

Transport Evidence Review

Introduction

The Lake District was designated a national park in 1951. A number of its Special Qualities are relevant to this evidence paper including: a long tradition of tourism and outdoor activities, and opportunities for quiet enjoyment.

In 2017 the English Lake District was also designated a World Heritage Site cultural landscape.

Relevant outcomes in the Partnership Plan 2020-2025

1. We will increase the rate of decarbonisation in travel.
2. We will increase opportunities for and use of sustainable and active travel.
3. We will make use of new technology and digital connectivity to reduce the need to travel and to market and create new sustainable travel opportunities

1. Facts, figures, trends

- 1.1. Visitor numbers are slowly rose following the Covid pandemic, to 18.1 million in 2023 which is still lower than 2019 figure of 19.9 million.¹ 2024 figures from the STEAM model are just in and show total visitors to the Lake District National Park are modelled at 17.73, a fall of 2.1%.

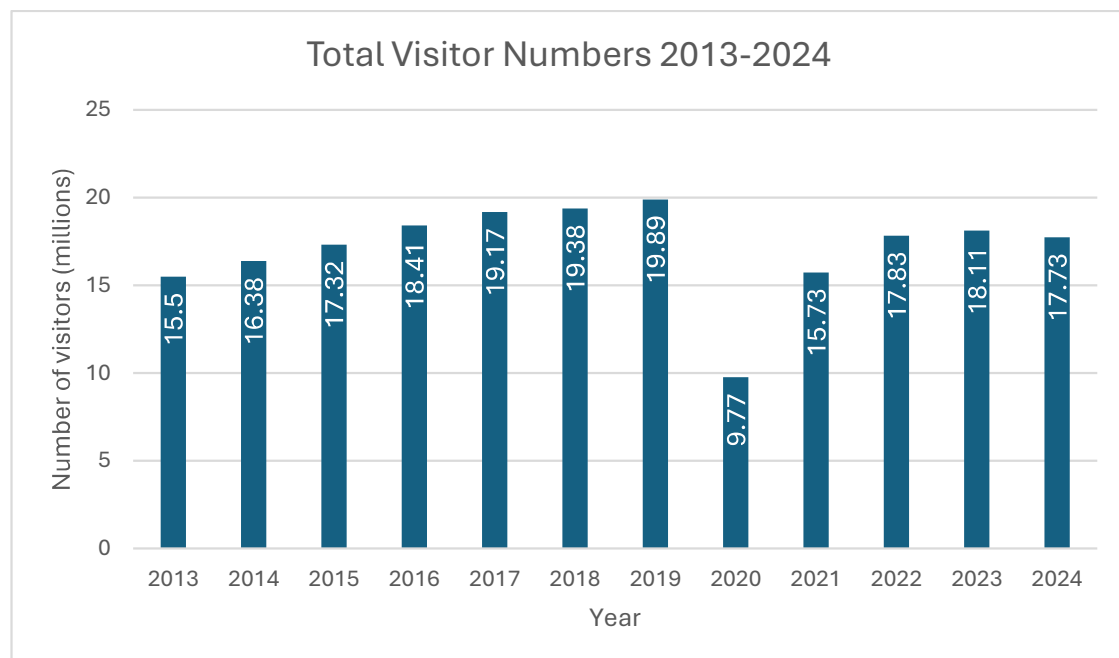


Figure 1: Annual total visitor numbers from STEAM data between 2012-2023

¹ STEAM report, Cumbria Tourism, 2023

- 1.2. Traffic levels have fluctuated over the past 7 years, other than the decline during the pandemic overall², but the overall trend masks local variations, with some count locations in the north, such as in Keswick and Borrowdale, showing increasing numbers, whilst in the Windermere area at some points there is a decline.

