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## Aberdeenshire Integrated Travel Towns

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### 1 Introduction

People make transport choices every day of their lives. Be it how we choose to travel to work, visit shops or services or spend our recreational time. At some point a transport choice has to be made. Often, the choices made are subconscious and are based upon previous or habitual behaviour.

Consequently it has been recognised amongst policy makers for some time now that if we are to support and encourage a move towards more sustainable travel behaviour, we need to do this by adopting a wider programme of behaviour change initiatives. This includes providing the tools to facilitate the change in behaviour and importantly providing the context for change.

This approach was adopted by Aberdeenshire Council when considering its own Demonstration Town initiative; quickly establishing the north east town of Peterhead as a successful model and now often cited as a case study. The project, which has helped deliver a network now extending to some 17km of shared use paths, was underpinned by a number of wide ranging 'softer interventions' and built on well-established community engagement methods.

Underpinning this, much work was undertaken to support local initiatives around cycling. This included the establishment of Peterhead's first cycle club, development of an annual family bike ride, a bike recycling scheme and training for cycle mechanics – all were fledgling projects on their own but under the Cycling Demonstration Town (CDT) umbrella were galvanised and able to flourish with a coordinated approach.

At the core of the CDT project was a Masterplan document which set out, what would be delivered, by whom and when. This simple plan was based upon an evaluation of the existing network and aimed to complete links between residential areas and key trip destinations. The Masterplan also included a programme of events and activities, all of which were brought together under a consistent brand identity. Taken together in one document the facilities for change and the context for change were readily set out.

The model of evaluation, community engagement, masterplanning and monitoring has worked well for Aberdeenshire Council to support infrastructure development and behaviour change interventions. Taking this into account and applying the learning from the CDT success, Aberdeenshire Council has now embarked on an ambitious project to support a broader switch to sustainable transport under the Integrated Travel Town (ITT) initiative.

This paper discusses how the ITT project is being delivered making use of the Smarter Choices Smarter Places agenda with an emphasis on the role that Monitoring and Evaluation has to play in helping shape masterplanning work and measure the outcomes and outputs in a coordinated manner.

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## **2 Smarter Choices Smarter Places: The Integrated Travel Town Project**

### **2.1 The Smarter Choices Smarter Places programme**

The overall aim of the SCSP programme is to support and enable increased levels of cycling and walking, through a range of initiatives developed by local authorities and partners.

This supports the achievement of a wide range of policy objectives across different sectors; increased walking and cycling have extensive health and accessibility benefits which can bring economic and social improvements on a local and wider level. Where active journeys replace travel by car or other motorised modes, there are additional benefits including reduced carbon emissions, reduced traffic congestion, and improved local air quality. Some of these objectives are also addressed by the increased uptake of electric vehicles.

Within the SCSP programme there is a strong emphasis on knowledge sharing at a national and local level, and this extends to the monitoring of projects. Knowledge sharing is co-ordinated at a Transport Scotland/Paths for All Level between all Scottish authorities. In addition, Aberdeenshire Council officers work closely with neighbouring authorities (Aberdeen City and Moray Council) to ensure effective programme delivery and also to co-ordinate elements of monitoring and reporting.

### **2.2 Aligning the ITT project with SCSP**

The Integrated Travel Town project, part funded by Sustrans and Paths for All, looked at 5 major towns across Aberdeenshire; Huntly, Inverurie, Ellon, Portlethen and Fraserburgh with the aim to foster a move towards greater sustainable travel by developing sustainable transport opportunities and supporting a change in travel behaviour.

The five towns were selected on the basis of population and typical journey to work patterns; opting to work with communities where car use is relatively high and distances to places of work or study relatively low. This early screening work provided a measure of the latent demand for sustainable, shorter journeys.

The delivery of the project has taken at its heart the need for early engagement with the local community and the need for a thorough appreciation of the issues affecting how individuals chose to travel. The masterplans were thus informed using desk top analysis, site audits and making use of typical Smarter Choices Smarter Places interventions to engage with local communities.

### **2.3 Understanding the issues**

To fully appreciate the problems and potential opportunities for infrastructure development in each of the ITT's, a desktop mapping review was undertaken using GIS map bases. Rather than adopting a holistic town wide approach which would have been resource intensive, the initial exercise required the identification of key trip destinations and main residential areas. The study then considered the key corridors along which residents would be most likely to utilise for a typical journey to local facilities, services and employment centres.

