



Thanks to guidance from John Grimshaw, one of Sustrans' founders and a civil engineer, other campaigners delivered similar paths connecting York and Selby, Derby and Melbourne, the Liverpool Loop and the Consett and Sunderland path. Come the mid-1990s, Sustrans, with just 25 staff, won £42.5m from the National Lottery, seed funding the charity's idea for a national network.

Local councils, charities, landowners and supporters were persuaded to chip in four times that sum, turning lines on a map into navigable routes. While some of it was signposts plonked beside 3,464 miles of road – along with 150 miles of pavement or footpath, some verges, forest tracks and footbridges with steps – this diminutive task force managed to deliver 272 miles of new routes on old railway lines, canal towpaths and the like. By

the millennium there was a 10,000-mile network of sorts.

What Sustrans, its volunteers and their countless supporters in councils and organisations nationwide achieved cannot be underestimated. Through considerable negotiating and marketing skills, and a good measure of sheer belief, hard work and determination, they delivered one of the first national cycle networks in Europe.

In France, Denmark and Germany similar campaigns for cycle routes were growing. However, while their national governments backed the idea and funded an ongoing programme of path development, with local governments contributing their own funds, in the UK the momentum petered out once the money was spent. The volunteer-and-charitable model was never sustainable. ►

### If you build it

Human habits aren't fixed and, given the choice, people can and will change how they move about. In London, hundreds of kilometres of cycle routes have been built in recent years and, no surprise, people do use them. Cycleway 3 alone, running past Parliament, now carries 2.7m users a year. That first volunteer-built path, between Bristol and Bath, carries 2.4m trips annually. In Manchester, Oxford Road sees a million a year.

It's not just urban paths that matter either: the Camel Trail in Cornwall carries 476,000 users a year. One of my favourites, a diminutive 300-yard tarmac path in Shepton Mallett in Somerset, links the town centre with housing, avoiding a horribly busy road by ducking beneath it, traffic free, on an old railway line. I attended the path's grand opening in early 2023. In its first 12 months, it carried 106,000 trips – from a town of just 10,000 people.