

OVERCOMING UNEMPLOYMENT WITH SMARTER TRAVEL CHOICES

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1. Introduction and background

In 2017, Nottinghamshire County Council were awarded £845,000 from the Department for Transport's Sustainable Travel Access Fund to introduce a comprehensive programme of sustainable travel interventions in two market towns in Nottinghamshire. 'Travel Choice' was established as a sustainable travel service offering incentives as well as tailored travel advice to jobseekers, school leavers, businesses and residents within Mansfield and Newark, with the primary purpose of changing travel behaviours to encourage sustainable travel use and instilling sustainable travel behaviours at critical times, such as before travel habits to new destinations (e.g. new workplaces or education establishments) have been formed.

This paper focuses specifically on one of the four successfully delivered packages – jobseeker support – which aimed to remove transport barriers to employment and training for jobseekers by raising awareness of transport options, offering incentive-based support, and encouraging jobseekers to consider more sustainable alternatives to car use.

In Jobcentres across the UK, work coaches help prepare an estimated 251,000 jobseekers (*Statistica, 2019*) for employment and further training by taking an active role in their search for work, providing reassurance and support, and signposting them towards suitable live vacancies and 'upskilling' opportunities. However, with the average Universal Credit appointment lasting just 10 minutes, it's often challenging for work coaches to fully explore the often complex and sometimes numerous barriers preventing individuals from finding and maintaining employment.

Transport is widely acknowledged as a significant barrier to economic and educational opportunities for many, particularly in rural and low-income areas ([Smith et al, 2007](#)). Since its launch in 2018, Travel Choice has been working with the Jobcentre Plus in Mansfield and Newark to establish an efficient referral and drop-in service for jobseekers experiencing problems arranging transport to work or training, as well as those who want to find out more about their travel options. This support service intends to complement the extensive support already delivered by work coaches.

Historically, other sustainable transport projects have underexplored this link between transport and unemployment and thus many jobseekers have not had access to a support service specifically designed to help them overcome transport barriers. Nottinghamshire County Council have previously delivered travel behaviour change interventions for jobseekers through LSTF programmes and have built on their experience with Access Fund project Travel Choice, which has been innovative in exploring the demand for additional

support and proactive in creating a scalable approach that best serves the requirements of those accessing the service.

This paper goes on to discuss the delivery approach adopted by Travel Choice, before reflecting on qualitative and quantitative evidence to evaluate the impacts of the project. The paper concludes by identifying key lessons learned, and best practice principles that can be applied to similar projects moving forward.

2. Engagement Strategy

2.1 Understanding jobseekers needs

To develop an engagement methodology tailored to the specific needs of jobseekers, a focus group was arranged with jobseekers in Newark, whilst in Mansfield a meeting was held with several work coaches with the aim of identifying the key challenges faced by jobseekers and to understand how best to support them. Owing to a change in building location it was not possible to host a focus group with jobseekers in Mansfield. Participants were invited to discuss their knowledge of the local transport network, highlight any key transport barriers to long-term employment, and discuss different ways in which Travel Choice could provide support.

The focus groups yielded the following key findings, which were consistent across both locations:

- It would be challenging to set structured appointment times with individual jobseekers – a more flexible ‘drop in’ service was favoured;
- A key barrier for jobseekers was access to (and availability of) public transport services within more rural settings;
- The affordability of public transport services and the cost of purchasing a bicycle were identified as key barriers to accessing employment and training by these modes; and
- There were issues of bicycle theft within the local area which influenced jobseeker’s decision to travel by bicycle.

The feedback collected during these sessions helped shaped the strategy for engagement and delivery, which continued to adapt and evolve throughout the project.

