

Working with communities to change travel behaviour

Personal travel planning is helping persuade householders in Leicestershire to consider more sustainable modes of transport, say Jon Parker, Daniel Godfrey and Charlie Sampson.

Introduction

Personal travel planning (PTP) is a technique that offers advice, information and incentives to households to encourage them to change behaviour away from single occupancy car use towards walking, cycling, public transport and car sharing.

PTP forms part of a toolkit of measures generally described under the term 'smarter choices'. PTP is also an element of Leicestershire's wider behaviour change programme called 'Choose how you move', partly funded through the Department for Transport's (DfT) Local Sustainable Transport Fund (LSTF).

This article describes the work of URS, ITP and Leicestershire County Council (LCC), who have jointly delivered and evaluated a cost effective PTP programme across 26,500 households in Loughborough and Coalville.

This summer the 'Choose how you move' project in Leicestershire won the CIHT / Skanska Sustainability Award.

Approach to PTP in Leicestershire

'Choose how you move' seeks to reduce reliance on the car for local trips. It comprises both:

- sustainable transport infrastructure improvements (such as walking/cycle network enhancements and bus based initiatives); and
- behaviour change programmes (such as PTP and workplace travel planning)

The overall philosophy adopted by LCC has been to 'plan-design-build-promote' sustainable transport infrastructure as part of a coordinated package of work to support mode shift away from single occupancy car use. The aim is to secure best value for the sustainable transport infrastructure by properly promoting and publicising its availability to local communities.

In Coalville, for instance, a significant investment in walking and cycle



Adult cycle training has helped to encourage modal shift in Leicestershire

infrastructure is now being promoted across the town, with walking and cycle events and adult cycle training.

LCC and its delivery partner URS have successfully delivered PTP across the whole of Loughborough (20,000 households) and extensive parts of Coalville (6500 households, with a further 8000 households scheduled for 2014). ITP's role has been to independently evaluate the programme and offer ongoing 'critical friend' advice to maximise adaptive learning for each new phase of the programme

This experience of joint working and adaptive learning has enabled the delivery and client team to better understand both the mechanics of delivering a large scale PTP programme in a rural town setting, and the travel behaviour change outcomes (modal shift away from single occupancy car use) that further PTP programmes across Leicestershire would likely achieve.

Delivery approach

A team of local travel advisors was recruited to visit households within the targeted area and had a range of incentives and offers at its disposal to offer local people. Members of the team were trained by URS to identify the types of 'signals' (such as a change in

lifestyle routine) which could indicate that a householder was in a position to make a change towards a sustainable transport mode.

Examples of this are when people are about to move job and do not know how to get there, or if the only reason they do not cycle is a lack of confidence about cycling to work within traffic.

A key challenge has been to structure a training programme that allows the travel advisors to identify the householders' habitual travel behaviour as well as the opportunities for change in a relatively short timeframe.

The work in Leicestershire has benefited from feedback from each round of delivery (via 'Lessons learned' documents, and innovation workshops), and the experience of other PTP projects. This has allowed URS to export its model to other neighbouring authorities such as Leicester and Nottinghamshire county councils. Leicester City Council has also benefitted from cross training of common staff to deliver its projects, which has led to greater efficiencies in the delivery process.

Reported findings

ITP carried out an independent evaluation

of the project and corroborated data from various sources to determine the likely level of behaviour change among project participants (defined as households that actively engaged with the project and received information, advice and incentives).

The main focus of the evaluation is on a before and after travel survey (including a simple diary of trip behaviour). This was complemented by data derived from customer feedback, cycle counts, interviews with stakeholders and focus groups with both participants and non participants.

Corroboration of data sources and consistent trends in different data sets helped to add weight to the reported outcomes.

The details are:

- 26,500 households were targeted between 2011 and 2013, covering Loughborough and Coalville;
- approximately 25% of these 'targeted households' actively participated in the programme;
- car mode share for trips to work for 'project participants' reduced by between 4% and 22%; as a result there is an estimated annual saving of around 3.5M vehicle kilometres travelled; with carbon savings equating to approximately 475t per annum;
- the estimated health benefits associated with increases in cycling are a reduced mortality rate of 41%, equivalent to a life saved (preventable early death) every three years (using standard World Health Organisation HEAT assessment methodology); and
- costs per household are below those reported for comparable projects and efficiencies in the delivery process have seen the cost per targeted household reduce by over 30% since the start of the project.



Targeted materials help promote sustainable travel

An examination of the travel behaviour of individuals who completed both a before and after travel survey provides important knowledge to add to the PTP evidence base. This suggests that the overall reported levels of change are likely to have resulted not from large numbers of people making small behavioural changes (which is generally thought to be the case for PTP programmes), but from a smaller number of people making big changes to their weekly travel behaviour.

For example, the data suggests that across Loughborough and Coalville, those people that make a change to their behaviour tend to switch from 'driving every day to work', to 'cycling, walking or catching the bus to work every day'. Similar findings were also identified through URS's work with Nottinghamshire County Council in Worksop, Sutton-in-Ashfield and Mansfield Woodhouse.

Key issues and learnings

A number of interesting insights have been identified by the project team during the course of the project and are summarised as follows:

- PTP has proven itself to be an effective tool in promoting and encouraging sustainable transport in small / market town settings;
- Delivering a successful PTP programme requires a complex blend of skills covering project management, graphic and creative design, marketing and communications, negotiation and persuasion, comprehensive and methodical data collection and analysis and the ability to inspire;
- A light touch approach to evaluation is both cost efficient and effective, providing insights into the behavioural response and offering valuable adaptive learning for future programmes;
- The quality of the sustainable transport 'offer' (i.e are the local walk, cycle and public transport networks fit for purpose?) is an important consideration when deciding on areas to target for PTP interventions. It is particularly helpful if there have been recent infrastructure improvements or public transport service enhancements;
- Information materials and incentives have to be of a high quality in order to capture the attention and imagination of householders;
- Comprehensive training of travel advisors is essential to teach them



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Charlie Sampson

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walking, cycling and using public transport as part of their daily journeys.

both the mechanics of the PTP delivery process and how best to 'sell' and promote sustainable transport options.

What next?

PTP is becoming increasingly accepted by mainstream transport planners as a viable and effective tool in improving the efficiency of the transport network. The work undertaken across Leicestershire provides compelling evidence that it can contribute to local authority objectives in a wide variety of settings, including rural towns.

As a direct consequence of the LSTF funding across the UK the evidence base relating to PTP is now substantially better developed. The challenge will be to ensure this experience is captured in future delivery programmes so that 'smarter choices' form an integral part of sustainable infrastructure delivery beyond the lifetime of the current LSTF funding window.

Acknowledgement

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