Year	Clappersgate	Newby Bridge	Briery Wood, Windermere	Nes Brow, Keswick	Borrowdale Rd, Keswick	Low Lorton	St John's in the Vale	Lowick Bridge	Gosforth	Whitham Valley	total
2017	7210.3	4207.3	14102.3	3857.0	2818.7	1066.4	2190.5	2094.5	4504.3	1843.4	43894.8
2018	7030.1	4307.7	14306.0	4440.7	2842.4	1073.1	2290.2	2139.3	4440.0	1955.8	44825.2
2019	7105.3	4346.6	14150.7	4563.2	2869.5	1046.9	2334.8	2118.5	4340.1	1930.3	44805.9
2020	5851.5	3200.7	10522.1	3239.1	2237.9	901.9	1758.3	1796.3	3259.8	1520.9	34288.6
2021	6365.8	3977.6	12522.5	3979.6	2832.6	1009.9	1889.7	2167.6	3819.5	1759.7	40324.5
2022	6761.9	4169.0	13440.1	4241.4	2975.6	1094.6	2141.2	2111.8	3869.5	1824.3	42629.4
2023	6667.1	4183.4	13527.5	4441.7	3025.0	1120.4	2641.1	2146.4	3902.9	1821.0	43476.5
% change 2017-2023	-7.53	-0.57	-4.08	15.16	7.32	5.06	20.57	2.48	-13.35	-1.22	-0.95

Table 1: Annual traffic count data from seven fixed point traffic counters in the Lake District.

- 1.3. National traffic levels also show a fairly static picture (National Travel Survey) but an increase in holiday travel that impacts the Lake District.

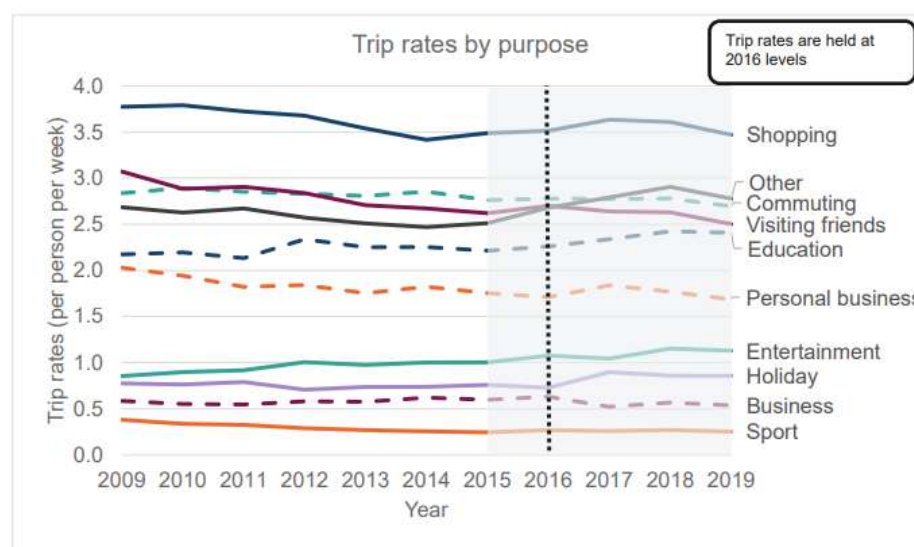


Figure 7 Trip rates (trips per week per person) broken down by purpose of trip, taken from the National Travel Survey

Figure 2: Trip rates broken down by purpose of trip, National Travel Survey.

² See State of Conservation Report 2024. Data from Council Automatic Traffic Count
Emma Moody
Version 5.0
Date: 25/06/25

- 1.4. The Department for Transport (DfT) has a number of forecasts for traffic changes in future years, with a number of unknowns and different models. These are summarised below. However, it should be noted that even some of the models showing low traffic growth overall, such as the Behaviour Change scenario, still show an increase in holiday traffic vehicle mileage of 19% by 2060.

