

Sustainable Travel Towns

May 10, 2011

Webinar Transcript





Landmark Designation

The program described in this case study was designated in 2010.

Designation as a Landmark (best practice) case study through our peer selection process recognizes programs and social marketing approaches considered to be among the most successful in the world. They are nominated both by our peer-selection panels and by Tools of Change staff, and are then scored by the selection panels based on impact, innovation, replicability and adaptability.

The panel that designated this program consisted of:

- Danny Albert, University of Ottawa's Parking and Sustainable Transportation Department
- Daniel Coldrey, Transport Canada
- Mark Dessauer, Active Living by Design
- Catherine Habel, Metrolinx
- Jacky Kennedy, Green Communities Canada
- Jessica Mankowski, Federation of Canadian Municipalities
- Gary McFadden, National Center for Biking and Walking
- Lorenzo Mele, Town of Markham
- Chuck Wilsker, U.S. Telework Coalition
- Phil Winters, University of South Florida
- JoAnn Woodhall, Translink

This transcript covers a webinar held on Tuesday May 10, 2011. Additional materials about Sustainable Travel Towns can be found at <http://www.toolsofchange.com/en/case-studies/detail/644/>

Introduction by Jay Kassirer, Culbridge Marketing and Communications and Tools of Change.

Welcome to today's webinar. We're quite excited to have Joe Finlay with us to give us an indication of what they've been doing with their Sustainable Travel Towns program.

Today's webinar is the second of our two *Landmark* transportation case studies designated this season. Our *Landmark* designation highlights social marketing programs and approaches considered to be among the most successful worldwide.

Landmark case studies are rated by a peer selection panel based on impact, innovation, replicability, and adaptability, and you can see the panel members listed on page 2 of this transcript. We thank them very much for helping us find and select these case studies. The reasons the panel rated this program highly are that it is very well researched, it's on a large scale, there's a good integration of activities, and excellent evaluation, including benchmarking against national trends. The cost per vehicle per kilometer traveled was only 3.6 pence, which made it very cost effective. You can multiply by 1.6 to get the rough estimate in Canadian or U.S. pennies.

The panel also wanted to know a little bit more about some things, and Joe is going to cover them today. How did they target their specific audiences? What was happening in Darlington that led to such a large change in cycling? What lessons did they learn from their program? What I suggest you look for as we go through today's webinar, first of all, is the approach that they're taking to workplace, school, and personal travel planning. Some of you in North America will be familiar with the individualized planning approach and the Safe Routes to School approach. In this case, they're looking at a similar kind of personal travel planning at workplaces, schools, and in the home.

In terms of the tools of change that we talk about, there's building motivation over time, like through their loyalty scheme. There's a lot of norm appeal, overcoming specific barriers, and communicating with vivid personalized empowering communication.

Joe Finlay has been at the Department for Transport in the U.K. since 2007, working on sustainable travel policy and climate change strategy. During this time, he managed the three sustainable travel town projects that are the subject of today's webinar. Joe has held posts at a number of other U.K. government bodies, predominantly on matters of environmental protection and sustainable development. He is based in London.

Joe Finlay, Department for Transport, London, England

I'm Joe Finlay from the sustainable travel team here in the Department for Transport in London. We are at a national level, working on a number of projects to support more sustainable modes of travel within local areas. Much of the delivery is done by our local authority partners, which are similar to towns or municipalities in North America.

I'll run through some of the main points about what the sustainable travel town partakes, where, why we did them, what we think we got out of them, and what we think they're going to mean for the future.

Some things that are already happening here rely quite heavily on what we've done in the past. For any of you who may have looked over some of the work we've done, you'll see that this is quite a large topic and quite a bit of information has come out of it. I'm not going to try and cover all of it because I would bore you all to death. If I don't cover something that you are specifically interested in, I'm more than happy to talk about it during the question period. I can also cover specific things later on (Jay has links to the various documentation produced).

These projects ran from 2004 to 2009. They're essentially large-scale testing of a concept. They also covered two administrations here in the U.K. In 2010, we had a change of government, so many of the initial motivations of the project were from that earlier government. In some cases, a very different objective. However, one good thing about these projects is they've shown that many of the results are relevant to lots of different objectives and on different viewpoints about transport.

