20. The management of effective Smarter Choice Programmes

20.1 Introduction

The experience of the Sustainable Travel Towns in implementing their initiatives suggests a number of learning points for the management of effective Smarter Choice Programmes. These can be drawn from the observations of the interviewees, the apparent efficacy of the initiatives and the challenges in interpreting the monitoring data. This chapter discusses several aspects of managing Smarter Choice Programmes: the staffing of the sustainable travel team; the role of partnership in taking the work forward; the importance of building political support; the way in which the programme is communicated; the balance of initiatives within the programme; and the issues encountered in establishing an effective monitoring process.

20.2 Assembling an effective team

All three towns met some challenges in assembling and retaining the right team to deliver their Smarter Choice Programmes. Their experience points to the necessity of allowing adequate time for recruitment (which took between six months and a year) and for bringing new recruits 'up to speed' in their understanding of smarter choices activities. Two of the towns found their programmes hampered by the frequency of staff changes, a problem exacerbated by uncertainty around long-term funding.

Officers emphasised the importance of finding staff that were 'people-focused' with communication skills such as PR and marketing, and the ability to engage with the public and liaise with senior politicians. It was notable that members of the sustainable travel teams did not necessarily specialise on single initiatives and where they did, were sometimes redeployed from one strand of the programme to another. Given the innovative nature of the programmes rolled out in each town, there was a need for enthusiastic teams that could combine versatility and creativity with an analytical approach to the effectiveness of their work.

Besides marketing/PR, interviewees identified some specific skills and interests that would have been a useful addition to their teams at various stages. These included IT expertise for tackling technologically innovative information projects (Peterborough), and a better understanding of businesses for the promotion and development of workplace travel plans (Worcester). Interestingly, in Darlington and Worcester former teachers were employed as school travel advisers, and so brought a stronger understanding of the way schools operate to the work. The skill set needed by the sustainable travel team was partly contingent on the extent to which officers were able to draw on expertise elsewhere in the local authority. For example, in Peterborough interviewees felt that too much of the time that should have been spent on promotional schemes had been drawn into advising on walking and cycling infrastructure, because this expertise was not readily available elsewhere in the council. Conversely in Worcester, officers promoting public transport for the Sustainable Travel Town initiative did so

alongside a public transport marketing officer for the whole county, whose work sometimes overlapped with theirs.

All three towns made extensive use of external consultants, for example, to deliver personal travel planning and to assist in brand development and market research informing the project. Consequently it was important that the sustainable travel team had the skills to commission and manage these contracts effectively. Some innovative arrangements were used to deliver specific aspects of the programmes. In Darlington, local travel advisers, recruited by the consultant Steer Davies Gleave to assist in the personal travel planning initiative, also provided support at *Local Motion* events, and there were plans to involve them further in future work. In Worcester, the sustainable travel team invested significantly in a local charity working with disaffected young people, to procure cycle maintenance sessions for worksites and the refurbishment of second-hand bikes used in various schemes.

The size of the sustainable travel teams running the projects varied from six to seven staff in Darlington and Worcester (with urban populations a little under 100,000) up to 10 in Peterborough (with around 140,000 in its urban area). The aspirations of officers for the future of their initiatives indicated that these were not upper limits and they could readily have made use of greater capacity. In many cases interviewees saw scope to substantially expand on their existing work, were the staff and resources to be available, as the following examples show:

- In Darlington, officers employed 0.5fte staff on public transport information and marketing, but could see scope for 2fte staff to service an expanded programme.
- In Peterborough, there were plans to expand an existing team of 2fte staff on workplace travel planning to 3.5, who would also promote and develop travel plans for residential developments.
- In Worcester, where the school travel officer anticipated continued funding for 0.5fte staff, he could envisage that with 2fte employees it would be possible to support major improvements in walking and cycling infrastructure and to ramp up promotional activities such as loan schemes and events.

Another important factor in establishing an effective team was its location within the local authority. For example, in Worcester the sustainable travel team had initially been split between two managers, giving its work less coherence. In Peterborough interviewees expected the team to gain a firmer footing within the authority, following a restructuring which placed *Travelchoice* in a newly formed Accessibility and Travel group, together with three teams in the Integrated Passenger Transport Unit.

