BRIEFING

TRANSform Scotland
the campaign for sustainable transport

Smarter Choices

Changing travel behaviour

1. WHAT ARE 'SMARTER CHOICES'

'Smarter Choices' are small-scale, local measures that help people become better informed about travel alternatives, and of the benefits of these alternatives. Research has shown that Smarter Choices are very cost-effective in delivering change in travel behaviour.

The term 'Smarter Choices' (also known as 'Smart Measures' and previously called 'soft measures') covers a wide range of new and established techniques to encourage people to modify their travel behaviour away from car use, and towards more sustainable options such as walking, cycling, public transport and car sharing. As opposed to the construction of major new infrastructure, they typically involve a more psychological approach to encourage modal shift, based on concepts such as:

- Giving people better information about travel options
- Marketing sustainable travel options more effectively
- Making improvements to the way services are organised
- Providing new services closely focused on a particular target market
- Providing new options that reduce the need to travel at all.

The Dundee City Journey Planner, an example of a public transport information 'Smarter Choices' initiative. Image courtesy of Dundee City Council.

There is now a wide variety of proven techniques available to help influence people's travel decisions. This, in turn, helps cut congestion, reduce environmental impact, improve quality of life, enhance social inclusion and encourage people to be more physically active.

The types of intervention typically used for Smarter Choices programmes, and which are reviewed in some detail in Section 3 below, are:

- Workplace travel plans
- School travel plans
- Personalised travel plans
- Public transport information
- Travel awareness campaigns
- Car clubs
- Car sharing schemes
- Teleworking
- Teleconferencing
- Home shopping.

2. WHY SMARTER CHOICES MAKE SENSE

One of the attractions of Smarter Choices is that they provide *choices*. Getting people to use their cars less through increased pricing and legislative change is necessary, but can be difficult.

Smarter Choices can pave the way towards more sustainable travel behaviour through encouraging people to *voluntarily* use their cars less.

Research for the Department for Transport[1] found that an intensive programme of Smarter Choices over ten years could cut urban peak-hour traffic by 21% and non-urban peak-hour traffic by 14%, while national traffic volumes could be reduced by 11%. It has also been estimated that such measures could reduce carbon emissions by 1.4m tonnes over the period 2006-2010.[2]

For maximum impact, Smarter Choices need to be combined with traffic restraint measures, to avoid freed-up road space filling up with other traffic.

There are many established measures to help

'lock in' the traffic reduction benefits, including:

- Re-allocating road capacity to buses, cyclists and pedestrians
- Parking controls
- Congestion charging
- Traffic calming, pedestrianisation, and better enforcement of speed limits.

Smarter Choices interventions can also offer much better value for money than traditional 'big infrastructure' schemes. It has been estimated[3] that an average cost of just £15 is involved for each 1,000 vehicle kilometres of traffic removed, with an average benefit of £150 – in other words, a benefit-to-cost ratio of at least 10:1, which is vastly superior to many conventional road-building schemes.

In summary, an intensive Smarter Choices programme could (a) deliver large cuts in traffic and carbon emissions, (b) have most impact where the problems are greatest (urban areas at peak times), and (c) deliver excellent value for money.

3. SMARTER CHOICES IN PRACTICE

The July 2004 Department for Transport report *Making Smarter Choice Work* highlighted a variety of techniques and success stories, based on 24 UK case studies, and a worldwide literature review into the impacts of Smarter Choices schemes.[4] These are reviewed below.

Workplace Travel Plans

A workplace travel plan sets out to encourage staff to travel by bike, foot, public transport or car share. Travel plans can cover a single site or a cluster of businesses, as in a business park. Plans are tailored to specific conditions and can include, for example:

- Dedicated 'works buses'
- Personalised journey plans
- Interest-free season ticket loans
- Reduced public transport fares
- Secure cycle parking and shower facilities
- Preferential car parking for car sharers
- Encouragement of teleworking.

Evidence suggests that travel plans can reduce car use by between 10% and 25%, although much higher reductions have been achieved at the most successful locations.[5] Buckinghamshire Council reduced the proportion of council employees driving to work from 72% in 1998 to 49% in 2003.[6]

Local authorities can maximise impact by employing teams of workplace travel officers to promote travel planning to businesses, and by ensuring that all significant new developments have to draw up travel plans. Often the best returns come from concentrating on the largest employers and those with the most congested sites, such as hospitals.