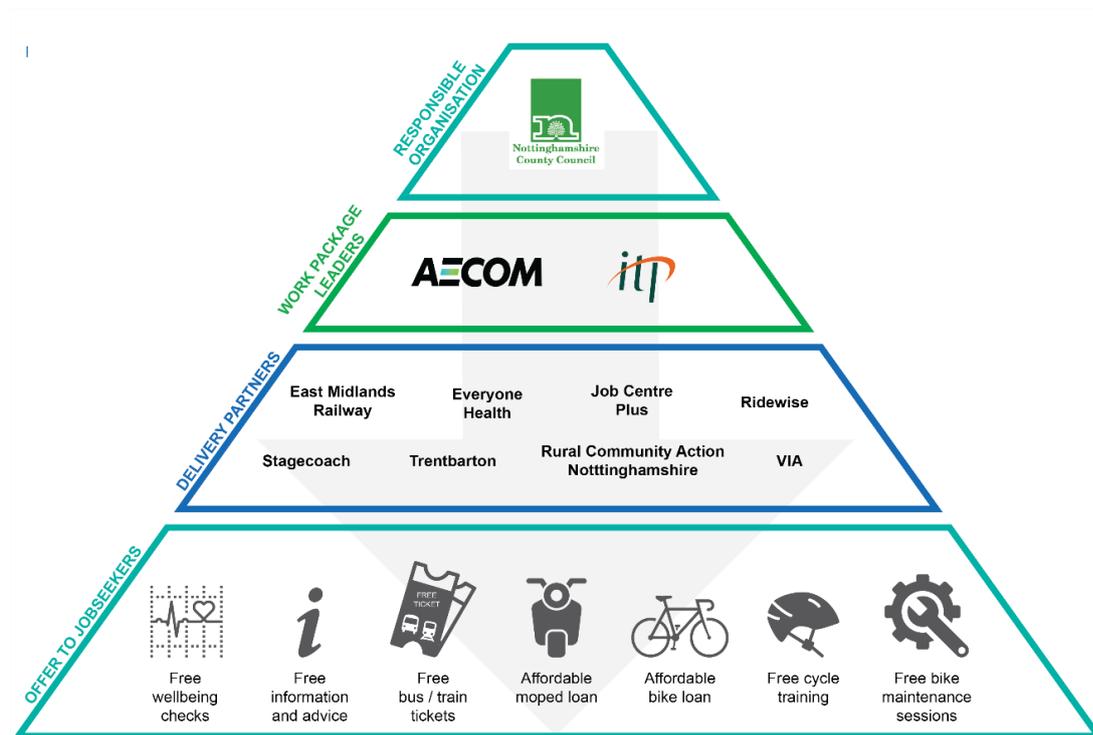
2.2 Delivery method

The approach relied upon strong collaboration between several stakeholders, drawing upon a diverse team of behavioural change experts, jobcentre work coaches, public transport operators, cycling support services, moped loan providers and public health services to identify and collate a number of incentives that could be offered to jobseekers as part of an

enhanced package of support for enabling access to employment and encouraging a behaviour change towards sustainable transport.

Figure 1 summarises the key stakeholder involved in the project, as well as the final package of support developed to assist jobseekers based upon the conversations with stakeholders and the focus group sessions.

Figure 1: Summary of stakeholders and services offered to jobseekers



The finalised package of support is detailed in sections 2.2.1 to 2.2.5

2.2.1 Information and advice

Jobseekers who attended the initial focus groups highlighted the importance of flexibility in accessing the service. To accommodate this, Travel Choice delivered monthly drop-in Travel Clinics at Mansfield and Newark Jobcentres. The Travel Clinics were organised and led by the delivery team who wore a branded uniform (see Figure 2) to grow a strong, recognisable and memorable brand image. At each event, travel advisors provided personalised travel planning advice, information packs and incentives to help jobseekers get to training, interviews and employment opportunities. Branded Travel Choice incentives (such as water bottles, bags, bus pass holders etc.) were used to incentivise jobseekers to speak with the Travel Choice team, and further solidify the brand. Travel Choice teams also attended events organised by third parties such as wellbeing clinics (De-Frazzle Café, Mansfield) and jobs fairs (Jobcentre Plus, Newark) to provide information and advice to a wider pool of jobseekers, including hard to reach groups.

Within both Mansfield and Newark, all sessions were initially planned to take place once a month on the same day of the week (i.e. Wednesday). This was thought to be the best strategy for making drop-in session dates memorable and increasing attendance. However, soon after delivery started it became apparent that the Travel Choice team needed to vary the day of the Travel Clinic to reach a wider audience. Scheduled appointments are generally booked for the same time each week, limiting the potential for Travel Choice to engage with new jobseekers.