20.3 Developing active partnerships

In all three towns effective partnerships with both external organisations and other council departments, appeared integral to the success of the Smarter Choice Programme. Officers in Darlington advised that partnerships should be built into the design of the programme from the outset and be a core part of its operation and delivery. A local strategic partnership had been involved in supporting the authority's bid to become a Sustainable Travel Town, and a member of this partnership, drawn from the business

community, went on to chair a reference group for the project that included community organisations, teachers, local council members and officers.

In other instances partnerships oversaw specific initiatives within the programme. In Peterborough, for example, a 'travel training' project for pupils moving on from secondary education and for vulnerable adults, was implemented under the umbrella of a post-16 transport partnership, involving the Learning and Skills Council, a local college, Stagecoach, Children's Services and the Passenger Transport Unit.

Partnership working was also critical in the effective distribution of project information. In Worcester, a customer services portal funded by the county council and the six Worcestershire district councils – called Worcestershire Hub – provided a one-stop shop for information on Worcestershire services through offices around the county, telephone access and a website portal. Many other organisations were involved in providing distribution outlets for the towns' project materials, including community centres, GP surgeries and employers.

The role played by some of the key partners involved in Smarter Choice Programmes is described below.

Health sector
In Darlington the town had a strong record of working with a primary care trust, which funded *Walk to School Week* and was included on the reference group for the *Local Motion* project. In Peterborough a primary care trust participated in both the travel training programme and a *Transport to Healthcare* initiative. In Worcester a primary care trust provided funding for information on access to health services and the *Choose how you move* project was able to establish an unstaffed travel counter at the Worcestershire Royal Hospital.

Cycling organisations
Several organisations with a remit to promote cycling played an important role in facilitating the work of the Sustainable Travel Towns. In Worcester, Sustrans provided funding for a new pedestrian and cycling bridge and associated improvements through their *Connect 2 Worcester* project, a lottery-funded award secured by a TV vote, which the sustainable travel team campaigned hard to win. Cycling England, an independent expert body established by the Department for Transport, selected Darlington as one of six Cycling Demonstration Towns, with the result that the authority gained an additional £1.5 million in external funding for cycling. The organisation also audited cycle routes in Peterborough and funded extra cycle training in Worcester. Other partners included local cycling forums, which were well placed to contribute to local events or share their experience of the cycle network.

Public transport companies
A strong relationship with the main bus operator, Stagecoach, was identified as a key success factor in Peterborough, where bus use grew substantially. In Worcester, which also saw a considerable rise in bus patronage, partnership working with the bus company, First, appeared weaker, but the operator ran a series of marketing initiatives alongside the work of the sustainable travel team, which are likely to have been influential in building bus patronage. In both Peterborough and Worcester, the bus companies contributed to the towns' personal travel planning programmes by providing home visits to advise on

public transport. In Darlington, at the start of the project, partnership working with public transport providers was frustrated by competition between the two leading bus operators. This situation changed however when Arriva took over from Stagecoach to become the town's main operator. From this point the partnership between the company and the authority became more productive, facilitated by a 'Memorandum of Understanding', setting out expectations on both sides.

Local authority

Other key partners in Smarter Choice Programmes were agencies/colleagues from different parts of the local authority or from neighbouring local authorities. In Worcester, where the sustainable travel team was based within Worcestershire County Council, Worcester City Council played an important role in supporting workplace travel planning by running the Worcestershire Alliance, a local strategic partnership for the city, which brought together organisations from the public, private, voluntary and community sectors and included a transport working group. The county council's negotiations with the city council were also critical in securing a change to the structure of city centre parking charges to deter long-term parking.

Other key local authority partners included road safety teams, because of their role in supporting school travel planning through the delivery of pedestrian and cycle training; passenger transport units, because of their role in coordinating and promoting bus services; highways engineering teams because of their role in implementing walking and cycling infrastructure; and tourism information centres because of their function in distributing information. There was also cooperation with colleagues running other local authority initiatives that aimed to encourage sustainable travel, such as Healthy Schools, Eco-Schools, *Walking for Health* and Agenda 21.

