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# Local Travel Plan Groups: Are these the way forward for travel plans?

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Travel plans are attractive to local government because they are quick and cheap to introduce and are politically uncontroversial. They are thus an 'easy win', in marked contrast to most other transport improvement schemes. But, travel

plans are dependent on other organisations being motivated to participate in helping to solve something that 'is not their problem' – a major obstacle to their widespread adoption. One possible way of overcoming some of the barriers

eg company self interest, internal organisational barriers, poor quality alternatives to the car etc, is to form some kind of 'Local Travel Plan Group' (LTPG). This paper examines some examples of how such groups operate.

## THE BENEFITS OF LOCAL TRAVEL PLAN GROUPS

Bluntly, LTPG's are worth considering because:

1. LTPGs can collectively achieve more than single organisations due to pooled resources delivering higher investment, dedicated staff, and greater political influence, while allowing them to focus more on their core competencies.
2. Gs move Transport Demand Measures (TDM) from a site-specific application to more flexible and effective area-wide application.
3. Gs can improve the level of communication between the sectors and allow the level of flexibility necessary to ensure that transport objectives are met in ways that maximise the benefits for businesses, residents and commuters.

This article presents three vignettes of such groups and draws out some lessons as to how such experiences may be effectively transferred in future.

## TYPES OF LOCAL TRAVEL PLAN GROUP

Overall, six types of LTPG can be identified (see Table 1 for descriptions). Of these, the Individual Organisation travel plans and Development Zone travel plans are already fairly widespread in the UK and are well publicised as following the 'traditional travel plan model'. Meanwhile the Transportation Management District (currently only found in Montgomery County, Maryland, USA) would require new legislation before being established and so would not be practical in the UK in the short term. This article will therefore look at examples of the ABGs (Area Based Groups), BIDs (Business Improvement Districts), and TMOs (Transportation Management Organisations) and try to comment on their potential effectiveness as mechanisms for delivering travel plans.

## AREA-BASED GROUPS

Area Based Groups (ABGs) are informal networks of organisations that operate (or are interested in operating) travel plans located within a loosely defined neighbourhood. They exist where two or more organisations feel combining resources will be a more effective way to deal with transport issues, and are generally formed either by local authorities 'suggesting' groups or by one leading organisation taking a lead to help address a transport issue. One of the best known ABG is in Bristol.

### Temple Quay Employer Group, Bristol

Bristol City Council set up a Green Commuter Club in 1999 following a conference designed to promote travel plans among companies in the city. This now has more than 85 members and meets on a quarterly basis.

In 2001, a number of the members were about to move into a new development area known as Temple Quay and so decided, together with the City Council, to set up their own sub-group. The Temple Quay Employer Group now has 15 members both in and next to the newly developed area. These include Orange, Norwich Union, Highways Agency, DEFRA and Bristol and West.

Members of the sub group are required to sign up to a statement of intent which commits the company to addressing common issues. Projects – eg a car sharing database – are financed by contributions from the Council and member companies on a project by project basis. Initially, the TQEG was run by the council, but recently some of the organisational effort has been taken on by Norwich Union.

Bristol City Council has since tried to establish a second sub group in the Avonmouth area of the city, but this has struggled to attract much interest probably due to the area's relative inaccessibility by alternative modes to the car. The council is currently examining the feasibility of establishing another group in the South Bristol area.

## BUSINESS IMPROVEMENT DISTRICTS

Business Improvement Districts are a partnership management initiative between a local authority and the business community which provides investment within a defined area. The aims of a BID are developed and agreed by local businesses and activities are funded by mandatory contributions from non-domestic rate-payers within the BID area. BIDs can be used to fund a wide range of initiatives, including transport services and environmental improvements.

The BIDs model was pioneered in Canada in the early 1970s to improve the retail environment in downtown Toronto. The idea quickly spread to the USA, and there are now over a thousand BIDs in North America, primarily funded through a levy on the property owner. In England and Wales, primary legislation was enacted in September 2003, with the first pilot schemes established only since the beginning of 2005. As of 28 April 2005, local businesses in 14 BID areas had been balloted to see if they wished to establish a district, of which ten were positive. To date, the focus in the UK schemes has mainly been on physical improvements to the urban realm and community safety, although accessibility and transport objectives are sometimes included.

### The Perimeter Community Improvement Districts (PCIDs), Atlanta, Georgia, USA

The Perimeter business district in Atlanta, Georgia is the region's largest employment district, and is home to 4,000 businesses including Hewlett Packard and United Parcel Service (UPS), and more than 115,000 employees. PCIDS is the Perimeter Community Improvement District (CID) — effectively a BID. Contributions are determined by the rateable value of the property, and the levy is collected by the local government Tax Commissioner and returned to the company established by members to run the CID. The CID's Board of Directors then invests the levy in infrastructure improvements for the area.