Figure 2: Travel Choice Travel Clinic



Furthermore, to maximise the dissemination of information and advice, a jobseeker portal was established on the Travel Choice website (<https://www.nottinghamshire.gov.uk/travelchoice>) for users to access bespoke digital resources and information and contact Travel Choice officers by email, telephone or written postal correspondence. Social media was also used to promote the services, as well as to advertise upcoming Travel Choice events.

Figure 3: Social media extract



During the final delivery year in the Mansfield and Newark area (2019 / 2020) the Travel Choice team enhanced existing collaborative working arrangements with the Jobcentre Plus by providing work coaches with the necessary information to be the first point of call for travel advice and signposting jobseekers towards further assistance. Work coaches attended group briefing sessions with the Travel Choice team to develop familiarity with the project and materials and ensure a consistent high standard of delivery. Sharing the project delivery with the work coaches meant that there was greater potential to engage with jobseekers, maximising the number of beneficiaries.

2.2.2 Free bus / train tickets

A key barrier to employment and further training identified within the focus group is the cost of public transport, particularly for those in rural areas who may need to use multiple services via different operators to get to their respective destination.

Negotiations were held with public transport operators to secure discounts for the bulk purchase of a range of daily and weekly bus tickets and the purchase of train tickets. These were intended to help jobseekers bridge the gap between starting employment and receiving their first pay packet, and to enable jobseekers to attend interviews and taster or training days. Whilst jobseekers are able to claim the cost of interview travel back through their work coaches under the Universal Credit scheme, this operates on a reclamation basis (i.e. jobseekers must pay upfront for their travel before the cost is refunded to them by the Department for Work and Pensions (often up to a week later)). This may be a barrier for those without the funds to purchase a ticket in the first place. Given this, the pre-paid nature of the Travel Choice free bus / train tickets is particularly novel when compared to alternative support available at the time of delivery. Travel Choice provided a number of

public transport taster tickets for the Jobcentre to keep on site to fast-track the distribution process, subject to an applicant meeting the necessary criteria.

2.2.3 Free wellbeing checks

Free wellbeing checks were offered to jobseekers to help them to better understand their physical and mental health and make changes, when recommended. Wellbeing checks involved a basic health 'MOT', including a check of blood pressure, BMI etc. as well as a discussion with a trained medical professional as to measures that can be incorporated into their daily routine, such as walking and cycling more. Professionals were also able to signpost jobseekers to weight management and stop smoking support services where appropriate. These sessions were trialled in Newark, but low attendance made them unsustainable and the project team instead focussed their efforts on providing services that were more likely to directly influence travel to work. Wellbeing checks remained available on request throughout the project.

2.2.4 Affordable moped and bicycle loans

Funding was secured to obtain several mopeds, which were provided by Rural Community Action Nottinghamshire ([RCAN](#)), and bicycles which could be loaned out to jobseekers for whom public transport was not an option. Feedback obtained within the focus group sessions identified that those working night shifts and/or those working in remote areas faced particularly strong barriers in terms of accessing employment owing to limited / non-existent public transport provision. To address this, mopeds and bicycles were offered for loan on a 6-month (mopeds) and 3-month (bicycles) basis at an affordable (means-tested) price level. Eligibility criteria for each incentive was carefully planned to ensure that priority was given to those who were in most urgent need and most likely to benefit.

All recipients received full training and safety gear. Those receiving a moped loan undertook a Compulsory Basic Training (CBT) course and received a helmet, bike lock and safety gear. Those receiving a bicycle underwent a basic assessment of cycling proficiency and received a helmet and bicycle D-lock (in response to feedback regarding localised bicycle theft).

Figure 4 shows recipients of a Travel Choice moped and bicycle loan, respectively.

Figure 4: jobseekers receiving Travel Choice moped and bicycle loans



2.2.5 Free cycle training and bicycle maintenance

Cycle training was provided by Via East Midlands and Ridewise to all those accessing a bike loan and was also offered to any jobseeker wishing to improve their cycle skills in order to cycle to work and/or training opportunities.