Other organisations

Other organisations mentioned as partners included local employers and local schools implementing their own travel plans; the Highways Agency because of its extensive involvement in travel planning; external consultants commissioned to deliver specific components of the programme; and environmental organisations with an interest in promoting sustainable travel, such as Groundwork. The three towns also benefited from sharing experience with one another as their programmes developed. In all three towns the Government funding made available for school travel grants from the Department for Children, Schools and Families played an integral role in their school travel programmes.

20.4 Gaining political support for smarter choices and complementary measures

All the towns stressed the importance of achieving political support for smarter choice work and engaging with elected members at an early stage, so that they understood the value of the programme and were prepared to back it.

In Worcester, county and city councillors were invited to annual seminars about the project and received a regular newsletter informing them of its developments. In the first year of the project some councillors and officers participated in a tour of transport good

practice in Germany, organised by Sustrans. Throughout the programme, the sustainable travel team worked closely with the cabinet member for the environment, who was briefed on a weekly basis and supplied quotes for the media. Council members were invited to launch events for individual initiatives and so encouraged to appreciate the stream of positive publicity that the programme generated.

In Darlington, officers particularly stressed the role of monitoring and good quality evidence in persuading their more sceptical politicians that the programme was worthwhile.

In general, it appeared that the kudos of being selected to be a Sustainable Travel Town and the predominantly voluntary nature of smarter choice initiatives both helped in attracting political support for the programmes.

In contrast, there was much less political appetite for complementary measures that are considered to be important in 'locking in' traffic reduction through traffic restraint and the reallocation of road space:

- In Darlington, the town centre pedestrian heart scheme and an increase in parking charges could both be seen as fulfilling a 'locking in' function. Nevertheless, officers said that road capacity increases were still seen as necessary in the short term and an Eastern Relief Road was under construction with potential for traffic generation.
- In Peterborough, officers said that there was strong resistance to any measures that might involve taking road space away from cars, and car parking charges were seen as 'taboo'. A temporary bus lane was put in place during road works but subsequently removed when the road works were finished, and there were major increases in road capacity during the project.
- In Worcester, smarter choice measures were viewed as a good way forward in the face of difficulties in reallocating road space in the city's traditional street layout. Nevertheless, officers felt that the political popularity of the programme had made politicians more prepared to contemplate bus priority measures, and to undertake a consultation on this. The project had also facilitated cooperation with the city council in setting city parking charges to deter commuter parking.

An implication from the Worcester experience is that a Smarter Choice Programme may help to create the political climate for complementary measures that might otherwise be considered unacceptable. The importance of improving the quality of the sustainable transport 'offer' is discussed below.

20.5 Communicating the programme

Communication was central to the work of the Sustainable Travel Towns. The experience and advice of interviewees suggests the following good practice guidelines:

- Invest in a strong brand that can be used widely across the project's many initiatives. In Darlington the initial branding of *A town on the move* was replaced with the stronger *Local Motion*, following advice from a marketing agency. Recognition of the project's logo was somewhat lower in Worcester than in the other two towns, and it may be

that the longer *Choose how you move* campaign name was less memorable than the shorter *Local Motion* or *Travelchoice*. Another possibility is that the *Choose how you move* brand was diluted by being adapted to different campaigns: e.g. *Choose walking for health*.

