Approaches To Workplace Cycling

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This paper compares the approaches of two cycling promotion strategies from opposite sides of the globe.

Cambridge (UK) is a long-established, high-density city of 100,000 residents with an entrenched cycling culture. Perth (Western Australia) is a modern, low density and very large city with a population of 1.1 million and lacking a cycling culture. The paper notes that the two cycling strategies are driven by the differing concerns of the professionals and communities involved.

Cambridge is attempting to overcome land use planning problems whereas Perth is attempting to tackle air quality and health promotion problems. Furthermore, the two approaches to cycling promotion involve distinctive methodologies. The Perth study drew upon corporate sponsorship and provided free bikes to car drivers who would switch to riding. Perth is simply trying to establish the actual benefits that individuals and corporations receive when more people cycle more often. In Cambridge, the approach is part of a broad attempt – of which cycling is a key component – to deliver integrated transport to the city.

In both instances, promotion of the health aspects of cycling is viewed as a secondary benefit overall but a prime motivator for encouraging individual change. Results from Perth indicate a highly successful project with participants recording over 33 per cent more cycling than required by the project and also showing statistically significant improvements in cardiovascular fitness. The project in Cambridge has only just commenced and so it is too early to deliver results. The paper concludes that small-scale projects are effective in meeting their established goals but funding difficulties restrict their benefits to the margins of mainstream transport planning.

Cambridge

Cambridge, being a relatively densely populated medieval city undergoing rapid economic growth, places more emphasis on land use issues and tackles its traffic problems that way. It has a population of 100,000. Historically, Cambridge has had a reputation as the UK's main cycling city. A University of Cambridge by-law bans students living in University accommodation from owning a car within 16 kilometres of the city centre. This has contributed to a relatively high proportion of cyclists as part of the city's overall traffic – 25 per cent of people cycle to work as opposed to 2 per cent in the rest of the country. The challenge is to move off this plateau and reach levels reached in some historic European cities, such as Delft and Groningen.

The development of an integrated transport system in Cambridge will be delivered through a Local Government Plan – a 5 year strategy which includes aims for traffic growth reduction. At the moment, this is highly dependent on promotion of buses – mainly for journeys outside Cambridge city centre. For journeys within this region, the bicycle is an integral part of the approach. Planning restrictions on new companies relocating to Cambridge now often include requirements on the part of the employer to minimise their impact on traffic in the region. These requirements can come in the form of both hard measures – such as provision of cycle parking and restricted car parking – and soft, such as the development of green travel plans.

For existing employers without new developments, pressure comes through networks such as the Travel for Work network and its sister programme, the Cycle Friendly Employers Scheme. These employers develop green travel plans with the assistance of these programmes, which include targets for increasing or at the very least maintaining the level of cycling. Cambridge Cycle Friendly Employers generally works with a network of co-ordinators at different workplaces who get together to share best practice and report on their progress on improving facilities for cyclists. They each work to develop company cycle plans which detail targets for increasing cycle usage and how they will achieve this. In many respects, we act as an information broker between different organisations and employers.

In Cambridge, cycling is seen as a solution especially for those journeys under 5 miles and is a natural outgrowth of a traditionally strong cycling culture, which has come about through University laws. It fits in well with a young, casual workforce in the high tech sector. Although there is a strong cycling culture, there is a fear of traffic which is the main reason people do not cycle.

Measures are being taken to address this problem through on-road facilities as well as promotional activities, such as adult cycle training.

In the health monitoring project, participants are required to cycle or walk to work for four months. In return, they'll receive free fitness assessments (normally worth £25) at the beginning of that period, after six weeks and at the end.

The ideal participants are those who may not take any exercise at the moment and are therefore likely to see some real improvement in their fitness. Participants will also be asked about their attitudes to active forms of transport, such as walking and cycling.

This is part of a shift in our focus from solely looking at workplaces to targeting individuals. As part of this, we will also be looking at geographical communities in terms of suburbs of Cambridge and surrounding villages and working with them to change people's travel habits.

