Workshop on Implementing Sustainable Urban Travel Policies in Japan and other Asia-Pacific countries

2-3 March 2005
Akasaka Prince Hotel, Tokyo

Mobility Management at the Employer Level

Thomas RYE
Napier University
Scotland (United Kingdom)
BIO-NOTE

Tom Rye has been a Lecturer, then Reader, in Transport Studies at Napier University since 1996, combining this with work in consultancy and local authorities since 1999. He has considerable experience of public and sustainable transport, through his work for London Transport Buses and London Transport Planning, through his research that has taken him to the US, Germany and the Netherlands, and through his work with consultants Colin Buchanan and Partners. He has been project manager for several commissions for the English Department for Transport, the Scottish Executive and others.
1. Introduction

Travel plans are an important aspect of national and local transport policy in England and other parts of the UK today. Other European countries such as the Netherlands and Italy have laws and/or structures and funding in place to facilitate travel plan implementation. Recent research for the UK Department for Transport (DfT 2002, DfT 2004) has shown and/or argued strongly that travel plans can influence the way in which staff travel to work and can bring about meaningful reductions in the proportion of employees who drive alone. This argument is echoed by European Commission research such as the MOST Framework 5 project on mobility management (http://mo.st). This paper reviews these findings amongst others to assess the current climate for travel plan implementation in developed and newly-industrialised countries, building on the paper presented by Rye (2001) at the 121st ECMT Round Table, and relating the findings to the ECMT’s document Key Messages for Governments. It should be noted that some of the evidence in this paper is also anecdotal, based on the author’s impressions of the development of employer mobility management gained by working with other researchers in the field from the US, Canada, Australia, the Netherlands, Switzerland and Austria.

2. What is a travel plan?

A travel plan is the UK term for mobility management at the employer level, and is synonymous with terms such as trip reduction plan and green commuter plan. The rest of this paper will use the term travel plan (TP). A TP is a package of measures implemented at the workplace to influence employees’ choice of mode of travel to (and sometimes at) work, with the objective of reducing the proportion of staff who drive alone to work.

There is a general consensus in the literature that an effective travel plan will be one that tailors such measures to individual site circumstances – for example, that does not promote walking and cycling at a site whose employees on average live beyond reasonable walking and cycling distance. Typical measures that are employed can include the following:

- Promotional and awareness raising, such as websites, posters, leaflets and promotional events.
- Car-sharing – databases to match carsharers, and reserved parking spaces for those who share.
- Improved walking and cycling facilities – trip end facilities such as cycle parking and lockers and showers; and safe routes through and off sites.
- Cheaper and better public transport, secured through negotiation and/or contracts with local operators.
- Car park management (e.g. rationing of spaces) and/or charging or cashout.
- Flexible and tele-working and on-site facilities – cutting the need to travel.
- Financial incentives to leave the car at home, such as additional days’ leave for those who cycle to work, for example.

The author’s 2001 paper to the ECMT Round Table 121 identified that those employers that are most likely to implement travel plan measures are those that are large, and that have particular problems, such as parking or accessibility difficulties, transport-related recruitment difficulties, or planning conditions/regulations related to site expansion. Only a few employers will be motivated by more altruistic factors such as environmental image or employee health. Travel planning employers tend to be quite large (over 500 staff at least), giving them the resources to devote to travel planning; and they tend to be located away from town and city centres, with consequently poorer public transport accessibility than their
centrally-located counterparts. More recent work (DfT 2002, DfT 2004) continues to support this view.

3. What makes a good travel plan?

The presentation accompanying this paper details five travel plans from the UK, USA and Australia. It is not intended to repeat this here as the presentation is self-explanatory. For more examples of workplaces that have implemented successful travel plans, the reader is referred, for UK examples, to DfT (2002, 2004), and for US and Dutch examples to Schreffler and Organisational Coaching (1996). Such studies have confirmed that there are key elements in a travel plan that, whilst not guaranteeing effectiveness, are normally associated with it.