- Give the campaign a strong local identity. All three of the Sustainable Travel Towns developed communication strategies which set out not only to 'sell' sustainable travel options, but to make them a part of the town's identity, with the project brands each including the name of the town. In a similar vein, the sustainable travel loyalty schemes run successfully in Darlington and Peterborough, both encouraged the town's residents to identify with the project by signing up to receive special offers, discounts and information. This kind of scheme has the advantage of creating demonstrable and visible support for sustainable travel, which in itself is a powerful message for encouraging further support from other residents. In Worcester, focus group research found that people preferred to see local photographs in the project's promotional literature, again indicating that they responded positively to aspects of the programme that showed a clear local focus and made it the town's own.
- Adopt a positive tone. There was agreement in the three towns that it was important to emphasise choice, with 'pull' not 'push' messages that gave people the tools to change their behaviour rather than telling them what to do. Focus groups in Worcester pointed to the value of simple light-hearted messages with strong credibility and realism. They also identified that there were good opportunities to promote walking and cycling for health, fitness, relaxation and sociability.
- Run a proactive and positive press/PR strategy, by providing a stream of good news stories for local media. In Peterborough the team issued a couple of press releases a month on average, while in Worcester officers pointed to the cost effectiveness of positive media coverage in comparison with paid advertising. Good media coverage was also influential in gaining political support for the programme.
- Ensure effective and extensive distribution of campaign information/messages. Interviewees had invested substantial time and effort into ensuring that their information and publicity materials were widely distributed through different outlets. These included websites, door drops and information counters as well a great many small outlets such as newsagents, community centres, employers, hotels and health centres. In Peterborough, a regular distribution run for leaflets included more than 200 outlets. Advertising for the three towns' programmes was carried by local radio and local papers and on bus backs, bus shelters, billboards and town centre banners.
- Use innovative ways to celebrate sustainable travel and capture the imagination of the public and the press. Examples include Peterborough's *'Thank you'* campaign, in which sustainable travellers received thank you post cards and a balloon launched in the city centre celebrated the 35,000 tonnes of CO_2 a year being saved, as a result of residents' travel choices; *Worcester Free Ride*, a PR stunt in which 50 refurbished second-hand bikes were placed on the streets of the town for free use by residents; and the cycling festivals, run in all three towns as family events. Notably, these initiatives helped to build a culture that was supportive of sustainable travel, by demonstrating that residents were prepared to take up these choices.

20.6 Developing a balanced package of initiatives

Comparing the towns' three programmes there were some clear differences in focus in terms of mode of travel, as measured by staff resources or funding or both. From April 2006, Peterborough dedicated substantially greater staff resources to public transport information and marketing than the other two towns (alongside substantial capital investment). In Darlington, which became a Cycling Demonstration Town during the programme, a comparatively high level of staff resources were allocated to cycling and walking, while the town's investment in cycling infrastructure was substantially higher per head of population than that of the other two towns. In both cases this additional effort and resource was reflected in the success of the relevant mode, with Peterborough achieving the most dramatic increases in bus travel, and Darlington enjoying the greatest success in increasing cycling. This should give some confidence to local authorities in allocating resources to particular aspects of their Smarter Choice Programmes. The implication of the towns' experience is that focusing attention and resources on particular modes pays off, so that programmes can be successfully targeted to achieve specific outcomes.

Not all smarter choice measures are mode-specific. Moreover a key rationale for funding the work of the Sustainable Travel Towns was to assess the effects from a *combination* of smarter choice measures when implemented together, making it important to consider whether there was synergy between different interventions. In general, interviewees considered the different strands of work within their projects to be mutually reinforcing. They reported that branding and town-wide marketing raised wider awareness so that officers promoting specific initiatives were not 'cold-calling' and a favourable experience of one initiative encouraged a more favourable response to others. For example, in Darlington, travel advisers working on the personal travel planning programme perceived that parents who had heard about the *Medal Motion* campaign, through school travel work at their children's schools, were more receptive to entering into a dialogue about their own travel. Another benefit was that resources and products produced for one strand of the programme often proved useful in the context of others. For instance, in Peterborough, where weekly *Megarider* tickets had been introduced to promote bus use, vouchers for these were included in travel packs for new residents as part of residential travel plans. In Worcester, a cycle loan scheme originally introduced for teachers was then made available to residents generally, and also marketed to employees. Consequently, towns which develop broad programmes that combine a variety of smart measures stand to gain positive synergies in the effective delivery of these initiatives, providing that there is cooperation between the officers implementing individual schemes and different initiatives are clearly identifiable as belonging to the same programme (e.g. through common branding). It was also argued that in implementing initiatives together the authority could generate much broader support for cycling and walking infrastructure, which would in turn help all strands of the programme to be successful.

As we have seen, distinguishing the role of specific measures in influencing travel patterns is often problematic. Nevertheless, our evaluation of the effects of the Sustainable Travel Town work indicates that changes in behaviour (e.g. increased bus use or less car use for the trip to school) were due to combined impacts from more than one initiative. In Chapter 14 we estimated that the 'whole town' effect of personal travel

planning was to increase public transport trips by around 5-15%, with further reductions attributable to other initiatives, including marketing campaigns. Similarly, in Chapter 16 we concluded that increases in walking in all three towns appeared to be due to a combination of personal travel planning work and other activities. In Chapter 12 we noted evidence that the reductions in car use at schools was not solely attributable to school travel planning, with the possibility that other smart initiatives also played a role.

