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# A possible blueprint for mainstreaming travel plans in the UK?

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## **Abstract**

The purpose of this paper is to briefly review the evolution of the travel plan since its introduction in the UK just over a decade ago, and then draw on this to suggest how travel plans may develop over the next ten years.

The paper draws on existing literature and the experience of the authors and colleagues to suggest that travel plans have gradually shifted from being predominantly a niche product towards being an integrated, comprehensive yet still focused tool in three senses: segment, scale and scope, and proposes that a fourth element 'structure' is also important. It then suggests that policy makers might use these observations to provide an eventual target destination that might inform a more strategic approach as to the potential of the travel plan in the future and sets out some possible intermediate stops along the way.

**Keywords:** travel plans, mobility management, policy, transport demand management

## **Introduction**

A travel plan (also known as 'Employer Transport Plan', 'Green Travel Plan', 'Site-Based Mobility Management', 'Green Commuter Plan' and Site Based Transportation Demand Management') is "a *general term for a package of measures tailored to meet the needs of individual sites and aimed at promoting greener, cleaner travel choices and reducing reliance on the car. It involves the development of a set of mechanisms, initiatives and targets that together can enable an organisation to reduce the impact of travel and transport on the environment, whilst also bringing a number of other benefits to the organisation as an employer and to staff*" (EEBPP, 2001).

From a public policy perspective, travel plans are attractive to regional and local government since they are reasonably quick to introduce, relatively cheap and they are usually politically acceptable. And, from a company viewpoint there are circumstances where some pressing motivation – e.g. access issues, a shortage of parking, a lack of space or money, problems with neighbouring organisations, need for planning permission or a need to enhance the organisation's image (perhaps for Corporate Social Responsibility and/or marketing reasons) – mean there are potentially significant benefits for adopting a travel plan. However, in the absence of such motivations most organisations have simply not participated in helping to solve something that is not legally or institutionally 'their problem'.

Therefore, a number of studies (Rye, 2002; Bradshaw, 1997; Coleman, 2000) report that less than ten percent of large private businesses (of over 100 employees) have adopted travel plans while small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) have taken even less of an interest. This lack of interest is for a number of reasons. In particular, Rye (2002) identifies a number of key barriers to wider travel plan implementation, namely:

- Companies' self interest and internal organisational barriers;
- Lack of regulatory requirements for travel plans;

- Personal taxation and commuting issues;
- The poor quality of alternatives (particularly public transport);
- Lack of examples due to novelty of the concept.

In addition, while the UK Government has formally recognised the travel plan since its inclusion in the 1998 White Paper *A new deal for transport: Better for everyone* (DfT, 1998), and has provided a whole series of support measures, these have tended to have been rather small scale, incremental and randomly applied. Travel plan policy meanwhile has largely been reactive and somewhat lacking in an overall strategic direction.

Despite these barriers though, travel plans have somehow survived and over the last few years have begun to make an increasing impression on the formulation of transport policy and practice and on travel behaviour. The purpose of this paper then, is to look at what has happened, to try and explain how and why, and then to try and predict just where travel plan policy may end up in the future.

### ***The story of the travel plan***

Originally developed (simultaneously and independently) as a response to the oil crises of 1973 and 1979 by electronics company 3M in St Paul, Minnesota and Conoco in Houston, Texas in the USA (Martz, 2006), the travel plan concept spread first to the Netherlands and eventually arrived in the UK in the mid 1990s, where Boots in Nottingham and Derriford Hospital in Plymouth became probably the first UK organisations to develop plans. Thus, initially, travel plans were very much focused on large organisations at single sites and on commuting and business trips.

Since this time, travel plans can be said to have developed in three core directions – by segment, scope and scale. The following section briefly describes how this relatively niche mode of operation has subsequently expanded.

