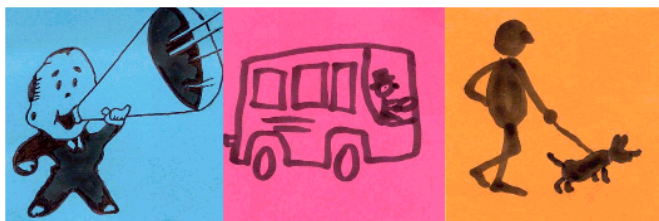


Longsight Transport Project



www.onthemovefm.org

Consulting Longsight

Briefing 2: December 2007

Background

The Longsight Transport Project began in September 2002. With support from Friends of the Earth, people living locally were given training in an approach to consultation called participatory appraisal and supportive throughout a consultation on getting around in Longsight. This is documented fully in our report *Better Buses and Safer Streets for Longsight* (2002) (www.onthemovefm.org).

Since then project members have carried out smaller consultations in a variety of ways. This briefing identifies key features of the processes and offers some insights in terms of lessons learned, in the hope that others can learn from, and take forward, our work. It is intended to accompany the 2002 report.

Involving People

We believe that it is vital to take into account the needs of people living locally when determining transport policy, otherwise inappropriate “solutions” will be imposed. We wanted to develop a method of finding out the transport concerns of local people – that could be replicated in other places – to make sure people's views and experiences are influencing the decisions made on transport. We have set an example of how this can be done, and we hope that others can now learn from our work. We do not present our work as a perfect example, rather we want to document it so that others can learn from and add to it.

Where We Did It

Longsight is an ethnically diverse ward in South Central Manchester, with a range of bus services running through it and where, according to the 2001 census, under half of households own a car. The A6, which runs through the middle of the area, is a busy commuter route, and the communities close to it experience ‘rat running’. Although the area is bisected by a high-frequency bus route heading into the city centre, our consultation found that buses going around the city are comparatively less reliable. The area has a busy community and voluntary sector, therefore providing a range of established community groups to consult.

We would recommend the following criteria for selecting areas for similar work:

- Is the area likely to need improvements in its transport infrastructure?
- Have recent changes meant that transport and/or accessibility problems may have arisen: e.g. the closure of a post office, the development of a new, or loss of an old, supermarket, the relocation of a hospital or health centre?
- Are there proposed developments that are likely to be difficult to access, or generate unacceptable levels of traffic?
- Are there evident environmental issues such as air quality and congestion?
- Is the local community such that some minority interests are likely to have been overlooked in more mainstream consultation exercises?

In practice, any area is likely to be suitable since it is not always possible to predict what issues a consultation is likely to unearth.

When We Did It

Better Buses and Safer Streets Consultation

Summer 2002 Selecting area and recruiting the project team

September 2002 Training for project team

Until December 2002 First stage of fieldwork. Asking general questions like ‘how do you get around?’ and ‘what difficulties do you have getting around?’

January 2003 Reference groups to share results

and decide next set of questions

Until April 2003 Second set of fieldwork asking people about buses and safety.

May 2003 Longsight residents vote on priorities for improvements to transport related issues. As documented in the 2002 report, the list of issues to prioritise was distilled from the comments given by local residents during the consultation.

June 2003 Sharing results with reference groups and looking at ways to tackle the problems identified.

August 2003 Writing the report and beginning to raise the issues highlighted during the consultation.

Further Work

Ongoing communication with local groups and individuals.

November 2004 Email survey for contributions to the Local Transport Plan. (our response to the council's consultation is on www.onthemovefm.org)

March 2006 onwards Vox pop consultations for the On The Move show. (see briefing number 3)

May and June 2006 Postcard survey of bus user satisfaction and bus reliability. (see www.onthemovefm.org)

What We Did

In our consultation, we wanted to demonstrate a different way of working and to set a challenge to others to be more thorough and inclusive. 'Community Assessment and Action', developed by Development Focus¹, was the basis for our approach. The following qualities of the 2002 consultation characterise it:

- We talked to people 'on their turf'. This means that we went to their meetings, their community centres and their library, instead of expecting them to come to us. Where necessary (on the advice of the groups), we used an interpreter.
- We used visual techniques, therefore making the consultation accessible to those with low literacy and language skills.