School Travel Plans

School travel plans aim to cut traffic congestion and danger caused by the school run. They also encourage more children to use active travel methods such as walking and cycling, giving more independence and reducing childhood obesity. A typical plan can include:

- Physical changes such as traffic calming and improved pedestrian crossings
- Organising 'walking buses' or 'cycle trains'
- Pedestrian and cycle training for children
- Car sharing
- Curriculum activities to promote the benefits of sustainable transport.

The best results can be achieved where the local authority works in partnership with schools, involving children, parents and teachers in the process of deciding what to do. School travel planning in Merseyside is coordinated by a partnership of five local authorities and Merseytravel. Schools with fully-fledged travel plans are encouraged to draw up a list of desired infrastructure and environmental improvements which are funded through a Safer Routes budget.

Image courtesy of Sustrans.

Personalised Travel Planning

Personalised travel planning is a targeted marketing technique, providing travel advice and information to people based on their personal travel patterns. Experience of personalised travel planning is still at a relatively early stage, and is usually carried out by consultants, but local authorities could develop the expertise to run in-house programmes. A personalised travel plan for employees, school children or households in a particular area can offer:

- A timetable specifically for their nearest bus stop
- Personalised journey plans for regular trips
- A free one-month public transport trial ticket
- A map of walking and cycling routes in the area
- Loan of a bike.

Participants can be asked to keep a travel diary and may be given tips and suggestions for how to use their cars less. Results from projects worldwide

suggest that it is possible to cut car use by 7% to 15% in urban areas. A case study in a suburb of Gloucester with higher than average car use, but relatively little traffic congestion, suggested that the project may have cut car use by 9%.[7]

Public Transport Information

There is a great deal of potential to increase use of public transport through better marketing and information. Individual bus or rail routes can be promoted to those most likely to use them – both through personalised journey planners and area-wide projects.

Case studies suggest that many people have poor or outdated information about public transport. Targeted marketing may be particularly effective in attracting car drivers, whereas general public transport improvements without marketing may mainly influence existing bus users.

In Perth a direct marketing campaign produced passenger growth of 63% over three years, roughly double the average increase for a conventional 'quality partnership' between local authority and bus operator.[8] The people converted to public transport were all from the social groups most likely to be car drivers.

Travel Awareness Campaigns

Travel awareness campaigns aim to improve public understanding of the problems caused by traffic growth and to encourage people to think about their own travel behaviour.

These campaigns, which tend to be aimed at the whole population rather than particular groups of people, can use posters, leaflets, local press or radio advertising, or tie-in with high-profile national events.

The City of York Council has run a series of city-wide awareness campaigns, based on media space that drivers will see – for example on the backs of buses and the backs of car park tickets.[9] Health seems to be the strongest motivator for people to change their behaviour, and local authorities can work closely with the health sector to communicate messages about the health benefits of walking and cycling. Tentative evidence from the York campaign suggested that between 3% and 12% of drivers may have cut their car use as a result.

Car Clubs

Car clubs give people access to a car whenever they need it, but without the high fixed costs of individual car ownership. Car clubs are well developed in Switzerland, Germany, the USA and Canada, but less so in the UK. However, one of the pioneers has been the Edinburgh 'CityCarClub' scheme, the UK's largest. Annual car mileage in the Edinburgh club has fallen by at least 3,600 kilometres per member.

Local authorities can help car clubs in a number of ways, including:

- Providing start-up grants
- Designating on-street parking bays for car club vehicles
- Block-booking club vehicles as a car pool for staff members.

The City of Edinburgh Council has a block booking on nine car club vehicles during working hours, to replace leased vehicles.

Car Sharing Schemes

Car sharing can involve (a) local authorities, businesses or schools promoting car sharing for regular trips to work or school, or (b) schemes which help people to find someone to share a one-off car journey.

The best-developed car sharing schemes are targeted at the daily commute. A typical scheme might involve:

- Employers purchasing car-sharing software to match employee journeys
- Buying into an internet-based scheme
- Promotions or incentives to encourage people to join
- Dedicated, preferential parking spaces for sharers.

