

DISTILLATE: Barriers to the Delivery of Sustainable Transport Solutions

A Report for the DISTILLATE research programme by the Centre for Environment & Planning, University of the West of England, Bristol

Overview

This report provides an assessment of the barriers experienced by local authority transport officers in the delivery of sustainable transport solutions. The report draws on evidence created through an EPSRC-funded research study (www.distillate.ac.uk) that investigated the views of officers from 16 local transport authorities in the UK.



Our evidence identifies the existence of key barriers in local authorities' ability to deliver a step change in the way in which sustainable urban transport and land-use strategies are developed and delivered, as:

- Organisational barriers affecting the way in which local authorities are able to work as organisations and together with others
- Technical barriers affecting the ability of officers to make sound, evidence-based judgements for the development of effective strategies
- External barriers arising from the framework and context of decision-making which impinge upon the local delivery of sustainable transport strategies

An aim of this study was to identify what the officers who are actually implementing sustainable transport schemes consider to be the key barriers in the process of delivering sustainable transport systems. A subsequent aim was to prioritise these barriers and develop areas of focus for further research effort aimed at testing ways of overcoming these barriers, so that local authority organisations are able to make more effective and faster decisions.

This study adds to a body of evidence that identifies similar process barriers in the delivery of sustainable transport plans and policies (e.g. Atkins, ECMT, STELLA, TRANSPLUS, PROSPECTS).

We conclude that the effective delivery of transport solutions demands the integration of other sectors in transport planning, in an arena that is driven by performance in policy delivery, value for money, and a need to satisfy a diverse range of local, regional, and national social, environmental, and economic policy goals. The decoupling of adverse impacts is being addressed through further work on policy integration and organisational behaviours and barriers. This is designed to aid the development of a suite of improved and integrated methods/procedures to support decision-making.

Executive Summary

- ES1 DISTILLATE is a consortium of five research institutions, working together with local authorities to help develop and deliver a step-change in the delivery of sustainable transport and land-use strategies
- ES2 This report summarises the findings of a recent DISTILLATE survey of local authority transport officers from 16 local authorities in England and Scotland. The aim of the survey was to look at the barriers facing local government transport officers in the delivery of sustainable transport by considering the following questions:
- 2.1 Which stages in the process of local transport strategy and scheme delivery are regarded as being most problematic?
 - 2.2 What difficulties are encountered when working with other stakeholders, and how is it possible to prioritise them?
 - 2.3 How do internal working arrangements contribute to (or hinder) the technical decision-making process?
 - 2.4 Which policy instruments are most difficult to implement, and at which stage(s) of decision making are they most incongruous?
 - 2.5 What specific difficulties are faced in the development, compatibility and use of the following design and implementation decision-support tools:
 - indicators;
 - option generation;
 - modelling;
 - and appraisal;and what more is needed from these 'tools' in order to help overcome the difficulties faced in the implementation of policy instruments?
 - 2.6 What funding sources are available, and how do funding and phasing regimes impact upon the implementation and outcomes of local transport schemes?
- ES3 Regarding organisational barriers inhibiting the delivery of sustainable transport policies, our key findings are that:
- 3.1 Specific organisational obstacles affect joined-up working within authorities. These include time and resources, the timing of writing plans, divided responsibilities for delivery, and different stakeholder procedures
 - 3.2 Some of these are sector-(discipline or department) based, and some related to procedures or stages in the process (levels of planning and delivery)
 - 3.3 Working with stakeholder groups provides serious difficulties. These are most commonly associated with the engagement of transport operators, business interests, the public, and other public services
- ES4 Investigation of local authorities' capacity to deliver effective policy instruments identifies that:

- 4.1 Buses, restraint-based measures, and fares are seen as the most difficult instruments to implement as part of an effective transport strategy. Land-use measures and light rapid transit are also associated with serious implementation worries
 - 4.2 Private funding, Section 56 highway grants, and regeneration-related funding streams have led to delayed implementation and truncation in the delivery of scheme objectives
 - 4.3 Obtaining revenue funding (e.g. lack of ongoing operational or maintenance subsidies) is a difficulty. Scheme development costs and infrastructure building are also financial constrained
- ES5 From the opinions of the officers involved, the key barriers affecting local authorities' ability to use decision-making tools for the delivery of sustainable transport solutions were:
- 5.1 Comprehensive Performance Assessments and Public Service Agreements have the greatest likely scope for improvement in monitoring transport's impact on sustainable development. Target-setting and consistency with land-use planning and sustainable development are issues which need to be addressed in indicators. Slow mode use, accessibility, and congestion are important variables not well reflected in current indicators
 - 5.2 Inputs into option generation are in need of improvement at a national, regional, and local level. Tools are potentially most beneficial for generating options at the strategy level. More resources and better institutional support would facilitate improved option generation
 - 5.3 Appraisal methodologies do not meet expectations for accessibility, the economy, and a number of distributional impacts. Public transport patronage, health impacts, and travel times were problematic areas for both indicators and appraisal
 - 5.4 The biggest constraints to modelling were staffing and resources followed by the input and output characteristics of the models themselves. Demand-restraint measures such as congestion charging were at the forefront of the problems in the modelling and appraisal process
- ES6 Perceptions of the adequacy of the external framework for pursuing a sustainable local transport system provide these conclusions:
- 6.1 The biggest challenges are lack of operational subsidies, privatised or deregulated passenger transport operations, and the perceived lack of public acceptability of restraint-based instruments (such as Road User Charging)
 - 6.2 The majority of local authorities are hindered by contradictions within national policy and short-termism in political decision-making (at the local or national level), and by a lack of local control over the local rail network

ES7 The direction of future research focus in DISTILLATE will be towards the most serious and common barriers rated by local authorities; DISTILLATE will work towards identifying best practice (Project D) and improving tools (Projects B,C,E,F,G), whilst exploring additional issues that are considered to merit further investigation (further detailed in separate unpublished working reports)