In all three of the demonstration towns, personal travel planning was a cornerstone of the sustainable travel work, and consumed the largest share of the project's funds. In general interviewees felt that the emphasis on this aspect of the programme had been successful and that personal travel planning worked well in the context of a nest of other initiatives, creating many synergies. Darlington officers felt that their personal travel planning, school travel planning and travel awareness initiatives had together been successful in ensuring the whole programme was widely disseminated across the town. The decision to target all households with personal travel planning was seen as a socially inclusive strategy.

Because of the costs involved none of the towns anticipated repeating a full-scale personal travel planning exercise. Instead they were looking at ways of utilising the same techniques in less costly ways – for example, marketing travel information and offers through targeted mail drops (Worcester) or extending the role of travel advisers to other initiatives (Darlington).

Given the broad similarities between the programmes in the three towns it is not possible to estimate quantitatively what might be the optimum balance of resources between different smart measures: since all three towns chose to prioritise personal travel planning we cannot know what might have happened if similar resources had been committed to other initiatives. Particular questions remain about the potential role of workplace travel planning. In all three towns this took a comparatively low share of resources at between 4-10% of revenue funding, including staff costs. Although school travel planning also received a comparatively low share of funds, at between 2-5%, this was significantly supplemented by the use of capital grants for school travel-related infrastructure, made available from central Government, and considered by officers to be central to their approach. Similarly, money spent on public transport marketing by the local authority was additional to the marketing spend of public transport companies. Consequently, the work of the three towns does not provide a level playing field for testing the potential of workplace travel planning. This position was partially reflected in the views of our interviewees. In Darlington and Worcester particularly, there was a feeling that they had yet to realise the full potential of this initiative, and there were plans to develop their work in this area further. In Worcester the approach had been refined in the course of the project, and there was a sense that the town was now better equipped to take the initiative forward. Neither Darlington nor Worcester had sufficient travel plan monitoring data to allow an evaluation of their initial progress on workplace travel planning.

In Peterborough, where the initiative was more fully developed, monitoring data from employers with travel plans showed an overall reduction in car use of about 4%, but reductions at individual organisations ranged up to about 20%. Results from the household travel surveys indicate that car commuting by Peterborough residents declined by about 3-5% across the town. This seems to indicate that measures other than

workplace travel planning (e.g. the overall travel awareness campaign, personal travel planning, public transport information and marketing) had an effect on travel patterns for the journey to work. At organisations with modest changes in car use, it is possible that reductions in car use were the result of various town-wide measures, while the organisations with above-average reductions in car use may be demonstrating the additional effects of more intensive implementation of workplace travel planning. Since it was not possible to directly compare the level of car commuting of householders working for organisations with travel plans with the level of car commuting of householders working for organisations without travel plans, we cannot be sure of this.

Nevertheless, evidence from the household travel surveys suggests that a proportionately greater investment in a systematic approach to reducing car use for travel to work, and especially for longer trips (over 10km), could potentially achieve substantial savings in traffic and carbon not yet realised. The rationale for this is that car driver mileage for commuting accounts for a high proportion of overall mileage (43% for trips of <50km in 2004) and clearly therefore represents a significant potential 'prize' – that is, even small percentage savings would deliver large absolute car mileage reductions. The towns were most successful in reducing car driver kilometres for work in the shorter journey distance bands (<10km), where reductions in car driver mileage for commuting accounted for over a third (36%) of overall mileage savings. There was notably less success in reducing journeys in the longer distance bands (10-50km), where car mileage for commuting increased in Worcester, though it fell in Darlington and Peterborough. This suggests that further work to design effective interventions targeted at longer commuter trips is needed. In Chapter 21 we discuss what policy levers might be required to support such interventions.

20.7 Improving the quality of the sustainable travel offer

Several aspects of the towns' results indicate that interventions targeted at specific modes are most effective when accompanied by quality improvements. There is evidence for this in the failure of the personal travel planning and other promotional work to reverse declining bus use in Darlington, in the absence of service improvements. Similarly, the growth in bus patronage in Worcester was not sustained beyond the period in which the main service improvements took place. By contrast, in Peterborough, where the initial bus service reorganisation was followed by a series of service enhancements, growth in bus patronage was sustained throughout the Sustainable Travel Town period. The evaluation also identified specific examples, in Peterborough and Worcester, where personal travel planning was particularly successful in encouraging the growth of bus use following the introduction of new services, again suggesting that marketing and promotion are at their most effective when combined with improvements in service quality.

