# Somerset's Strawberry Line Path Network Creates Safer Cycling and Walking Routes in Shepton Mallet



In Somerset, the Strawberry Line network of paths has made significant progress in developing a 76-mile cycling and walking route around Shepton Mallet. Over the past two years, new sections have been regularly introduced, enhancing local connectivity. One notable 300-meter path section in Shepton Mallet makes use of a Historic Railway Estates bridge and provides safe passage under a busy road, replacing a previously dangerous crossing. The town, with a population under 10,000, reported 104,000 trips in the path's first year.

Additionally, a new route now connects the villages of Westbury-sub-Mendip and Easton, previously linked only by a narrow A-road. This path is expected to see 30,000 trips annually. These developments followed a strategic change in navigating planning permission hurdles. In 2022, Somerset began using “permitted development rights,” typically used for agricultural tracks, reducing planning timeframes significantly.

Councillor Ros Wyke, a proponent of the initiative, cited community benefits and streamlined processes facilitated by volunteers and experts like John Grimshaw and Caroline Levett. These paths are built for significantly less cost than government-led projects, often involving local volunteer efforts in construction and maintenance.

Despite challenges like securing landowner permissions, the project’s impact is considerable. It has fostered community engagement and provided safer routes for residents, demonstrating the wide-ranging benefits of regional cycling and walking networks.