Ex-Post Evaluation of Smarter Travel Areas
Interim Report 2015 – Executive Summary
Executive Summary
Introduction

The Smarter Travel Areas (STA) investment programme was launched by the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (DTTAS) in 2012. The objective of the programme is to pilot a range of sustainable travel measures which are aimed at achieving a modal shift from private car to sustainable travel modes such as walking and cycling. Following a competitive bidding process, funding of €21.2 million was awarded to the three successful demonstration towns across a range of sizes – Limerick, Dungarvan and Westport. A package of both infrastructural and behavioural change measures is being delivered in each of these areas between 2012 and 2016.

Given that the STA programme aims to understand how different sustainable transport measures impact on modal shift in a range of Irish contexts, monitoring and evaluation is a fundamental component. A comprehensive evaluation programme was developed by the DTTAS and is being led by AECOM with the support of the STAs. Programme evaluation has been ongoing since 2012, with monitoring reports prepared every six months. This Interim Evaluation Report provides a comprehensive review of programme delivery and investment impacts from 2012 to the end of 2014, during which time almost 60% of the total programme funding has been invested. A final evaluation will be completed in 2018 following full delivery of the programme.

Evaluation Methodology

The evaluation of the STA programme adopts the “Theory of Change” approach, which aims to systematically test the assumed connections between interventions and the anticipated outcomes and impacts of these interventions. A large amount of quantitative and qualitative data has been collected to date in order to facilitate this.

The most important quantitative data source is the Household Travel Survey (HTS). The HTS was first conducted in October 2012 in advance of Smarter Travel Areas programme investment taking place. A follow up survey was conducted in October 2014 and a final survey is expected to be completed in 2017. The HTS is conducted among a random, representative sample of people within each of the STAs (with an overall sample size of over 5,500 respondents). It is comprised of three sections – a 24 hour travel diary which collects information about journey purposes, travel modes, time of travel and distance travelled; an attitudes and awareness survey which collects information about the attitudes of respondents towards local travel and sustainable transport; and a socio-demographic survey. The National Travel Survey (NTS) administered by the CSO provides a control sample for the travel diary, while a control survey was conducted for the attitude and awareness survey as part of the evaluation.

Additional quantitative data examined as part of this evaluation include:

- Vehicle, pedestrian and cyclist movement counts on key routes;
- Car and cycle parking occupancy rates;
- Road Safety Authority statistics;
- Economic activity data including footfall counts, business occupancy rates, town centre intercept surveys and business sentiment surveys; and
- Bespoke surveys targeting key groups (e.g. leisure cycle club members).

A qualitative research programme was developed to supplement the quantitative data. The aim of the qualitative research was to further analyse the reasons for modal shift, barriers to modal shift, additional measures that might be required to encourage modal shift and the issues and opportunities experienced in implementing sustainable travel measures. The programme included:

- Ten focus groups representing the views of individuals who make key journey types;
- In-depth interviews with key stakeholders engaged in programme delivery, including local authority staff, workplace travel plan coordinators, school travel plan coordinators and principals and UL Smarter Travel coordinators;
- Route intercept surveys among users of greenways within the STAs;
- Independent cycle network quality audits to assess the quality of cycling infrastructure;
- Community Cycling audits to assess public perception of cycling infrastructure; and
- Monitoring of print, broadcast and social media to gauge how it may influence community views of the programme and modal shift.

**STA Programme Delivery**

In terms of programme delivery, Dungarvan and Westport had completed a large proportion of their infrastructural investment by the end of 2014. Limerick experienced a number of delays in relation to infrastructure delivery, however there was substantially more investment in behavioural change measures.

Dungarvan received €7.2m in STA funding and €4.8m (67%) of this has been invested to date. Investment in infrastructure has amounted to 87% of total spend up to the end of 2014. The majority of this has been invested in pedestrian and cycle routes through the provision of new and upgraded links including “The Track” Greenway. Other investments have included additional bike parking facilities and a travel centre with changing facilities, showers, lockers and bike storage. Behavioural change measures have amounted to 13% of spending to date and have included school travel planning, school and community events, as well as local campaigns and promotion.

