

# WHAT'S SMARTER ABOUT SMARTER CHOICES, SMARTER PLACES?

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## INTRODUCTION

Smarter Choices Smarter Places (SCSP) is a Scottish Government partnership project with COSLA. The demonstration programme is designed to increase active travel and public transport use and tackle transport emissions and health problems caused by lack of regular exercise. As such it will contribute to a number of transport, health and environmental objectives in the Scottish Government's National Performance Framework and Local Authorities' Single Outcome Agreements.

With the SCSP programme due to 'go live' in May 2009 in seven project communities, the purpose of this paper is to describe the origins and intentions of the programme and the associated monitoring and evaluation, and discuss the lessons we have learned from previous work in this field whilst setting out some of our own considerations for others to learn from in the future.

The title of this paper originally asked the question "What's *Smart* about Smarter Choices, Smarter Places?". Between then and appearing in the STAR programme it has transformed into "What's *Smarter* about Smarter Choices, Smarter Places?"

Although it sounds as if we have gone from being confident to complacent in one short bound before the heavy work of the programme has even started, the paper tries to demonstrate why the choices that have been made so far are smart, and the seven locations in which the work is being carried out are going to be smarter, thanks to the solid foundations that were laid before we started.

## DEFINITIONS

Smarter choices are techniques such as school, workplace and individualised travel planning which influence people's travel behaviour towards more sustainable options. They can include changes in cycling and walking infrastructure, improvements for public transport services and personal travel planning as part of a co-ordinated package of measures designed to make it easier and more attractive to choose travel modes other than driving a car. This package of 'soft' measures focussing on behaviour change can be distinguished from 'hard' measures such as large-scale improvements to road infrastructure, traffic engineering or road pricing<sup>1</sup>.

The term 'smarter choices' was first applied in connection with sustainable transport as the title of the 2004 report "Smarter Choices – Changing the Way We Travel" (Cairns et al, 2004). This studied a range of soft measures, all with the potential to reduce car use, concluding that: "..... these soft measures, in a favourable wider policy context, could be sufficiently effective in reducing traffic that they merit serious consideration for an important role in transport strategy for the foreseeable future, prima facie offering very good value for money, and few disadvantages."<sup>2</sup>

Car drivers have to be convinced that choosing public transport or more active modes of travel is smarter. Key arguments are that they may offer quicker and cheaper journeys and a more convenient way to take regular exercise. There are also other wider considerations that may play a role in their decisions, such as reduced air pollution or greenhouse gas emissions.

It might be considered that this naming policy is comparable to Lenin and his co-revolutionaries in 1903 calling themselves the Majority Party (Bolsheviks) and their opponents the Mensheviks (minority), at a time when the hard-line Bolsheviks were actually very much in the minority. But, just as the Bolsheviks did eventually become the majority party (and the rest is history), the term ‘Smarter Choices’ has been validated in a range of studies since 2004, and it has become the accepted way of describing this approach.

Despite this, in using the term ‘smart’ in public descriptions of the work, there is the risk of antagonising the very people that we are seeking to persuade. The target audience living in the seven project communities, whether they are ‘diehard drivers’ or ‘aspiring environmentalists’<sup>2</sup>, might resent our labelling of their current car use as ‘not-smart’.

In order to pre-empt this backlash, whilst emphasising the local nature of the campaigns and avoid them being seen as Big Brother messages from local or central government, the term ‘Smarter Choices, Smarter Places’ will not feature in local publicity for the programme.

Each project is developing its own brand and identity, some linked to existing campaigns such as ‘Better Barrhead’, and others stressing health or other benefits, such as ‘Travel Active’ in Dundee, ‘Take The Right Route’ in Larbert/Stenhousemuir or ‘Healthy Habits’ in Kirkintilloch/Lenzie.

## **ORIGINS AND SELECTION PROCESS**

The SCSP Programme was included in the 2006 National Transport Strategy as: “... sustainable travel demonstration towns and villages, to reduce car use and promote cycling, walking, home zones, tele-working and pedestrianisation to test best approaches and share best practice.”<sup>4</sup>

After some consultation about how this commitment could be delivered within the programme of the SNP Government elected in 2007, the SCSP programme was announced jointly by the Minister for Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change and the COSLA spokesperson for Regeneration and Sustainable Development in a call for expressions of interest issued on 17 March 2008.

