

Interactions between policy sectors and constraints on cross-sector working in the delivery of Sustainable Urban Transport Solutions

Overview

This report presents some remarks on the interaction of transport planners, land-use planners, public health promotion officers, environmental strategists, and local authority corporate policy officers in the delivery of sustainable urban transport solutions. It forms part of a wider research programme called DISTILLATE (Design and Implementation Support Tools for Integrated Local Land-use, Transport, and Environment – www.distillate.ac.uk) which is looking at ways of making the delivery of sustainable transport solutions easier for local authorities.

The conclusions of this report are that to deliver sustainable transport solutions, a deliberate practical change is needed in the way organisations are able to respond to the challenge of delivering sustainable transport. This study shows that good practice in the working relationships between professionals from different policy sectors does exist. However, this is limited by the external framework of transport delivery. There is a lack of clear policy support from central Government for the implementation of ambitious and radical local transport solutions. Professionals from different policy sectors also experience barriers in working together to deliver sustainable transport solutions, caused by the complexity of organisational collaboration, professional mindsets, their technical skills and abilities, and because of local political forces.

Key messages

The process of delivery for sustainable urban transport encounters inherent risks which must be identified before solutions to problems can be implemented effectively.

- Barriers are organisational, technical, and externally driven in nature;
- Achieving sustainability is a multi-disciplinary process;
- Overarching constraints derive from the availability of funding, the influence of politicians, and the decisions and actions of private sector delivery agencies; this system is currently not able to deliver integrated transport solutions;
- There is a wide variety of individuals and departments – with differing professional and personal interests and areas of expertise – acting on transport policy delivery in local authority settings. Barriers are affected by a number of different actors.

The key message is that the delivery of sustainable transport outcomes is dependent on the effective working relationships between policy sectors within a network of different professional, policy, public, political, and commercial interests. Because of barriers and risks within this process, the trickle-down effect between sustainable transport principles and scheme design and implementation is not working as effectively as it could. These barriers have led to a frustration over a lack of progress in implementing sustainable transport solutions, and the forestalling of the introduction of more radical policy approaches to address transport-related policy problems. This is limited to a large extent by the external governance and delivery framework for transport.

Executive Summary

Interview surveys were carried out by researchers at the Centre for Environment & Planning at the University of the West of England, Bristol with six policy specialists, and a total of twenty-three officers from five local authority settings, between December 2005 and April 2006. The units of analysis for this research were local land-use planners, environmental strategy officers, public health personnel, local authority corporate strategy officers, and local transport planners.

Ten deficiencies affecting the management of change towards delivering national and local sustainable development objectives for transport were identified from the interview data. These are listed below.

Barriers

The barriers that exist within the delivery process for sustainable urban transport can be divided into, a) those that affect mainstream transport planning and policy-level **integration** and, b) those operating at the interface of other policy sectors **interacting** with transport planning. The table below shows that barriers to do with the organisational complexity of collaboration, professional mindsets, and politics predominate with respect to the constraints on transport professionals' working relationships with other sectors on transport issues at the local authority level.

Type of barrier	Effect on mainstream delivery of sustainable transport solutions	Effect specifically on interpersonal communications (i.e. interactions) between the transport profession and other policy sectors
1. Societal constraints on the development of 'sustainable' strategies	✓	
2. Strength of focus on narrow national transport priorities	✓	
3. National Government unwillingness to use its own executive actions to support transport policies	✓	
4. Lack of local control over the implementation and operation of schemes	✓	
5. Funding for sustainable urban transport solutions	✓	
6. Complexities of organisational collaboration in the process of transport planning	✓	✓
7. Analytical capabilities and technical decision-making skills	✓	
8. Physical characteristics of local areas	✓	
9. Professional mindsets	✓	✓
10. Politics	✓	✓

Barriers such as those related to organisational and professional boundaries (factors 6 and 9) were linked with other types of barriers including strong central priorities and technical and analytical barriers (factors 2 and 7).

