

Summary paper: Place making for quality of life and housing

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This paper summarises the key themes which were discussed at the fifth knowledge sharing event in the National Infrastructure Commission's 'Next Steps for Cities' programme. This paper has been developed in collaboration with the event speakers and city representatives across the country

- **The importance of considering different perspectives when designing sustainable transport infrastructure**

City planners should ensure they talk to a wide range of stakeholders when designing new and sustainable transport initiatives. This should involve going out and talking to parts of the community who are not easily accessible to avoid the perception that the scheme is 'not for them.' This could be in the form of Citizen's Assemblies or through more direct one on one interviews. It is also important to engage with developers in the area to get their buy in and ensure they incorporate active travel into their projects. Engagement should not be seen as a requirement but as an integral part of the process.

A key aspect of ensuring different views and perspectives are reflected within infrastructure decisions is the language used by planners. The current language is too car focussed meaning active travel technologies are pushed out to the side of most transport infrastructure plans. This has led to the sector remaining predominantly focused on car based solutions and has left groups such as cyclists feeling that their place on the road is unsafe.

This has been partially caused by city planners applying their own perspectives to infrastructure design and not considering alternative perspectives. Male cyclists tend to be more comfortable cycling on roads than other groups, partially due to them feeling as if they can defend themselves against the threats of other road users. This has the potential to leading to them delivering active transport infrastructure which other groups, such as parents with children consider to be unsafe to use and thus act as a barrier to uptake. Examples of these unintended consequences include as cycle paths which are not passable by cargo bikes. Future plans for active transport should consider the needs of all groups potentially utilising the road.

A good example of where a sustainable transport scheme has been delivering is in Waltham Forest where as part of the Little Holland scheme they have successfully delivered increases in active travel whilst decreasing car usage.

- **Evaluating the full range of benefits infrastructure can deliver**

When assessing the potential infrastructure projects to deliver wider, societal benefits it is important to consider how it interrelates and impacts the areas it travels through. This would both aid the consideration of alternative delivery options, such as green infrastructure in the place of traditional hard engineering solutions. This approach would also enable projects to identify where

The built environment can also promote social inclusion through encouraging healthy, resilient and connected communities and reduce persistent health inequalities. This has the potential to save £100 billion through reducing worklessness.

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Well designed spatial planning can deliver neighbourhoods where everyone can get around on foot/ bike.

When selecting future transport modes it is important to consider how it can be utilised to meet the needs of all residents in the surrounding area. This includes factors such as health and education. Whilst transport is important as a means of driving social change, so is digital connectivity. An important aspect of wellbeing is to avoid individuals/ communities not feeling like they have been left behind.

The planning process plays an important role in delivering these benefits and actively responding to specific problems.

- **Creation of local plans can help cities highlight the potential for housing developments within the cities**

Through creating a local transport infrastructure plan, cities can identify alternative areas with potential for delivering additional housing capacity. This can release capacity within inner city areas and has the potential to rejuvenate the local economy.

- **There is a need to revisit the potential for existing infrastructure to deliver additional housing**

Some recent research has suggested housing growth has stalled within suburban areas and thus existing infrastructure is not being fully utilised which is pushing development onto the greenbelt. To rectify this, there is a need to reconsider how the planning system works in the UK. One approach would be to implement the Japanese approach to planning which would replace the discretionary aspects of the process with set of fixed principles which provide developers with certainty of whether a project will receive planning permission or not. As the current system works on the surface, there is not a strong drive to change it. However, there is a need to address this in order for the UK to better utilise existing land.

- **Delivering sustainable infrastructure projects**

Strong leadership at both political and official level is important to deliver effective sustainable transport schemes.

This has been a key component of cities which have delivered successful schemes, such as Groningen and Lyon has been the unrelenting delivery of the vision which have delivered modal shift whilst also densifying. It was suggested that the best way of facilitating this is to create and implement ambitious sustainable transport visions without seeking approval from all parties in advance.

Cities which have not been so bold and vision focused have frequently watered down the proposals, meaning that the final results end up pleasing nobody. City leaders should take the lead in the delivery of these plans, focussing on the project's positive outputs, which few are likely to argue with rather than short term pressures exerted by opponents to the scheme.

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In addition to strong leadership the drive to decarbonise transport needs to be embedded throughout the organisation/ local authority. Now is a good time to do this as there is currently greater public/ political goodwill towards active transport.

This has been done within Transport for London (TFL) through widening the focus of discussions from improving air quality to delivering the opportunity for all residents to have daily physical activity. Through applying this approach by integrating planning and service delivery, they have been able to consider the competing needs/ drivers of change on transport infrastructure to balance competing priorities and ensure active travel is central to all future scenarios. This modal shift is required regardless of any developments in transport e.g. electric vehicles as the city continues to densify.

Targets have been an effective method of delivering these changes, although it is important these targets are realistic and consider the challenges of promoting active travel in the round. Through applying this approach TFL have successfully delivered projects which reshape urban areas from being car focussed to enabling walking/ cycling as well as promoting social and thus can demonstrate their future mode shift aims are feasible.