‘Dr.Bike’ cycle maintenance sessions were also offered and were typically run in conjunction with Travel Clinic events at Jobcentres and third party events. Jobseekers could drop off their bicycle for basic maintenance (e.g. gear tuning, puncture repair, changing brake cables etc.) to ensure their bicycle was road-worthy and safe. Jobseekers were also provided with safety items such as bike lights and hi-visibility vests to further make cycling an attractive method of accessing work. For those unable to get their bicycles to the Jobcentres (e.g. due to distance, or their bicycle being in disrepair) home visits were arranged.

An extract from Nottinghamshire County Council’s twitter page advertising a cycle maintenance session and Travel Clinic held at Mansfield Jobcentre Plus is shown in Figure 5.

Figure 5: Cycle maintenance session and Travel Clinic at Mansfield Jobcentre Plus



3. Monitoring

The project adopted a mixed qualitative and quantitative approach to monitoring, comprising:

3.1 Jobseeker surveys

To evaluate the success of the project, monitoring was ongoing throughout the duration of project delivery (2018-2020). Survey design was influenced by best practice guidance and followed GDPR regulations. To ensure impartiality and avoid bias, Travel Choice team members, who had taken an active role in engagement and delivery, were excluded from undertaking monitoring and evaluation. A separate team of 'in-house' experienced behaviour change professionals were selected to form an evaluation team.

Jobseekers receiving Travel Choice support were asked to complete a short pre-intervention survey about their current travel patterns and also to opt-in to a post-intervention follow up survey (to be completed two / three months after initial contact). A prize draw for a £20 Amazon gift card was offered as an incentive to encourage participation.

After a brief trial period, the Travel Choice team observed low survey completion rates for the pre-intervention survey, which was first designed as a double sided A4 page. Consequently, a shorter version of the survey was trialled with a new A5 design, which promoted the prize draw incentive more prominently and reduced the average completion time. The shorter pre-intervention survey resulted in a higher survey completion rate and was met with less resistance and scepticism. In the year 2019/20, 57% of survey completions were made on the short survey.

The A5 survey was printed on medium thickness card, unlike its predecessor. This simplified the completion process, as jobseekers were able to record their answers easily, even if no clipboard was available.

Post-implementation surveys were conducted with jobseekers three months after they met with the Travel Choice team. Surveys took place over the phone or, where no phone number was provided, by email. The Travel Choice evaluation team found that jobseekers were more receptive to follow-up survey invitations when asked to participate over the phone. Of all conducted after surveys, 89% were by telephone.

From April 2019 – March 2020, 798 (70%) project participants participated in the pre-intervention survey, with 200 (18%) completing both the pre-intervention and post-intervention survey.

Of those:

- 90% recalled the conversation with the travel advisor
- 68% found the conversation useful
- 60% found the advice/information useful in helping plan a journey
- 76% rated Travel Choice helpful in obtaining work, education or training
- 52% felt Travel Choice made it easier to travel to work, education or training
- 44% felt more confident cycling to employment, training or education
- 43% of the 85 jobseekers who re-entered employment, training or education were travelling by sustainable modes (walking, cycling, public transport, car share)

Several jobseekers contacted through the project reported that they change their mobile phone number regularly, with some not being in regular possession of a mobile phone or having regular access to a computer. It is possible that changes in contact details initially recorded on the pre-intervention survey and the limited availability of, or access to, personal electronic devices impacted on the post-intervention survey completion rate. To provide the best possible chance of post-intervention survey completion, respondents were given the option to leave both a mobile and email address, though it is not clear whether this was sufficient to mitigate any effect.

3.2 Engagement metrics

Metrics to assess progress towards the programme output targets were collected by the Travel Choice team throughout project delivery. The key metrics collected were as follows:

- The number of jobseekers approached by the Travel Choice team;
- The number of jobseekers who had meaningful conversations with the Travel Choice team;
- The number of jobseekers who received travel information;
- The number of branded incentives given to jobseekers (e.g. Travel Choice pens, water bottles etc.);
- The number of bicycles services by the Dr. Bike team;
- The number of cycle training sessions conducted;
- The number of health checks provided;
- The number of bus / train tickets given to jobseekers, and the number of which were redeemed;
- The number of bicycle loans; and
- The number of moped loans.

