

Smartmoves: the public realm by foot and pedal

An event hosted by Transport for London for those organisations it funds or interacts with is not the obvious domain of The Leisure Review but the impact of non-car transport systems on the public domain proved too much of an allure. Having made sure he walked a good long way to get there, Jonathan Ives reports from the Smartmoves conference

Few things dominate the lives of the average Briton like traffic. All too often one can gain the impression that much of the national effort and a huge part of the gross domestic product is spent on devising ways to move people from one part of our crowded islands to another. With the majority of the UK's population living an urban or suburban existence, whether one drives a car or takes a bus traffic issues dominate our immediate environments from the front door to journey's end. It can then seem that much of the energy left from making the journey is spent discussing it and complaining about it. The minutiae of transport funding, the design of highway infrastructure and the policy imperatives of the many non-governmental organisations involved in transport issues is not immediately enticing for anyone with a sport, leisure and culture brief but there is little doubt that transport policies do have a significant impact on every aspect of our lives, including our leisure pursuits. Throw the promotion of walking and cycling into the mix, add discussion of the evolution of official thinking regarding the public realm and how the impact of motor traffic can be minimised, and you can easily find much to interest the leisure profession.

For this reason *The Leisure Review* was pleased to accept the invitation to attend the Smartmoves conference earlier this summer. Held in London after the general election but before the full scale of the government's intentions for public spending were revealed, Smartmoves set about demonstrating that not only had the importance of walking and cycling been recognised but it was now influencing transport policy in a way that had only been envisaged by the most committed few. Ben Plowden, director of Transport for London's Better Routes and Places initiative, started the day with an upbeat explanation of how his team's work on "function, mode and place" was making London a better place to live and work, while Kulveer Ranger, the mayor's director for transport policy, spoke of 2010 as "the year of delivery" after a few years of sustained increase in the number of people cycling in the city.

Ranger spoke of how the Greater London Authority had worked with high-profile sponsors to make 2008 the "summer of cycling" and 2009 the summer of mass participation rides, an initiative that had not only seen huge numbers of cyclists taking advantage of a day of closed roads in central London but had brought 11,000 people onto their bikes to explore the borough of Hounslow. The so-called cycling super highways would be combining with the July launch of the London bike hire initiative – London's answer to Paris's Velib – and would, he argued, mark 2010 as the year of a cycling revolution for the city. "It's about infrastructure, culture and safety," he said. "We have to look at all these things if cycling is to be embedded in the city."

Ranger also noted that there had been an official acceptance that cycling and walking are not the same. The city has to change if people are to be comfortable making journeys on foot. The new pedestrian crossing system at Oxford Circus, new way-finding posts with walking distances marked in minutes rather than distances and a reworking of a major traffic junction on Great Queen Street were all examples of how the needs of pedestrians had been recognised and acted upon. Decluttering the public realm of unnecessary obstacles and barriers are not immediately noticeable but such change does make people more comfortable in the street and therefore more likely to walk in them. David Rowe, Transport for London's head of borough implementation, explained how the changes in Great Queen Street had maintained the levels of motor traffic while decreasing speeds and creating the perception of reduced traffic flow. The subways at Marble Arch are being replaced with ground-level crossings in response to public disquiet about the underground walkways. Around 190,000 pedestrian journeys are made around Marble Arch each day and, Rowe argued, each deserves to be thought about in the context of London's traffic requirements.

"Creating better streets is about basic principles," Rowe said. "Understand function, reflect character, go for quality." The Strand and the Walworth Road were good examples of improved streetscapes, reduced segregation of

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A new consideration for traffic management in the capital

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pedestrians and motor traffic, and a reduction in accidents. Transport for London is looking to remove one third of all the guard rails from its roads, not only to improve the aesthetics of the streetscape but to enable pedestrians to move more freely around the streets, rather than being corralled and pressured into specific areas and routes. A representative of the Cyclists' Touring Club also noted that cyclists welcome the removal of guard rails from the pavements as research shows that roads without such barriers show a reduction in traffic speeds.

Twenty years ago cyclists were a rare sight on London's roads but now London is being mentioned in the same breath as some of the world's top cycling cities. Patrick Ladbury from the National Social Marketing Centre has spent a career working on how to make such behavioural changes sustainable, using marketing for the benefit of people rather than trying simply to sell them a product for profit. "Marketing is not just about communications," he said. "It's about delivery and people's journey. We're asking people to change their habits, which is a difficult thing to do. And it's not just about behavioural change: it can be about monitoring habits or preventing the uptake of bad habits. Just telling people won't work. If just communicating a message were that powerful society would not have any problems."

The four Ps of marketing, he explained, are known to be place, product, promotion and price. The four primary methods for behavioural change are: educate, support, control and design. To illustrate the point he offered the experiment of a piano staircase which looked and performed like a keyboard as people walked up it. This quickly persuaded the users of an underground station in Sweden to use the stairs rather than the adjacent escalator. In Amsterdam's Schipol airport cleaning costs relating to the gents lavatories were cut by some 60% by painting a small fly on the inside of the urinals; few men, it seems, can resist a target. The problem for the public sector Ladbury argued, is that it offers long-term benefits for short-term costs. The challenge is to demonstrate that this approach is demonstrably effective, sustainable and efficient. Segmentation of the market is essential, as is evaluation. Social marketing requires behaviour maintenance and study of the triggers that lead to lapsing. It is not easy but, like a fly on a urinal, it can be highly effective.

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