With a narrowed scope of review, the focus of the desk top mapping exercise then extended to consider existing linkages between people and places; identifying existing walk and cycle routes and bus stops along these corridors. The review at this stage also considered areas where remote paths could be utilised to support shorter or more direct journeys.

To further inform the study, existing traffic count data was referenced and the census output data was used to create a picture of transport movements associated with each settlement. The 'Datashine' tool

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was queried to develop an appreciation of modal travel patterns at a neighbourhood level within the towns. This data would also provide baseline data to be revisited in future years.

## **2.4 Exploring the Opportunities**

The information from the desktop mapping was used to direct the onsite audits and assessments. The audit team were tasked with evaluating the existing infrastructure along the identified corridors and explore opportunities that were either identified at the desk top mapping stage, or as a result of the onsite assessments.

Notes were taken of observed pedestrian and cycle movements through the ITT town and along the corridors assessed. It was intended that these observations would provide some qualitative information regarding how individuals used the infrastructure, noting in particular informal crossing points or use of unsurfaced tracks and desire line routes.

Bus stops were located and mapped recording at each location, the quality of the shelters and existence of raised kerbs, locations of adjacent crossing points on well trafficked routes and availability of cycle parking.

The site audits identified existing crossing points along the corridors and the availability or otherwise of dropped kerbs or island refuges to support these crossings. Opportunities to provide new crossing locations were noted by observing where individuals tended to cross.

The location of any cycle parking was also recorded at the previously identified destination points including the town centre and work places; noting both formalised parking and informal parking such as bikes secured to street furniture.

The audits also considered suitable locations where electric vehicle charge points could be installed to support a greater uptake in Electric Vehicles. Local bus interchanges were identified in particular as hot spot locations where cycle parking and EV bays would be complimentary.

## **2.5 Community Engagement; making it appeal**

The information gathered from the desktop mapping exercise and the site audits was collated and used to create information for a series of community engagement events. The aim of the events was to confirm the initial findings and to gather supplementary information based upon local knowledge. Importantly, the events were used to generate local interest in the project and help foster a sense of ownership of the project.

A series of consultation materials were developed to support the engagement exercise alongside hand outs and flyers promoting the project. The materials were designed to reflect the branding adopted for the Councils smart and active travel marketing campaigns. The display materials included an introduction to the project and some context as to the type of improvements that could be delivered locally under the ITT project.

The initial findings of the study were set out using annotated maps and a SWOT analysis of the town's infrastructure was used successfully to stimulate debate and discussion. Local residents were asked to mark up town maps, placing sticky dots on infrastructure which was deemed acceptable, areas for improvement and areas where the level of provision was poor.

The events were held at main community hubs for each of the ITT towns and stakeholders already identified at the start of the project were invited to attend directly by email. Social media was used widely to promote the events and this was backed up by posting announcements on virtual community information boards and by making use of community planning partnership contacts.

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## 2.6 Community Engagement, Monitoring and Evaluation

Community engagement was also used to provide an element of monitoring and evaluation. By seeking feedback from the wider public this was an opportunity to baseline and benchmark brand awareness and general travel and transport.

To support the event, an electronic booklet was prepared which distilled the information from the display materials into an A4 document. The consultation booklet was hosted on the Councils website with links directing stakeholders to these pages in all media output.

An online survey was prepared to support the engagement events, providing interested parties the opportunity to comment on the findings and make suggestions for future infrastructure priorities. Recognising the value of online feedback, a new tool was utilised to elicit further responses from the community.

The 'Placecheck' tool, developed by Urban Design Skills was developed predominantly to generate feedback on the quality of local town centres, inviting users to 'pin' comments on an electronic map. Tagged either as 'Like' 'Dislike' or 'Fix' with corresponding symbols, this resource would provide a clear visual reference of the problems and opportunities associated with each ITT.

Aside from the ability to match comments electronically with a map base, it was the intention to use Placecheck as a means to engage residents who might not normally attend traditional engagement events. With the tool being hosted online and available on to use on smart phones, Placecheck was promoted as a way to provide feedback in a fun and interactive way and it was hoped this would appeal to those who may not normally attend Council facilitated events.

## 2.7 Developing the Masterplans

The Masterplan development was based upon the findings of the desk top mapping exercise and site audits taking into account the findings from the consultation event and the comments generated by Placecheck. It was the purpose of the Masterplan to establish a network of infrastructure that would be delivered over a prescribed period of time, typically a 5 year rolling programme of investment.

The comments of the engagement were grouped according to the corridor areas and used to form the basis of larger scheme proposals. These corridors and routes were mapped onto a base plan of the ITT which also incorporated key residential areas and destination points. The Masterplan was then evolved on the basis of connections between origins and destinations building up to a complete network.