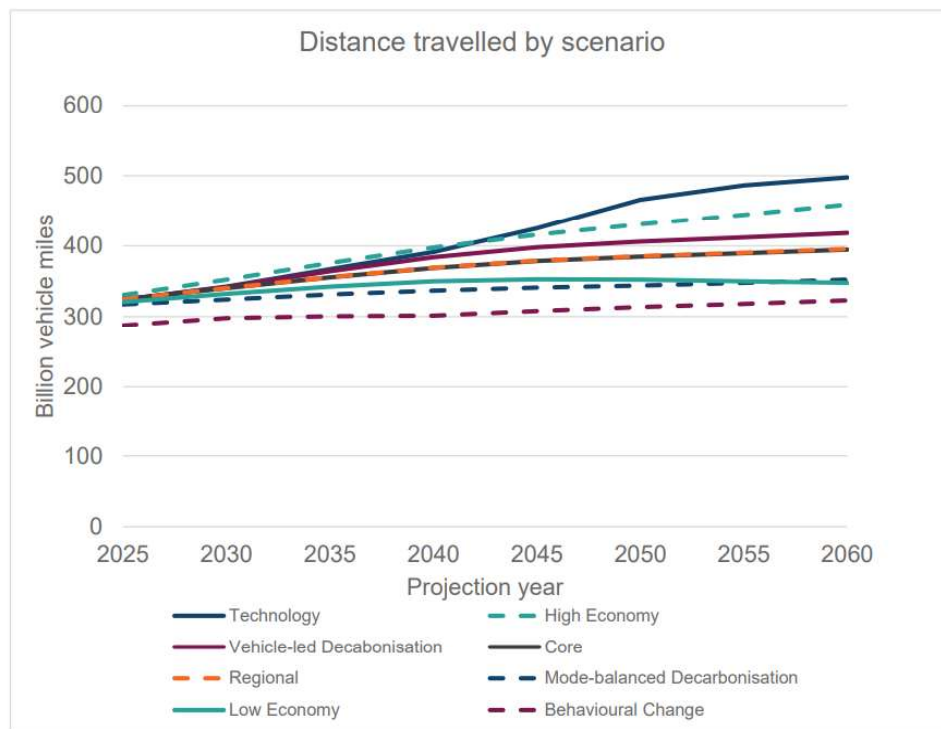


Figure 3: National Road Traffic Projections, 2022, DfT [National Road Traffic Projections 2022](#)

- 1.5. The main mode of travel to the Lake District is still dominated by private vehicle (approximately 91% in 2022 up from 89% in 2018).³ For travelling around the Lake District modes of travel change, with 68% of visitors travelling by private vehicle meaning other modes become more significant. The main other modes of travel include walking (16%); boat/ferry (1%); cycling/ebike (9%); bus (5%) and train (1%).⁴
- 1.6. As can be seen from Figure 4 below frequency and availability of bus services vary throughout the national park based on market demand from both visitors and residents. In the main A591 corridor between Grasmere and Windermere

³ Cumbria Visitor Survey 2022

buses run every 15 minutes in summer, and even in winter they run at least every 30 minutes. However, in less densely populated and busy areas there are more limited services available. In some deeply rural locations, a public bus service may not be viable but other options such as lift share, demand responsive transport, community transport or active travel become more viable alternatives.

