



Travel Office

Newcastle City Council, United Kingdom

Summary

Newcastle City Council opened its Corporate Travel Office on 4th September 2006. Its purpose is to ensure that as many day-to-day journeys made on business are as cost effective and energy efficient as possible and discourage, wherever possible, travel by private car. The activities of the travel office are hence concentrated around raising awareness of alternative sustainable modes and energy saving, and present the target audience (primarily council employees) with a wide range of alternatives to using private cars for business purposes. The Travel Office is funded by parts of the Newcastle City Council £ 2.3 mill travel budget, which is being spent on introducing and marketing sustainable modes of transport. The results generated from this initiative have so far been positive, and 13069 bookings have been made through the Travel Office in its first operational year, as later demonstrated in Table 2.

End-user area

- New buildings
- Refurbishment of buildings
- Transport and mobility
- Financial instruments
- Industry
- Legal initiatives (regulations, directives, etc)
- Planning issues
- Sustainable communities
- User behaviour
- Education
- Other

Target Audience

- Citizens
- Households
- Property owners
- Schools and universities
- Decision makers
- Local and regional authorities
- Transport companies
- Utilities
- ESCOs
- Architects and engineers
- Financial institutions
- Other

Technical

- Energy efficiency
- Heating
- Cooling
- Appliances
- Lighting
- CHP
- District Heating
- Solar energy
- Biomass
- Wind
- Geothermal
- Hydro power

Context

- The Newcastle City Council Travel Office was established as a response to the recognition that congestion in the city is one of the biggest causes of poor air quality and involves great expenses to the city as well as local businesses. The travel office has its own office within Newcastle Civic Centre.
- As a response, the council has recognised that they must provide a best practice example by doing whatever possible to reduce unnecessary journeys where achievable. To reflect this purpose, the motive of the travel office is to reduce the number of inefficient car journeys and encourage other modes of sustainable travel choices, in order to contribute to a wider corporate travel plan. This also ensures that day to day business travel is cost effective and environmentally friendly: especially important in a time when car ownership is steadily increasing, congestion spreading past peak hours and there is clear evidence of a modal shift away from public transport.
- The socio- economic reasons for carrying out this project are to reduce congestion, accidents, poor air quality, climate change and costs to the city. The technical methods employed to aid this process include management information systems, such as vehicle tracking.

Objectives

The objectives of setting up the Newcastle City Council Travel office were to reduce the number of inefficient car journeys and to increase the use of alternative modes of transport, thereby increasing sustainable travel choices. This is in the context a current trend of increasing car ownership, rapidly increasing congestion on key



radial routes, modal shift away from public transport for journeys to work and peak hour congestion spreading over a longer time period. Strategies used to achieve these aims have focussed on raising awareness of the existence of the travel office, and well developed energy efficient choices. Schemes such as a shuttle vehicle operating between key sites, eco friendly pool vehicles such as semi-automatic SMART cars and bio diesel Citroen C3 Cars, free and reduced public transport passes and parking restraint measures have proven successful tools in encouraging people to use modes other than private cars.

Process

This initiative has been set up as part of the Council's commitment to developing and implementing a Sustainable Travel Plan. The service will be periodically reviewed and additional services will be introduced in further phases of development. This will ensure that the service is developed in a manageable process. The City Council's Travel plan will help to promote sustainable travel alternatives to car travel such as walking, cycling, using public transport or car sharing with friends and colleagues. The Authority currently promotes Travel Plans as part of its statutory duty as Planning/Highway Authority and will continue to take a lead in promoting good practice within the Authority and further afield. Reducing vehicle emissions has a real impact on health and quality of life for everyone in the city and this initiative aims to help people find ways of contributing to improving the air quality in Newcastle. The reason for choosing the travel office as the method to deliver on these aims is that it is cost efficient, easy to operate, and it also targets the end users through being convenient and available, as it is located within the offices of the organisation. Methods used for this include:

- Pool vehicles
- One day public transport passes
- Shuttle vehicles
- Restricted parking.

Technical methods are also used to provide the users with greater options to driving their own car, such as management information systems and vehicle tracking, which have been developed to enable a full analysis of travel-office related journeys to build information and inform future initiatives.

The Travel office has been a success in its first operational year, as it has had a large amount of customers and have proved cost effective compared to precious measures of business travel (as demonstrated in Table 1 and 2). The target audience for this project is employees at, and visitors to, the Newcastle Civic Centre. It is however an ambition to roll this example of best practice out to all the local authorities within Tyne and Wear. This project has been developed through a number of phases, from a scrutiny review of the 1998 health transport plan guide, followed by the Good Going' Newcastle City Council Sustainable Travel Plan. From this travel plan stemmed proposals for a City Council Sustainable Travel Plan, of which the Travel Plan Office became part in 2006. Some problems have been encountered and flagged up through ongoing consultations and forum groups, such as the unavailability of out based outlets for public transport passes and lack of awareness of the office. These have resulted in in-house awareness campaigns such as information stands in the Civic Centre reception, - as awareness of services is key in this project.