In Cambridge, although more efficient land use is the main driver, health is increasingly an important factor for those considering cycling and in this respect we are following Perth's lead. For us, it can be a selling point for getting people out of their cars and into the saddle. Hence, the health monitoring project which is just underway. Environment is not a selling point at all to the general public, even though it may be important for us as policy makers. There are reservations from both Perth and Cambridge about this approach in the long run as what happens when you get clean or zero emission cars? There goes your foundation for tackling traffic problems.

Perth

Perth is the most geographically isolated capital city in the World. Its nearest neighbour is Singapore, some 3,500 kilometres to the North. Geographically speaking, Perth is a very large city. It nestles on the Swan Coastal Plain and measures approximately 70 kilometres along its North-South Axis and about 35 kilometres across. It is larger than London in area, but with a population of just 1.1 million people.

History demonstrates that Perth turned its back on alternatives to the car in the post-war period. A "hub and spoke" public tramway system with buses and train routes was largely abandoned as the outer edge of Perth expanded from about 10 kilometres distance at the end of World War II. Transport planners embraced the motor car and endorsed a "corridor plan" for Perth with major arterial roads stretching to all points of the compass. The metropolitan region grew rapidly outwards along the four identified "corridors" and residents came to increasingly rely on their car to meet their travel needs. Transport spending is still hugely dominated by the road building imperative with only minor consideration given to transport alternatives to the car.

Perth's planning history has resulted in a very low density city with a high car use and this situation now presents unique problems for cycle promotion. Distance is the enemy as many suburbanite residents live long distances from their places of work, education, shopping and leisure. This is particularly true for commuter trips with distances over 50 kilometres being not uncommon. With such a high use of private vehicles, Perth is now experiencing air quality problems, particularly summer photochemical smog. Both professionals in Government and the lay public are becoming more concerned about traffic trends and air quality outcomes.

The new situation of concern and questioning of established planning goals in Perth presents unique opportunities for cycling promotion. The starting point is that Perth has a very low base-line of cycle commuting. The 1996 census demonstrated that only 801 of the almost 80,000 commuters to the Perth central business district were cyclists. Perth does not have an established cycling "culture" and so any increase in cycling numbers has big outcomes. Secondly, we have a Perth Bicycle Network (PBN) that provides some excellent commuter routes into the city. The aesthetic sections of this infrastructure (e.g., the Swan River foreshore path) are used quite heavily for recreational and leisure trips at weekends but are underutalised at other times. Thirdly, although we have a low density city, it is still true that large numbers of car drivers are commuting less than ten kilometres to work in the city. Fourthly, Perth is a great place for cycling! It has gentle gradients, a great climate with short winters and beautiful cycle routes along river edges and through parks. The last opportunity is that many of the large and modern office buildings in the city have reasonable "end of trip" facilities like showers and lockers.

The methodology for the Perth study started with the assumption that many thousands of car drivers who currently drive less than ten kilometres to work in shops and offices in the city could

change to cycling using off-road PBN routes and arrive for work feeling refreshed after a nice shower at work. Starting with the assumption that some people could change to cycling without major disruption to their lives, the Cycling 100 Project began to promote four periods of cycling each week. To secure sponsorship from private organisations, the project focussed on the health benefits to be gained by individuals who begin cycling and the likely productivity benefits gained from a fitter and healthier workforce. Companies who were interested in the health and welfare of their staff and who had end of trip facilities were approached to sponsor new riders in their workplace. Funding for 100 new riders was gained in this way. The company benefits were at the forefront of the marketing activity and each individual rider underwent a full baseline fitness appraisal.

Unlike most social marketing strategies that promote behavioural change using marketing messages, the project did not use any specific motivational "messages" about health, environmental or economic benefits when recruiting the actual riders. We simply offered people willing to start cycling for four trips each week the opportunity to use a free bike. Further motivational incentive was given in the form of the transfer of ownership of the bike once the person had completed 12 months of riding.

To conclude, both schemes – despite differing backgrounds and motivations – have proved successful within their remits. However, if they are not integrated into – and funded by – broader transport, health and environment strategies, they are destined to remain as nothing more than interesting pilot projects.