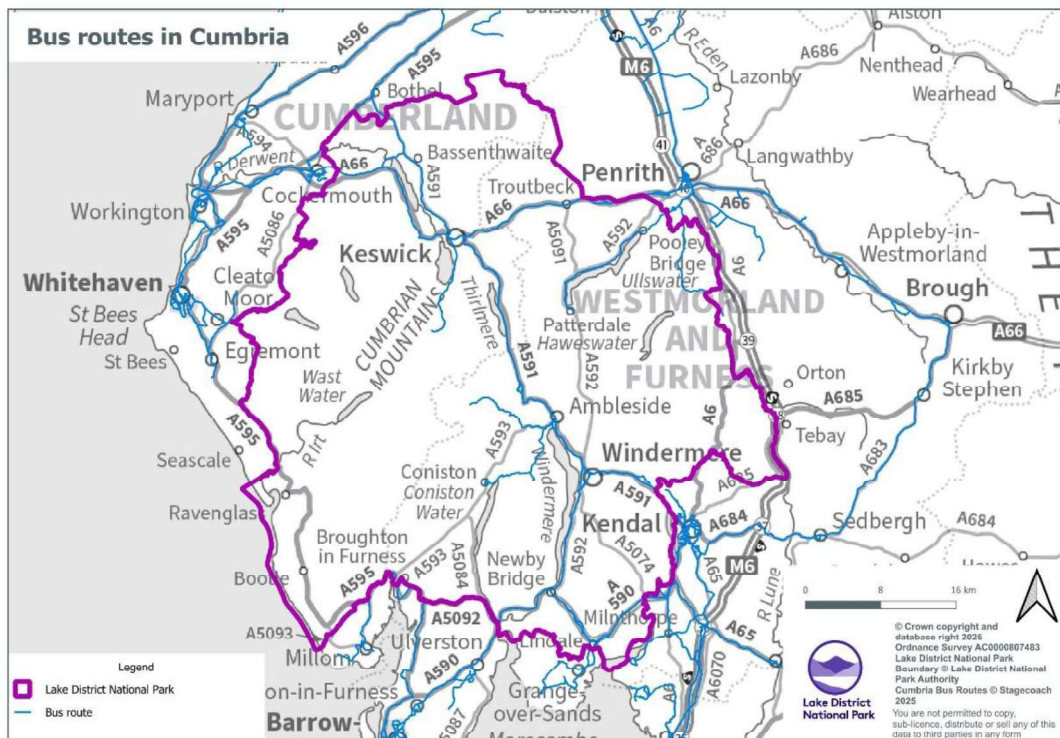


Figure 4: Main bus routes in Cumbria 2025

- 1.7. The Cumbria Visitor Survey 2022 noted a significant increase in satisfaction among visitors regarding traffic levels and parking availability:
 - 83% of people agreed that ‘Traffic levels were reasonable,’ up 26% from 2018 (57%).
 - 85% agreed that ‘there is sufficient parking available,’ up 20% from 2018 (65%).
- 1.8. There are planning controls detailed in the Local Plan on the development of new car parks in the Lake District. Where policies are met, new car parks have been approved, for example the recently opened Bluebird car park in Coniston, with 70 spaces, EV charging, cycle and walking information and free toilets. It is estimated that there are 7,500 off street public parking spaces in the Lake District and many more on streets and attached to businesses. In addition, there are an estimated 1,200 spaces available at peak times as pop-up car parks that open for a maximum of 28 days per year under permitted

development rights. It is up to the landowner which days they open, and they will tend to use their local knowledge of visitor patterns and the weather conditions to decide on a day-to-day basis which days the car parks open. In some cases, the landowner will work around seasonal farming activities for example, the field may not be available until the season's hay has been mowed.

- 1.9. In the past five years there have been some notable developments in the bus sector, with the £2 (now £3) bus fare offer, new multi-year multi million pound investment from the UK Government in new and improved bus routes through BSIF (Bus Service Improvement Fund), which has resulted in 1 new bus route in the Lake District (Little Langdale) and investment in enhanced service levels in 6 services. The involvement of partners in shuttle bus services such as the Wasdale Explorer and the Buttermere Shuttle, investment from the private sector in new lower emission vehicles supporting decarbonisation and improving journey quality, and increased services on core routes.
- 1.10. Cumbria Tourism has initiated a survey about the £3 bus fare and the need to keep this running. Of the 663 people surveyed, over 40% of those now using the bus didn't before the fare cap was introduced. It should be noted that these results are from an online survey shared on social media and so there will be some sampling bias.
- 1.11. There has also been development of through-ticketing to and from Keswick and mainline railway stations via Penrith station.
- 1.12. Rail use has declined at stations in the National Park⁵ from 525,516 in 2014/15 to 404,586 in 2022/23. Rail services have been disrupted over recent years due to a change in travelling habits following the pandemic, particularly for commuting and business use, and there has been industrial action, but the leisure market is holding up and becoming more important for rail operators. Some routes, such as Avanti's on the West Coast Mainline, have now recovered to pre-pandemic levels. The percentage of visitors travelling by rail to the Lake District showed a slight increase in the 2022 Cumbria Visitor Survey at 6.9% of all visitors.
- 1.13. In some areas pro-active community groups have been successful in developing sustainable transport initiatives, such as the Ullswater Hopper bus run by the Sustainable and Integrated Transport for Ullswater group (SITU). The two bus services organised through SITU carried 9,382 passengers in 2024.
- 1.14. Cumbria has active community rail partnerships which work with communities to promote and develop rail use, with projects ranging from caring for local stations, lobbying for improvements and arranging school visits including the recent ones to mark the 80th anniversary of the arrival of the Windermere Children jointly with the Lake District Holocaust Project.