This call was addressed to local authorities and transport partnerships, seeking proposals to undertake “... intense activity on sustainable travel interventions and related physical activity interventions, particularly those involving behaviour change ... through the use of Smarter Choices and associated demand management measures.”

Each proposal had to relate to a self-contained town, city or group of villages or an identifiable neighbourhood or community within a town or city with a population between 8,000 and 100,000. (the successful communities are all between 10,000 and 38,000 residents).

Despite initial concern that very few proposals would be submitted, 40 stage one proposals were received from 27 local authorities and 2 Regional Transport Partnerships (some submitted more than one proposal). Following assessment of these proposals, thirteen were invited to submit a stage two proposal. Twelve proposals were submitted by the deadline of 9<sup>th</sup> July 2008.

Assessment of the proposals focussed on testing how the projects proposed to carry out the work, the quality of the proposed work programme, how the project fitted with local and national outcomes, the projected impact on the chosen community, and the strength of support available from the bidder (both in the form of matching funding and in political support).

The selection process adopted for the second round of Cycle Friendly Towns in England included an interview of all shortlisted applicants, testing both the quality of the proposals and the strength of commitment shown by the submitting local authorities.

The three English Sustainable Travel demonstration towns (Darlington, Peterborough and Worcester) were also selected following presentations made by shortlisted proposers.

In all cases, the intention was to have firm proposals agreed at the outset, leaving the way clear for the projects to be managed at a local level.

## **THE INITIATIVES**

The seven SCSP project communities range from 10,000 to 37,000 residents: Kirkwall, Glasgow East End, central Dundee, Stenhousemuir/Larbert, Kirkintilloch/Lenzie, Barrhead and Dumfries.

The total cost of the programme over its three years (2009-2012) is £15m: £10m from Scottish Government plus £5m match funding from the participating local authorities and other local funders.

Across the seven communities, infrastructure improvements (cycle/walking paths, public realm work and public transport enhancements) are the main focus in year 1. The main behaviour change measures do not start until a baseline profile of local travel behaviours and attitudes to change has been completed in April 2009. The first local promotional campaign launch will be in Dundee on 2nd May 2009.

The table below summarises the allocation of funding into various categories across the seven SCSP projects:

Cycling/walking infrastructure	36%
Bus infrastructure	19%
Personal travel planning	12%
Public realm improvement	6%
Travel information	6%
General promotion/ branding	5%
Cycle hire	3%
Health linked projects	3%
Speed reduction	2%
Research	1%
Cycle training	1%
School-based projects	1%
Other projects*	1%
Parking control measures	1%
Workplace travel planning	1%
Car club	1%
Signposting and mapping	1%

*\* includes travel training, path rangers and volunteer involvement*

Although the 2004 – 2009 English Sustainable Travel Demonstration Towns (STDT) was an important source of inspiration for SCSP, there are a number of key differences.

The first difference is that the three STDT towns are all substantially larger than any of the SCSP communities, with populations ranging from 94,000 to 160,000. Although the allocation of central funding to each STDT town was significantly larger than the funding for individual SCSP towns, the annual funding per head of population was lower. In addition, the money was spent over a longer period.

The second difference is that the monitoring and evaluation was commissioned by each of three STDT towns individually rather than in a central contract, although all three towns used the same contractor (Sustrans/Socialdata). Annual reports from this study are available already, and a final report is imminent. A follow up study across the STDT towns has been commissioned by the Department for Transport, which will report in Autumn 2009.

The third difference is that the STDT funding did not include money for infrastructure improvements, although participating local authorities had to provide matching funds for this purpose. In addition, Darlington was also a Cycle Friendly Demonstration town from 2005, which meant that extra money was available for cycle facilities and promotional campaigns.

The fourth difference is that we have a clear opportunity to link the SCSP programme with a number of other demonstration programmes in related fields which are currently being funded by the Scottish Government. The Equally Well test sites include work in Dundee and Glasgow, which are also covered by SCSP projects. The Climate Challenge Fund is supporting community-based projects throughout Scotland, many of which will promote changes in travel behaviour. The Healthy Weight Communities programme will fund a small number of communities to experiment with local co-ordinated work, using the French EPODE programme as a model.

A key part of the communications and learning within the SCSP programme will be to ensure that links are made with the work carried out in these Scottish Government initiatives to ensure that efforts are not being duplicated and to maximise the potential for learning.