The PCID comprises two complementary organisations, the Perimeter Community Improvement District (PCID), and the Perimeter Transportation Coalition (PTC), which together implement a programme of transportation enhancements coupled with land-use strategies that aim to improve mobility and access to the Perimeter business district. The district is surrounded by residential districts, with a resident

population of 81,000 (over 30,000 households) within a three mile radius of the centre of the employment zone. Projects such as improved pedestrian infrastructure are closely linked to wider community-focused plans to promote 'smart growth' and to develop 'liveable communities' with a balance of work, life and leisure amenities.

The Perimeter district has good links to the local and interstate road network, state airports and the MARTA rapid transit rail system. In order to promote alternative to travelling by car, the Perimeter Transport Coalition has developed a range of initiatives including a public transport pass, a van-pooling programme, a car sharing programme and walking and cycling initiatives.

In addition to promoting alternatives to car-use, PTC works closely with the PCID to identify and progress the necessary infrastructure improvements. These include commissioning transportation research and improvements to road, bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure. Overall, with the joint efforts of PCID and PTC, 'the CIDs will be able to provide nearly \$2.6m per year in transportation funding for improvements in the district'.

## TRANSPORTATION MANAGEMENT ORGANISATIONS

Transportation Management Organisations (TMOs), (also known as Transportation Management Associations) operate on an area-wide basis within a defined area, such as a commercial district or industrial park and coordinate the provision of customised services, and activities to assist in providing transportation services and achieving transportation performance standards. They are generally most successful in areas currently experiencing significant growth in employment and associated traffic.

TMOs first began to emerge in the early 1980s, as public-private bodies, designed to address traffic congestion and air-quality problems, and by 2002, there were over 150 TMOs, operating mainly in the USA, Canada and the Netherlands. However, the concept has only been introduced in the UK over the last year or so, with examples being introduced in Dyce in Aberdeen, at the Park Royal site in west London, and in the London Borough of Islington.



Edinburgh Royal Infirmary is an example of an Individual Organisation with a travel plan that is also involved in the OPTIMUM2 project funded by the European Regional Development Fund.

(Photos: Stephen Potter)



Travel plans are dependent on other organisations being motivated to participate in helping solve something that is not their problem – forming a group can overcome some of the barriers.



### Dyce TMO(TMA) Aberdeen

The Dyce TMO in Aberdeen is thought to be the first business park in the UK to draw a diverse group of businesses together specifically to address travel issues within a formalised relationship.

Dyce is an area of 20,000-30,000 commuters with mix of employer types between the docks and the airport. The public transport access is poor. With support from Aberdeen and Grampian Chamber of Commerce, and consultant Vipre, a not-for-profit organisation was established, called 'Dyce Transportation Management Association (TMA)'. However, because of Inland Revenue rules regarding incorporated bodies using the word [Association] in their name, the TMA was subsequently re-registered as a Transport Management Organisation.

All businesses in the Dyce/Kirkhill/Stoneywood area were invited to join, irrespective of their number of employees. The initial TMO group includes several companies involved in oil exploration, such as BP and Halliburton, which together employ over 3,000 onshore staff.

The idea of establishing a TMO came up after mobility management consultant Vipre approached BP (and later the council) in March 2004. In July 2004, NESTRANS (the North East Scotland Regional Transport Partnership)<sup>1</sup> appointed a Travel Awareness Project Leader, whose role was to promote travel awareness, encourage more businesses and other organisations in the region to adopt company travel plans and to reduce dependency on private cars. Public money (£70,000 from NESTRANS and the Council) was used as seed funding. Of this, a one off total of £20,000 was invested in producing relevant materials, conducting surveys etc, while the remainder was to be spent on the TMO management at a cost of around £4,000 a month. Initially, Vipre's costs will be met mainly by NESTRANS. Organisation members will also make a contribution to the management cost through an agreed funding formula (£10 per employee per year). This is because payment of a membership fee means that the organisations are more likely to take the plan seriously and expect results. From financial year 2005-6, half of the operational costs are to come from TMO members. Overall, any travel incentives devised by Vipre and agreed by the Organisation will be funded by the TMO itself, although the TMO will have the opportunity to apply to the NESTRANS Sustainable Transport Grants scheme.

To promote Dyce TMO to the business organisations,

Open Days were held in August 2004 in the Dyce, Kirkhill and Stoneywood areas respectively. Representatives of NESTRANS and Vipre were available for discussion throughout the day. Research began in August when Vipre conducted an online survey within the area and successfully got back 2,500 responses from local businesses in the following month. Aberdeen City Council then identified a set of travel plan measures including car sharing, van pooling, public transport operator network changes etc. A travel plan was finally set up around late-November 2004.