The advantages of this approach are twofold. Firstly it provides an opportunity for local residents to view how the proposals will be delivered over a period of time and gain a better understanding of how the improvements integrate. Secondly, the masterplans provide an element of forward budget planning for the Council and funding partners alike. A review of the CDT project suggested that this approach provided comfort to funding partners as they could see how the individual schemes would contribute to the overall development of a better integrated town.

The outline scheme proposals were then cost appraised to provide budget estimates for delivery. Again this would support future budget setting and would also help to determine if larger schemes would be more deliverable over a longer term period. Another advantage of having outline proposals identified in the Masterplan would be to coordinate any future maintenance works alongside scheme delivery, which would lead to cost efficiencies.

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## 2.8 Community Ownership

The Masterplan documents were circulated directly to key stakeholders including community interest groups, local roads teams, Community Planning Partners and area management teams. In an effort to maximise input from members of the local communities, opportunities to attend already established local events were sought.

Linking into already well-established community events provided an opportunity to engage with local residents not normally likely to attend traditional consultation events. Existing events were used as an opportunity to distribute walking and cycle maps, public transport information and branded give-aways. Once engaged, individuals were asked to comment on the scheme proposals – identified on large map bases.

## 2.9 Masterplan Delivery

The final Masterplan document was based upon a good appreciation and understanding of the geography and issues associated with each town, derived from the desk top mapping and site audit exercise. The document also summarised the key problems, issues and importantly the opportunities for each town, based upon site audits and feedback gathered during the wide community engagement exercise.

The scheme proposals which would ultimately aim to create a better integrated town centre, were mapped, with accompanying explanatory text included in the Masterplan document. This was supported with a priority check list and an action plan setting out when each project would be delivered.

Taking into account the need to support behaviour change with other softer interventions, a soft interventions action plan was also developed setting out events and activities designed to support wider behaviour change.

Involving the community from the onset and creating opportunities to feed into scheme proposals and priorities contributed positively to the community ownership. The final Masterplan documents were designed to be both public facing and internal – aiding any discussions around roads development and maintenance proposals helping the development of any subsequent town centre planning and regeneration proposals.

## 2.10 Measuring Success

Throughout the development of the Masterplans, Monitoring and Evaluation has been a constant feature – weather to ensure that draft proposals meet the aspirations of the local community or if there were existing programmes where best practice examples could be utilised. The development of the Masterplans has been a reflection of this unique approach which has seen Monitoring and Evaluation being in built to the development stages.

The final successes of the ITT programme will be a culmination of a continuing programme of monitoring and evaluation to ensure that projects will deliver the proposed outputs and subsequently the outcomes.

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### 3 Smarter Choices, Smarter Places: Monitoring and Evaluation

#### 3.1 Why Monitor?

The monitoring exercise is an essential component of Aberdeenshire's Smarter Choices Smarter Places programme, and the wider delivery of sustainable and active travel interventions.

The Council are required by the funders (Transport Scotland via Paths for All) to undertake monitoring within set parameters. Furthermore the Council has a responsibility to report to the public, initially through the Council committee system, on the work undertaken, costs and results.

Monitoring and evaluation are essential during the delivery programme and afterwards, in order to maximise the effectiveness of initiatives and to inform future project planning. Through the monitoring exercise, Aberdeenshire can identify what is or is not effective, and working with partners can modify delivery programmes even within a 12-month project cycle.

Recording positive outcomes of sustainable and active travel can be used to support future budget planning and funding applications, and through evaluation financial values can be assigned to these outcomes.

Establishing a robust monitoring and evaluation framework at an early stage in the delivery programme allows travel behaviour data to be monitored over a long period before, during and after delivery.

#### 3.2 Objectives of Monitoring

The objectives of the monitoring programme undertaken by Aberdeenshire for the Smarter Choices Smarter Places programme are:

- To meet the requirements of funders
- To record the direct outputs of the delivery programme
- To analyse the wider outcomes of the programme
- To understand changes in travel behaviour in the five towns
- To analyse the connections between specific delivery initiatives and travel behaviour

The monitoring exercise essentially has short term and long term applications. In the short term, Aberdeenshire Council uses monitoring and evaluation to assess the impacts of ongoing programmes, for example where an initiative produces high levels of public engagement, it can be more widely deployed, or where results indicate an initiative is ineffective, resources can be reallocated elsewhere. In 2015-16, Aberdeenshire and other Councils required to make funding applications for 2016-17 before the end of the financial year and before current year delivery programmes were complete. Therefore ongoing monitoring was essential to inform effective best value delivery continuing into the following year.