There is similar evidence in relation to cycling. Darlington, the town where investment in improving cycle facilities was greatest, achieved by far the largest increases in levels of cycling. The growth in cycling in Darlington started from the date when the town became a Cycling Demonstration Town. Early growth seems more likely to be attributable to a combination of increased promotion of cycling and a range of small-scale improvements, such as provision of cycle parking, rather than to major improvements in cycle paths. However, there was subsequently a further jump in cycling,

which coincided with a period when substantial capital investment in new cycle lanes, cycle crossings and other cycle infrastructure took place.

A large-scale Smarter Choice Programme should therefore address service quality (in marketing terms, the 'offer'), alongside marketing, promotion and information provision, and is likely to require a combination of capital investment and revenue support. From a road safety perspective too, as discussed in Chapter 19, there is a clear case for efforts to promote walking and cycling to be supported by a strong programme of improvements in the quality and safety of the walking and cycling environment, such as 20mph zones, cycling infrastructure and other pedestrian and cycling-friendly highways measures.

20.8 Monitoring the impacts

Funding from the Department for Transport enabled the three Sustainable Travel Towns to invest in a substantial and high quality monitoring process, by commissioning baseline, interim and post-intervention household travel surveys. This data was supplemented by a variety of other indicators that were routinely collected by the authorities. In Darlington particularly, officers argued that the quality of monitoring had allowed them to move from an intuitive to an evidence-based approach, which was critical in gaining support for smarter choice measures, both inside and outside the local authority. Our own evaluation inevitably revealed both strengths and weaknesses in the monitoring data from different sources, providing a number of points for good practice that are discussed below.

20.8.1 Household travel surveys

The household travel surveys were a key strength of the Sustainable Travel Town initiatives, ensuring that all three towns had comparable data, collected at the beginning and end of the project, with some additional interim survey work in the middle. These surveys, discussed in Chapter 13, made it possible to determine how travel patterns had changed in terms of the shift from one mode to another and allowed a breakdown in these changes according to journey purpose, journey length, and various demographic and socio-economic factors.

One limitation of the household travel surveys was that, because they were based on sequential sampling from the towns' populations, some questions remained unanswered. For instance, it was not possible to say whether changes in travel behaviour were the result of many people making small changes or fewer people making large changes. There was also no way of identifying which individuals had changed their travel behaviour and so investigating the reasons for these changes retrospectively. For this purpose a panel survey, in which the data is collected from the same participants over time, could have been a very useful addition to the monitoring process, though evidently this has cost implications. A possible criticism of panel data is that filling in a travel diary is an intervention in its own right, so that a panel that has completed this process may be unrepresentative of the town's wider population.

For benchmarking purposes (see below) it is much easier to compare local and national travel patterns if the household travel diaries used for local monitoring correspond closely to the design of travel diaries used in the National Travel Survey.

Another general limitation of household travel surveys is the fact that they depend on self-reports, which are not always reliable. For this reason it is important to cross-reference the results from travel diaries against data collected from other sources. One possible data source that would be very useful in evaluating changes in car use, is the vehicle mileage records held by DVLA. While these were not available for this evaluation it would be worth exploring the scope for using mileage records in future projects. A number of other sources of data have been examined in this study, as described below.

20.8.2 Triangulation with other indicators

In the current evaluation we have compared changes in travel shown by household travel surveys with data collected from automatic counters for both motor vehicles and bicycles. Where counters were in place before the project began, count data was available for earlier years with the advantage that it was possible to establish not only the baseline for traffic and cycling levels, but also the historic trend. A shortcoming of the data was that counters were not always ideally placed to monitor changes on the minor urban roads used predominantly by local residents, which were likely to be most affected by smarter choice measures. Counters located around the peripheries of the towns, though useful for monitoring incoming flows, were not particularly helpful for assessing intra-town changes in travel by residents. Similarly, there were not always enough counters to provide a full picture of either traffic or cycling patterns in the town. There was also a lack of data on neighbourhood walking levels, another important indicator of success in encouraging sustainable journeys.