Many of the lessons we learned have moved forward into the new administration's thinking. It's also worth noting that the concept of using certain behavior change tools to try and change the way people travel wasn't invented by us. Projects like this, i.e., influencing behaviour using information marketing and travel planning, has been tried earlier in other parts of the U.K. and around the world. What we tried to do from the start, and as we looked at the evaluation, was to look at it as scientifically as we possibly could and get as big a demonstration going as we could at the time. But it started with a study in 2004.

How many of you have heard of the phrase "smarter choices?" [Participants answered] It doesn't look like many of you have heard of that. That phrase has been used quite a bit in this country because we did an initial piece of research looking at some of these examples in other countries where behavior change had been used. This study took those and tried to guess the potential that might be out there for bringing benefits. It was originally going to be called something like "soft measures," but the minister in charge at the time was so horrified by something so wishy-washy sounding that he demand it be called something different and the slightly confusing "smarter choices" came out of that. It

means the same thing as sustainable travel, voluntary travel behavior change, better use, and other phrases like that used. Once the study was completed, it was clear there was some potential based on these previous projects and we decided to test it out in specific towns with a level of investment that wasn't normally be given to these sorts of things.

All of the measures described are ones that local authorities themselves always have the option to invest in with their own funding. We wanted to incentivize them to do it in quite an intense way and across the whole town. We made £10M available over those five years, plus anything that they wanted to put in to try and test some of them out. We had a competition and three towns (Worcester, Peterborough, and Darlington) were chosen to be our “guinea pigs.” Does anybody have any experience of these three towns? [Participants answered]

All of these towns had a specific reason going for it and all of them had their own characteristics. That becomes quite important for them later on when we're looking at what they actually managed to get out of it. The programs that they put forward were very similar because they were looking at the set of measures, which I'll come to in a minute. In fact, that was looked at in the original research. So although they're quite similar, the approaches to implementing those measures were quite different. Darlington, for example, was looking for a way to deal with development around its edge, so economic development was a priority for them, but also a number of health challenges within the borough itself as well.

Peterborough is an excellent town to drive around in. It's a relatively new town and quite unusual in British towns in that it has quite a large road capacity. Worcester is slightly different in that it is quite a traditional town with narrow streets. They had a real challenge with traffic congestion in the centre. It has a broader layout more suitable to the 18th Century than the 20th. I mentioned earlier, the resources we put in. Of the £10M, Worcester put forth about five million—that came out to about £10 per head, per year.

That doesn't sound like very much, but it was actually a lot more than had ever been invested in these sorts of measures before. Quite a bit of staff time went into it as well, which was quite important. I found working with the team that they tended to be very well motivated, very excited about what they were doing, and this was an important factor in all of it. If you want to imagine the starting point for this, it was money specifically available to invest in these programs, plus the staff that wanted to do it and a specific team with that as an objective. In putting together their programs, there were some very clear, shared elements in all of them.

[Slide] As you can see from the pictures there, all three towns developed a clear brand identity. The thinking behind this was to ensure that there was a recognizable thread running through the different measures taken. It also allowed the development of specific marketing and loyalty schemes. Worcester didn't do that specifically, but that left

Darlington and Peterborough. That actually built up quite quickly in the first couple of years. They used some incentivizing, for example, money off travel and so on, but it was more a way of getting information to people.

For example, if you were in Darlington at the time, you would find the locomotion branding on bus stops, other sources of information, and other key transport hubs. Of the measures that were used, there were lots of little things done to gradually try and influence the way people traveled within the towns themselves. These fell into some broad areas: information, public transport information marketing, planning, and workplace travel planning. Now, what actually underpinned that was a variable in each place. For example, Darlington very heavily promoted cycling and walking. In fact, at the same time as they were doing the sustainable travel town project, they were also a cycling demonstration town (still linked with the Department of Transport, just with a slight different emphasis). They invested heavily in cycling infrastructure, cycle training, and they also pedestrianized their town centre, which was quite a bold move, and made quite a bit of difference to the town itself. You'll see when we get to the results how that had quite a market impact.

