

HOW WALKING AND CYCLING CAN IMPROVE TOWNS

The following questions and answers were recorded during the live event, a recording of which can be found on the townsfund.org.uk/events webpage.

We have a very busy heavily trafficked road linking Morley to Leeds City Centre. There is no cycling provision at present but it is quite narrow, with pinch points, on-street resident parking and in some places no pavement on one side. There isn't an obvious alternative direct route on quiet streets. Would you recommend including cycling provision in parts/sections? I think this goes against the new cycling infrastructure guidance which seems to encourage a bit of an all or nothing approach? Is there a risk that it might discourage delivery of incremental or partial improvements?

I don't know that particular area so can't comment in detail but I would be happy to have a follow up discussion.

Certainly, it is important that networks are continuous and I always think of transport as being a bit a chain and you only need to have one link that's missing and the whole journey cannot be made. However, I would hope there may be the potential to reallocate some road space if possible but that's something I would need to look at in more detail.

There's a range of ways that provision can be improved but I'm hesitant say anything without actually knowing the detail but more than happy to have a follow on conversation with colleagues who would know that area in more detail. But the continuous nature of the provision is really important.

Apart from creating the kinds of environmental change you have described, what good examples are there of engaging communities and businesses into buying into and using active commuting, especially those least likely to want to cycle/walk?

I think it is really important to engage with stakeholders from the very beginning of a project. There are interesting examples in Liverpool, where they have been looking to put in parklets on two streets (on Bold Street in the city centre and Lark Lane, which is by Sefton Park). The retailers and businesses along Bold Street have worked together and have been in support and so it's made the council's life much easier in terms of implementing things.

In Lark Lane there's been disagreement between the different traders and that has led to a one-way system with a number of bollards. This approach doesn't create such a good environment so I think it's engaging early with the businesses that is really important.

It is key to explain the benefits. When the early work was done in Waltham Forest - which is one of the first three Mini-Hollands in London – the traders got together and they were fearful of the changes and there were processions with coffins and concerns that the changes kill off the street and it was really hard for the council to weather that and say no, trust us to make these changes. And the changes were positive and it's a really thriving street. So it is good that we now have examples of to refer to.

It is right to expect resistance, but it's simply about starting off with a plan of the area and saying OK, what do we want to change? Where are the problem areas? Introducing some things on an incremental basis, enabling people to see what a difference that makes and that can help bring confidence and trust.

How have you found interaction with Counter Terrorism concerns in creating crowded places on the high street.

There's been a lot of work done looking at what's referred to as hostile vehicle mitigation (HVM), and that's certainly been a concern in some of the bigger cities. For example, London has installed barriers to stop people driving vehicles driving into people. However, this creates difficulties in terms of how people move around, how people cross the street.

In some places it's not just putting up bollards, but using things that can prevent vehicles such as planters or seating. Obviously they have to be a particular strength to actually withhold vehicles driving into them. There is also the issue of needing to allow emergency vehicle access, so it's something we have got colleagues looking at. I'm not an expert myself but again happy to put some put you in touch with someone who is. It is a balance in terms of having areas that are accessible to people and people-friendly, but not having areas that are vulnerable in terms of terrorism.

We are looking to remove car parking on a main Town Centre access road which is lined with retail units. What is the best piece of advice for progressing removal of car parking spaces on a main corridor? We are anticipating resistance from the businesses

Yes, I'm sure there will be resistance, I would say early discussion and explaining why it's being done and then introduce it as a trial, ideally at least a month, so people can see the difference.

In some places they have made some parking spaces unavailable on Sundays, so people can see what the impacts are but that's not always so convincing. Drawing on positive experiences from elsewhere can be helpful, although I accept that this is not always easy, because every area is of course unique.

I would advise introducing the intervention as a trial, and make sure that when the parking is taken out something better replaces it. For example, when Times Square in New York was pedestrianized, all they did at first was take out the traffic and nothing happened. So Janette Sadik-Khan, who was the advisor, told all the staff to just go out and buy cheap plastic chairs - beach chairs, garden chairs, whatever – and as soon as they put chairs in the space, people came.

Taking out the traffic wasn't enough because people didn't know what to do with the space. So I would say it is taking out that parking and putting in some planters, maybe some tables and chairs, using it in a way working with the retailers and businesses, so they see and understand why this is being done and they see that it brings benefits to them.

In other places, surveys have been undertaken to record how people who shop or arrive at their businesses travel. There is a lot of research showing that businesses overestimate the amount of people that arrive by car, and underestimate the amount of people that come by walking and cycling and that's why they fear any change. It is of course difficult to do surveys at the moment, but there are good examples from elsewhere and hopefully that information could be useful. I am happy to have a follow on chat if that would be helpful.

What has been the most successful way of leveraging private sector match funding through walking/cycling projects?

I do not have a lot of information on that one. It could be more to do with some of the business improvement districts to involve private sector funding. The Liverpool work is through the Business Improvement District, so that's probably the best example. I think it's something that some of the people on the call may have better information than I do. I'm not so much aware of private sector being involved, but I would like to see more of that as there are real benefits to businesses if their staff travel via active

modes. I'm not aware of any particularly good examples, but I'll certainly go away and try and find some examples.

The 'traditional' method of assessing value for money and benefit cost analysis in securing government funding has been very orientated towards road schemes and time savings from vehicle transport. This is starting to change but what would you focus on in demonstrating the monetary benefits of active travel schemes?

There is something in the Gear Change document about looking at how we how we value these differently. It is really difficult when everything in the past has been designed for major schemes and time savings. There is good evidence out there that shows that typically active travel schemes have a benefit cost ratio of more than 6:1.

Typically, the schemes are a lot less expensive than the major infrastructure schemes and the work that you can do to actually try and justify the BCR might not be commensurate with the scale of the scheme.

It is something DfT is aware of, that there has been a bias towards major schemes in the past and it's something they're looking to change in the future.

DfT has announced setting up of a new organisation called Active Travel England and I think that's one of the things it will be focusing on is to how to look at the economic impacts of active travel schemes so that they can be assessed more fairly.