The Dyce TMO Board consists of a chairman, a vice chair, a secretary and a treasurer. As a large member, BP has a place on the board and it also provides an office for the TMO co-ordinator. Vipre, as a facilitator, provides the resident TMO Travel Manager who attends the meeting but who has no place on the board. Although Aberdeen City Council subcontracted Vipre to run the TMO, council staff including a transport planner and staff from NESTRANS invest heavily in their efforts to help the Vipre Travel Manager to operate the Dyce TMO.

To further encourage participation, the local authority now requires companies to develop a travel plan and environmental policy, which TMO members are effectively exempt from as the TMO has its own travel plan and environmental policy.

As for the performance of the TMO, Aberdeen City Council is to measure a number of indicators including number of people car sharing and the number of people driving on an annual basis.

### ESTABLISHING LOCAL TRAVEL PLAN GROUPS

Overall, LTPGs can either be set up from the 'bottom up' (where organisations encounter transport, parking, recruitment and retention or other issues), or as a result of a policy decision by a local or regional authority. In both cases however, a similar four-stage process based on marketing theory can be adopted by the lead body.

The analysis stage should first identify likely partners in the venture (local authority, other local companies with travel problems etc) and the level of resources available. It should then draw on transport and planning data, which may already be carried out for Local Transport Plan or Local Transport Strategy purposes, to highlight specific current and

potential future transport 'hotspots'. Finally, this needs to be overlaid with a fairly detailed examination of the organisations to record:

- The number of organisations;
- Their locations (edge of town, city centre etc);
- Their distribution (clusters, evenly spread, corridors);
- Their types (industrial, leisure, retail, commercial, health, education etc), and
- Their size (number of employees and visitors).

In the planning stage it should be possible to identify firstly the areas/organisations most suitable for establishing some form of LTPG, and secondly the level of local authority involvement. For instance, a business or a retail park operated by a single landlord or management agency (particularly where parking, congestion or poor access were issues) may best be served by a Development Zone travel plan. Or, where several relatively small businesses that are not grouped into obvious clusters exist then perhaps the more centralised approach where the strategic authority provides a travel plan for them to buy into would work best.

In terms of implementation, key factors for success include elements such as convergence of objectives, the existence of a network of communication channels between the public and private sectors concerns, the existence of a broker to facilitate negotiations, mutual trust, unambiguous objectives and strategy and the protection of third parties' interests and rights.

Finally, the control phase is about monitoring the performance of the LTPG – not only in terms of meeting only transport and financial outcomes, but also in terms of how

the LTPGs themselves perform, i.e. the process factors such as the participation rates and awareness levels of organisations and individuals within the LTPGs.

In summary, it should be noted that as with travel plans, every individual situation is different, and so care should be taken when transferring ideas from elsewhere to ensure that even subtle variations in context are accounted for. Therefore, while the general framework described above should be applicable in a wide range of situations, it should always be remembered that it is only a framework.

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<sup>1</sup> NESTRANS is a voluntary regional transport partnership which comprises of Aberdeen City Council, Aberdeenshire Council, Scottish Enterprise Grampian and Aberdeen & Grampian Chamber of Commerce.

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	Individual Organisations (IOs)	Development Zones (DZs)	Area Based Groups (ABGs)	Business Improvement Districts (BIDs)	Transportation Management Organisations (TMOs)	Transportation Management Districts (TMDs)
<b>Definition</b>	Organisations that operate their own travel plans	Local areas developed for specific uses	Informal networks in a loosely defined neighbourhood	LA-business partnership to invest within a defined area	Private, non-profit, member-controlled organisations for defined area	Companies in defined area legally required to develop travel plans
<b>Group structure</b>	Single organisation	Leading organisation and members	Organisations all equal	Coordinating organisation created	Coordinating organisation created	Led by LA coordinating organisation
<b>Leader-member relationship</b>	N/A	Landlord-tenant – formal	Common interest – informal	Financial (tax) – very formal	Financial (member fee) – fairly formal	Legal requirement – very formal
<b>Power structure</b>	In single organisation	Landlord in control	Power shared equally	Membership in control	Membership in control	LA in control
<b>Transport only issue?</b>	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
<b>Primary actor</b>	IO/LA	DZ/LA	LA/private companies	LA initially, then private BID company	LA/private companies	LA
<b>Secondary actors</b>	LA/IO	LA/DZ	Private companies/LA	Private company members	Private company members	Private companies
<b>Role of local authority (voluntary travel plan)</b>	Support	Support	Support	Initiator and facilitator	Support	N/A
<b>Role of local authority (mandatory travel plan)</b>	Regulator	Regulator	Support	N/A	Regulator	Regulator
<b>Funding</b>	IO/LA – ad hoc	Ad hoc grants, rent	Ad hoc grants, scheme basis	Business levy	Ad hoc	Local authority funded

**Table 1:**  
Attributes of the various Local Travel Plan Group structures