Central Government was said in many cases not to be fully behind the delivery of sustainable transport at the local level. National targets and 'shared priorities' added to a feeling of centralisation, and did not always fit local objectives. There was a lack of support for solutions such as congestion charging, low emissions zones, and transport alternatives to the private car.

Strategic Environmental Assessment, although a welcome legal driver for environmental integration, was said to have been dealt with abruptly in the transport planning process, where skills and understanding of its requirements had initially been lacking. Better ways were needed of ensuring the effective integration and communication of its findings into transport decision-making, using the skills already available within local authority environmental strategy departments.

Examples were given of cases where officers' work had been skewed away from the delivery of sustainable transport strategies and schemes, towards satisfying the political wishes of portfolio members for transport at the local level. There were examples of 'closed' processes of transport and land-use scheme development which made it difficult for other stakeholders in the process to understand decision-making or aid its development. On some occasions, Members' understanding and commitment to sustainable development was said to be poor, and therefore organisational leadership on these issues was lacking.

It was felt that the delivery of joined-up solutions was to a large extent outside of the hands of local authority officers, with private sector business decisions dominant over the provision of local bus services and local land-use development. These were seen to be key stumbling blocks in the delivery of sustainable transport solutions across all sectors.

Some officers found it difficult to interact with other sectors because of differences in professional backgrounds, training, and levels of importance attached to different elements of transport delivery. In some areas this was hard-wired, although there was some evidence of barriers breaking down – but not quickly enough to address current transport problems.

In many instances, responsibilities for sustainable transport were not felt to be a specific requirement of the transport planning process, given that current shared priorities could be isolated and traded-off against one another. The lack of focus on low-CO₂ modes such as walking and cycling, particularly at the strategic and regional level of transport planning, was felt to be a major barrier. Again, it was felt that authorities could get by paying lip-service to non-car based modes.

Funding frameworks for projects prior to implementation (e.g. Community Infrastructure Fund, Regional Funding Allocation) were not always unbiased in the criteria they used to assess different policy options. They could also distort scheme priorities at the local level, particularly where schemes were ready to be delivered, even though they might not provide the most appropriate solutions compared to schemes which had not been worked up.

Some partnerships were instigated following the preparation of options, and suffered decline following formal consultation. Although most participants were

happy to be involved at the strategy (rather than the detailed scheme design) level, it was felt that communication through the strategy development process – including the generation and adaptation of options in response to inputs from other sectors – could be improved.

The overarching barrier in the interaction of different policy sectors, as well as within transport planning itself, was seen to be the time and resources available for such interaction to occur. Local authorities were said to be limited in their capacity for cross-sector working, because of constraints on their time in dealing with, or having to fend off, a wide variety of cross-cutting agendas.

Common policy agendas

There were – however – positives as well as negatives. There were common policy agendas around the implementation of a number of transport policy measures. Included were measures to change attitudes and behaviour of transport users, the encouragement of walking and cycling through better provision, and better public transport travel alternatives. The majority of the interaction between professionals on these issues took place through the input of strategic principles into the transport planning process. Health providers were also involved in planning and procuring their own transport services to health facilities. Land-use planners and sustainable development officers also got involved in detailed design aspects.

A number of professions at the local level relied on effective transport policy measures to deliver their public policy objectives for public health, the environment, and regeneration. Other sectors commonly used intermediate brokers (such as communities, consultants, local strategic partnerships, external websites, reports, politicians, planning processes, statutory consultation bodies, and officers or 'envoys' working across departmental boundaries) to influence transport policies and help engender change in professional mindsets through interpreting and promoting wider policy agendas.

Recommendations

A number of recommendations are made, below, to improve the process of transport policy delivery, derived from local authority interviews and professional judgement using the research data. These are provisional pending further research work in the DISTILLATE programme, which completes in 2007. These are divided into three categories, with recommendations over the short, medium, and longer term.