⁵ Windermere, Staveley, Ravenglass, Silecroft, Bootle
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- 1.15. Transport continues to create a high percentage of Greenhouse Gas emissions within the Lake District. However, transport to the Lake District accounts for far more emissions (see Climate evidence paper).
- 1.16. There is growing adoption of electric vehicles, with almost 382,000 Battery Electric Vehicles (BEVs) sold in the UK in 2024, the highest number to date at 19.6% of all new car sales. It is expected to continue to increase, although there are a number of national policy and international factors that will influence this.
- 1.17. 25% of households in Cumbria do not own a car⁶ and in urban areas around Cumbria, especially areas of high deprivation, the number is generally higher. This leaves many people unable to reach the employment, leisure and health and wellbeing opportunities the Lake District can offer.
- 1.18. 33% of businesses⁷ in Cumbria stated that lack of public transport was a significant issue for their staff.
- 1.19. There are 50 accessible Miles without Stiles routes in the Lake District, as part of around 1,900 miles of public rights of way (see also the Lake District for Everyone evidence paper).
- 1.20. Previous work in developing active travel routes has demonstrated the demand for walking, cycling and wheeling routes, for example the evaluation of the K2T Trail showed 265,000 visitors in one year.
- 1.21. There is a growing willingness, as evidenced in recent research amongst residents, visitors and businesses, to change how people travel to and around the Lake District with visitors preferring seasonal managed visitor access to busy locations and residents preferring comprehensive integrated public transport.⁸
- 1.22. Travel by boat including public boats on Ullswater, Windermere, Derwentwater and Coniston is a popular sustainable transport experience with 9.8% of visitors using it as one of their forms of travel to get around the Lake District.⁹
- 1.23. The number of people holding a UK driving license is an increasing trend from 27.65 million in 2002 to 34.5 million in 2023. The number of licence holders under 20 has been increasing since 2021 following disruption to DVLA testing following Covid, but falling for those aged between 21-29. The largest increases in license holders is people aged 50 and above, which is driven by an ageing population rather than new drivers.¹⁰

⁶ 2021 UK Census

⁷ Cumbria Tourism Business Tracking Survey, Autumn 2024

⁸ [Appetites to travel differently in the Lake District](#)

⁹ Cumbria Visitor Survey 2022.

