

SUSTAINABLE TRAVEL TOWNS SHOW TRAFFIC REDUCTION POTENTIAL



Peterborough City Council

A strip of the images being used to promote the TRAVELCHOICE work in Peterborough



BACK IN APRIL 2004

Darlington, Peterborough, and Worcester were announced as winners of the Department for Transport's 'Sustainable Travel Towns' competition.

Jointly, they were allocated £10 million over five years to become showcases of what can be achieved by implementing a range of 'softer' transport policies. In March, the towns reported on their first year of work, at Landor's 'Making Smarter Choices Work' conference, held in Darlington. This marked the beginning of a sequence of annual conferences to report progress.

The Sustainable Travel Towns initiative follows on from recent Department for Transport commissioned research on *Smarter Choices*.¹ As reported in the November issue of *Town & Country Planning*,² this study examined the likely impacts of implementing a range of 'soft' measures such as workplace and school travel plans, information and marketing campaigns, car clubs and car-sharing schemes, and increased use of tele-options such as tele-working. It concluded that such measures have the potential to cut urban traffic by 14 per cent overall, and up to 21 per cent in the peak period. Part of the rationale for the Sustainable Travel Towns project is to establish whether these results can be achieved in practice.

Speaking at the conference, Patricia Hayes, Head of Sustainable Travel at the Department for Transport, said that interest

in the initiative had significantly exceeded expectations. Over 50 places competed to be chosen as the demonstration towns. In return for the funding for 'smarter choice' measures, participating local authorities were required to promise a contribution to the costs of the project, to implement an overarching strategy for their town, and to put in place high-quality infrastructure to enable 'quick, safe and pleasant travel by all modes.'

In Darlington, Peterborough, and Worcester, the initial phase of work has included an extensive benchmarking study, assessing both existing travel patterns and the potential for change. Overall, 12,855 people were surveyed. Reporting the results, Werner Brög of Socialdata highlighted that, in some ways, the towns are very similar. In all three, 41-45 per cent of trips are made as a car driver, and about two-thirds are made by car overall. Similarly, in all three, 22-25 per cent of trips are made on foot. All the towns are relatively self-contained, with residents making more than three-quarters of all journeys within their town. Notably, in all three, at least 85 per cent of residents would favour a local transport strategy that gave preferential treatment to walking, cycling, and public transport, even if this were to 'disadvantage' private cars.

All three towns are also similar in that a significant proportion of car journeys are very short. However, the proportions vary. For example, the percentage of car trips under 3 kilometres within each town is 43 per cent in Darlington, 38 per cent in Worcester, and

27 per cent in Peterborough. Perhaps partly because of this, the survey work also revealed significant differences in the potential for change.

In a smaller in-depth survey, 1,209 respondents were asked why they made specific journeys by car. For each trip, researchers analysed whether realistic alternatives were available (by walking, cycling, or public transport), taking account of factors such as acceptable walking distances, comparable bus times, and luggage or disability constraints. In Darlington, at least one viable alternative was found for 56 per cent of car trips within the town, compared with 46 per cent in Worcester and 39 per cent in Peterborough.

Taken together, these results imply that there should be substantial potential to achieve behavioural change in all three locations using 'soft' measures, although the degree of change achieved could be significantly different.

Achieving change will also depend on the strategies that the towns adopt. Already, it is clear that their approaches share similarities, but also important differences. All three now have staff dedicated to introducing workplace and school travel plans. However, in Darlington, these are relatively recent appointees, while Worcester has a relatively established travel planning programme, having already worked with about half its schools.

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Personalising transport choices

All three sustainable travel towns will be undertaking extensive 'Personalised Travel Planning'. Their initiatives will constitute some of the most extensive work of this kind in the UK.

'Personalised Travel Planning' (also known, for example, as 'Individualised Marketing', 'TravelSmart', 'Travel Blending', or 'Living Change'), involves giving people information, advice, and other incentives to use more sustainable travel options which are specific to their circumstances. For example, residents might be offered a timetable about buses visiting their nearest bus stop; free 'taster' tickets enabling them to try out the services; maps of local walking, cycling, or shopping opportunities; individual advice on how they could optimise their travel; etc. Many proponents also argue that a key aspect of successful work is enabling participants to request what they want to receive (rather than distributing materials to all).

