

Moving Towards Smarter Travel?

LTP3 and Smarter Travel Choice assessment study

Summary

National and local Government is failing to roll out value for money measures proven to cut traffic and carbon emissions despite the advice of its own green adviser, the Committee on Climate Change.

This is an executive summary of a report produced for Sustrans and Friends of the Earth that provides an objective, quantitative assessment of the latest Local Transport Plans. It reveals how much Local Authorities in England have invested in Smarter Travel Choices to encourage sustainable travel.

The full report, prepared by Robin Hickman (Halcrow Group and Transport Studies Unit) and Tim Pharoah (Independent), can be found at www.sustrans.org.uk and www.foe.co.uk

Introduction

The transition towards sustainable travel is proving difficult, with a growing gap between actual carbon dioxide emissions from transport and the reductions necessary to meet carbon targets in the near and long-term. It is recognised that meeting these targets relies on enabling significant changes in people's travel behaviour. Achieving this will, in turn, require a high level of political commitment and funding.

Smarter Travel Choice (STC) programmes encourage people to plan their journeys better and seek to increase the number of journeys taken by foot, bike and public transport. These programmes were successfully trialled (between 2004-2009) by the Department for Transport in the Sustainable Travel Towns of Darlington, Peterborough and Worcester, with significant reductions in CO₂ emissions achieved by reductions in car distance of 5-7% and increases in walking, cycling and public transport, particularly bus, use.

The third round of Local Transport Plan (LTP3) submissions are the primary tool available to Local Authorities to implement the steps necessary to achieve more sustainable travel. Central Government funding is available to invest in increasing the uptake of STCs leading to increases in travel by public transport, walking and cycling. Analysis of LTP3 submissions will reveal whether Government ambitions to achieve a shift away from car use is actually being delivered at the local level through investment in proven and effective STC measures.

Nick Clegg at a Friends of the Earth public meeting in Sheffield on May 28th 2011

"We are way behind, particularly compared to other European Countries, in trying to provide incentives and infrastructure to encourage people out of their cars and onto sustainable public transport"

David Kennedy, Chief Executive of the Committee on Climate Change (CCC) to Friends of the Earth (Jan 2010)

"The Government should implement a phased national roll out of Smarter Travel Choices schemes across the UK"

Professor Julia King (CCC) at castle Debate on Sustainable Transport on May 24th 2011

"progress has been disappointing on the behaviour change front", "We're moving backwards." and "On behaviour change, it's not yet happening – it's a really challenging area for our politicians."

Funding for local transport in England is significant

From 2011/12 to 2014/15, the Department for Transport will provide four grant streams in support of local transport with overall funding being more than £6.3 billion. Of that funding, more than £4.85 billion is available for spending on STC and infrastructure via the Integrated Transport Block, Highways Maintenance Block and Local Sustainable Travel Fund (LSTF).

The report looks at:

Smarter Travel Choice

Measures aimed at intervention in travel choice at the personal level

Types of intervention

Travel Plans – workplace, educational, residential, station, etc.
 Personalised travel planning
 Car pooling/sharing
 Marketing/media campaigns
 Public transport/other information
 Tele/home working
 Home retail/delivery

The report looked at approximately a third of LTP3 submissions.

Region	Metropolitan	Joint	Unitary	County	TOTALS
North East	1	0	5	2	8
North West	2	0	4	2	8
Yorks-Humber	2	0	2	4	8
East Midlands	0	0	3	6	9
West Midlands	1	1	1	5	8
East of England	0	1	3	6	10
South West	0	3	2	5	10
South East	0	0	11	8	19
TOTALS	6	5	31	38	80

Is the journey towards smarter travel moving forwards?



The reduction in funding for LTP3 (2011-15) relative to the previous funding period LTP2 (2008-11) is marked. Comparing LTP3 average allocation levels (where available) to LTP2 average allocation levels total LTP funding has reduced by an average of -28%. The levels of STC funding relative to the total LTP3 are extremely low, usually at the level of 1-10%, at around £1.50 per capita.