Limerick received €9m in STA funding and €3.4m (38%) of this has been invested to date. Key projects delivered have included a shared walking and cycling route at Shannon Fields, an extension of the existing network to the main entrance at the University of Limerick (UL), the provision of additional bike parking in the city centre and improved links, showers and bike parking at UL. €1 million (29% of spend) has also been invested in an extensive programme of behavioural change measures focusing on school travel planning, workplace and campus travel planning and community travel planning, in addition to a major marketing and information campaign.

Westport received €5m in STA funding and €4.3m (86%) of this has been invested to date. Investment in infrastructure has accounted for €4.14m (96%) of spending to the end of 2014. The majority of this was spent on the delivery of a Town Greenway which is connected to the Great Western Greenway. Investment has also been made in on-road cycle lanes, urban realm improvements and traffic calming. Behavioural change measures including school travel planning, employer and community based travel competitions as well as other events and promotion have accounted for €0.16m to date (4% of programme spend).

**Key Results – Modal Shift**

The key objective of the STA programme is to achieve a modal shift from private car travel to sustainable transport. The impact of STA investment in this regard is primarily monitored through the travel diary component of the HTS (with the NTS acting as a national control). The results of this survey are outlined below and in the accompanying graphs:

- **All Trips:** Overall there have been moderate increases in the modal share of walking and cycling and a decline in the modal share of the car since 2012. Walking has increased by 3.8pp from 20.4% to 24.2% while the modal share for private car trips has decreased 3pp from 70.8% to 67.8%. There has been a minor increase in cycling trips overall (0.4pp from 2.3% to 2.7%). At the STA programme level, modal shift to walking and cycling is slightly higher than trends observed at a national level (excluding Dublin), although the modal shift achieved varies across the three STAs;
**Employment Trips** (between the home and workplace):
There has been a moderate increase in trips to work on foot (5pp from 12.5% to 17.5%) at the overall STA level, with a similar decrease in trips by car (-4pp from 79.9% to 75.9%). Modal share for trips to work by bike showed marginal growth and overall the number of trips remains relatively small. The level of modal shift to walking and cycling for employment trips is greater at the overall STA programme level and in each of the individual STAs than the change observed at a national level (excluding Dublin);
• **Escorted Education Trips** (adults accompanying a child to education): There has been a moderate increase in escorted education trips on foot (5.2pp from 12.9% to 18.1%) at the overall STA level, with a similar decrease in trips by car (-4.5pp from 83.8% to 79.3%). Modal share for escorted education trips by bike showed marginal growth and overall the number of trips remains extremely small; and

• **Independent Education Trips** (adult students – Limerick only): There has been an increase in the modal share for walking and cycling, with cycling in particular showing a significant increase (6.2pp from 5.0% to 11.2%). Walking increased 5.5pp from 43% to 48.5%, while there has also been a decrease in private car trips (-11.3pp from 46.7% to 35.4%). Modal shift to sustainable transport for independent education trips in Limerick are slightly higher than national trends.

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**STA Programme Implementation – Key Findings**

The predominant focus of the STA programme has been on infrastructure delivery and in particular, segregated infrastructure. Both Dungarvan and Westport have completed most of their proposed cycle network infrastructure, and in both areas, the networks provide good connectivity to the main trip generators within the town. An independent audit of the infrastructure in 2013 concluded that the fully off-road greenways had been delivered to a high standard and that the overall quality of work has had a positive impact on the cycling experience within the town. However, a key concern raised regarding the delivery of the segregated infrastructure was that many routes form a ‘secondary layer’ of the transport network in that they cannot be seen from main roads and do not have obvious entry points from town centres. These issues were exacerbated by the fact that there is little evidence of Smarter Travel to date on many streets within the urban centres of each STA and opposition to parking and urban realm proposals have resulted in a virtually unchanged local road network and parking provision.

The impact of investment in facilities for pedestrians and cyclists in Dungarvan and Westport has been somewhat mixed. Infrastructure investment has enhanced the environment for pedestrians and cyclists, reduced the level of potential conflict between vehicles and cyclists/pedestrians and improved perceptions of personal security on walking and cycling networks. These impacts have resulted in the improved attractiveness of walking and cycling, and as noted above there is evidence of a significant positive change in relation to increasing modal share for walking and decreasing modal share for car journeys overall.