Car sharing can also target leisure trips, such as the 15,000 to 20,000 regular visitors to the Eden Project in Cornwall who live within 50 to 60 miles.[10]

In general, car sharing is most appropriate where people are travelling long distances, where public transport is poor, and where many journeys are made to a limited number of places. Further benefits of car sharing could be gained the provision of High Occupancy Vehicle (HOV) lanes on major roads. The South-East Scotland Regional Transport Partnership is currently looking into provision of HOV lanes on approaches to the Forth Road Bridge in order to reduce congestion and manage traffic flow.

Teleworking

Teleworking means working at home, or at a telecentre (*not* call centre) nearer to home, for some or all of the time. It involves work that has to be done with a telephone and a computer. Since 1997 the number of teleworkers has been growing at 13% a year.

Local authorities can promote teleworking to their own staff and other employers. Teleworking can also save companies money by reducing the amount of office space needed. Over 7,500 BT staff are registered with its teleworking scheme, and it is estimated that each teleworking employee has cut their commuting by nearly 200 miles a week on average, even after allowing for some new non-work trips.

A survey of BT staff who telework also found that they are more productive and take less sick leave, with higher retention rates.

Teleconferencing

Teleconferencing includes communicating by video link or webcam, or several people speaking together by phone (audioconferencing).

Some local authorities have installed videoconferencing suites for hire at telecentres, community venues or area offices. This can be an important part of a strategy to support economic development in rural areas, reducing costs whilst enabling support for business start-ups.

Teleconferencing can greatly reduce business travel. BT estimates that audioconferencing saves the company about 59 million miles of car travel a year. A survey by face2face found that the average cost of the staff time involved in a business trip is more than £2,000 per person, excluding travel costs.[10]

Home Shopping

People are increasingly shopping online or ordering from catalogues,[11] and although some home delivery items may have been ordered after a visit to a store, much involves no travel by the purchaser.

Nottingham City Council worked with Royal Mail on a trial of local collection points in a suburban area with 68,000 households. The initiative meant that people had less far to travel, and led to some choosing to walk instead of driving. The project was estimated to have saved between 50,000 and 100,000 car miles a year.[12]

If home delivery of groceries reaches a critical mass of 15% of the market within 10 years, it could cut car mileage for grocery shopping by 8% and car mileage for all shopping by 4%.[13]

4. CONCLUSION

There is a wide variety of 'Smarter Choices' measures available, with something for virtually every circumstance in urban Scotland (where most of our population lives) and for many circumstances of rural living. Together, they offer the potential to secure significant reductions in traffic and carbon emissions, as well as valuable enhancements in quality of life, safety and public health.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

- Through its National Transport Strategy, the Scottish Executive should put in place an intensive Smarter Choices Programme at local and regional levels. The programme should form a central part of a national programme for road traffic reduction.
- The Executive needs to set out clear policy on travel plans as a key component of the Smarter Choices Programme. Planning permission for new developments should be conditional on the implementation of travel plans for completed development.
- Local authorities, as planning authorities, need to ensure that travel plans are put in place, while Regional Transport Partnerships have a role in ensuring travel plans are effective. There is also be a need for enforcement to be carried out by the local authority or RTP, and a system of incentives and/or penalties to ensure adherence.
- Ultimately all employers should be required to produce travel plans showing how their employees will travel for employment purposes. However, the initial urgent focus should be on the larger employers (both public and private sector) where the biggest and quickest impacts on traffic reduction can be expected.

6. REFERENCES

1 Department for Transport (2004) *Making Smarter Choices Work* – available at <www.dft.gov.uk/stellent/groups/dft_susttravel/documents/divisionhomepage/038507.hcsp>
2 Presentation by Dr. Jillian Anable at the TRANS*form* Scotland *Facing the Flood* conference, 8th May 2006 – available at <www.transformscotland.org.uk/conferences/facingtheflood>
3 *ibid.*
4 Department for Transport (2004) *op cit.*
5 Anable (2006) *op cit.*
6 Department for Transport (2004) *op cit.*
7 *ibid.*
8 *ibid.*
9 *ibid.*
10 *ibid.*
11 *ibid.*
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***Smarter Choices* briefing - version 1.1**
Published by TRANS*form* Scotland, March 2007

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