In other towns, they focused more on other elements. For example, Peterborough, focused much more heavily on public transport information. They built a strong information hub around their bus station. We'll come back to that once we get to the results.

One thing all the towns did was personalized travel planning. Has anybody come across personalized travel planning where whole towns have been personally approached for information on how they travel? [Participants answered] Essentially, personalized travel planning was done in all the towns and in Darlington it was done for every household. Peterborough and Worcester approached a large number of their households. The way it worked was that someone came to your door, asked if you were willing to talk about how you travel, and, if you were interested, there were a number of stages that could then happen. The person could be just given information, or could be given an in-depth travel audit where advice on travel opportunities was made available. As you can imagine, that's quite labor intensive but it also provides a very good opportunity for collecting information from people.

Travel planning was important for us for two reasons. The personalized travel planning forms the basis of our evaluation, so we were able to interview people. It was also one of the major lessons around targeting as well. It is quite labor intensive and costly to visit everybody's house in a given town. That's an important lesson when designing new programs, which I'll come to at the end.

[Slide] The yellow quadrant shown here, that's the personalized travel planning. This is actually measured in an amount of investment and you can see that a lot of the money in

each place went that way. Under Worcester you'll see a blue sector. That was a car club where the population could join a club and access shared cars. This was the only varied measure and only Worcester did it. It was also the only one that didn't really work. That doesn't necessarily mean that car clubs don't work, but I think it showed that it was quite location specific.

Most of these measures carried on throughout the four or five years of the project. The personalized travel planning was done in phases over that time. We took surveys at the start, in the middle, and at the end to gauge travel behavior in the populations we talked to.

I'll quickly run through the overall results. [Slide] These are the averages at the end of the program. These are all percentage changes in that particular mode rather than percentage point changes. Based on that average, it turned out just as we wanted it to. Car trips were down.

Some remained because it was through reducing car trips that we hoped to get the health, environmental, and congestion benefits. Bus trips, cycle trips, and walk trips are all up. Darlington was much more successful on cycle trips than the others, but that was because they tried a lot harder on that particular mode. Peterborough had more success on bus trips and that was because they invested quite a bit in that. Darlington actually experienced difficulty with their buses, which was due to a dispute with the private operators within the town. I'll come back to that later, but that was quite important because it demonstrates the importance of relationships with the local stakeholders, whether they be public transport providers or the community itself.

The initial sources of data were the travel diaries that we did with those people that were targeted within the towns. When we came to the evaluation, we tried to supplement this by using a range of other data. For example, in the U.K. we have a national travel survey, which is a survey-based collection of data on a wider scale and with a slightly different questionnaire than what we used in the towns. They're not precisely comparable, but they're pretty close and it was a good way of seeing whether or not what was actually happening in those towns was typical of anywhere else. In fact, the quick changes were noticeably different in the towns, even accounting for some variation in data sources. Within the changes that happened there were different patterns and, this is quite important, how people changed their behavior because that influences some of the results that come out the other end.

Who has recently replaced a journey not just with a different mode, for example cycling instead of the car, but has actually chosen to go somewhere else than they originally intended in order to use a more sustainable mode? [Participants answered] What we found was that there was a mixture of responses from people. Perhaps the most obvious

one was a shift in mode, i.e., simply replacing what they would normally do with a bus, bike, or walking. That was fantastic. That's what we were looking for at the start.

What we also found with some people—and this actually opened up opportunities for longer journeys to be replaced—was that they changed the trip all together. For example, instead of going to an out of town supermarket, someone might choose to actually walk to their local shop, and that has quite a big impact on the number of kilometers taken off the road. We also found that as an element of overall trips going down, which we can't necessarily attribute directly to this process, but it was quite useful in that it made those changes not seen against a rising background. We only looked at trips of 50 kilometers or less, as these measures were all trips within the towns.

Most of the trips that we actually changed were below one kilometer, which is what you would expect with those sorts of measures with people decreasing their walking and cycling trips. However, the biggest reduction in kilometers came from trying to capture those longer trips. The behavior change that brought the most benefit was the longer trips, but naturally these types of measures were better at hitting shorter trips. Getting back to what I was saying earlier, trip substitution or destination change is very important as well as changing how people travel from the same place.