Longer term the evaluation exercise allows more strategic planning and support the alignment of the SCSP programme with other Council and partner initiatives, for example where demonstrating positive health impacts of a project it might be possible to plan future delivery in partnership with health organisations. Longer term, the outcomes of the project can also be compared against other towns and local authorities, and background trends can be more readily taken into accounts.

#### 3.3 Guidance

A number of references are useful to inform the approach to monitoring and evaluation of active and sustainable travel.

- Sustrans
- Paths for All
- DfT

Sustrans include guidance in Chapter 16 of their Design Manual, which states:

*“It is vital that authorities establish a programme of active travel monitoring, which will establish a baseline and changes will be measured from that. This will inform priorities and help make the case for continued investment, show where further investment is needed and provide data for the planning and design of networks and facilities.”*

Paths for All as part of their management of the Smarter Choices Smarter Places funding programme have developed clear guidance on monitoring and evaluation which forms the basis for Aberdeenshire’s monitoring framework.

The Department for Transport has produced a guide to assessing the benefits of cycling and walking, within “Investing in cycling and walking: the economic case for action”. A complementary spreadsheet tool enables an economic assessment to be made, and together these resources help to inform the types of data which should be collected.

Similarly the World Health Organisation HEAT tool (Health Economic Impact Assessment Tool) can be used to inform useful data sets to be collected.

### **3.4 Alignment with Other Data Collection**

Aberdeenshire Council aimed to extend the value of the monitoring exercise as far as possible, by aligning data collection with other monitoring programmes. By using similar methodologies, the results of Aberdeenshire’s SCSP monitoring can be compared with previous data collected by the Council, and with information gathered in other locations (for example to compare with Scottish averages, or with towns where similar sustainable travel programmes have been developed).

During 2015-16 Aberdeenshire aimed to establish a strong baseline of monitoring, which will reap benefits through an extensive monitoring programme to be continued in future years.

As part of this, a ‘question bank’ was developed for use in surveys and interviews, using questions & responses from previous/ongoing surveys such as:

- Smarter Choices Smarter Places evaluation (Transport Scotland)
- Citizens’ Panel surveys (Aberdeenshire Council).

The format of responses is an important consideration, as it is much easier to compare survey results with consistent response formats. For example it is difficult to compare findings if two surveys use different formats such as:

- Agree/No Opinion/Disagree
- Strongly Agree/Agree/Somewhat Agree/Somewhat Disagree/Disagree/Strongly Disagree

At the start of 2015-16, Aberdeenshire had pedestrian and cycle counters from multiple suppliers in towns including the five ITT towns. The data from these counters was accessed in different ways, and output in different formats.

During the course of the year, the Council has worked with suppliers to standardise the data collection and output formats, to ease the process of data analysis and allow more meaningful comparisons to be made.

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### 3.5 Short term and long term

Monitoring and evaluation of Aberdeenshire's Smarter Choices Smarter Places programme has required consideration of both short- and long-term issues.

The short term focus is to ensure effective project delivery during the 12-month window for spending funding. The longer term angle is to consider how the 12 month delivery programme fits into Aberdeenshire's wider and ongoing efforts to encourage sustainable and active travel.

Long term monitoring is also important to establish a baseline and long term trend data. Trend data is analysed through a review of continuous or repeated data collection. The most obvious example of this is automatic counter data which provides outputs on (typically) a daily basis. This allows trends to be observed across different time scales such as:

- Days of the week, including weekday vs weekend
- Months of the year (observing weather and daylight hours impacts)
- Year-on-year

To complement the trend analysis Aberdeenshire Council have developed a project delivery timeline, which records internal and external factors which could influence travel behaviour. For example opening of a new cycle route, or a public event promoting walking, could have a direct influence on cyclist/pedestrian counts and it is useful to attempt to correlate the inputs and outputs.

External factors which might affect count data, and which can be recorded on the timeline, include:

- Major road closures
- Extreme weather
- High profile cycling coverage in media (for example Olympic games).

### 3.6 Outputs and Outcomes

The monitoring framework is designed to capture both outputs and outcomes.

Outputs are the deliverables which directly result from the project activities. For example the construction of 1.0km of cycleway would be an output, as would the printing and delivery of 1,000 cycle maps. Similarly engaging with 50 commuters at an Electric Vehicle event would constitute an outcome. Recording outputs is an essential part of project monitoring, and allows the comparison of value for money between different schemes and the identification of particularly high or low cost methods of delivery.