¹⁰ Driving licence holding and vehicle availability Dataset NTS0201

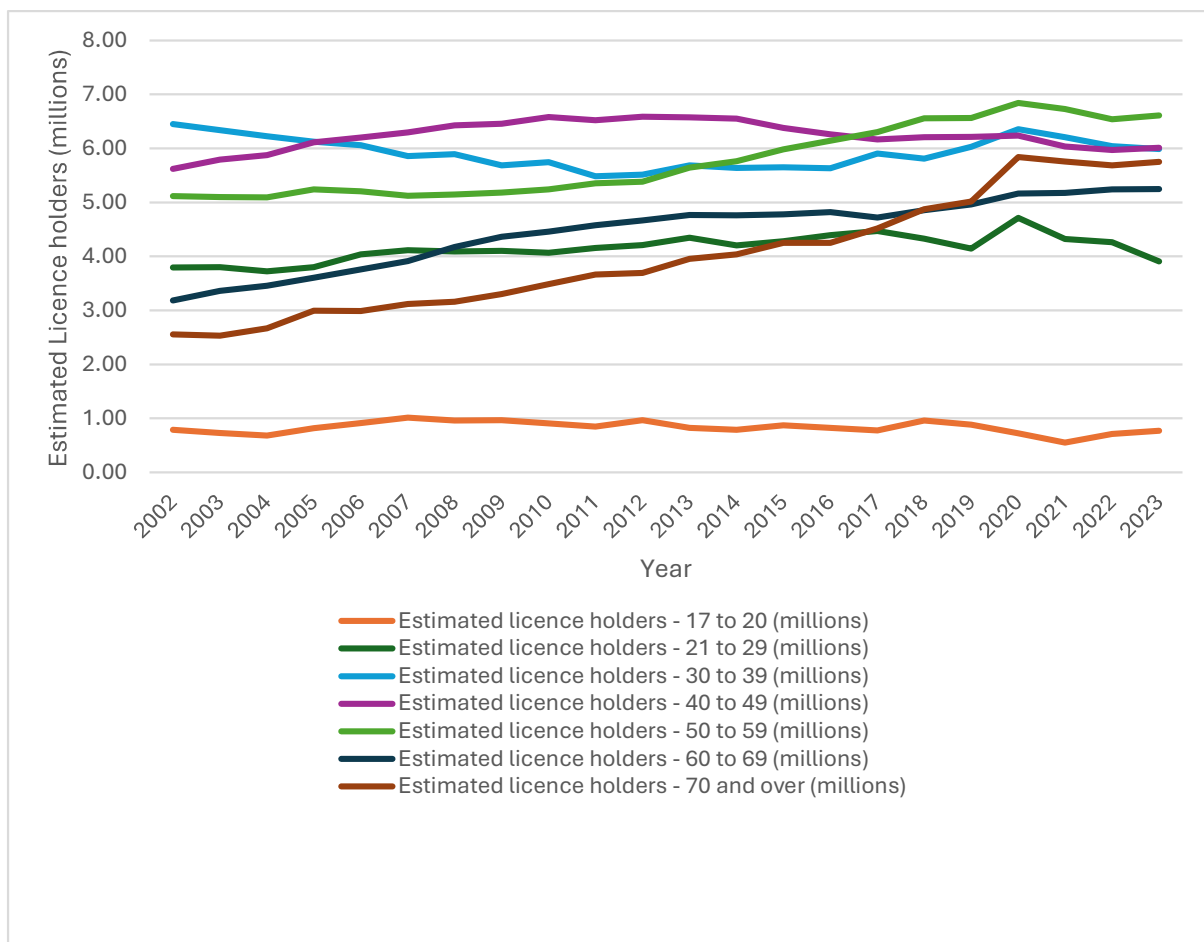


Figure 4: Driving license holders 2002-2023, Source DVLA

- 1.24. Inappropriate parking can cause traffic delays/congestion, restrict residents' access to property, businesses and farming, cause delays or cancellations to bus services and hinder the response of emergency services in areas of highest pressure. For example parking at Buttermere (Gatesgarth) caused two journeys of the 77/77A bus to be cancelled on Easter Weekend in 2025.
- 1.25. Levels of traffic and congestion vary temporarily and geographically in the Lake District, with some areas experiencing very high volumes of traffic at peak times, impacting on communities, businesses and visitors. The weather and also impacts on traffic peaks. For example, traffic counts in Wasdale in August 2023 showed daily traffic of as low as 501 in the quietest day and as high as 1421 on the busiest weekday.

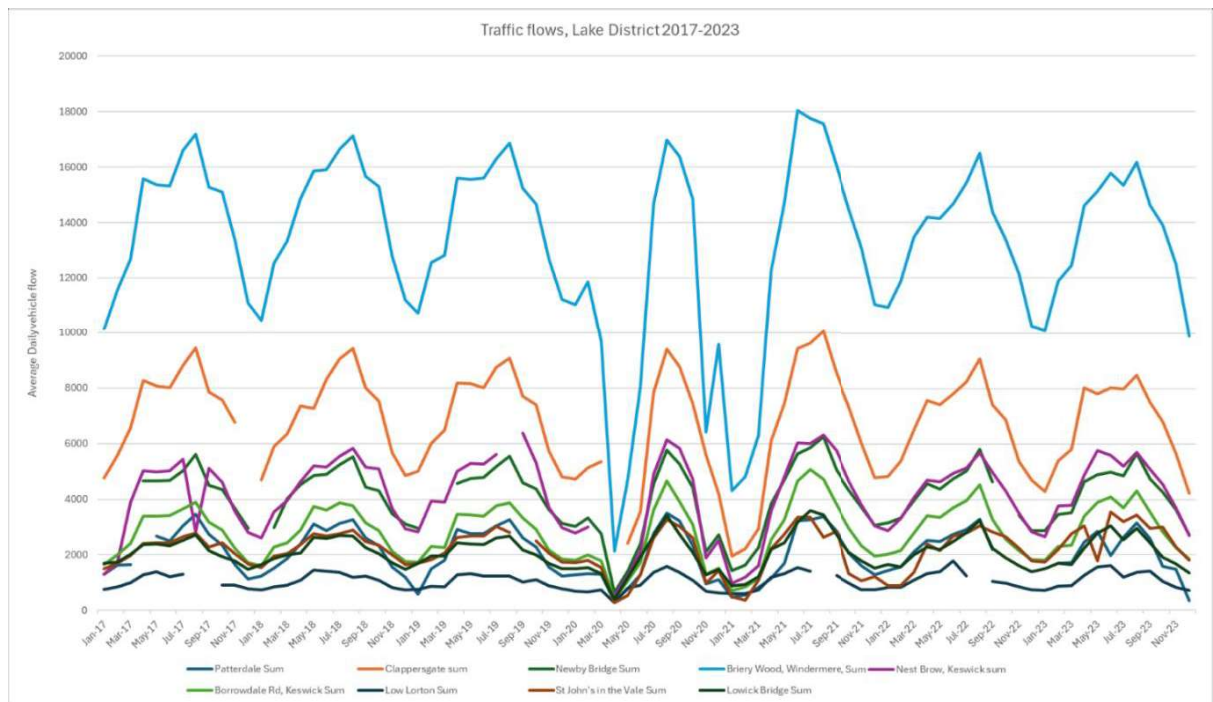


Figure 5: Seasonal fluctuations in traffic flows as shown from the fixed point traffic counters between 2017 and 2023

- 1.26. Traffic has an impact on tranquillity, with the national tranquillity index devised by CPRE¹¹ showing that areas of lowest tranquillity follow road corridors through the Lake District. Although nearly 20 years old these maps were produced based on detailed research which measured multiple factors, both positive and negative including sound, light pollution and visual impacts.