As with any behavior changes, it's interesting to know who's actually doing it. We found no big gender or age differences, although slightly older age groups showed less change. Another experience, which we've seen in other projects since, is that change of life or change of life situation seems to offer the best opportunities for change of behavior (e.g., students, the recently retired, etc.). Those who found it hardest to change were those in full-time employment as they probably have less flexibility about what they choose to do.

However, their changes in behavior patterns are often the most valuable as they are on the roads at the peak times and perhaps going the longest distances. The main impacts came from the 50 kilometer journeys, but you will actually see the most effect in numbers on those lower trips. Interesting enough, the most car drives came from leisure and shopping, which probably has important lessons for future targeting, depending on the objectives of the project in hand.

To recap on some of the lessons we learned. I can't stress enough how important it was for these projects to be locally driven, so the teams in the towns were very well motivated. They planned how they were going approach it. They knew when to target their measures. For example, where their main bus corridors were, where they might have particular populations, they may want to target for a specific reason, maybe health. Many of them had local demographic data they could use for that. All of them developed a strong brand, which was very important for a technician tying together the various measures, and for encouraging people to maintain behavior change.

Once it started, within those places, the information and the contact went right across the towns. It really did get to a lot of the population. Getting buy-in from local partners is vital. In the U.K., that particularly proved to be public transport operators, but it was also relevant for the local community itself. For example, when Darlington was pedestrianizing its centre, it initially didn't engage with some age groups, disabled groups, other representative groups, and at first that gave them a few difficulties until they were able to make sure that it was suitable to everybody. Many of these changes had quite a rapid impact on people's behavior.

The question is always: how long does the change last? One thing that the original research was quite strong on, and was a lesson from the project and the towns, was that once behavior change starts, you need to lock in some of the complementary measures. For example, if you have reduced car trips and increased bus trips, there may be an opportunity to reallocate road space through bus lanes to try and lock some of that behavior in. The quality of service matters to people and not just particularly on public transport. The better public transport was, the more people were more likely to use it.

Many of the people that were talked to before the project started underestimated the quality of public transport and overestimated how long it would take. As I've mentioned a few times, that's where the target team is so important. Not just what they did at the start but to try and think where they might make such projects more affordable, even better value for money in the future. There is scope to being more selective. For example, the personalized travel planning that covered the whole town. That is quite labor intensive.

In the future, where this sort of thing gets repeated, you will see people using demographic data a lot more carefully to try and pick out those people most likely to change. There is quite a spectrum from the completely unwilling to change to those who have a few specific barriers that can be overcome. Also, the projects were quite innovative in that they were happy to change their tactic quite quickly as they went through in order to move with what was happening on the ground. For example, Darlington changed their brand not far into the project when they realized that it wasn't working.

These projects are very dynamic in that the teams were always looking for opportunities to improve what they were doing. I understand that there are probably lots of questions as I skimmed over some information to avoid going into too much depth.

Jay Kassirer: Thank you. For those of you who were expecting Emily to also be speaking about her experience with the individual travels at one of the individual travel towns, we're sorry she wasn't able to make this because of personal circumstances and we weren't able to find someone to replace her, but we have the overview and she will

take questions, after the fact, if there are questions that need to be answered by a local, on-the-ground perspective.

Q&A

Q: What's the population of each of those three towns?

A: Worcester and Darlington are about 100,000 people; Peterborough about 140,000 to 150,000. They're medium sized towns in the British context. We were quite keen at the start to have towns that were reasonably large places, large enough to have a range of different communities, population, people with different interests, different needs, and big enough economies to show what the effect might be, and hoped to follow up with testing in a large city of 700,000 to a million. In the end we weren't able to do those projects. We are hoping that through a new more general fund that we put forward this year that we will show how it works, both in much smaller places and hopefully much bigger places as well.

Q: Was the household visit preempted by any other action? Was it accompanied either before or after by any other action, like a telephone call, or a mailing?