## **MONITORING AND EVALUATION**

As part of the SCSP programme, a centrally managed monitoring and evaluation study is being carried out by an Aberdeen University led consortium<sup>5</sup> across the seven communities involved in the programme. The purpose of the study is to assess and analyse the impacts of the SCSP initiatives within and across each community to ascertain whether the objectives of the SCSP programme have been met.

Given the SCSP programme is a pilot, the monitoring and evaluation study is a crucial element of it, as the findings will not only inform discussions on what types of initiatives have the greatest impacts and why, but will also be fundamental in directing the future of SCSP in Scotland.

The monitoring and evaluation study of the SCSP programme has specified the following set of objectives:

1. Build a comprehensive profile of personal travel behaviour for each community to describe: the use of different modes of transport; the physical activity levels of the populations; and the related health of the populations.
2. Determine public attitudes towards, and perceptions of, sustainable travel within each community.
3. Determine how public attitudes and actions have changed in response to the SCSP initiatives within each community.
4. Determine what impacts the interventions have on the desired outcomes of increased use of sustainable transport modes, improved health as a result of more active travel and other outcomes, such as reduced greenhouse gas emissions.
5. Assess and explore the sustainable transport and health outcomes during the programme across a range of different groups, taking account of differences in terms of age, gender, disability and any other relevant criteria (e.g. socio-economic status, ethnicity).
6. Evaluate the impact of the interventions, both in each individual community and across the group of communities (at the end of the SCSP programme in 2012). This will bring together all the primary and secondary research that has taken place over the previous three years.

7. Recommend interventions that can be transferred to other communities in Scotland to increase their levels of sustainable travel (at the end of the programme).

As the SCSP programme is being piloted in seven communities, each with a variety of initiatives being implemented at different stages between 2009 and 2012, it is important for the study to run in parallel with the programme to help ensure that the impacts of the initiatives are captured robustly, both within each community and across the seven communities.

Throughout the monitoring and evaluation process, a wide range of data sources and survey techniques are being used as a means of trying to capture an extremely wide range of variables and also to increase the confidence in any results obtained. These include national data sources on travel behaviour, local data on the pilot communities, door to door and telephone travel surveys, travel counts (vehicle, cycle, pedestrian), focus groups and in depth interviews.

The first stage of the monitoring and evaluation study is the profiling of each SCSP community prior to the initiatives being implemented (objectives 1 and 2). The purpose of this is three fold. Firstly, to understand what the current attitudes to travel and what actual travel behaviours are within each community; secondly to create a baseline of travel behaviour data against which changes can be compared over the course of the study; and thirdly to use the information collected to inform the implementation of the initiatives in each community.

The profiling of each community is a key task as it is essentially to ascertain what point each community is starting from, each of which will be different. The demography of a community, its location, the transport infrastructure, the experience of previous transport initiatives, local attitudes, the local economy and many other factors all make up the 'current situation' within a community. Having a good knowledge of this will help ascertain what types of sustainable transport initiatives would be most appropriate, how best they can be implemented and what the scope for change may be within each community.

The research methods used in the first stage include both qualitative and quantitative research. The qualitative research includes focus groups and in-depth interviews as a means of ascertaining what individual/community attitudes are, why they have them and what influences could stimulate change. Attitudes and behaviours towards active travel may be dependent on issues such as cost, place, health, environment, convenience and so on.

In addition to trying to tease out further attitudes to active travel, the quantitative research (telephone and door-to-door surveys) is used to gather evidence of what people's travel behaviours are and their levels of physical activity. A key element of this is through the use of a travel diary to record information on people's trips over the course of a day.

The second stage of the monitoring and evaluation study (objectives 3, 4 and 5) is the annual monitoring work, in which the telephone surveys are repeated in each community in the spring of 2010 and 2011. This allows changes in people's attitudes

and travel behaviour to be captured during the period that the SCSP initiatives are being implemented. The extent of change expected to be captured through the annual monitoring is naturally uncertain and is likely to reflect the nature of the initiatives being implemented and the success of marketing them. In addition, given the range of external factors that can influence people's travel behaviour, a key challenge will be attributing any changes to the SCSP initiatives. The telephone and door to door surveys have been designed to capture this where possible.