100% of the transport planning officers interviewed consider that funding for STC measures is inadequate, with 62.5% considering them very inadequate, suggesting that the vast majority of local authority transport planning officers share this view. There are a number of other reasons why the Government's commitment to sustainable travel is not being realised:

- **Non ring-fencing of funds** enables Local Authorities to spend funding on their chosen areas rather than national strategic areas. For example in 2010-11 Kent transferred about a third (£5.35 million) of their Integrated Transport block allocation (which is where funding for STC would normally come from) to its Highway Maintenance budget to fund road improvements and repairs; Buckinghamshire and other authorities have followed a similar approach.
- **Investment in road-building** can be high. For example Kent has identified investment in major highway schemes worth at least £210 million, the equivalent of 40 years of their current Integrated Block spending.
- **Reduction in funding from other Government sources for bus services** is resulting in funding from local transport funds being used to keep services in operation. For example Merseyside, where the expenditure on subsidised bus services (not including concessionary fares subsidy) is equivalent to 80% of the total LTP3 expenditure.
- **The LSTF will go only some way towards filling the funding gap left by cuts.** Whilst very welcome, this ring-fenced funding stream is not embedded within a wider strategic process for improving local transport and is not large enough on its own, or when added to what is on average being spent on STCs, to make the necessary difference. The spending required to match the level of spend on STCs in the Sustainable Travel Towns is estimated at £5.65 per head of population each year. The LSTF, if distributed according to population rather than the bidding process, would provide £2.08 per head of population per year which, with most LTPs having identified no or low levels of spending for STC, will not achieve this.

Findings

Despite the strong recommendations from the CCC, delivering sustainable transport is a low priority for Local Authorities, with spending on STC a mere fraction of that in successful Sustainable Travel Town pilots.

Significant reductions in CO2 emissions need to be made from transport if the national target of a reduction of at least 34 percent in greenhouse gas emissions by 2020 is to be achieved. STCs could be implemented now, require low investment in additional infrastructure, and deliver sustained and growing reductions in car use over time. The recommendation of the CCC for a phased roll-out of smarter choices to cities and towns across the UK based on evidence from the Sustainable Travel Town pilots is not being taken forward. Spending by Local Authorities across England on smarter choices is around a quarter of that of the Sustainable Travel Town pilots.

Despite Central Government's stated commitment to sustainable travel, delivery at a local level is patchy at best - 'hands off' localism isn't delivering sustainable transport.

The proposed expenditure on STCs is likely to be at very low levels in the next two to three years, usually at the level of 1-10% of total funding of the LTP3 process. While most LTP3 strategies acknowledge the importance and potential of STC measures, there are few significant committed programmes in place, and there is heavy reliance upon measures being financed through prospective LSTF bids and/or from other non-LTP funding sources.

Research, monitoring and evaluation are often absent for the spending of more than £4.5 billion of Government money.

Monitoring of the impacts of the policies and programmes contained in LTP's is fairly rudimentary, and none of those assessed included comprehensive mode split data that would allow overall trends in travel behaviour to be followed. This means, amongst other things, that measuring the impact of STC funding or other contributions to CO2 reduction targets can only be approximate. The lack of comprehensive travel data at the user level means that at best trends can only be reported by proxy.

Government bodies have a duty of care to ensure that public money is well used, yet at the technical level the monitoring of impacts is less than robust.

Transport emissions vary considerably across local areas and local authorities are falling short on delivering their share of the CO2 reductions we need from transport.

Significant reductions in CO2 emissions need to be made from transport if the transport sector is to contribute a 'fair share' of national targets. Local Authorities are able to contribute to reductions in emissions by delivering STCs with support and incentives from central Government. Despite the recommendation of the CCC for a phased roll-out of smarter choices to cities and towns across the UK, spending by Local Authorities across England on STCs appears to be less than a third of that invested in the Sustainable Travel Town pilots.

Key Recommendations

- Government at all levels must ensure that funding levels are at least those in the Sustainable Travel Towns pilots of £5.65 per head, in order to deliver the repeated recommendation of the Committee on Climate Change for a national roll out of Smarter Travel Choices.
- Local Authorities should produce climate change strategies for their local area to ensure that Government targets for cutting carbon emissions from transport are met and the commitment to sustainable transport realised.
- Central Government should provide incentives for local authorities to improve local transport by evaluating outcomes delivered from past Local Transport Plans. This would both inform cost-effective use of future funding and maximise accountability to local communities.