A: I think in some cases it was. I think an attempt was made to make people aware that it was going to happen. The actual experience showed that, after the first wave, it didn't need much trailing. They called the team. Neighbors would talk to each other and people knew what was going on. That's one of the advantages of having the brand and the town-wide publicity, but after the initial strangeness of people knocking on people's doors to talk about transport, I think it became more expected. All of this was completely voluntary. If someone said no that was the end of that. If someone wanted to talk or was interested in changing their behavior, there was opportunity to provide other information, like eco-driving tips. Mailing or marketing probably helped smooth the first waves.

Q: I understand there was something that you did before they got the home visit. After those initial visits, there was no telephone call, no mailing, nothing that to promote it? Nothing in the paper?

A: There would've been information throughout the town telling people what was going on. Many households would've been contacted again if they wanted more information. In some examples, someone would've got some information through the post, they would've then got a visit, and if they were interested, they may have got another longer visit to actually talk through these things in detail. It was a process depending on how interested the person was. I have more materials available on this if people want it.

Q: To what degree did the extensive public investment leverage volunteer/community based effort?

A: That's a very good question because it is something that our current government, for example, is quite interested in for future projects. In the towns it was variable. But often, and this is true in Britain, there are many organizations already interested. For example, we have an organization called Bustrans that came to promote travel. We have another one called Living Streets that promotes walking and more pleasant street environments. What these sorts of investments did was give the towns more opportunities to get that "soft trend" brand of personalized travel planning into the town. They were being paid for that, but they were probably doing a lot more work and they used a lot of volunteers in what they did. Investment here brings a lot of people in to support it.

Q: Do you have the total number of trips for each town in each mode available at this point?

A: It varies. But to give you a rough idea, there were under 50 kilometers per 100 people, per day, with an average of about 300 trips. Does that make sense?

Q: In each community?

A: Per 100 people, per day. That's three trips a day per person. If you look at the evaluation, it presents the data in a number of different ways, so you get to see the differences and changes. That's really worth being clear, but in some places like Darlington, cycling trips for example started out very low. Because their percentage changes, although there was a 113% change in Darlington, that needs to be put into context that it was starting from a low base. There was a lot of behavior change. But it sounds bigger than it actually is.

Q: If a fourth town wanted to take a similar approach with only a quarter of the available funding, where would you recommend they invest to get the greatest bang for their buck, or pound in this case? What did you learn about that?

A: Actually, we are taking this approach in our funding in the future. A town that is thinking of doing one of these projects needs to think very carefully about the problem it's trying to solve. Peterborough's investment was in their bus station, so the information around that, and their work with their local bus supplier probably had a disproportionately large impact compared to some of the other things.

If you're looking how best to target with the least money, I would recommend you either go for the transport you're trying to target or try and think of it thematically. For example, instead of looking at transport corridors, you could look at people with health challenges or people who are just changing jobs or they're retired. You can do a number of things to reduce the amount you're investing across the board. I don't think anyone

would probably go for that approach again, i.e., trying to reach everybody, because there are some people who are less likely to change and value the objective less.

Q: What local partners were involved?

A: It varied quite a bit. There were the big ones that I mentioned, like public transport, they're very important. There would have been other government partners also, not just those with any authority or within the central government. There would also be health groups, and the police were often involved to help. Beyond that, as the towns learned the best way to manage it, there were often larger groups convened that brought other people in.

Darlington had a regular meeting of a larger, looser management group, which included the town, colleagues, or other party authority, often the Department of Transport, Department of Health, but also community groups, people working in voluntary work in schools, etc. Gradually it brought in a wide arrange of people. That's what's interesting about this approach—it not only influences transport outcomes, but health and environmental ones, and it generates a lot of interest in the community.

Q: You mentioned about longevity or persistence of the results that there are things that you can do to improve that. Will you be following up to confirm what happens with the persistence of these behavior changes?

A: The honest answer is that would be very difficult to do. The challenge we had with the evaluation, and often when we're talking about it, presenting the results, is that naturally with any of these towns there were lots of different things happening that could have influenced people's transport. Towards the end of the project, there was the financial crisis which led some people to actually reduce their transport anyway. Now we're able to isolate that out from the data we had. But as time goes on, it gets harder to estimate or draw direct links between those particular projects at that time.