### **Segment**

From a segmental perspective, workplaces were the first area to develop travel plans, largely as a response to commercial pressures (as noted earlier). Then there was a gap of a few years – the creation of the School Travel Advisory Group (STAG) by Government occurred in December 1998 - before the idea of travel plans for schools was put forward (this time by local authorities) as a way of combating traffic levels during the ‘school run’ and improving children’s health. After this, the segments where travel plans have been applied has begun to grow more quickly, and hence leisure facilities (both for day to day visitors and for one off events) (Transport 2000, 2001), shopping centres and most recently residential areas (DfT, 2005) are now also served, while the idea of Quality Freight Partnerships – that focus on goods delivery and distribution issues rather than on just people - are also gaining currency.

### **Scope**

A second major trend to have occurred, has been in the scope of travel plans. In particular, while the first plans were applied by the organisation themselves to mitigate existing problems by the late 1990s a number of local planning authorities were beginning to make the link between travel plans and planning consent. Therefore, by 2001 a survey for the Department of Transport Local Government and the Regions found that 156 local authorities out of 388 surveyed required the developers of some proposed developments to set up a travel plan as a condition for being awarded planning permission (DTLR, 2001). However, until the changing of planning guidance in 2005 with the issuing of Planning Circular 5/05 (ODPM, 2005), such rules and regulations tended to be made on a case-by-case basis with no guarantee that an effective plan would be in place following the results of the negotiation phase. With the new guidance though, local authorities are now encouraged to develop standardised, transparent, and area-based approaches to planning decisions, and in London this has had significant

ramifications. Here, Transport for London (TfL), the capital's transport authority, is currently in the process of drawing up guidance for London Boroughs that aims to ensure that some form of travel plan will need to be provided for every planning application in the capital.

There is also evidence that the scope of travel plans is also been extended to more existing organisations. For example, all NHS facilities and all Government Department offices have been required to adopt a travel plan for a number of years, while some commercial organisations are applying similar regulations based on internal drivers (typically driven by cost saving and/or by corporate responsibility agendas).

## **Scale**

Meanwhile a third trend that has started to emerge since the beginning of 2005 is the development of so-called local travel plan groups or networks. These have come about for a number of reasons, but fundamentally these are that:

1. Groups are collectively able to achieve more than single agencies or employers when dealing with common concerns (thanks to pooled resources delivering higher investment, dedicated staff, and greater political influence) and yet allows the member companies/organisations to focus more on their core competencies.
2. Groups have the ability to move Transport Demand Measures (TDM) from a site-specific application to more flexible and effective area-wide application.
3. Groups 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.

Enoch, Zhang and Morris (2005) provides an overview of the various types of groups in place as of mid 2005 and develops a basic framework to classify their structures and functions. What is particularly interesting is that some of these groups are becoming increasingly formal, while some also include not only business organisations, but residential areas and shopping facilities too – e.g. at the Dyce Transportation Management Organisation in Aberdeen.

In addition to the trends directly affecting travel plans and the transport agenda, it is also clear that such a shift towards this neighbourhood-based model of service delivery is not just confined to the transport sector – for instance policing and health care have been moving to such a devolved model for a number of years. Until now though, transport has usually been an absent voice even in such policies as the Sustainable Communities programme, run by the ODPM.

## ***Possible future directions for travel plans***

Based on the above observations, it is therefore possible to plot how these steps have occurred (see Figure 1). Moreover, these stepping stones actually seem to lead towards a possible future policy destination, whereby travel plans continue to develop until:

1. They cover all segments (which we are now very close to in London for example);
2. They apply to all proposed and existing organisations (the logical extension from covering all proposed developments as they will in London from 2007 and from them being mandatory for all NHS and Government Department buildings); and
3. They apply to increasingly comprehensive local networks or groups that apply across all segments on a neighbourhood basis.

In other words, travel plans might switch from being a very niche tool not just to being a mainstream mechanism of transportation demand management, but to being **the** primary means of delivering transport policy within a local area or neighbourhood.