However, there is limited evidence that infrastructure investment has resulted in other important anticipated outcomes such as an improved image for cycling or an improved perception of safety, and the increase in modal share for cycling trips has been relatively small (albeit statistically significant).
The approach taken to the delivery of behavioural change measures has varied between the STAs, but has generally involved an overarching marketing campaign supported by direct engagement with schools, workplaces and communities. The STA teams have engaged with hundreds of people in their local communities, however the impact of this direct level of contact on modal choice is difficult to attribute. However, it should be noted that the €1m investment made by Limerick STA in behavioural change measures is considered by stakeholders to have contributed towards the increase in walking modal share as well as the largest increase in cycling modal share of each of the three STAs.

One significant issue in the delivery of behavioural change measures is that very few staff are formally trained in this area. An important exception to this is An Taisce staff who deliver school travel planning nationally as part of the Green Schools programme. An Taisce staff were seconded to local authorities on a part time basis to support the implementation of the ‘Travel Theme’ of the Green Schools programme to schools within the STAs, and this has been one of the most well delivered behavioural change measures to date.

In contrast to the widespread roll out of travel planning in schools, fewer organisations than anticipated have engaged with workplace travel planning and the majority of these are in Limerick. However, at the University of Limerick, single occupancy car trips reduced significantly, while walking and cycling increased amongst both staff and students during the period of the programme, indicating the positive potential of workplace and campus travel planning. The potential of some other behavioural change measures also remains to be fully realised. For example, adult cycle training has been offered for free in each STA, but with very low take up. Car-sharing formed part of the original strategy of each STA, but to date limited progress has been made in successfully implementing programmes within the community or workplaces.

### Barriers to Modal Shift

A number of barriers to modal shift have been identified through the evaluation process, including the following:

- **Poor perception of safety:** The key barrier was found to be perceived safety issues for both pedestrians and cyclists, which was a consistent theme throughout the evaluation. There is a perceived lack of dedicated space for cyclists and pedestrians, which generally relates to a lack of segregation between motorists and vulnerable road users, but in some cases relates to shared space intended for both cyclists and pedestrians. The dominant nature of car use in urban centres acts as a barrier to cycling and cyclists expressed concern about driving behaviour which has reduced their perception of cycling safety.

- **Low levels of cycling confidence:** Levels of cycling confidence are also low, with almost 43% of HTS respondents reporting they are not confident cycling or would not consider it. This low level of cycling confidence significantly limits the potential for modal shift to cycling; however Community Cycling Audits undertaken in Dungarvan highlighted how there is some potential to improve cycling confidence through cycle training as after basic instruction on cycling in traffic participants felt almost immediately more confident.

- **Perception of walking and cycling as leisure activities:** There is also a perception that walking and cycling are purely leisure activities as opposed to modes of transport (e.g. for commuting purposes). While the infrastructure which has been delivered as part of the STA investment is highly valued by the community, the facilities are generally perceived to have been introduced to encourage leisure and tourism cycling as opposed to commuting. The popularity and high profile of cycling as a sport and leisure activity in Dungarvan and Westport may be further consolidating this perception. Intercept surveys on the greenways in Dungarvan and Westport have also indicated that they are used predominantly by tourists and locals making leisure trips;

- **Negative imagery:** Walking and cycling for commuting purposes are still associated with negative imagery, as commuting by car is closely related to socio-economic status and travelling to work on foot or by bike is stigmatised. In addition, there is an alternative image of cycling as an activity which requires a specific ‘look’ and ‘gear’, which can also alienate people from taking up cycling, despite a recognition that in the past it was undertaken without any special clothing or equipment. Focus groups undertaken as part of the evaluation confirmed that women and girls in particular are self-conscious about wearing clothing associated with cycling, especially helmets.