Work of this nature has been taking place for a number of years, with high-profile success in Australia. In the UK, the charity Sustrans generated renewed interest in the topic by undertaking small-scale projects in Gloucester and Frome in 2001. These led on to Transport for London's 'Travel Options' work (involving 4,000 households), the Scottish Executive's 'Stepchange' initiative (involving 4,000 households), and a Department for Transport programme of 14 pilot projects throughout the UK (including larger projects focused on 10,000 residents in Gloucester and 18,000 employees in Oldham). Initial results seem promising. From the five pilot projects that it was involved in, Sustrans has reported consistent reductions in car driver trips of 10-12 per cent, and a full evaluation of the programme is expected from the Department for Transport soon.

Meanwhile, the sustainable travel towns are planning work on a significantly larger scale. Darlington is planning to engage all 98,000 of its residents, Peterborough is aiming to target about 70,000 people, and Worcester is focusing on higher-car-ownership areas representing about 60 per cent of the city (56,000 people). ■

the 'Personalising transport choices' panel above).

All three are also undertaking considerable marketing activity, albeit with differing emphases. Darlington has initially developed some relatively general advertising, as part of trying to generate a 'mood for change' (see the 'A town on the move' panel, below right). In comparison, Peterborough has developed a specific brand for each mode, displaying consistent colours and images in a range of locations, including cinema adverts, on-street posters, letterheads and business cards for the council's Environment Services, and the city's buses.

It is notable that none of the towns is using TravelWise branding, but have, instead, developed town-specific logos, images, and slogans: 'Darlington: a town on the move'; 'Your TRAVELCHOICE in Peterborough. Your city, your move!'; and 'Worcester: on the move in town' (although Worcester will also be supporting its corporate work with the TravelWise branding). This raises questions as to whether localised transport marketing is now considered to be more powerful than a generic national approach.

Other 'smarter choice' initiatives are also under consideration. For example, both Darlington and Peterborough are involved in car-sharing schemes, and all three towns are considering introducing car clubs. All three have also involved a wide range of stakeholders, including the commercial and health sectors, as part of taking the work forward.

At the same time, all three towns have parallel programmes of 'harder' measures, aimed at reinforcing the softer work which takes place. For example, speaking at the 'Making Smarter Choices Work' conference,

Emilie van de Graaff, Passenger Transport Development Manager at Worcestershire County Council, explained that Worcester's sustainable travel work is seen as being closely linked with a strategy to develop park-

Darlington – a town on the move

Darlington, the town identified in the recent survey work as having the greatest potential for change, began its work by extending half-price fares for under-16s to all bus services across the borough. Positive marketing has also been put in place, including catchy radio adverts featuring music from a local band. *Get ready to change the habits of a lifetime* proclaims one voice-over, while others advise people to try walking, cycling, or taking the bus.

Travel plan officers have been appointed to start working with local schools and businesses. A small grants scheme has been established for employers, and free cycle training is offered to all schools. The consultancy SDG has been contracted to start the first of three phases of personalised travel planning, which will involve all residents (see 'Personalising transport choices' box above). Living Streets (formerly the Pedestrians Associations) has been involved in community street audits in four areas, aimed at producing recommendations about benches, litter bins, lighting, surfacing, crossing points, signing, and maps. A series of cycle guides are being developed.

As part of leading by example, the council has proposed subcontracting its mail delivery system to Green-link, a cycle courier firm, and within the region's car-sharing website (<http://www.2plustravel.com>) a car-sharing facility specifically for the council's employees has been set up and promoted.

A number of awareness-raising events are planned for the summer, including participation in national campaigns, a two-day 'Darlington walking festival', and a series of organised bike rides.