Rye (2002) notes that other studies have found that the travel plan measures that produce the greatest change in travel behaviour are those that involve some significant resource input (either financial or organizational), such as much enhanced public transport to the site, significant (~50%) discounts on public transport tickets, or highly organized car-sharing schemes where these are linked to access to a car parking space in the context of reduced parking on or around the site. In UK case studies, shuttle buses to nearby rail stations and/or town centres have been found to be highly effective, especially when linked to public transport discounts (DfT, 2002). Rationing or pricing car parking, where there are no on-street alternatives around the site, has been shown to be very effective at influencing mode choice, but also provokes considerable negative employee reaction at least initially (see van der Maas 1998; Rye and Ison, in press). Measures that give employees additional flexibility (e.g. flexitime, compressed work weeks and working from home) are, unsurprisingly perhaps, most popular with staff but not so much with employers (Ferguson 1991). The literature also points to the need to employ a member of staff who has responsibility for the implementation of the travel plan, and also management support for the travel plan which in practice equates to support for the actions of the travel co-ordinator, some willingness on the part of senior managers to at least occasionally lead by example, and also a readiness to pay for the travel plan.

Clearly, travel plan measures require money. The research carried out for DfT (2004) found that among 33 UK organizations, the average cost of the TP per employee per year was around £47/US$80/€62 – not huge. The key literature on travel plans amplifies the point that travel plans are relatively cheap by noting that, firstly, the costs of travel plans are normally much less than the capitalized cost of car parking; and also that, where travel plans include parking charging, they can often generate revenue.

4. Effectiveness of travel plans

There is a reasonable agreement in the literature from the UK, the Netherlands and the USA as to the average level of travel reduction that can be achieved by an effective travel plan. This is in the range of an 18-20% reduction in the number of staff at a site driving alone. Such reductions can be achieved over a relatively short period, such as one to two years. Some travel plans, especially those where parking pricing and rationing have been significant, have achieved reductions in excess of these levels. However, these data are drawn from relatively small numbers of organizations (fewer than 150 in all three countries combined). Anecdotal evidence, and intuition, suggest that those organizations that undertake before and after monitoring of the effects of their travel plans are those with rather greater levels of motivation than the average organization with a travel plan.

Therefore, in the view of the author, questions remain about the confidence with which the results from such highly motivated organizations can be generalized across regions or countries to arrive at measurements of aggregate impacts of TPs on peak hour commuting.
This has been done in the UK by Rye (2002) and DfT (2004), the latter study suggesting that car commuting could be reduced by as much as 3.3% in the seven regions for which that study had data. Such calculations rely on quite heroic assumptions; however it is probably true to say that in localities where peak hour traffic is dominated by a few very large local employers – such as around Astra Zeneca, a drugs company located in a rural area south of Manchester, UK – then if they adopt effective travel plans, there will be a noticeable impact on peak hour traffic levels, at least initially.

Clearly then the level of take up of travel plans by employers is critical to their system-wide impacts. The literature on employer’s attitudes to travel plans is therefore of relevance here. Coleman (2000) surveyed small employers in Oxfordshire about this issue. Of the 20% who responded to her postal survey, the majority said that company structure and/or resources would make it difficult for them to implement a travel plan. This echoes the findings of earlier surveys by Bradshaw (1997), and Rye and MacLeod (1998), which revealed a similar level of reluctance amongst companies to become involved in travel planning. Bradshaw’s respondents specifically cited the important role of government in providing alternatives to car travel. More recent studies such as DfT (2004) suggest much higher levels of take-up and also a high level of total workforce exposure to travel plans, due to TP activity being concentrated among larger employers. However, the data in this study was gained by asking local authority representatives to estimate local travel plan activity rather than surveying employers themselves.

5. Barriers to wider TP implementation

The author’s 2001 presentation to ECMT Round Table 121 identified the following barriers to the wider implementation of travel plans:

- Companies’ self interest and internal organisational barriers.
- Personal taxation and commuting.
- The nature of public transport provision (in the UK).
- Lack of regulatory requirements for travel plans.
- Lack of examples due to novelty of the concept.

To this list, it is also wise to add the relative cost of private and public transport. If the cost of the former continues to lessen in relation to the latter, as in the UK, then travel planners face a continually more and more difficult task in trying to effect mode shift away from car.

There have been relatively few changes to the other five barriers during the intervening four years. Certainly, the first one remains the most important. The last barrier has become slightly less problematic as a few more successful examples have become available. The UK has made some marginal changes to the way in which commuting benefits are taxed, which one can conjecture may have encouraged a few organizations to implement financial incentive measures where they would not have done before, and which has saved money for organizations that were already committed to such measures. However, countries such as Germany and Norway, where there is a long-established tradition of employer contributions to commuting costs and/or their being tax-deductible, face a much larger barrier to the wider adoption of travel plans.