Short Stay parking bays at Newcastle City Council, parking spaces which can only be used for short stays unless part of a car sharing scheme, to discourage single private car journeys



Eco friendly SMART car, part of the Travel Office Pool Vehicle fleet



Financial resources and partners

Table 1 outlines the 2007/08 projection of costs for running the Travel Office, based on previous years. Sources of funding come from Newcastle City Councils annual travel budget, partly allocated to the Sustainable Travel Plan Development. As the travel office is operated in and funded by Newcastle City Council, it is not run in partnership with further stakeholders. Neither is the local energy agency involved in the energy effective outcomes of the travel office, although they have provided some advice on the future of hybrid powered vehicles. The popularity of Travel Office initiatives has made this a cost effective initiative, as well as having positive effects on the environment. Figures from previous years show that in 2004/ 05 over £1m was spent with over seven different taxi companies, and over £1m spent to pay 2,309 claimants mileage costs. With the introduction of the Travel Office travel plan initiatives, expenses have decreased, as demonstrated above.

Table 1: 2007/08 Projected Costs for Running the Travel Office based on previous years.

Expenditure Head	2007- 08 Projection (£)
Salaries	69,350
Vehicle Hire (Shuttle) and Running Costs	33,250
Vehicle Borrowing Repayments	31,350
New Cycle Sheds	15,000
Office Running Costs	30,000
Vehicle Tracking System (Installation and Running costs)	15,000
Proposed purchase of further vehicles	20,000
'Rent' for Car Park	551,000
Total Expenditure	759,950
Income Head	2007- 08 Projection (£)
Directorate Claw back	(250,000)
Car Park Passes Recharge	(529,490)
Total Income	(779,490)
Surplus / Deficit	(15,540)

Results

Although there are no available figures demonstrating the exact kilowatts of energy saved as a result of more sustainable modes, it is evident that the introduction of alternative modes has seen a decrease in private car journeys. This has not only led to economic benefits for the council in terms of less expenditure for mileage claims and taxi bookings. It has also resulted in improvements in local air quality and increased uptake of energy efficient measures. This is further explained in Tables 2 and 3, which outline the amount of bookings the Travel Office has received within its first operational year, and who is actually making these bookings. Figures presented in these tables indicate that so far, an acceptable amount of the target audience has been reached and persuaded to try alternative modes of transport for business. The environmental benefits of the Travel Office are obvious, as a reduced percentage of cars on the roads evidentially help air quality and pollution. There are however also social benefits attached to this project, as it has created new jobs and increased accessibility for non-drivers.



As shown in Table 2, 13069 bookings have been made through the Travel Office in its first operational year, while Table 3 reflects the usage by each Directorate over the first nine months of the Travel Office. Note: These figures are calculated over the first operational nine months, rather than a year.

Table 2: Number and Type of Bookings the Travel Office received during its first operational year.

	Public Transport	Shuttle Vehicle	Pool Vehicle	Taxi	Short Stay Bay	One Day Pass	Total
September	113	104	157	157	188	16	735
October	130	82	265	206	284	22	989
November	115	96	281	200	305	31	1028
December	86	76	222	202	231	33	850
January	107	73	292	223	344	33	1072
February	104	50	312	200	285	36	987
March	176	110	362	300	362	79	1388
April	112	48	297	209	254	37	956
May	112	118	391	332	323	80	1336
June	154	84	383	324	341	44	1330
July	133	97	379	341	334	86	1370
August	83	64	353	195	256	77	1028
Total	1425	1002	3694	2888	3507	553	13069

