

Enterprise and Business Committee Inquiry into Town Centre Regeneration

Evidence from Sustrans



Sustrans welcomes the recognition of the Enterprise and Business Committee that sustainable transport plays an important role in the regeneration of town centres. We will attempt to frame our response around the terms of reference for the inquiry.

1 What approaches have been followed to successfully deliver and finance the regeneration of town centres in Wales? Are there lessons to be learned from elsewhere?

As part of Sustrans' major infrastructure projects to extend the National Cycle Network we are working with local authorities to open us access to town centers by people on bikes or on foot.

Pedestrian and cycle-friendly environments have been shown as the core around which economic growth, public health, sustainability and overall quality of life are built. It is therefore crucial that these environments are considered in any long-term development and regeneration plans¹.

Land use and urban transport policies have historically been dominated by the desire to facilitate mobility (the ability to travel) rather than accessibility (the access to the goods and services which are the motives encouraging people to travel). This has resulted in lengthening journey distances, increasing levels of motorised traffic, and wide-ranging negative side-effects, including an increasing centralisation of services in out-of town centres, impacting severely on town centre facilities.

Using EU Convergence funding through our Valleys Cycle Network project, and Big Lottery funding through our Connect2 project, we have been able to lever in further funding from WG Regeneration money and Safe Routes in Communities, as well as Regional Transport Plan grants, to enhance town centres. For example, in Merthyr we are linking the town centre via the shopping centre to the National Cycle Network (in this case the local Trevithick Trail) to allow people to get from nearby communities without using a car. In Monmouth we are working with the local authority and volunteers to create a local network of routes to link pedestrians and cyclists to parts of the town that are severed from the shopping centre by the busy dual carriageway. We are opening up access in Rhyl, Pontypool, Ebbw Vale, Maesteg, Pontypridd, and Newport.

Retail vitality and increased footfall are frequently linked to the provision of an attractive shopping environment.² Whilst it is traditional for retailers to pursue more car access and parking, and to resist measures to promote walking, cycling and public transport use, research suggests that retail vitality and regeneration would be best served by traffic restraint, public transport improvements and a range of measures to improve the walking environment.³ In a study conducted by Sustrans involving 126 retailers and 840 customers, retailers were found to have overestimated the importance of car-borne trade by almost 100%. This misperception can lead traders to push for transport planning decisions which are not in their best interest and creates the risk of mistakes being made in transport and planning policy.

¹ Warren, J (2010) Civilising the Streets

² Wales Online (2009) Capital Investment Pushes Cardiff Up Retail Rankings

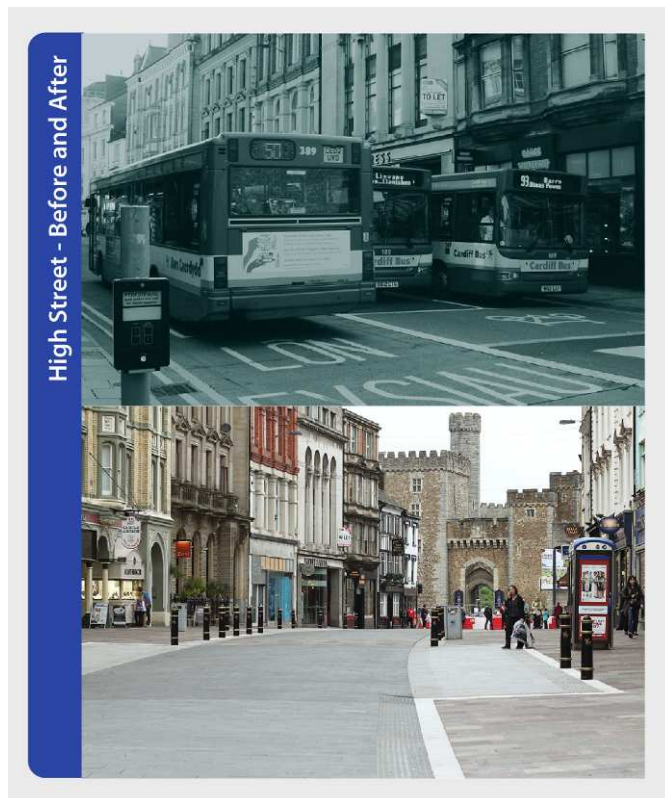
³ Sustrans (2006) Shoppers and How They Travel

In the same study, researchers analysed how many businesses a shopper will visit, according to their mode of travel. Cyclists and car users were found to make four times as many single-shop visits as pedestrians. Four out of five pedestrian shopping trips were found to take in two to five shops, compared with three fifths of car and bicycle trips.