¹¹ [National Tranquillity Map](#), CPRE, 2007

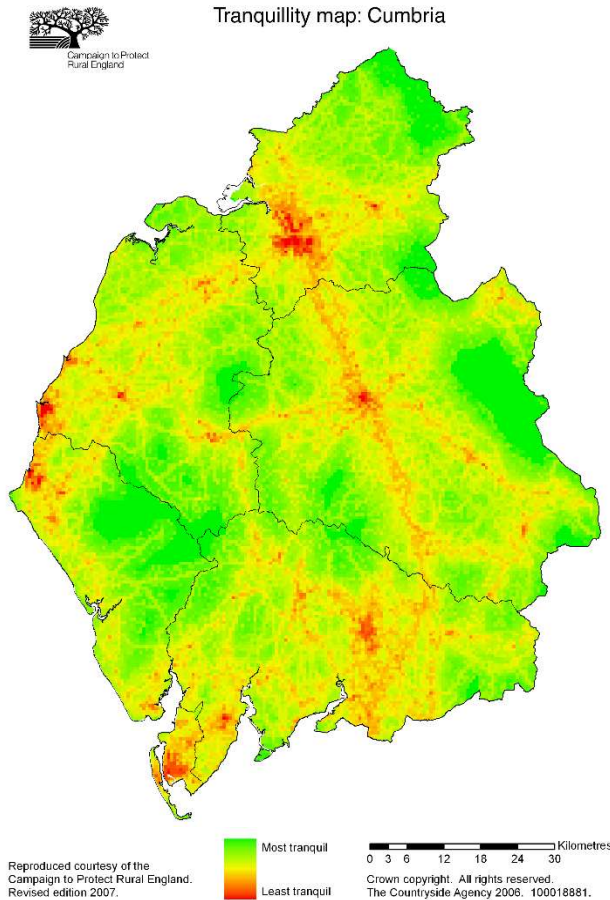


Figure 6: Tranquillity Map of Cumbria from [Tranquillity Map: England - CPRE](#)

- 1.27. We know that when people are on holiday they are more willing to try new modes of travel, particularly active travel. This then translates into travelling differently when they get back home with long term positive impacts on carbon reduction, traffic reduction and an increase in their health and wellbeing. For example, in the evaluation by the Department for Transport (DfT) of three visitor-facing Local Sustainable Transport Fund projects, which included the GoLakes Travel Project in the Lake District, 36% of visitors who tried sustainable travel on holiday stated they would definitely be more likely to use sustainable travel when they got home.¹² More research is needed in this field.
- 1.28. The Destination Management Plan for Cumbria 2024 to 2030 sets out a vision for tourism which includes objectives “**Responsible and Sustainable:** Supporting tourism that benefits our environment and vibrant communities” and “**Inclusive and Accessible:** Ensuring everyone can enjoy our destination.”

¹² [Local Sustainable Transport Fund visitor travel case study: final report](#) DfT

- 1.29. Three Plans visioning transformational movement at valley scale have been prepared that identify actions to further the aspirations of the Destination Management Plan. These cover Langdale, Ullswater and Hawkshead and West Windermere.

2. What does this mean?

- 2.1. Without significant interventions and investment in public transport and active travel, private vehicle travel is likely to remain the most dominant mode of transport in the Lake District. Expansion of sustainable travel (all forms) is reliant on significant, long-term funding. There have been improvements to sustainable travel in recent years, but it has been very dependent on short term funding.
- 2.2. The examples of our work in Wasdale and Ullswater - driving change at a local level - provides the means of achieving far greater community buy-in and potentially securing transformational travel behaviour changes bespoke to that area, they take time to develop.
- 2.3. There has been a downward trend in rail sector use due to service disruptions but usage is now recovering. Improvements, including the Lakes Line Passing Loop and the Cumbrian Coast Line signalling to increase capacity, have been in development for some time, and this is an example where long term funding commitment is needed.
- 2.4. The evidence indicates that the quantity of traffic in the Lake District is relatively static in annual totals, but some places are experiencing higher numbers whilst others experience lower numbers on average. For resident communities this most likely feels masked by seasonal increases in traffic.
- 2.5. Reducing emissions from transport to and within the Park will be necessary to meet the 2037 net zero ambition. Much of this is likely to be driven by changes at a national level, such as the uptake of EV vehicles and continuation of the discounted national £3 bus fare offer, but local efforts to increase the uptake of sustainable and active travel in the Lake District and Cumbria will be necessary to meet these targets. Recent research demonstrates that there is an appetite for travelling differently so this Plan will build on these ambitions and research.

