

LLTAF Update: September 2025

STRATEGIC UPDATES

Planned Capital Works

With the capital budget fully committed, the team has been finalising agreements with landowners and drafting and publishing invitations to tender over the last couple of months with a view to progressing key projects over the autumn and winter when the routes are less busy (further details in the below updates). We are also in the process of finalising the legal agreement with FLS (Forestry & Land Scotland) to allow the NPA to act as their agents in the project to upgrade the West Highland Way 'Low Path' north of Rowardennan (further information below).

Team News

The funding associated with the above project will allow us to extend Mick Foran's secondment until around the end of March 2025. Simultaneously, Guy Keating is expected to return to the team in early September. His secondment with Scottish Government effectively ended slightly early due to his receiving a date for long-awaited knee surgery. Guy has been recuperating since the operation in early July, but hopes to be back with us shortly.

Sustainable Travel

Forum members may be aware that the NPA was successful in securing the funding for a second season of the Trossachs Explorer shuttle bus. We have a new operator this year – McColls, who are based in Alexandria – and this has enabled the route to be extended to run between Drymen and Aberfoyle, with a morning and evening direct connection to Balloch. Anyone who has used the service will have noticed that the buses are smaller, but more modern, featuring Euro 6 engines, making them more efficient and less cumbersome on the narrow and twisty sections of the route.

The National Park Mobility Partnership is continuing to build momentum with Emily Davie's support and organisation. An East Loch Lomond Parking Study, partly funded by shuttle bus ticket sales, has been completed and will inform further work in this key corridor. A Mobility Partnership 'Route Map' will be the key strategic output this year. Calum Langdale has attended the first meeting of the Stakeholder Insights Group on behalf of the Forum and will be able to report back.

National Access Forum involvement

Sue continues to represent LLTNPA on the National Access Forum (NAF), sharing the role with a rep from the Cairngorms NPA. This link benefits the team and the wider Authority by ensuring we are engaged with, and able to influence, access-related discussions and initiatives at a national level. Sue is currently involved with the NAF's Resources for Access Sub-Group, and she also chairs the NAF's working group on Public Access and Private Level Crossings. This is a high-profile group comprising representatives from Ramblers Scotland, Scotways, The Highland Council, Scottish Government and Network Rail Scotland's senior lawyer. Discussions in the group have been productive but legally complex, however a recommendation is currently being finalised to present to the NAF at its meeting in September.

LAF Site Visit – New Conic Hill Path

An evening site visit for LAF members to view and discuss the Conic Hill path upgrade project took place on Thursday 12 June. It ended up being a small group with a number of members not being able to attend, but was still worthwhile for those who made it. Two NPA Board members were part of the group, which was welcome. It was a very windy evening up high and we got off the hill just in time before heavy rain came in from the west.



Members of LAF on Conic Hill summit

AREA REPORTS

West Loch Lomond, Breadalbane and Cowal

Upholding Access Rights:

Gouk Hill / Three Lochs Way

The Forum will recall that a short section of core path from Darleith Moor to Ben Bowie/Bannachra, which forms part of the Three Lochs Way and John Muir Way, was completely blocked by windblown trees for over a year, with a very long diversion in place created by HADAT (Helensburgh & District Access Trust). The path was re-opened around April by persons unknown, however soon after, Scottish Woodlands informed us that they were intending to commence harvesting in the area.

Harvesting has been underway since June which has required the Three Lochs Way/John Muir Way to be diverted for the duration of the work. Signage is in place to direct people onto the previous diversion route. Harvesting is expected to be completed in September or October. Scottish Woodlands have indicated they will reinstate the path once harvesting is complete.

Glen Fruin, Luss Estates

We received a complaint from a member of the public in May 2025 regarding locked vehicle gates in deer fencing on the A817 Glen Fruin Haul Road (West Loch Lomond). These obstruct access rights to the open hillside. These gates have been discussed with the CEO of Luss Estates and he has indicated that the gates are required to be locked for stock management purposes. Verbal agreement has been made by Luss Estates to install pedestrian gates, however, no timeframe has been given.



Padlocked gate in deer fencing, Glen Fruin, Luss Estates

Uncontrolled dogs, Conic Hill



A working group, linked to the NPARC (National Park Action on Rural Crime) Group has been set up to try to develop solutions to the issue of uncontrolled dogs at this location. The group has met twice with good attendance from the farmer, Police Scotland, Animal Health and NPA staff.

An early action has been to erect signs developed by Police Scotland (left) which highlight the kind of behaviours that might lead to a significant fine or even imprisonment. Whilst similar wording has been used on NPA signs before, it is hoped the police logo might add weight to the message.

Other types of messaging and engagement are being considered, alongside the development of a year-long observational survey to be carried out by NPA staff and volunteers. The aim is to gather more robust data about the numbers, behaviour and effects on livestock and potentially wildlife of uncontrolled dogs.