For Central Government Decision-making

- ✓ Adoption of wider approaches and greater innovation through creativity and diversity in the development of local transport policy frameworks
- ✓ Adoption of an approach to sustainable transport policy based upon transport and land-use characteristics of local areas rather than through universal policy approaches based on authority type, particularly in urban areas

- ✓ Setting of funding criteria which allows local authorities to address local objectives alongside centrally-led priorities
- ✓ More clearly aligning existing funding for transport (including Local Transport Plan settlement, Highways Authority, Network Rail) against clear and unambiguous statements of Government transport policy
- ✓ Prioritisation of demand management through congestion charging and Low Emissions Zones through policy initiatives that financially benefit local authorities that implement these schemes
- ✓ LTP3 must have substantial funding for Light Rapid Transit, rail station improvements, and community bus services in addition to the Transport Innovation Fund

For Central Government's Executive Actions upon its Delivery Agencies

- ✓ Introduction of stronger economic/fiscal measures (pricing) to address social-behavioural barriers to the use of sustainable transport and to internalise the negative environmental and social costs across government departments of increasing car use
- ✓ Working with the Department of Health, the Department for Transport should fund advice and information exchange on healthy lifestyles using prime-time television commercial slots, television programmes and other media
- ✓ Mainstreaming joint departmental projects and funding across central Government departments (e.g. DEFRA, DTI, DfT, DCLG, DoH)
- ✓ Placement of a statutory responsibility on all central government departments to implement clearly defined objectives for sustainable development in their policies
- ✓ Specification of core, statutory multi-sector indicators/targets for transport that can be adopted in all sectors at the local level in their policy and operational decisions
- ✓ Placement of a statutory responsibility on public agencies (e.g. Primary Care Trusts) to contribute towards the provision of funding for sustainable transport in their areas
- ✓ Improvement of legal tools for local authorities to adopt measures to deliver sustainable transport (e.g. ease for local authorities to regulate and/or control local bus services)
- ✓ Funding by central Government for multi-professional qualifications to improve the understanding of the role of sustainable transport inter-professionally across different policy sectors; the Department for Transport should fund the training/CPD of transport planners and engineers in 'soft measures' and public consultation through short courses and web-based professional training
- ✓ Provision of better technical decision-making tools for local government decision-making

For Local Government Decision-making

- ✓ Improvement of organisational structures in shared and joint Local Transport Plan areas, to encourage better links between sectors and the development of more effective formal as well as informal working relationships; stronger formal networks are needed across non-transport sectors in LTP areas where the spatial scales of transport policy delivery perpetuate traditional transport planning approaches and break links with local service and community planning
- ✓ Ways must be found so that other sectors can exchange ideas and best practice around sustainable transport at the same scale as LTP development, as well as interact with the transport planning process at the senior level to ensure appropriate and sustainable transport solutions are able to be delivered within local authorities
- ✓ Training of transport planners in communication and partnership skills
- ✓ Educating other sectors on how transport impacts upon their own business interests, and more effective ongoing consultation strategies to involve other service sectors
- ✓ Improving departmental structures and locations to encourage the development of effective, informal working relationships between different professions and services within local authorities
- ✓ There is a need for clearer political and senior officer leadership to be shown on the delivery of sustainable transport, through Executive decisions and funding priorities, and through the demonstration of personal commitment to promoting sustainable transport to officers in other services across local authority functions
- ✓ The community strategy or key corporate document must agree the council's strategy/vision with clear political priorities for sustainable transport
- ✓ There is a need for a more effective role to be played by local council scrutiny committees on sustainable transport issues who have a wider and more legitimised remit than corporate policy officers, e.g. to ensure integration of health concerns in transport planning
- ✓ There is a need for a more deliberate process of debate around the meaning of sustainable development in local authorities in order to help build consensus on LTP priorities
- ✓ Greater levels of acceptance – and more effective integration and use – by transport planners of the multi-sector in-house skills and advice within local authorities during the LTP process. For example, during the application of Strategic Environmental Assessment to Local Transport Plans and in the use of other planning tools
- ✓ More inclusive technical decision-making to embrace the social and human work-related aspects of organisational delivery, including option generation, indicator use, modelling and appraisal