On this basis it is advisable for towns embarking on Smarter Choice Programmes to review their automatic counter networks, ensuring that they are sufficiently comprehensive and inclusive. They should also ensure that there are adequate arrangements in place for monitoring walking levels across the town, not least since increases in walking may be one of the largest behaviour changes achieved by such programmes.

In assessing count data it is always important to be aware of the nature of this data. Traffic flows on different types of roads may be more, or less affected, by traffic from elsewhere. Knowing where counters are located makes it easier to estimate how much of the traffic that they record is likely to be traffic that might have been affected by specific initiatives. Adding an extra counter to a cordon can lead to an artificial increase in numbers, which may be difficult to identify, if simply examining cordon totals over time, rather than understanding where the counter fits into the wider network. Another problem relates to malfunctioning counters. Authorities need to ensure that these are identified quickly so that they can be promptly repaired.

This project also made extensive use of bus patronage data. In interpreting this information meaningfully, it is important to have a good understanding of the way in which services have been reconfigured over time, for example, through their amalgamation or substitution. Consequently, local authorities need to establish good partnerships with the bus operators early in their programmes, and to agree what data can be shared, and how it will be used.

For all travel modes it is essential to take account of seasonal variations. In this study we indexed data against performance in previous years. In order to relate travel changes to specific initiatives, analysts also need to know with some precision when these took place – information that can be surprisingly hard to check a few years later. The value of keeping an initiative diary is discussed further below. In general, analysis of data needs to take account of any contextual changes over the relevant period that may have influenced travel patterns – such as major pedestrianisation schemes, periods of flooding or freezing and economic downturns.

20.8.3 Benchmarking data

To assess how far changes in travel can be attributed to smarter choice work it is important to examine 'what would have happened anyway', through the use of benchmarking data. This makes it possible to assess whether the trends identified in the town reflect broader national trends (e.g. in response to economic factors) rather than the effects of local initiatives. Possible sources of benchmarking data include the National Travel Survey and National Road Traffic Estimates; in the future, data collected via National Indicators for local authorities may also provide a source of benchmarking data.

Benchmarking can be refined on the basis of data for more comparable areas – e.g. urban areas. As discussed in Chapter 10, choosing a similar 'control town' is often fraught with difficulty, since no two towns are alike on all dimensions and different outcomes can too easily be attributed to specific differences. This problem may be overcome by identifying a substantial group of comparator towns rather than one, and using averaged indicators from all of them. A further issue to be aware of is that many towns are now implementing smart measures themselves, so that the difference between the programme of work in a Sustainable Travel Town and its comparator towns is likely to be a matter of degree.

20.8.4 Monitoring for individual initiatives

As well as carrying out town-wide monitoring work the local authorities used some monitoring processes for specific initiatives: interim household travel surveys were conducted to assess the impact of personal travel planning; school travel surveys were used to monitor modal split for the journey to school. Various other indicators were also collected, such as the number of people taking up cycle loans or cycle training or the number of people attending specific events.

One conclusion from this evaluation is that it is important to consider from the outset how the effects of each initiative within the programme will be evaluated. This may necessitate collecting some additional monitoring data. For example, to evaluate the effect of a campaign advocating use of late night buses it is helpful to have data about the use of bus routes by time of day. In this study officers had had particular difficulty in persuading employers to carry out post-intervention employee travel surveys, making it hard to assess the effects of workplace travel planning. To some extent, monitoring procedures were improving as a result of the introduction of online surveys for use by employers. However, it may be that to gain a full picture of the impact of these initiatives, it is necessary for local authorities to commission their own independent

monitoring surveys, gathering baseline and subsequent data from a sample of different worksites, including both those that are engaged in travel planning and those that are not.

20.8.5 Relating monitoring data to wider objectives

The choice of monitoring data collected should take account of the project's wider objectives. These might include, for example, cutting carbon emissions, reducing traffic congestion, improving road safety, improving air quality or improving health through more active travel. In each case different indicators are relevant and will need to be identified, agreed and incorporated in the monitoring programme. There is also a case for assessing any wider impacts from the project, for example, its consequences for social inclusion or economic vitality. .