3.3 Feedback from stakeholders

To capture qualitative feedback associated with the project, stakeholders (including both Mansfield Jobcentre Plus and Newark Jobcentre Plus as well as delivery partners) were approached for comment by the evaluation team. Interviews were conducted to ascertain their thoughts regarding the success of the project and whether the scheme was effective at removing transport barriers to accessing employment / training opportunities.

The aim of the survey was to understand what elements of the programme had worked well and less well and if they had any suggestions for improving the delivery of the programme for their jobseekers. The survey was conducted over the telephone with one Jobcentre Plus representative from each location. Respondents were asked to rate the delivery of the Travel Choice scheme in terms of the usefulness of materials, usefulness of Travel Choice services and finally the usefulness of incentives. Any additional comments were also captured.

4. Project Evaluation

The evaluation methodology follows the principles of DfT's guidelines for light touch evaluations and the DfT's Access Fund Revised Evaluation Guidance (2020). The methodology is based around the project resources available and takes a pragmatic approach to provide an overview of the progress towards the programme's output targets, an indication of the likely level of overall change in travel behaviour resulting from the project (short / medium term outcomes) and further insights into what has worked well and less well.

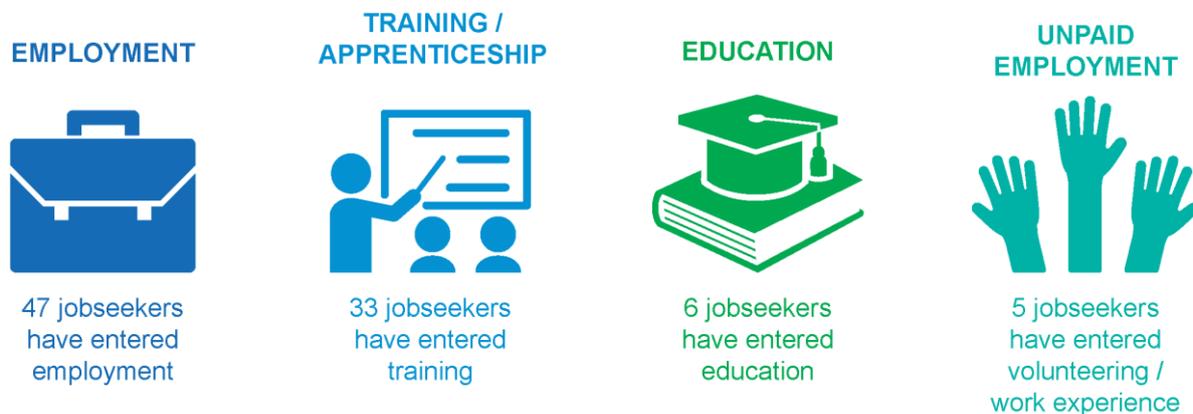
4.1 Project outputs and outcomes - Quantitative

More than 2,000 jobseekers were approached by the Travel Choice team with the offer of information, advice, and support regarding their transport options. Approximately 60% of those approached opted to access support through the project. This exceeded project targets and demonstrated a clear demand for the service. Indeed, the engagement target for the jobseeker element was to provide 1,000 jobseekers across the two-year delivery programme (2018/19 - 2019/20) with individual advice or a printed travel information pack. This target was exceeded by engaging with 1,140 jobseekers over the two-year delivery period.

Of those receiving support, 1,140 received bespoke travel information, 241 received a free bus or train ticket to access interviews or training, 36 jobseekers applied for a moped loan (of which 10 went on to complete their CBT training and receive a moped), 13 jobseekers applied for a bicycle loan (with 6 going on to receive a bicycle) and 26 jobseekers accessed Dr. Bike cycle maintenance sessions.

Of those who had engaged with the monitoring process from April 2018 – March 2020 through jobseeker surveys, 91 were recorded as re-entering employment, training, education or voluntary work over the two-year programme, as illustrated in Figure 6. This figure may indeed be higher if it were possible to capture the outcomes of all those who received support through the scheme.