East Loch Lomond and the Trossachs

Upholding Access Rights:

Borland Hill path, Gartmore

We informed the landowner that we going to enter his land on 26th August to install gates on the Borland Hill core path that would allow public access. Prior to that we installed a gate at the Corrie Farm end of the core path on 20th and 21st August.

On 20th August we also walked the rest of the path to assess the current state of the locked gates. On our return we found that the landowner had tied up gates at three other previously open gateways. All of these gates were broken and tied to gateposts with twine. They were both unopenable and inoperable so constitute a further three obstructions on the core path.

On 22nd August the landowner contacted us saying that due to a family bereavement he has not had time to contact us since receiving the previous letter notifying him of the date of the works. He repeated that he did not want a core path across his land, requested a further meeting and asked for the proposed work to be postponed until that meeting took place. On legal advice, we agreed to this and replied on 25th August:

“we have been attempting to resolve this matter with you for several years, and we have given you a number of opportunities to specify what kind of gate arrangements you would prefer. Therefore, please email some dates when you are free over the next week to a fortnight so that the meeting can be arranged promptly.”

“We would stress that the purpose of the meeting is to agree the details of the work to remove the obstructions on the core path. As we’ve previously explained, the core path already exists having been approved by Ministers through the core paths planning process. Even if this were not the case, general rights of access apply to your land and should not be obstructed.”

“If we do not hear from you with dates for a meeting, or if the meeting does not take place within the next two weeks, we will proceed with the works as previously notified as soon as possible.”



New gate, Corrie Farm end of the Borland Hill core path

Ardchullarie

The gate here was still locked on a site visit of 18th August 2025. We contacted the landowner's agent on 25th August and he said it had been unlocked (we have never seen this), but it was locked again following the death of a cow which had apparently ingested some plastic. We have agreed to meet on site in mid-September to discuss next steps.

Managing recreational use:

Gravelfoyle

All of the shared use signs are now out on site although it was thought that signs at two locations could be better sited. Bike Trossachs and FLS would review these. The LAF's written comments were discussed at the last Gravelfoyle Management Group meeting on 18th August. Bike Trossachs has agreed to further review and amend the Gravelfoyle website on the back of these comments. We are also intending to hold an all-user familiarisation day before the start of the next visitor season, ideally before Easter 2026. *(Andrew Clarke to provide further comment at the LLTAF meeting.)*

Access Infrastructure Projects:

NCN7 Barrier Reduction Project

The construction tender for this project was issued on 29th August with a targeted approach to seven Scotland-based contractors with relevant experience. The designers Raeburn, Farquhar & Bowen will oversee and manage the construction contract this year. They have costed it at £99,000 and it is hoped work will start in January 2026 when recreational use of the NCN7 will be at its lowest. Works fully funded by Sustrans.

West Highland Way Improvements: Burn of Mar to Conic Hill East

We issued the tender for a design and build upland path contract on 22nd August. This is an open tender process although we have specified any winning bidder must have the relevant upland path-building experience. The path will be an aggregate path as before and will bring the path back to its 2012 width and appearance. The existing ditches will all be cleared and new drainage features installed where deemed necessary.

Rowardennan to Rowchoish (Low Path)

FLS have provided the NPA with a £150k contribution to fund the planning and delivery of some path improvements on this section of the West Highland Way 'Low Path' during 2025-26. This includes funds to cover NPA staff time. Path improvement priorities have been identified, and we are currently preparing a planning application. As the path work is within the Loch Lomond Woods Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and requires widening in sections from 0.5m to 1.2m, this will require a planning application and Habitat Regulation Appraisal (HRA)/Appropriate Assessment. National Vegetation Classification (NVC) and Protected Species Surveys by independent ecologists will be needed and these will be procured imminently.

Loch Earn Railway Path

Due to major changes to the way Sustrans are funded by Transport Scotland, funding for this ambitious, multi-year project has not been made available to date in this current financial year. This being the case, the NPA has agreed to contribute £200k of capital funding to ensure momentum is maintained by enabling work on a section of the route to continue. As part of facilitating the work (which is carried out by a contractor on behalf of St Fillans Community Development Trust), Dave has been in negotiation with two of the landholders to resolve an issue about ongoing tree management adjacent to the route. There is still a possibility that Transport Scotland will release funding to Sustrans for National Cycle Network development this year, which may mean that more work can be delivered.

Aber Bridge

The footbridge here has been closed for around 5 years due to rotten wooden structural beams. The bridge is located at the convergence of four landholdings and replacement has been stalled by a lack of landholder consent. Friends of Loch Lomond and Trossachs (FOLLAT) have made an offer to project manage the replacement of the bridge, employing one of the landowners to undertake the bridge reconstruction. As the bridge is on a core path and creates a blockage in the path network, the repair is considered a priority. The NPA has therefore agreed to make a contribution to FOLLAT of £11k to enable the project to go ahead. FOLLAT will be contributing £8k themselves. We are currently drawing up a legal agreement to ensure the landowner who is building the bridge will retain liability in perpetuity.



Currently closed Aber Path footbridge, showing with rotten beams

Recreation & Access Team, September 2025