20.8.6 Initiative diary

A central challenge in evaluating the impact of smarter choice measures is to understand precisely what initiatives and events have taken place that could have a role in affecting travel patterns. It is critical to know when a particular scheme was first introduced and at what scale. This kind of information is often hard to retrieve as activities recede in time. Consequently it would be useful for local authorities running Smarter Choice Programmes to record the details of their activities, and any potentially confounding factors, on an ongoing basis in an 'initiatives diary' or log. This should be filled in according to a clear format that ensures consistency and keeps the information brief and simple to enter. Key entries would include:

- activities implemented, including where and when these took place, and any indicators of scale, (e.g. how many leaflets in a door-drop; how many attendees at an event);
- staff levels and expenditure over time, with a break down according to categories of spending;
- the work of other departments/organisations effectively implementing smart measures in parallel with the Sustainable Travel Town team, for example, the marketing initiatives of the bus company or the passenger transport unit. This points to the importance of having good communications with these partners;
- any significant changes in services or infrastructure likely to affect travel, for example, the introduction of a new cycle way or a new bus service; a wholesale upgrade in the quality of bus stops and shelters; a change in the parking regime;
- any major events that would be expected to have implications for travel, such as large road works, flooding, a period of unusually bad weather or a major festival held in the town.

20.9 Conclusions

In summary, the experience of the Sustainable Travel Towns provides a series of good practice guidelines for future programmes:

- Officers embarking on Smarter Choice Programmes will need to ensure that adequate time is allocated to recruitment and training of a strong team that includes

staff with skills in PR and communication, the experience to commission work by outside specialists where necessary, and any specific expertise needed to implement specific aspects of the programme.

- Developing initiatives in cooperation with a range of partners can help to facilitate their delivery and increase their effectiveness. This will include both other local authority departments, such as highways engineering, and external organisations, such as health agencies. Liaison with partners can be especially important in ensuring wide distribution for programme materials.

- Efforts will be needed to win wider support for the programme by communicating its purpose and benefits to elected members and involving them in events and media coverage. Through the programme it may also be possible to increase members' understanding and awareness of the value of measures that 'lock-in' travel behaviour change, such as the reallocation of road space towards more sustainable transport modes.

- Communication is central to the implementation of Smarter Choice Programmes. In the three demonstration towns this involved the creation of a strong brand with a clear local identity; a proactive strategy for gaining ongoing media coverage; use of positive campaign messages and innovative approaches, with particular attention to demonstrating wider support for sustainable travel; and the development of an extensive distribution network for campaign materials.

- The balance of initiatives in the programme, and the allocation of resources should be determined in the light of priorities and objectives – for example, to encourage more active travel or to build bus use. The study demonstrates that the level of resources allocated to specific modes is likely to be reflected in the outcomes of the programme. It also points to potential scope for realising greater savings in driving distance and carbon, through greater investment in initiatives that address commuter travel, and particularly longer journeys to work.

- Good communication channels are needed between officers working on different strands of the Smarter Choice Programme so that potential synergies are realised, for example, where products and services developed for one initiative can be used in the context of others, or where residents engaged in the programme through one initiative could potentially facilitate wider participation in other initiatives.

- Interventions are likely to be most effective in achieving modal shift where promotional messages are coupled with improvements in the quality of the sustainable transport offer, for example, with better bus services or cycling infrastructure. From a road safety perspective too, there is a clear case for efforts to promote walking and cycling to be supported by a strong programme of improvements in the quality and safety of the walking and cycling environment, such as 20mph zones and other pedestrian and cycling-friendly highways measures.

- It is important to ensure that a robust monitoring framework is in place from the beginning of the programme and incorporates the collection and triangulation of data from different sources, including household travel surveys, bus patronage and traffic,

cycling and walking counts. Detailed consideration will be needed to ensure that counters are appropriately located to detect the expected changes in travel. There is a case for collecting panel data, making it possible to monitor change in travel patterns over time at an individual level. Evaluating programme outcomes necessitates benchmarking against performance elsewhere, though clearly the nature of this benchmarking changes as Smarter Choice Programmes are more widely implemented. Separate monitoring will be needed for specific initiatives within the programme, such as school and workplace travel plans. It is also recommended that sustainable travel teams maintain an 'initiative diary', in which they keep a detailed record of programme activities, together with any other activities, events and contextual changes that are likely to have an impact on local travel.