The final stage of the monitoring and evaluation study is the evaluation of the SCSP programme in 2012 and feedback of recommendations on the further roll out of sustainable travel initiatives both within the SCSP communities and across Scotland (objectives 6 and 7). The evaluation will pull together all the primary and secondary research that has been undertaken over the 3 year project with the aim of evaluating the impacts of the SCSP initiatives within each community and across the entire programme.

In parallel with each of these three stages, control samples (counterfactuals) will be created to look at whether there is evidence of any changes in attitudes or travel behaviours in areas that did not receive SCSP funding. The purpose of this is to try and establish what specific impacts the SCSP funding has had above and beyond the general trends.

The main control is being generated through a pool of data gathered from surveying three towns that broadly reflect the seven pilot areas, but are not receiving SCSP funding. By collecting comparable data in these areas, seven control samples will be created to reflect each pilot area and comparisons will be made regarding travel attitudes and behaviours throughout the programme. In addition to this, important comparisons will also be made between the seven pilot areas and also against national trends.

A key question that the final evaluation will aim to address is 'what next for SCSP, or sustainable transport initiatives more generally, in Scotland?'. The evaluation will hopefully have been able to ascertain what impacts certain types of initiatives have had, how the impacts have differed in various parts of Scotland, and what the reasons have been for how successful it has been in changing active travel behaviours. Given the range of initiatives being evaluated, it should also have built up a keen understanding of where to strike the balance between combinations of hard/infrastructure, soft/marketing and complementary/lifestyle measures. As such, the evaluation and analysis will be used to generate an informed set of recommendations that can be used to suggest what types of initiatives tend to work best in certain types of areas, and whether or not it would be desirable to roll them out in other parts of Scotland.

## **KEY CHALLENGES FACED AND HOW WE DEALT WITH THEM**

It is important to bear in mind in this discussion, that the SCSP pilot is only one element of a range of influences that have and are being used to encourage people to increase their undertaking of more sustainable travel, whether it be through more walking, cycling, use of public transport or a combination of all. As such, there are

many lessons to be learned from both implementing and monitoring and evaluating sustainable travel initiatives, and the Scottish SCSP programme is no different. We have set out some of the key challenges (in no particular order) and how we chose to overcome them.

Given the SCSP programme is being rolled out in seven different locations in Scotland, a key consideration was how to organise the monitoring and evaluation study. Implementing initiatives in seven different communities at the same time is a large and complex undertaking, as is trying to monitor and evaluate the impacts of the initiatives at both a local and national level. As such, a centralised monitoring and evaluation programme was designed which would ensure one research team would carry out the research in each community, rather than have each community carry out their own monitoring and evaluation. The benefit of this approach is that it helps ensure a consistent methodology across each area and allows both local and national level evaluations to take place at the end of the pilot.

A second challenge encountered is how to manage the demands of the implementation programme alongside the demands of doing a robust monitoring and evaluation study. The SCSP programme as a whole has benefitted hugely from a close tie between the policy and analytical teams to ensure that the monitoring and evaluation fits in appropriately with the policy. For example, a key decision to be made was when to carry out the survey work as part of the monitoring and evaluation. Due to the timing of the implementation programme, the initial intention was to carry out the baseline survey work during the winter, which due to seasonal conditions would have impacted on survey responses on active travel behaviour. It was decided that the delivery programme was flexible enough to allow the survey work to be undertaken in late spring which offered a good compromise between smoothing seasonal variations and undertaking multiple surveys at various points in the year.

A third challenge encountered was how to enhance and make the best use of the links between all groups involved in administering, delivering and monitoring the SCSP programme – especially between the Scottish Government, Local Authorities and the contracted monitoring and evaluation team. Strong links are and will be of paramount importance to the success of the SCSP programme and overarching work on sustainable travel. The sharing of information and a shared understanding of what SCSP aims to achieve, both in the short and long term, should help ensure the best design and delivery of sustainable travel programmes. In the initial stages of the programme, links have been made by encouraging all groups to feed into decision making processes, and events will be organised in future to ensure information and experiences are being shared.