Q: Will you be tracking for each of the communities, the levels, just to see what does happen? Even if you can't attribute it directly to the program?

A: Not centrally. As I mentioned, with the change in administration here came very a change in focus on how we look at local projects. Now, the local authorities take the lead. Central government is now trying to collect as little data as possible from local authorities and is leaving it up to those areas to decide what they collect. It's possible that Worcester, Darlington, and Peterborough will collect that information in the future, but I don't know for sure.

Q: With the six to 10 staff members that were working on this, in each town, how long roughly did it take to do all of the home visits?

A: Sorry, I think I may have confused everyone here. The six to 10 staff members worked as the central team. When it came to the personalized travel planning, that was actually done by a much larger force of advisors. In two of the towns that were supplied by Bustrans, many of them were volunteers. In Darlington it was supplied by a company called Steer Davies Gleeve. That was actually a separate workforce that was used to do it. And that's one of the reasons why that element was quite expensive.

Q: Do you have a sense of how many people and how long it took?

A: Each wave, and I think Darlington did three waves, would have taken several weeks each, if not more, and probably thirty or more people working on it.

Q: Was there any consensus on whether the investment in the individual travel planning was worth the result?

A: There's varied opinions on this. Because this is done as a package, we have tended to look at it as a whole, as a representation of what can happen if you invest time and effort in a range of different things, which might be meeting different peoples needs. Those that have invested in promoting and supplying personalized travel planning in the past have pushed that as the key element to it. It also provides the opportunity for getting feedback and direct contact from the community.

My personal opinion is that because that particular tool is quite labor intensive, and involves a fair amount of planning logistics, there are probably different ways to target it unless you feel you really do need to get to lots of people. I think it's probably something that should be used more sparingly and probably where there is a specific area of a city or town that you'd want to engage with directly. Otherwise, there's lots of ways now that you can try and work out who wants that information.

Q: What were the mode shares before and after the project for each town? Did you have a slide on that?

A: Of those 300-odd trips per 100 people I saw here earlier, about 120-130 of those have been car, so a good 40%. That was at the start and was an average for all three towns. That was as a driver. As a passenger probably about another 70. So probably two-thirds of the trip was someone either driving or being a passenger.

Q: And how did that change?

A: Overall, the average went down by about 10%.

Q: Do you have that information for other modes?

A: Yes. I can send that information to you and you can send it to the webinar participants.

Q: How did you capture the mode use data?

A: As we went along, the surveys with those people getting information provided the base data. Naturally, with any survey there are potential problems with self-selection and whether or not they're telling us the answers that we wanted to hear and so on. So, when we finished the evaluation and were actually doing the process, we looked for other sources to try and corroborate. Many of the towns had traffic or bicycle counters of some sort. We looked at national traffic data as well, as a comparison. We looked at the national travel survey and we tried to get bus patronage data wherever possible from the operators in those towns.

We tried to get whatever information was available about people moving around those places. In an ideal world, we would've invested a lot more in that data collection, but it is quite expensive and it's difficult to gauge the point when you're actually improving the data and not just getting different data sources that appear to be pointing in roughly the same direction. We don't think that the surveys were giving us bad data. We had that process independently reviewed and I think it was as good as we could've got it.

Q: Do you have any information on financial benefits, either by the residence, or by community, on whether they're spending less money on petrol, spending more on the local economy, that sort of thing?

A: We didn't look at the individual financial benefits. We rather selfishly just looked at the benefits to the community at large. What we looked at was an overall cost benefit. Some of that's in the evaluation. We've also been doing some work separately to check the big matches with similar methodology that we used for other things. If you're interested in all the cost benefits, have a look at the evaluation. I'll give you any other information I've got. But in terms of how much an individual saved, we don't know. I imagine that would vary quite a bit, depending on what those choices were.

If someone wants to get that evaluation, you've got the link to it. I'm happy to try and highlight the most interesting bits because I'm aware it is quite a big evaluation. And I can provide a little bit of commentary on that as well.