- **Weather:** Weather is perceived as a genuine barrier to walking and cycling in each of the three STAs, with focus group participants concerned about clothes getting wet, especially during an outbound journey in the morning;

- **Parental concerns:** Encouraging modal shift for the school trip remains challenging, despite short trip distances being common, due to parental concerns about the safety of allowing their children to walk and cycle, predominantly in relation to traffic danger, but also other aspects of personal safety. In addition, a number of practical barriers to walking and cycling to school were identified which were not addressed through the programme to date, including the weight of school bags, affordability of bikes and equipment and school uniforms which compel girls to wear skirts; and

- **Dominant car culture:** While some of the above barriers refer to specific barriers to walking and cycling for transport, ‘car culture’ in general is also a factor influencing mode choice. Driving is still perceived as the most convenient mode of travel. Delays due to congestion are limited, particularly in Dungarvan and Westport, which contributes to the car remaining the dominant mode of transport, even for short, local trips. Workplace parking tends to be readily available and free of charge. Car ownership is regarded as aspirational and teenagers are keen to learn to drive at the earliest opportunity, while
parents believe they are doing the best for their children by driving them everywhere. In general, driving is regarded by many people in the STAs as an important mode of transport associated with the ability to make essential journeys at will, while cycling and walking are viewed as leisure activities or for those who are unable to exercise their preferred option to travel by car.

Based on the barriers to modal shift discussed above, it is recommended that investment in behavioural change measures and particularly in areas such as cycle training is enhanced. Behavioural change measures should focus on the benefits of Smarter Travel and refocus marketing strategies around active commuter travel in order to address the perception that Smarter Travel is related to leisure trips rather than commuting. While some barriers to Smarter Travel can be addressed by the STA teams, some issues require a broader, cross-Government response, involving, for example, spatial planning, educational policy and health promotion.

Lessons Learnt

To disseminate the experience of the three local authorities in delivering the STA programme, AECOM undertook individual and anonymous in-depth interviews with team members from each Smarter Travel team. This feedback has been combined with AECOM’s observations of programme delivery to generate the following ‘Lessons Learnt’:

- **Programme development:** There is a need to quantify the existing transport context and identify potential for change, as well as having a clear and realistic vision. Meaningful community engagement is essential in the development of proposals, and there is a need to directly address difficult issues such as parking and traffic management, taking a holistic view of the overall transport network and public realm;

- **Programme management:** Clear governance structures with defined roles and responsibility are required, and it is crucial to secure a multi-disciplinary team with a broad mix of skills, including community and stakeholder engagement. The STA teams recommended that the community and other stakeholders should be viewed as a natural extension of the delivery team. There is a need to allow flexibility to test what works before large scale investment and reduce pressure (both internal and external) to deliver the programme and see results quickly. There must be a culture of and opportunities for innovation, taking into account both international best practice and an understanding of local issues and opportunities. A strong monitoring framework is also required to facilitate robust evaluation;

- **Infrastructure delivery:** Early community engagement is needed to understand opportunities to address any existing barriers to cycling in an area and improve facilities, as well as to give the community a greater sense of ownership of local networks. Effective pre-design engagement with community and stakeholders can also help to mitigate delays. Trialling some schemes could help in assessing local uptake. Finally, there was broad agreement that segregation of cycling is crucial to encourage modal shift and improve safety perceptions; and

- **Behavioural change measures:** Securing appropriate resources, most importantly staff with the relevant skills, experience and character, is critical, and programmes should be well informed and targeted. There are opportunities to leverage from the planning system to encourage modal shift, as has been demonstrated by Limerick Smarter Travel. Schools are a key opportunity to influence modal shift, but as the An Taisce travel theme is currently only delivered for a two year period in each school, there may be a case for securing more ongoing support. In workplaces and schools, it is critical to secure management buy in and appoint an enthusiastic internal coordinator. Social media can provide a cost effective means of communication at a large scale and has been used by all of the STAs. Support and guidance in delivering behavioural change measures, such as that provided by the Smarter Travel Workplaces team in the National Transport Authority, is essential. Travel plan networks can also help to secure structured support for Smarter Travel, particularly in towns with few large businesses.

Conclusion

Overall, progress in achieving the objectives of the programme to date has been mixed. While the level of modal shift within the STAs has been relatively low it is still higher than that achieved within the control, particularly for employment and independent education trips. However, modal shift to cycling has been disappointing considering the resources which have been allocated to this. At this stage of the programme, it is not possible to directly attribute modal shift to specific measures, but there is evidence that the delivery of improved infrastructure has been well received and that behavioural change measures have raised awareness of Smarter Travel, particularly in schools, workplaces and third level campuses. Ultimately, a combined approach to both infrastructure and behavioural change measures is needed to facilitate and encourage travel behaviour change.
Smarter Travel Areas