¹ Development Focus are a consultancy who specialise in training on community consultations (www.devfocus.org).

- We involved local decision-makers, from the City Council, Greater Manchester Passenger Transport Authority and other relevant local organisations, in 'reference groups' to keep them in the loop and to get feedback on how relevant the information generated would be.
- We involved local residents in the consultation team, and provided training in the participatory appraisal approach.
- Members of the consultation team produced a report that could be used by members of the community to campaign on issues that mattered to them. We produced summaries of this in Urdu and Bengali. In this report we suggested avenues through which the issues could be addressed. We distributed the report to the community groups that were involved in the consultation and made it available in Longsight library and on the Internet.
- We used a detailed coding procedure so that each comment can be directly attributed to the person's age, gender, ethnicity, access to private transport, and any health issues. We used this to make sure that the project reaches out to all parts of the community, so that we could be confident that the results are representative of the community.

More detail about this approach can be found in *Better Buses and Safer Streets*.

What Problems were Identified

The following are examples of the types of issues that were raised during the consultation:

- problems with specific buses, sometimes at specific points and times, concerning price, reliability and frequency;
- suggested bus routes that are not currently served;
- points on streets where lighting is poor and/or where there is a fear of attack or robbery;
- points on streets where crossing the road is difficult and dangerous;
- problem areas with speeding traffic;
- differing perceptions and attitudes of

different modes of transport;

- evidence of lack of awareness of what is available and the need for information – e.g. complaints received about lack of day ticket, even though this does actually exist.

What Are The Advantages of This Approach?

There are many advantages to participative consultation:

- understanding people's needs, preferences and values by talking to them is a way to enhance the effectiveness of decision-making and service provision (Involve, 2005 p 22);;
- involving people in the decisions that affect them can make the outcomes more acceptable and more closely tailored to local needs (Involve, 2005 p 22);
- many public services need active participation to be effective (Involve, 2005 p 22), for example community transport;
- participation is seen as a way to improve the relationship between stakeholders and local authorities because ' [councils]... become more open and accessible when people understand how they work, are allowed to have a say in decisions and share the efforts to improve quality of life.' (Manchester City Council, 2005 p2).

There is an increasing emphasis on stakeholder engagement in planning and service provision. The national Planning Policy Statement on Local Development Frameworks (PPS12) views engagement as 'essential to achieve local ownership and legitimacy for the policies that will shape the future distribution of land uses and development in an authority's area' (ODPM, 2005 p 8).

Reflections

Through the 2002 consultation we have learnt:

- People experience frustration about the lack of influence that they have over the services that they need.
- The complex nature of transport governance means that people find it difficult to know where to turn when they have an issue that needs to be addressed.

- The difficulty of 'transport' as a concept, which can mean different things depending on the person and the context.
- Although there is a high resource requirement (particularly in terms of people and time), it is possible for a community group to carry out a similar exercise. In this instance there was substantial support from Friends of the Earth staff and this implies that support from local authorities, in particular the use of meeting rooms and the cost of training and translation, are beneficial in facilitating such initiatives.
- Although our *Better Buses and Safer Streets* consultation period took nearly a year, with the intensive work in the community lasting 8 months, it should be noted that all the participants had other jobs or were students. Depending on the schedules of the people involved, and the number of groups to consult, each phase of questions could take as little as two weeks.
- It is necessary to compile a detailed list of the community groups in the area. Luckily in this case this had already been carried out by a local group, the Hamilton Road Community Area Association.
- Local community knowledge is invaluable in helping to identify groups and individuals to talk to – Hamilton Road Area Community Association's knowledge of local groups and activities were invaluable, for example.

