

Transport Research Series

National Transport Strategy: User Consultation

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As part of the development of the Scottish Executive's National Transport Strategy (NTS), the aim of which is to promote economic growth, social inclusion and sustainable development through a safe, integrated and efficient transport network, George Street Research were commissioned to undertake research to gather the views of transport users within "hard to reach" audiences who were less likely to respond to the main consultation document.

Main Findings

- Different groups of respondents tended to have relatively similar points of view, with any different opinions being based primarily on their overall experiences of using transport or their attitudes towards certain key issues such as the importance of the environment or whether car drivers could be actively penalised.
- Respondents agreed on the overall need for a National Transport Strategy, but many felt the consultation document was aimed at stakeholders rather than the general public.
- While the overall objectives of the NTS were welcomed, many respondents found it difficult to think in strategic terms, with most basing their opinions on their immediate experiences and perceptions.
- Despite broad acceptance of the objectives of the NTS, respondents found it difficult to prioritise these and there was some cynicism over how the strategy would be implemented in practice.
- While economic growth was recognised as being important for Scotland, respondents found it difficult to suggest ways in which transport could facilitate economic growth, although there was some recognition that it could lead to more employment opportunities, particularly in rural areas, and an increase in tourism.
- Accessibility was seen to be an important issue by all respondents, with public transport being felt to be irregular and infrequent, particularly in rural areas and outwith rush hour.
- Cost of transport was seen as too high and inconsistent across providers, although the concessionary travel scheme for older and disabled persons was welcomed. Some respondents noted problems in terms of service delivery on the part of transport providers and a lack of co-ordination between transport providers.
- There were requests for increased choice in public transport and availability of more and better information (especially real-time information).
- Improving and increasing public transport and providing incentives to increase its usage were the most favoured means of managing demand, with less support for schemes that disincentivised car travel, for example road pricing.
- Respondents were concerned that amenities and retail parks were often sited on the outskirts of cities without adequate thought being given to the transport implications.
- Road safety was considered a vital part of the Strategy, with support for a range of road safety initiatives.

Introduction

The Scottish Executive is currently developing a National Transport Strategy (NTS), the aim of which is to promote economic growth, social inclusion and sustainable development through a safe, integrated and efficient transport network. Consultation is a key element in the development of the Strategy and a consultation paper was launched in April 2006 in order to ascertain the views of professionals working within the transport arena, others with an interest in transport and the general public. However, there are a number of audiences – primarily transport users – who typically will not provide their views to a consultation.

In order to ensure the views of transport users fed into development of the NTS, George Street Research was commissioned to undertake independent and objective qualitative research that placed a focus on understanding the views of “hard to reach” audiences who are transport users.

Aims and Objectives

The specific objectives of the research were as follows:

- To ensure that a cross-section of the public are consulted to allow an insight into the range of views available;
- To ensure the views of specific “hard to reach” groups are included in the consultation process;
- To identify the type and nature of unmet mobility needs of different groups;
- To gather views and experiences on key issues in the strategy relevant to the target groups;
- To learn of people’s interests and concerns;
- To hear people’s ideas about policy options;
- To understand the strength of feeling on particular issues.

Methodology

Given the exploratory nature of this study, a qualitative approach was adopted. A series of 11 focus groups and individual/ double/ triad in-depth interviews among a further 40 respondents were held across Scotland. Focus groups were held among the general public, young people, old people, women and those on low income. Interviews were held among disabled, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender people (LGBT) and minority ethnic individuals.

Qualitative discussions took place in May and June 2006.

Overview

All respondents agreed on the need for a National Transport Strategy, with most basing their opinions on their own experiences and perceptions, rather than having a strategic view as a whole.

Most respondents did not think the consultation document was aimed at them, but rather at stakeholders or professionals working within the sector.

Views on Goals/Objectives of the NTS

The objectives of the NTS are to:

- Promote economic growth;
- Promote social inclusion;
- Protect our environment and improve health;
- Improve safety of journeys;
- Improve integration.

The NTS aims to:

- Cover all modes of travel
- Cover all travellers
- Be medium to long-term in nature
- Provide the context for the Strategic Projects Review
- Be based on wide-ranging public consultation (that finished on 13 July 2006)
- Be complemented by the Regional Transport Strategies (RTSs)
- Be evidence based.

Respondents accepted these objectives as important, but found it difficult to prioritise them and state which was most important.

Implementing the NTS

Most respondents did not consider there were many ways in which they could *personally* contribute to achieving these goals. Cars in particular were used regularly by most respondents and viewed as an essential everyday item rather than a luxury.

Most respondents were car drivers or car users and only a small number had chosen not to own a car. This choice was often made on the basis of economic necessity rather than a positive lifestyle choice. Furthermore, despite environmental concerns, most younger respondents aspired to car ownership as early as possible.

However, the importance of transport was implicitly accepted by all respondents, regardless of what forms of transport they used. An increase in the availability, frequency and coverage of public transport was felt to be an essential foundation in the development of the NTS.