A regulatory requirement for large organizations to employ a travel co-ordinator and draw up a travel plan has been introduced in Italy, but the author is not aware of any
systematic evaluation of its effectiveness. According to the EU’s MOST project (2002; http://mo.st), Sweden’s 2001 Transport Act is supportive of travel planning. Washington State in the USA retains its Commute Trip Reduction law (see www.wsdot.wa.gov/ctr). In the UK, particularly in England, regulation of new and expanding sites through the planning system remains – in the opinion of this author – the key driver of travel planning activity.

Generally, there has been no global shift in regulatory or indeed the transport policy framework across OECD countries to one that is more supportive of employer-based mobility management. The author’s experience of working with other travel planning experts from other European countries, Australasia and North America suggests that these barriers, whilst perhaps nuanced locally, are not markedly different in different countries.

6. **How to overcome barriers to wider travel plan implementation**

The EU 5th Framework MOST project compared conditions for the implementation of mobility management (including but not limited to travel plans) in many EU countries. Under the following headings, the project made a number of recommendations to assist the wider implementation of mobility management; links between them and the ECMT’s own *Key Messages to Governments* are evident. Clearly, if there is to be wider implementation of mobility management in general and travel plans in particular, then there is a need for government to take a number of supporting steps. This echoes the conclusions of Rye (2001 and 2002). The key headings from MOST’s recommendations are:

- **Policy.** By this is meant the need to include MM in transport policy making, and to make it clear responsibilities for different aspects of MM from the start.
- **Actors and Structures.** Under this heading, the MOST project recommended that there is a need to train staff in MM in order to ensure that the correct skills are available to benefit further implementation. The project authors also argued that communication across levels of government and organisations is also important if MM is to become more widely-adopted.
- **Integration.** Here, the project identified the need to link MM to land-use planning, other policy areas, and to integrate within it the use of both “carrot” and “stick” measures.
- **Resources.** If MM is to flourish, it will require monetary resources and a gradual increase in the related knowledge-base.
- **Basic conditions.** Echoing Rye (2002), the MOST project argues that MM can only succeed if high quality alternative modes of transport are in place.
- **Inverse policies.** It is critical to ensure that other policies e.g. taxation do not undermine the implementation of MM.

These conclusions from MOST support the view that MM in general and TPs more generally are unlikely to be transport measures that will be implemented solely by third parties; clearly, there is also a very important role for government in setting framework conditions that stimulate wider uptake.

7. **Conclusions**

Experience, particularly in UK, indicates that TPs can reduce car use at single sites. However, there is not sufficiently reliable data in the view of the author to be able to be confident about predictions of their system-wide impact. Evidence from elsewhere in Europe and USA rather more patchy and if anything suggests a rather lower level of uptake in other
European countries, certainly at this time. Uptake in the USA is closely related to economic growth and pressures to manage it at the local level and so activity ebbs and flows with the state of local economies.

The MOST project has demonstrated that if certain conditions are met, the implementation of effective plans is likely to increase. Many of these conditions are strongly influenced by government, and hence there is a significant role for government in encouraging travel plans, broadly in line with the recommendations of *Key Messages for Governments.*
REFERENCES


Coleman, C., 2000, Green commuter plans and the small employer: an investigation into the attitudes and policy of the small employer towards staff travel and green commuter plans. Transport Policy, 7: 2, 139-148


Dickinson, J.E., Kingham, S., Copsey, S. and Pearlman Hougie, D.J., 2003, Employer travel plans, cycling and gender: will travel plan measures improve the outlook for cycling to work in the UK?, Transportation Research Part D: Transport and Environment, 8:1 pp 53-67


Kingham, S., Dickinson, J., and Copsey, S., 2001, Travelling to work: will people move out of their cars? Transport Policy, 8:2, 151-160


Mackett, R. L., 2001, Policies to attract drivers out of their cars for short trips, Transport Policy, 8:4, 295-306


School of the Built Environment
Transport Research Institute
Napier University
10 Colinton Rd,
Edinburgh, EH10 5DT
Scotland, UK
+ 44 (0)131 455 2477
t.rye@napier.ac.uk