This last point means not only that it is essential to communicate clearly, but also that issues will come up in conversation that would not arise were people asked: 'Do you have transport problems?' Citizens will not necessarily consider their issue a transport issue. For example feeling unsafe on foot at night, or waiting at a bus stop, might cause someone to pay for a taxi, or even to not attend an event, but they don't necessarily class this as a 'transport' issue. When asked if they have a 'transport' issue, they would probably say no, initially at least. This implies that we cannot expect people to report as 'transport problems' issues that might, for policy makers, fall into the 'transport problems' category.

Therefore it can be more difficult to find out about transport experiences in a short space of time. For example when doing the bus users survey, we had very little time to have the type of discussion that

can illuminate these issues. When doing 'vox pops' for the radio show, a similar problem arises, but the radio show itself allows for much more expansive treatment of themes.

Additionally, the following points arise from the consultation work in general:

- The level of commitment from volunteers tends to vary over time.

This was especially true for the bus survey and to a lesser extent in the 2002 consultation. Although some people were keen to help, others dropped out when the activity started despite having expressed interest in being involved when it was being planned. This may have been because there was a part-time paid worker available to coordinate the exercise, even though the actual work was too much for just one person. For the 2002 consultation, we had enough volunteers to mean that not everyone needed to attend every session. This helped to avoid the process becoming too burdensome for any one person. Continuity of the project after the 2002 consultation was hindered, however, by most of the team disbanding to pursue other projects, many of them leaving the local area.

- In the case of the bus survey people were suspicious and often unwilling to fill in a card because they thought we were a) from the bus company and/or b) promoting the service. At times we simply received dismissive comments because of their frustration at the quality of the bus service. These misunderstandings are a particular problem in areas such as Longsight where it is common to find people who speak limited English, and involving enough translators to cover the full range of languages spoken practically impossible.
- The fact that the consultation on the local transport plan resulted in Phil and Graeme setting up the *On The Move* radio programme shows that consultations can have positive indirect results.

Taking it forward

It is likely that many of the issues raised in our consultation will be relevant to other areas, particularly those that share some of the characteristics of Longsight. Moreover, a participatory approach to consultation can be carried out in any community. It is therefore important that

anyone with an interest in the transport needs of such communities, read our report *Better Buses and Safer Streets*, and consider how the issues raised apply to their area, and perhaps carry out a similar consultation.

The report documents the approach we took to consultation and we hope that other communities will be inspired to follow a similar approach. By carefully consulting to assess local needs, they are better able to enter policy debate confidently and informed.

Both the report and the radio show archives highlight issues that have not yet been satisfactorily addressed. It is important that the authorities and transport operators now respond to these.

The findings of the consultations highlight the fact that goals of environmental groups are often aligned with the aspirations of those concerned with social issues such as local quality of life, personal safety, public health, and accessibility of services. In fact, improving public transport, creating a safer environment for walking and cycling, promoting cleaner vehicles, and making key services accessible to everyone is something that is needed to satisfy the day-to-day concerns of people living in areas such as Longsight. At the same time, these improvements help to reduce carbon emissions, achieve clean air and an active population and ensure that everyone can get to the services they need. To achieve this it is vital to take on board the views and experiences of people who use, and are affected by, transport in the widest sense.

References:

Involve (2005) *People and Participation: How to Put Citizens at the Heart of Decision-Making*, Involve, London (www.involve.org)

Manchester City Council (2005) *The Manchester Community Engagement Toolkit*, Manchester City Council, Manchester.

ODPM (2005c) Planning Policy Guidance Note 12: Local Development Frameworks, Stationary Office, London.

This briefing is produced by the Longsight Transport Project. The authors are Graeme Sherriff and Frank Kennedy. It and the other briefings in this set of four are available on the website www.onthemovefm.org. For further information about the project as a whole, please contact Frank Kennedy on 0151 707 4328 or at frank.kennedy@foe.co.uk.