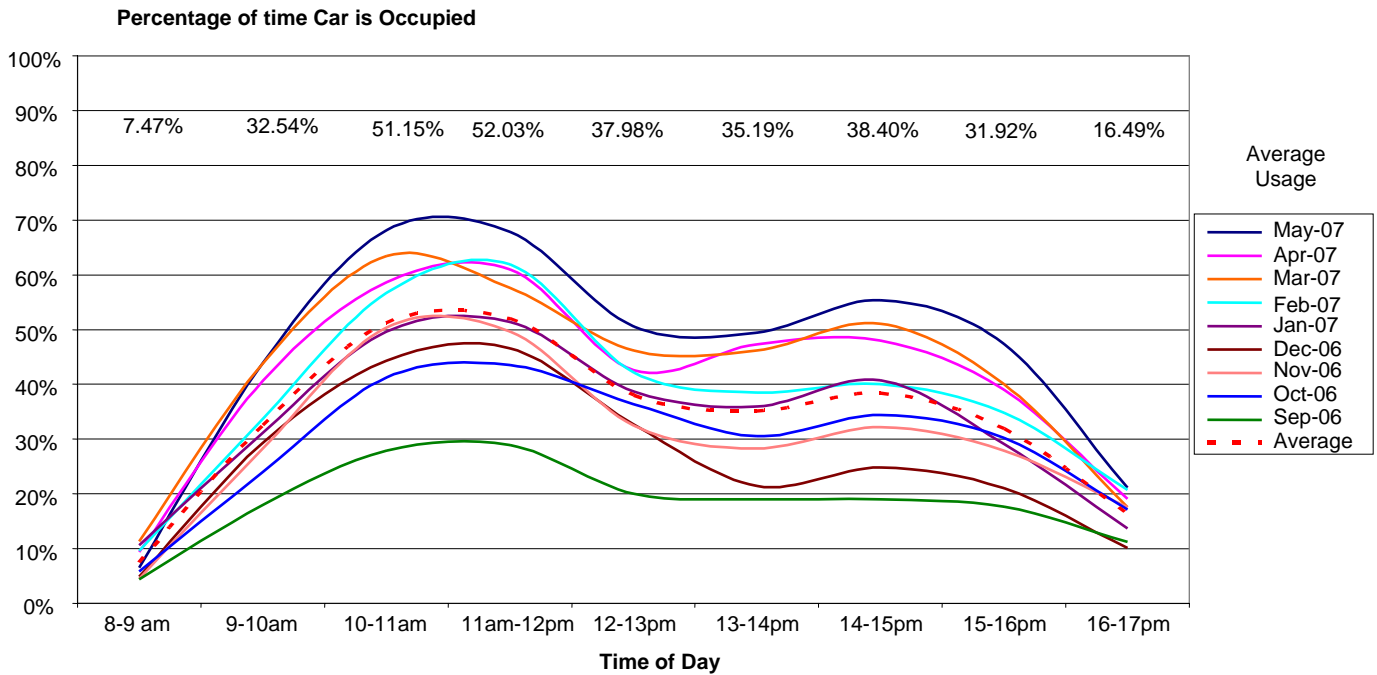
Table 3: Who Made Bookings with the Travel Office during its first operational nine months.

Usage Patterns September - May 2007							
	Public Transport	Shuttle vehicle	Pool Vehicle	Taxi	Short Stay Bay	Civic Centre One Day Pass	Total
Chief Executives	298	170	554	1007	595	60	2684
Children Services	1	38	2	177	49	20	287
City Service	15	70	171	251	196	43	746
Education & Libraries	8	100	23	32	61	56	280
Neighbourhood Services	127	259	208	95	900	42	1631
Regeneration	611	66	1543	359	312	112	3003
Social Services	34	40	79	87	161	14	415
Aldermen	0	0	0	0	24	0	24
Councillors	0	0	2	43	206	0	251
MPs	0	0	0	0	10	0	10
Total	1094	743	2582	2051	2514	347	9331

The first operational year of the Travel Office has seen a steady increase in the number of people accessing provided pool vehicles. The chart below indicates the percentage of hours that the eco-friendly pool vehicles have been in use. Significantly, there is an increase in the number of days when all cars are taken. This indicates the success of the scheme, directly leading to energy saving and environmental benefits.



Figure 1: Line Graph Showing Average Pool Car Usage by Time of Day and Year



Lessons learned and repeatability

The strength of the travel office is that it seeks to achieve a reduction in un-necessary journeys. It does so by providing a package of practical measures to reduce staff commuter journeys and provide a more sustainable choice for travel whilst at work. The reduction in staff commuter journeys has however also been advanced by introducing parking restraint, further diminishing the incentive for using single occupancy cars.

The fact that all these measures are developed and operated in-house increases their suitability for replication. In particular the need for wide-reaching marketing campaigns is modest due to a clearly identified target group. This means that any other partner with a designated budget and support for promoting sustainable transport modes can recreate the success of the travel office by introducing clearly structured schemes like car sharing, purchasing SMART cars, offering staff free one day public transport passes and introducing limited parking spaces and bike to work schemes. This does however demand strong partnership working with the regional public transport executive, as they provide free and discounted travel passes, as well as a robust budget and organisational support for completion of the scheme.

The Newcastle Travel Office has encountered a few problems during its first operational year, which have been flagged up through surveys and focus groups. These problems are mainly to do with flexibility, or lack of it. In particular complaints have been raised about the inability to return one day passes at any out locations and the time restrictions of using the SMART cars. This has prompted discussions regarding an extension of out based locations and the current three hour limit for the SMART cars. Through focus groups it has also been noticed that there is something of a lack of recognition for some of the services provided by the travel office, indicating that council employees are not aware of the entire range of services available from the travel office. This has resulted in small in-house awareness campaigns such as information stands in the Civic Centre reception and a further developed web site, ensuring that employees are aware of the services provided by the travel office and how these work. This clearly points out the importance of both marketing and focus groups in the process of setting up an energy efficient and sustainable travel office.

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Printed reports or other literature available:

Travel Office- Nine Month Review

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