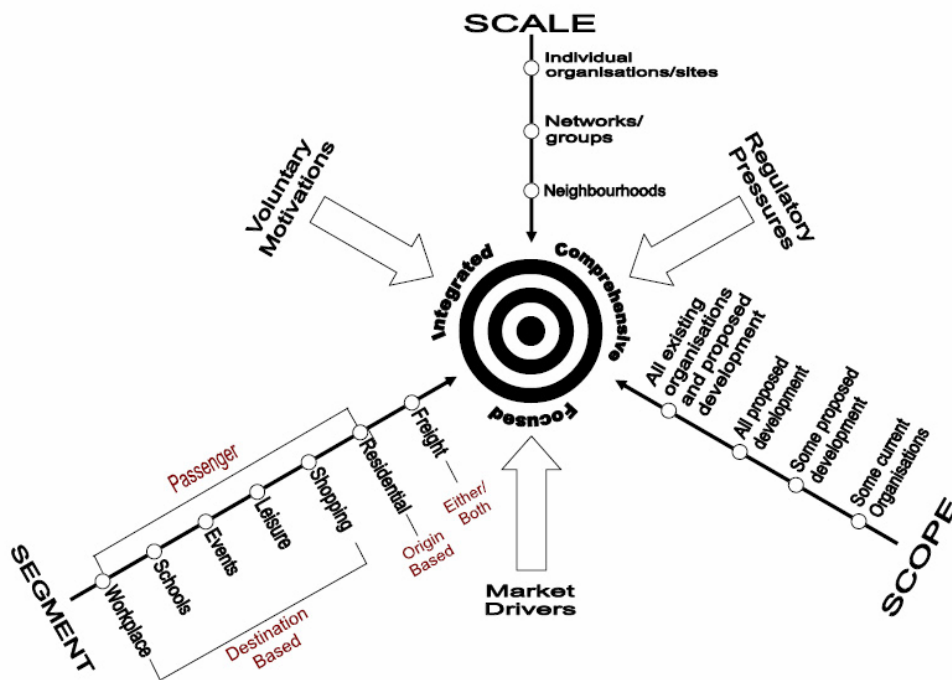


Figure 1: Mapping the development of travel plans in the UK.

In terms of future implications for policy, such an adjustment to this neighbourhood development approach may finally allow Government to deliver its much vaunted sustainable transport policy agenda in a more joined-up and integrated way – rather than in the age-old mode by mode approach still in vogue. For instance, in London the Local Implementation Plans (equivalent to Local Transport Plans outside the capital) are currently made up of sections considering walking, cycling, parking etc and travel plans independently of each other. Instead, LiPs should probably seek to consider local transport issues as a whole on a neighbourhood by neighbourhood basis (involving local stakeholders perhaps from some kind of local transport network), look at the authority-wide strategic decisions, and then consider the interactions before finalising the details.

### Structure – a fourth dimension?

Interestingly, there is also a fourth dimension that is somewhat hidden and yet is crucially important too – structure – i.e. how well integrated travel plans are within an organisation. Thus, traditionally travel plans have tended to be implemented by the estates or facilities departments within organisations and have thus been rather peripheral and of relatively minor importance. However, there could be significant travel and wider benefits in fully integrating travel plan measures across an organisation through its personnel, corporate social responsibility, environment, marketing, procurement and especially finance departments.

### *Delivering a vision for future travel plan development*

This paper is essentially a thought piece by one observer of travel plan development. Hence, the next stage now being funded by the UK Department for Transport sponsored National Business Travel Network is for a number of travel plan experts to be interviewed to determine whether the above analysis fully reflects what happened and more importantly, where it should lead in the future.

In particular, the research will seek to find a consensus on both tactical issues such as what barriers still exist that prevent travel plan take up; and more strategic issues such as how can

travel plans best fit within a wider transport planning policy context and what are the most suitable roles for central and local government in supporting travel plans. More specifically, the experts will be asked to consider the past, present and future performance of travel plans in practice, before being questioned on how they feel about the degree of regulation that is required; the merits of a systematic approach to travel plan implementation *vis a vis* an ad hoc approach; the optimum level of investment needed; whether organisations should be provided with travel plan measures 'off the shelf', a travel plan template, or left to develop their own plan and so on.

From this, it should then be possible to develop a series of scenarios for the future of travel plans from which policy makers would be able to choose the most appropriate for their own circumstances. In this way, through highlighting the different ways that travel plans could be developed, travel plans might finally begin to meet their full potential for managing mobility more effectively.

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