3. References and policy context

Some of the key international, national, regional and local strategies that provide important context for updating the Management Plan include:

National

- The Department for Transport (DfT) is currently preparing an [Integrated National Transport Strategy](#) and has called for ideas. Whilst at time of writing we do not know what it will contain, an overarching strategy covering all

modes of transport will set the strategic context and funding priorities for future years.

- [The Road to Net Zero](#) (DfT, 2018) out how the UK government will reduce carbon emissions from road transport.
- [Department for Transport and Active Travel England Cycling and Walking Investment Strategy 2022](#) CWIS2 sets out the following ambition, which maintains the aim put forward in CWIS1: 'To make walking and cycling the natural choices for shorter journeys, or as part of a longer journey by 2040'.
- [A railway fit for Britain's future](#) (DfT, 2025) sets out proposals to reform rail management in the UK, including bringing forward the Railways Bill to establish Great British Railways and end the current system of rail franchising.
- [Bus Back Better, national bus strategy for England](#), DfT 2021 a national strategy setting out the vision and opportunity to deliver better bus services for passengers across England, through ambitious and far-reaching reform of how services are planned and delivered.
- [DfT's Gear Change & Cycle Infrastructure Design \(Local Transport Note 1/20\) \(2020\)](#) In 2020, the DfT published Gear Change and its updated Cycle Infrastructure Design (Local Transport Note 1/20). It is recognised that some of the approaches in LTN1/20 may need to be modified in rural areas. Active Travel England are working on a rural design guide, due to be published in 2025.

Regional

- [Transport for the North, Strategic Transport Plan, 2024](#) sets out how the North of England will become a thriving, socially inclusive regions through a transformed, decarbonised, transport system.

Local

- [Cumbria Transport Infrastructure Plan 2022 – 2037](#) sets the policy framework for transport and connectivity in supporting sustainable and inclusive growth in Cumbria.
- [Heart of the Lakes Active Travel Infrastructure Strategy 2022-2037](#) the Heart of the Lakes Active Travel Infrastructure Strategy sets the policy framework for walking, wheeling, cycling and where appropriate, horse riding through one of the County's strategic connectivity corridors. The Heart of the Lakes Corridor covers a central proportion of the Lake District National Park, connecting the settlements of Keswick, Grasmere, Ambleside, Windermere and Kendal. It is identified in the CTIP as Transport Corridor 4.

- [Lake District Local Plan 2020 – 2035](#) the planning process is crucial in helping to achieve more sustainable travel patterns that will help achieve a modal shift away from the car and towards both public transport (bus, rail, coach and boat) and active travel such as cycling and walking, in order to reduce carbon and improve the environment for both visitors and residents.
- [Destination Management Plan \(DMP\) 2024-2029](#) developed by Cumbria Tourism with support from key stakeholders, the DMP includes a range of collective objectives and priorities – alongside a comprehensive action plan – to manage Cumbria’s visitor economy and support the county’s future growth as a great place to live, work, visit and study.
- [Smarter Travel: A vision for smarter visitor travel in the Lake District National Park 2018 – 2040](#) developed by the Lake District National Park Authority and endorsed by the wider Lake District National Park Partnership.
- [Zero Carbon Cumbria Partnership \(ZCCP\) Emissions Reduction Action Plan \(transport and mobility\)](#) Recognising that transport is one of the largest sources of carbon emissions in Cumbria a Transport and Mobility Emissions Reduction Action Plan has been developed, which includes the ambition to Reduce the demand for car journeys by 15% by 2030 and 25% by 3037 (measured in kilometres travelled).
- [Active Travel Network Plan \(LDNPA, 2025\)](#) Working with Active Travel England (ATE) and the two unitary authorities, it sets out the network of priority route improvements and creation to create a step change in how residents and visitors walk, wheel or cycle around and into the Lake District.
- [National Road Traffic Projections 2022](#), DfT, 2022, models and forecasts traffic growth nationally under a number of different scenarios.