

## **Evidence to NICE PDG Walking and Cycling: Experience from Bristol City Council and Cycling City (2008-2011)**

1) European experience shows that **sustained budgets** needs to be put in place for both developing and improving infrastructure and for "softer" marketing and encouragement measures. However, the reality of short term funding means that often tight timescales mitigate against doing the most important infrastructure improvements in place of what is possible within the timescales (for example projects in Cycling City that required a CPO were highly desirable but could not be implemented in the time available).

This leads to a number of problems - marketing of improvements can be impossible as it is not sensible to market until the product is in place. Where off road solutions (and high quality from safety and enjoyment perspective) are put in place some marketing is needed as it does not necessarily sell itself as it is not on the core (busy) routes in a city that people's mental maps are built around. This could also lead to an amount of frustration in the public and cycling groups who wish to see the most important improvements being implemented and are not aware of the limitations imposed through the availability of funding.

2) **The balance between hard and soft measures** is difficult to judge and there is not a great deal of research on the subject. For example in the Netherlands the municipal authorities typically do not spend significant amounts on marketing because there is a culture in which cycling is normalised and infrastructure is highly visible, continuous and where people want it. In contrast, UK culture in general sees cycling as an marginalised activity and is not part of the norm (this the outcome of the research carried out by University of West of England shortly to be published in Journal of Social Marketing and another 2011 study lead by Lancaster University)

Typically in transport departments, senior managers often come from a (hard) engineering background and therefore prefer infrastructure solutions as a first resort, often not having a great understanding of softer measures or seeing them as not as effective. Indeed hard measures are often prioritised despite the fact that soft measures can be equally (outcome) effective, cheaper and reversible if they do not work.

This engineering focus means that there is a pragmatic bent and a scepticism of academic research and/or rigorous evaluation which is often seen as a 'nice to have' - often the pressure is to move onto the next project without a proper leaning process due to the tight timescales mentioned above.. Also the pragmatism (and the lack of joined up government) means that there is only the funds for the transport and not for place shaping, so any attempt to improve the overall environment holistically which would benefit and promote walking and cycling is often not carried out. We were lucky as part of Cycling City to be able to make environmental improvements on our off road routes that helped to shape pleasant places too). Design guidelines concentrating on place shaping are seen as an unnecessary luxury and therefore a hassle. This is especially so in the latest round of funding where everything has had to be value engineered.

### **3) Lack of joining up in local authorities and in Central Government**

Heritage concerns can often hamper implementation of cycling and demand reduction initiatives (examples of Ashton Court, cycle parking and putting pay and display machines in B&NES). But a pragmatic approach can be implemented (eg bolted not cemented stands).

In contrast, in France the Government grants include money for re-landscaping around transport initiatives (to shape the place when cars are taken out) and for public art (1% of budgets, I understand).

Hopeful signs in Bristol of changes are in practice where Quality Assurance is now a joint process between disciplines (City and Landscape Design and Transport).

4) Despite the compelling public health evidence for cycling and walking, **cycling in particular is seen as not normal** (eg Alan Tapp's work and the Understanding Walking and cycling from Lancaster University). The meaning of evidence to transport planning and engineering is very largely different to what is understood as evidence to public health professionals and that this creates a problem when the former present 'evidence' which public health would consider as opinion and suffering from author, design, and other biases.

**As such it can be a very political subject** (Bristol Evening Post typically gets hundreds of user generated comments for cycling compared with typically a dozen or so for anything else). The majority of the press is aimed at segments of the population who are less likely to cycle. This is why people like Geoff Gollop (senior Bristol Councillor in opposition can say)

"Cycling is a "leisure activity for the individual ... unlikely in the near future to be a major means of commuting"."

This in turn means that it can be difficult to invest significant sums in cycling from mainstream council budgets, increasing the reliance on Central Government funding and then feeding back into issues (1 and 3) above. This is all the more so if there are regular elections, hung councils (or swings due to national protest votes being expressed in local elections)

It also means that reallocation of road space can be highly contentious (>60% of respondents in Alan Tapp's study said cycling and walking investment should not disadvantage motorists), not least as much of Central Government funding is reliant on BCR which has reliability and time of car journeys at its heart. This then means that the option of road user hierarchy initiatives like reduction in volume and speed of traffic mean that BCR (webtag version) are not high and that congestion measures (based on speed) tend to show a worsening of congestion.

This is exacerbated by the difficulty in measuring cycling and walking movements (what gets measured gets managed) compared with motorised movements. So congestion is a measure of the movement of motors and not people.

### **Specific positive actions taken during Cycling City**

- 1) Police referral - antisocial cycling leads to a potential cycle training session.
- 2) Stakeholder engagement - although you can not please all the people all the time and as Phillip Darnton says "we should stop listening to cyclists, they are not the same as our core market - potential cyclists." Cycle Route Implementation and Stakeholder Planning do yield rich data, and the joint exercise to plan a strategy has influenced our thinking if not endorsed it wholesale.
- 3) Parks - agreement of adjustable 'K' barriers which should keep out motorbikes without stopping pedal bikes too much, maintenance regime.
- 4) Online consultation, eg Bristol Streets, this is very good for identifying discontinuances and parking. We are now using this to consult on a network of on quiet road signed routes with advantage for cyclists
- 5) Corporate standards can be helpful or a hindrance, for example Bristol's Environmental Access Standards are focussed on disability but now allow for shared space as an option with clear quality standards
- 6) Innovative marketing such as the face to face channel (roadshow team to promote cycling and provide personalised travel planning), direct marketing of individual corridors to MOSAIC groups along the corridor based on good market research (eg Alan Tapp's work), as well as use of MOSAIC in general to segment audience.
- 7) Focus on the City Centre for greatest impact and visibility, including making it as permeable as possible using a filtered permeability principle and getting a network of arterial routes. Shared space generally works but does attract a great deal of negative comment, which does not seem to be justified by the accident statistics.
- 8) Signage has been a success to make routes more legible and end to end; this is not yet proven but an interesting "austere" approach is a well signed network of quiet roads (We would be very interested to know if there is evidence from London if this approach worked well). There is some emerging evidence that some of our routes may have taken off once the signing went in, but this is still a hypothesis being tested through the data at the moment. Also the use of horizontal signage has been a welcomed innovation.
- 9) Presumption that any new no entry on one way should be considered for a Contraflow. (this is covered above).

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