Outcomes are the changes which result from the delivery of outputs. For example – construction of a cycleway might enable someone to cycle to work instead of driving; this would be an outcome. Similarly the delivery of a map could lead a resident to find a quick and convenient walking route to the town centre; this would also be an outcome. Purchase of an Electric Vehicle to replace a conventionally fuelled car could be an outcome resulting from an EV Roadshow.

Recording and analysing outcomes provides an understanding of the wider impacts of project delivery, and the effects on wider policy areas such as health and educations.

### 3.7 Data collected

A monitoring framework was established at the outset of the SCSP project to catalogue the available and proposed data sources.

To demonstrate the extent of the data collection, the monitoring framework drafted at the start of the delivery year documented around 26 delivery activities, with multiple indicators for each activity totalling more than 100 altogether.



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This includes a mixture of information already collected by the Council and partners, along with data collection specifically commissioned for the delivery of the project.

The monitoring framework is designed to be flexible and expandable to accommodate a wider range of activities as required in the future.

### **3.8 Data Analysis**

Data analysis has proved to be an ongoing and iterative task. The nature of the delivery programme has led to a steady stream of output and outcome data becoming available throughout the year, and Aberdeenshire Council has aimed to process and react to that data as quickly as possible.

The mid-year and year-end reporting, required by funders, provided an opportunity to take a longer term and more strategic view on the data analysis.

Outputs are relatively straightforward to record and document in the course of project delivery. Outcomes can be more challenging to monitor, and also more challenging to directly link to project inputs. For example, data from an air quality monitoring station can be used to observe a change in nitrogen dioxide levels in the air, however it is then extremely difficult to assign this to a change in travel behaviour, much less to state which specific initiatives contributed to the change in behaviours.

A strong and robust combination of quantitative and qualitative data collection can help to fill some of the gaps in this understanding, for example through interview questions about how residents' behaviour has changed and what projects has influenced it.

## **4 Going Forward**

### **4.1 Funding Context**

Smarter Choices Smarter Places funding was confirmed for 2016-17, towards the end of the 2015-16 financial year. The funding organisations (Transport Scotland/Paths for All) aimed to make the application process more streamlined and efficient for local authorities, and therefore encouraged the continuation and extension of existing projects with proven effectiveness.

This meant that easy access to outputs of the monitoring exercise was a valuable resource in planning for future year funding; and Aberdeenshire Council were able to demonstrate with confidence the positive outputs achieved through the programme delivery.

### **4.2 Lessons Learned**

Lessons learned during programme delivery build on the collective experience of Councils through the longer term Smarter Choices Smarter Places programme. Aberdeenshire Council have been reactive to delivery lessons already, for example adapting the deployment of e-bikes in a different manner to originally planned, to enhance the effectiveness of the programme.

The primary lesson learned regarding monitoring and evaluation has been the benefit of a clear and structured framework, which can provide a basis for ongoing monitoring in the longer term. Identifying, collating and analysis existing and newly established data sets can be a time consuming and challenging process, but once complete this puts the Council in a good position to more easily continue the data analysis in future.

### **4.3 Expanding the Programme**

During 2015-16 Aberdeenshire Council has been delivering Smarter Choices Smarter Places initiatives in Ellon, Fraserburgh, Huntly, Inverurie and Portlethen.

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In parallel Aberdeenshire has been planning a SCSP delivery programme for a further ten towns from 2016-17 onwards: Banff, Banchory, Kemnay, Kintore, Mintlaw, Newtonhill, Oldmeldrum, Stonehaven, Turriff & Westhill.

The lessons already learned from the initial five towns can be applied to ensure best value and effective delivery for the new ten towns.

This includes for the monitoring programme, for example the Council are planning early implementation of pedestrian and cycle counters in the ten towns, using a single supplier and a single form of data access. This is a direct result of lessons learned from the 2015-16 programme.

## **5 Closing statement**

Aberdeenshire Council has moved on from the original Peterhead Cycle Demonstration Town project, taking into account the positive success of the project and applying lessons learned to drive forward an ambitious programme to create a number of Integrated Travel Towns. Delivered making use of an effective programme of sustainable travel measures through the Smarter Choices Smarter Places programme, supported with infrastructure developments supported via regional partners and the Community Links programme the ITT project is being delivered in a challenging funding/resourcing environment by maximising opportunities with partnership working.

Aberdeenshire will continue to apply the lessons learned in order to provide the best possible outcomes for public investment.