Figure 6: Number of jobseekers re-entering employment, training or voluntary work



By supporting 91 jobseekers into employment and training opportunities that may later lead to employment, there is a demonstrable benefit for society. Travel Choice has contributed towards reducing unemployment and increasing economic prosperity. In addition, by helping more people into work there is a reduction in payments from the public purse (through reduced Universal Credit payments), increases in tax contributions and wider GVA benefits generated by individuals re-entering employment. When the number of jobseekers¹ who have entered employment², training or education is applied to WebTAG calculators, the estimated benefit is roughly £1 million - 1.2 million (2019 prices). By encouraging sustainable

¹ Calculated based on jobseeker data from April 2018 to December 2019

² Assumed all jobseeker have entered full time employment

travel use, Travel Choice has reduced the impact of local congestion, improved air quality and encouraged healthy lifestyle choices.

To evaluate the project’s value for money, the monetarised benefits (£972,848 to £1.225 million) have been compared to the total cost of the intervention (£116k) and cost of accompanying incentives (£6k). The resulting Benefit: Cost Ratio ranges from 8:1 to 10:1 which is classed as **‘Very High Value for Money’** based on the Department for Transport’s Value for Money Framework (2017).

4.2 Project outputs and outcomes – Qualitative

The interviewed representative from each Jobcentre was asked to rate each element of the Travel Choice programmes on a scale of 1 to 5 (with 1 being not at all useful and 5 being extremely useful). Table 1 presents the outputs. Most elements of the scheme scored highly, with an average rating of between 4 and 5. The Travel Clinics, Dr.Bike cycle maintenance sessions, bicycle loans and moped loans were particularly highly rated with a score of 5 (extremely useful).

Table 1: Usefulness of different elements of the Travel Choice scheme (1 = not at all useful, 5 = extremely useful)

Element	Newark JCP	Mansfield JCP
Printed Materials / Travel information packs*	3.4	4.4
Travel Clinic	5	5
Health and wellbeing checks	5	No take-up of offer.
Dr Bike	5	5
Cycle training	No take-up of offer	4
Liftshare	3	3
Moped loans	5	5
Bicycle loans	5	5
Bus tickets	5	5
Train tickets	5	4
Incentives*	4	3.9
Average rating	4.5	4.7
* The average score has been taken (for presentation simplicity)		

In addition, the following positive comments were made:

" I hope it keeps going! We use Travel Choice all the time. It gives customers the opportunity to think about other options. The team are really helpful, and they have a really good

relationship with the work coaches.” (Mansfield JCP representative)

“The Travel Choice team do a great job of speaking to as many people as they can and they’re always very professional.” – (Newark JCP representative)

4.3 Key challenges

The introduction of Universal Credit in July 2018, impacted on the Travel Choice delivery strategy. It meant that those accessing the Jobcentre Plus waiting area were no longer exclusively jobseekers who were actively seeking work. Some were attending appointments as part of wider ‘work related activity groups’ under Universal Credit. Appointment times became less consistent and, to begin with, it was challenging to predict attendance for any particular day when planning a Travel Clinic. Moreover, the introduction of the Universal Credit system led a number of people to become more resentful, and sceptical, of the support on offer and engagement with jobseekers was noted by the delivery team to be more challenging.

Whilst the project successfully met its targets it is difficult to evaluate the true impact that this may have had on the numbers of jobseekers engaged in the project. . When Universal Credit was first introduced in July 2018, Travel Choice had only been running for three months and was still becoming established. Growth in brand familiarity and other external factors may have helped to mitigate the impacts of Universal Credit. These factors make it difficult to identify and associate any changes in engagement numbers with the new work-related benefits system.

Many jobseekers engaged through the Travel Choice project lead changeable lifestyles and were frequently unable to attend prearranged appointments at Jobcentre Plus or commit to any ‘sign-up’ activities, where attendance did not directly impact on their benefit payments. Many jobseekers changed their mobile phone numbers frequently, which reduced the number of jobseekers contactable for follow up surveys and monitoring activities.

5. Leaving a legacy and lessons learnt

Qualitative and quantitative evaluation highlights that there is a strong demand for the service, and that transport clearly acts as a barrier for jobseekers accessing employment and training. To continue the jobseeker support after the project ends in the Mansfield and Newark areas in March 2020, and to leave a legacy, the Travel Choice team have provided training to Jobcentre work coaches regarding transport services available, as well as provided a stock of printed material and access to online materials, so that they can continue to support jobseekers in-house.

