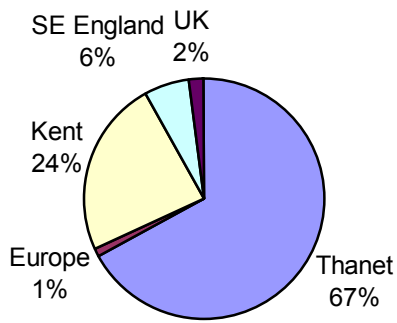


Figure 7 – Origins of Cyclists

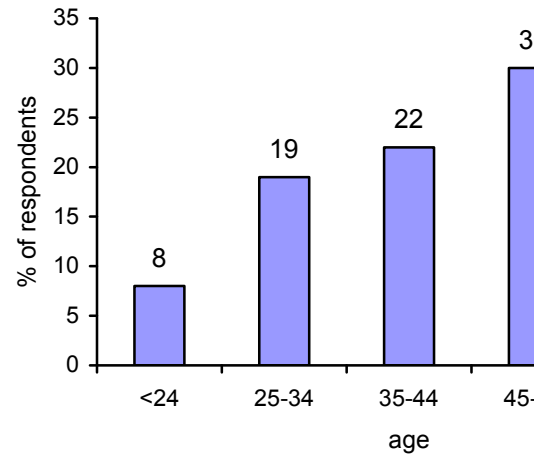


Figure 8 – Age Profiles of Cyclists

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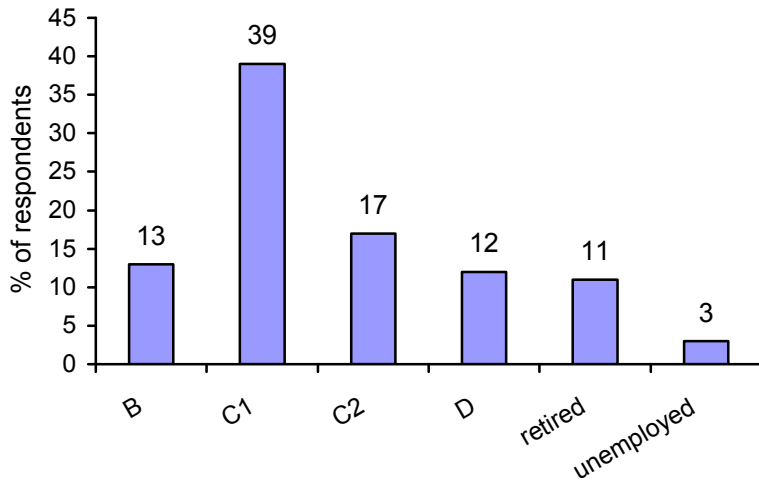


Figure 9 – Occupational Profile

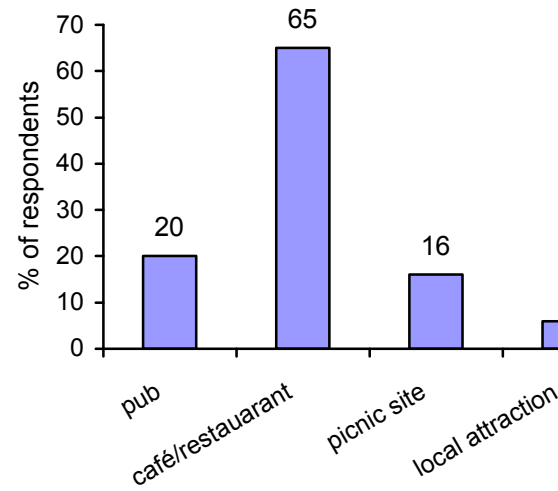


Figure 10 – Reasons for Stopping along the Viking Coastal Trail

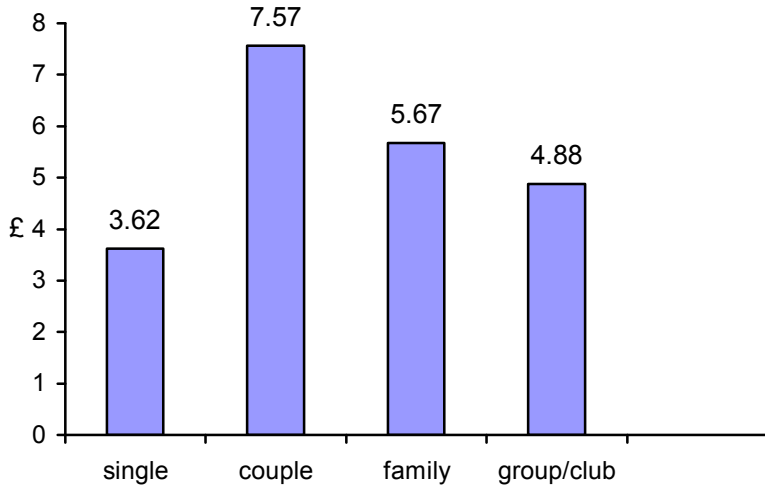


Figure 11 – Expenditure by Cyclist Profile

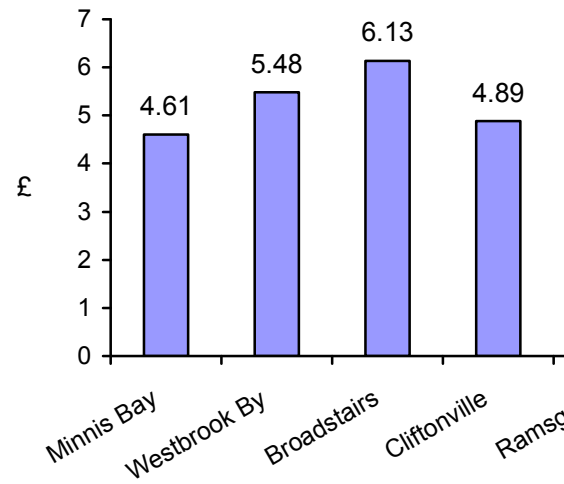


Figure 12 – Expenditure by Localities