There was a degree of cynicism as to how the strategy would be implemented and the ways in which different transport providers would work together with local authorities and the Scottish Executive in ensuring that the NTS could meet its aim and objectives.

Facilitating Economic Growth

Although only a small number of respondents felt this to be the most important factor, most recognised that economic growth was important to some extent. Despite this, respondents found it very difficult to suggest ways in which transport may assist in increasing economic growth.

There was a small amount of spontaneous recognition of the need to increase the proportion of freight travelling by rail or water, although there were also concerns that the current rail infrastructure is not capable of supporting increased levels of movement of goods. In considering economic growth in Scotland, there was a degree of spontaneous comment that an increased transport capacity could help lead to increased employment opportunities, particularly in rural areas.

Additionally, the role of transport in increasing the potential for tourism was noted by some, again primarily those in more outlying areas.

Promoting Accessibility

Accessibility was deemed a particularly important element of the NTS and respondents highlighted a number of key issues in relation to public transport provision.

Public transport was felt to be irregular and infrequent, especially in rural areas and outwith rush hours. Some respondents felt that deregulation and privatisation had exacerbated the situation by encouraging transport providers to focus on the most busy and profitable routes.

Cost of travel per se was seen to be high and respondents also noted the inconsistent nature of charges levied for different forms of travel and by different transport providers. While concessionary travel for older and disabled persons was welcomed, there were some views that this needed to be extended to all forms of travel and to a broader range of audiences. Information, especially for the blind, deaf or those who were not fluent in English, was felt to be lacking, as was real-time information.

Service issues were raised with many noting a lack of cleanliness on many buses and there were calls from respondents for public transport staff to have better training to enable them to provide a good service to all passengers. A negative image was associated with buses in many areas of Scotland, although trains generally had a more positive image, with this impacting upon desire to use these forms of transport.

Many respondents noted a lack of co-ordination between different public transport providers and there was a lack of awareness of the full range of transport options available, particularly of many community based initiatives.

Promoting Choice

Respondents overwhelmingly agreed that the range of different transport options needed to be promoted, and linked this primarily to increasing awareness and usage of public transport. Tram systems were requested by the majority of respondents, albeit none were aware of the cost of implementing them. Given the poorer image of buses compared to trains, it is not surprising that there were also calls for an increase in provision of train services across Scotland.

Two key methods of promoting choice were identified by respondents and these were the potential role of employers in offering transport schemes to employees, and awareness raising to encourage more usage of public transport options.

Managing Demand

In terms of managing demand, there was a preference for incentives to bring about increased use of public transport, rather than disincentives to car usage. Many respondents felt that the costs of car tax and road tax were sufficient penalties for drivers and that further penalties were unfair. For the minority who suggested that disincentives should be introduced (mainly non-car users), it was felt that without these disincentives car usage would not decline sufficiently.

With this in mind, schemes such as park and ride, encouragement for car share schemes and bus priority measures were preferred to congestion charging, road tolls or banning cars from city centres. There were some suggestions for differential car tax rates allied to engine size and/ or the environmental friendliness of a vehicle, although some noted that this is in fact already in practice and has done little to persuade drivers to consider buying smaller vehicles.

While there was some support for increased use of biofuels, there was cynicism as to whether car manufacturers would support this initiative.

Reducing the need to travel

There was concern that amenities and retail parks were often sited on the outskirts of cities, without adequate thought being given to the transport implications.

There were some calls for the provision of local amenities at new housing developments and some suggestions for planning permission to only be given for developments offering more by way of transport infrastructure.

Homeworking was favoured by respondents as a means of reducing the need to commute, although most felt that many people had jobs that would not be suitable for this.

While most car driving respondents noted that they would be unlikely to change their driving habits, there were some suggestions that there may be potential for encouragement of multi-purpose journeys.

Road Safety

Road safety was considered to be an important element of the NTS and many suggestions were made for improving this. In general, respondents were in favour of a range of road safety initiatives including more enforcement of drink driving penalties (some requested a 'zero-tolerance' approach), increased testing of driving skills, greater use and enforcement of speed limits, traffic calming measures and speed cameras.

In Summary

The research suggests that most car users are unlikely to radically reduce car usage without significant policy changes. That said, there were some suggestions that it may be easier to persuade some groups of individuals to give greater

consideration to increased use of public transport and this was often linked to lifestage. However, one essential requirement to help persuade car users to consider other forms of public transport would be an increase in the availability and frequency of public transport services.

There were also seen to be some contradictions between the aims of the strategy and its actual implementation. For example, while most respondents acknowledged the need for continuing economic growth for Scotland, many saw an aim to reduce travel in Scotland as counteracting economic growth.

The Scottish Executive was seen to be the most appropriate organisation to manage the introduction of a National Transport Strategy and to act as co-ordinator between providers of public transport, local authorities and others involved in the implementation of different elements of the strategy.

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