Moreover, the dynamic and adaptable delivery approach developed for, and throughout, the programme has left a lasting legacy applicable to future projects. Key lessons learnt throughout the Travel Choice scheme can be directly applied to any future project to maximise efficiency and ultimately success.

Key lessons learnt through the project include:

- **Partnership** – Success of the project is dependent upon a strong cooperative relationship with stakeholders, in particular Jobcentres. Jobseekers will rarely be proactive in accessing support through Travel Choice themselves and are more likely to engage if referred to the Travel Choice team by their work coach. A good relationship between the Travel Choice team and Jobcentre work coaches is therefore crucial. Additionally, when working together with multiple stakeholders, partners should provide a united ‘Travel Choice’ front e.g. when signposting to incentives such as bike loan, moped loan etc.
- **Delivery** – To maximise the dissemination of support, the delivery team should ensure that Jobcentre work coaches understand the information and services offered through Travel Choice via briefings and updates. This ensures that the JCP work coaches refer jobseekers to the Travel Choice team when appropriate and is particularly important for leaving a legacy of support once the project funding expires.
- **Information** – The time that the Travel Choice advisor has with each jobseeker before their appointment is limited and must be optimised. As such, information should be clearly presented, concise, and up to date.
- **Survey design** – The short pre-intervention survey works well when engaging jobseekers, particularly when there is limited time to speak with them before their appointment at the job centre. The prize draw also helps to increase participation. Where possible however the long survey should be completed to capture a more detailed picture of jobseeker’s travel behaviours before and after intervention.
- **Data capture** – To monitor the success of the scheme it’s important to accurately record information about incentives (e.g. number and type of bus tickets given out) and contact information (used for post-intervention survey). The number of job seekers who received Travel Choice support directly from a Travel Choice trained work coach, rather than a Travel Choice officer should also be captured.
- **Post-intervention survey sample size** – A large post-intervention sample size enables more effective monitoring of project outcomes. To maximise the size of the after sample, the following is suggested:
 - Allow ‘Caller ID’ to be visible so jobseekers can see who is calling
 - Ensure correct contact details are captured on the before survey
 - The Travel Choice delivery team should highlight the importance of pre and post-intervention surveys with work coaches, to maximise the response rate of surveys conducted in-house.
- **Delivery days** – Travel Choice activities should be conducted on different days of the week to maximise the proportion of jobseekers who have the opportunity to engage with them, including those who only attend the Job Centre on certain days.

- **Incentives** – Bus tickets and moped loans were particularly popular amongst jobseekers, and any future projects should ensure that there is sufficient supply of such incentives to meet anticipated demand. Moreover, it was observed that, due to changing personal circumstances and variable income (if any), some jobseekers may find it challenging to supply a monetary deposit to gain access to incentives. For example, many jobseekers found it too difficult to provide a nominal deposit for a cycle loan. Under these circumstances, a means-tested deposit waiver is recommended.
- **Awareness** - Some jobseekers have complex needs, including mental health issues and physical disabilities that may require additional support, beyond support available through Travel Choice, to access employment. Good awareness of complementary services to help such individuals is desirable for future projects.
- **Marketing** – Brand awareness is a key element in any demand management project. To maximise brand familiarity, it is important to reach the target audience and it is therefore suggested that, moving forward, focus groups should be held with jobseekers to understand which communication methods they prefer. Effort should be placed to developing a recognisable and reputable brand image.

6. Conclusion

The Travel Choice scheme has contacted over 2,000 jobseekers within Newark and Mansfield over the two years of project delivery (April 2018 – March 2020), with bespoke travel assistance provided to approximately 60% of those contacted. Of those jobseekers that participated in a post implementation survey, 91 re-entered employment or training, equating to monetised benefit to society of roughly £1 million - 1.2 million (2019 prices). This figure may be higher however if the outcomes of all those who received support through the scheme had been captured from the outset.

Successful delivery in Mansfield and Newark demonstrates the potential to replicate, evolve and expand the project into new areas and demonstrates that there is demand for the service. In testimony to this, Nottinghamshire County Council has been successful in securing further funding to continue delivery in a new location - Ashfield and Bassetlaw - in the year 2020-2021. It is expected that the successes and lessons learnt from the innovative Travel Choice project will help to pave the way for future projects, ultimately optimising efficiency and heightening success.

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