Meanwhile, the sustainable travel town work coincides with a major pedestrianisation scheme being implemented in the town centre, which should provide substantial reinforcement for the softer initiatives taking place. Measures will include the exclusion of traffic from key central streets, major streetscape improvements incorporating public art work, better routes for pedestrians and cyclists, new bus shelters, and greater bus priority. ■

and-ride around the town, since it wishes to create a situation in which no-one can say that they need to drive into the town. She also outlined plans for harmonising bus fares and parking charges, to ensure that public transport would always be the cheaper option.

Meanwhile, the three towns are introducing their policies in very different contexts.

Worcester is a non-unitary authority, and the relationship between the City Council and Worcestershire County Council has needed clarification (as the money has been allocated to the county, but is being spent on the city).

Peterborough is scheduled for considerable growth, since it falls within the London-Stansted-Cambridge growth area, such that sustainable travel considerations will need inclusion in the development of substantial areas of new housing.

In contrast, Darlington falls within a relatively deprived region, and ensuring that traffic restraint is not sacrificed in order to attract business will be a challenge. Richard Alty, Assistant Director for Development and Regeneration at Darlington Borough Council, reported that the integration of planning,

economic, and transport functions within Darlington should help to ensure consistency of approach.

For all three towns, emphasis was also placed on the importance of a positive working relationship with the local media, and the need for economic monitoring, to enable the impacts of any traffic changes to be interpreted appropriately.

As well as focusing on the experience of Darlington, Peterborough, and Worcester, the conference also explored the opportunities for other towns to undertake their own programmes of softer measures. Funding was seen as a critical issue – in particular, the need for revenue funding and the problems of obtaining this through the local transport plan (LTP) process, which has traditionally provided capital funding only.

Lynn Sloman, one of the authors of the *Smarter Choices* report, reported on new analysis suggesting that an intensive 'smarter choices package' for a typical town could be expected to cost an average of £5 per resident per year in revenue funding. She argued that latest LTP guidance encourages local authorities to bid for money for 'smarter choice' measures, highlighting para. 70 in part 4, which states that *'the Department*

would encourage authorities to consider how they might follow the lead of others in exploring how 'revenue-type' transport activity, aimed at maximising the benefits of particular infrastructure projects, could be funded from capital allocations'.

Speaking subsequently, Geoff Gardner, Travel Awareness Officer at North Yorkshire County Council, noted that 1 per cent of capital expenditure in the council's integrated transport programme is already allocated for travel awareness activities, on the basis that awareness-raising is needed to maximise the benefits of capital projects. Don Nutt, of Steer Davies Gleave, argued that requesting LTP funding for 'smarter choice' measures could be justified, as they should make a central contribution to achieving progress on the four shared-priority areas that authorities are directed to put at the heart of their next LTP, namely delivering accessibility, tackling congestion, improving air quality, and making roads safer.

In summary, the recent survey work undertaken in Darlington, Peterborough, and Worcester suggests that there is considerable potential for towns to achieve travel behavioural change, and the initiatives being implemented offer an exciting opportunity to see if this change can be achieved in practice. At the same time, many other towns have the opportunity to emulate the 'sustainable travel towns' if softer measures are made a higher priority for funding. LTP allocations may be key to this.

Speaking at the conference, Patricia Hayes emphasised the importance of short-distance local journeys, highlighting, for example, that people make as many trips by bike as by train. Yet the recurrent complaint by many local authority officials is that Department for Transport funding is still heavily skewed towards long-distance, heavy-infrastructure solutions.

For 'smarter choice' measures to achieve their full potential, this needs to change. If the 'sustainable travel towns' achieve success, this may provide the catalyst for an entirely new focus to transport policy. ■

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Notes

1 S. Cairns, L. Sloman, C. Newson, J. Anable, A. Kirkbride, and P. Goodwin: *Smarter Choices – Changing the Way We Travel: Final Report (Vol. 1), with accompanying volume of case studies. Department for Transport, London, 2004*

2 S. Cairns: 'Smarter choices – why soft options may be the best alternative'. *Town & Country Planning* 2004, 73, Nov., pp.308-310



Delegates in Darlington try out a Company of Cyclists bike as part of an awareness-raising event in the town centre