A fourth, and more technical challenge faced on the monitoring and evaluation side was what counterfactual, or ‘control’, was most appropriate for comparing the changes experienced in SCSP pilot communities with communities that were not receiving SCSP funding. At a basic level, the debate for the SCSP programme centred around whether you can in fact create an appropriate control scenario for the seven pilot communities. There are a range of options open, including: selecting and surveying a specific control town for each pilot community; selecting and surveying a small sample of control towns; comparing changes within the communities against national trends; and selecting and surveying a small number of towns to create a data



pool from which to generate appropriate control samples. Each approach has advantages and disadvantages and the Scottish study is undertaking a combination of control mechanisms as a means of capturing a range of comparisons. After a great deal of discussion on the topic, the only obvious conclusion we came to was that the control needs to suit the nature and scale of the programme being implemented.

## **LOOKING TO THE FUTURE**

In the short run, the implementation and success of SCSP initiatives could be affected by a variety of influences ranging from petrol prices to the weather. A key issue currently affecting us all is the economic recession and the subsequent squeezing of household, business and public sector budgets. In this context, it is intriguing to consider what impact this could have on individual and business active travel patterns, both within the SCSP pilot areas and across other parts of Scotland.

That question in itself is worthy of a paper as there are a wide range of potentially conflicting and complex impacts. For example, on the one hand, the recession could stimulate the use of active travel as a means of trying to cut the costs of using a car. On the other hand, recessions put a great deal of pressure on individuals and households and people may not feel that changing their travel behaviour during this period is a priority for them. Given this uncertainty and tightening budgets, it will be extremely important to establish what types of sustainable travel initiatives offer best value for money when allocating scarce resources. This will require central and local government to be even more innovative in how they develop and deliver initiatives.

In the longer term, the findings from the monitoring and evaluation will be used to inform how sustainable transport initiatives can be introduced in the future. Having the knowledge of what types of initiatives were most successful and in what circumstances, should be used to inform local initiatives across Scotland.

Equally important is having knowledge about what didn't work and why. Initiatives that aren't found to stimulate changes in behaviour are not necessarily bad ideas, they may simply work better in different locations or perhaps benefit from being implemented in a different way. It is important to know these, so that the Scottish Government and local authorities can shape the future of sustainable travel initiatives to what works best.

Within the current spending review, SCSP projects will be carried out over a two and a half year period. Although only early results of SCSP work in Scotland will be available for consideration within the 2011/2014 spending review, decisions on the future direction of SCSP could also be informed by the final STDT results from England. The funding pressures within local authorities and central government are likely to increase in coming years, so any case for Smarter Choices will have to include solid cost benefit analysis with consideration of all impacts.

## CONCLUSION

With the Scottish SCSP programme due to go live at the start of May 2009, the purpose of this paper is to describe the origins and intentions of the SCSP programme, its monitoring and evaluation study and discuss the lessons we have learned from previous work in this field whilst setting out some of our own considerations for others to learn from in the future.

As we have shown, the SCSP pilot programme is a large and complex undertaking which will hopefully stimulate changes in attitudes and behaviour towards sustainable travel in seven very different locations in Scotland. The diverse nature of the programme and range of actors and locations involved in developing and implementing the programme suggests that flexible and innovative approaches will be key to making them work.

Alongside this, a robust and consistent monitoring and evaluation study, in which the main challenge will be capturing the range of impacts of the initiatives at both a local and national level on travel behaviour, physical exercise and the environment. The wide range of research tools and resources being used aims to ascertain the scope for change in each community, capture the impacts that result from initiatives and inform both the delivery of the SCSP programme and its future.

Although the programme is yet to get fully underway, there have already been some significant challenges to overcome in designing both the programme and a compatible monitoring and evaluation study. The paper has given details of these for the benefit of any public body considering developing a similar sustainable travel programme in future.

The over-riding challenge at this stage of the SCSP programme is that the wide range of initiatives are successfully implemented in each of the seven pilot communities, providing people with the opportunities and information required to encourage them to undertake more active and sustainable travel.

So far, we are optimistic that we have made smart choices in our journey towards smart places.

## **REFERENCES**

Cairns S, Sloman L, Newson C, Anable J, Kirkbride A & Goodwin P (2004) '*Smarter Choices: Changing the Way We Travel*', Department for Transport, London

## **NOTES**

1 Cairns et al (2004) p1

2 Cairns et al (2004) p 373-4).

3 Terms identified by Jillian Anable

4 National Transport Strategy para 161

5 Consortium is made up Aberdeen University, Derek Halden Consultancy, Integrated Transport Planning

6 We are very grateful for the support that has been received from those involved with the STDT programme and individual projects, particularly Owen Wilson from Darlington.