People enjoy shopping in a more human environment where they navigate traffic-free spaces at their leisure instead of having to negotiate busy roads. Major investment in the walking environment, such as wider pavements and traffic restraint measures, should therefore result in attracting more regular, dedicated custom to the area and have a positive impact on retailers and customers alike.

2 How does the Welsh Government use the levers at its disposal to assist in the regeneration of town centres in Wales?

As discussed previously there are number of good examples of progressive measures being advanced. A further example is Cardiff city centre where the Welsh Government and the local authority have prioritised sustainable modes of transport in the city centre and have improved conditions for walking and cycling through improved crossings.



Many bus services have been re-routed away from the central train and bus station because of congestion and air quality concerns in the city centre, and through traffic has been removed from St Mary Street to create a pedestrian friendly environment. The Council has spent some £2 million to date on pedestrianisation and a further £9.5m on changing the bus routes with further investment planned during 2011/12.

The council is also managing demand for city centre car parking through the reduction of long stay car parking spaces and the creation of a network of Park and Ride sites along key road corridors into the city centre. Enforcement is being carried out by civil enforcement officers employed by the council to police the on-and off street restrictions by serving penalty charge notice to vehicles seen to be contravening the regulations. Cardiff Council took over responsibility for Civil Parking Enforcement in

July 2010. The scheme gives the Council direct control over the deployment of enforcement staff to tackle illegal parking and the problems it causes. The scheme ensures the benefits of other transport improvements such as Bus Priority are not compromised by illegal parking. However, work needs to be done on parking in cycle lanes.

A town that wishes to develop its transport sustainably and to increase the permeability for modes of sustainable transport needs to make it more attractive, convenient and easier for people to choose to walk, cycle and use public transport compared to choosing to use a car.

A recent success story was in Penarth where a key link between the town centre and the new Pont y Werin bridge was identified along a side street that had been earmarked for additional car parking spaces. After a constructive dialogue with the local authority we persuaded them to amend the plan for parking along Arcot Street to include a contra-flow for cyclists along the one-way street to allow a direct route to the bridge.



Conversely, one of the strongest tools for creating more convenient sustainable transport networks is to reduce 'permeability' for private motorised traffic. This means that people using cars would have limited access to many of the key destinations people want to get to, while people travelling by sustainable and active transport means would be able to get right to where they want to. Sustrans advocates full permeability for active transport modes, semi-permeability for public transport and reduced permeability for private motor traffic.

There is clear evidence from the evaluation of the Sustainable travel Towns project in England that in order to significantly increase use of sustainable transport projects need to plan for the long term (at least four years) rather than expecting to achieve results within a couple of years. In addition, these projects must address both 'soft' and 'hard' measures; i.e. including both improvements to service quality as well as improving the marketing and promotion of these services. Finally, measures must be taken to 'lock in' this traffic reduction, for example through the provision of bus lanes, implementation

of parking charges and reallocation of road space. Measures that enforce traffic restraint can also be combined with measures to improve the street environment, such as pavement widening, planting and seats, and decorative surfaces.

3 How are the interests and activities of communities, businesses, local authorities and Welsh Ministers identified and coordinated when developing and implementing town centre regeneration projects?

Too often they are not. A key element of our Big Lottery funded Connect2 project has been to work with local communities to develop the design and form of our project. This has not always been met with enthusiasm from local authority partners; the instinct from transport professionals is sometimes to agree the detail of a scheme and then consult. And indeed it is not always easy. In Treforest, for example, we have faced criticism from a small group of residents for our plans to build a new walking and cycling bridge to connect a new route from Church Village into Pontypridd, via Treforest. In response to the concerns we have been greatly involved in planning a community consultation programme with the residents, led by the local authority. There will be a series of exhibitions at community venues throughout September and October led by the local authority as part of the consultation process. We are also carrying out face to face and doorstep surveys to establish people's views on the proposed scheme. We are carrying out a similar process in a number of other schemes.

In strategic terms the impact of town centre regeneration projects on sustainable transport is rarely considered at an early stage. Where regeneration schemes have been able to make a contribution has often relied on Sustrans being able to influence the plans, but inevitably we cannot be everywhere and there is a limit to the impact a relatively small charity can have.

The Welsh Government's commitment to introduce a Highways and Transport (Wales) Bill to place a duty on local authorities to provide and maintain a network of walking and cycling routes represents an ideal opportunity to assist in the regeneration of town centres in Wales. This Bill, given the right tools, has the potential to aid the economic and social regeneration of communities across Wales. By stipulating the need to prioritise walking and cycling above private motorised modes of transport, through offering local authorities the legislative tools they need to develop these routes and by ensuring that a standardised approach is adopted, the Bill will bring benefits to health, to the environment and to businesses across Wales.

Lee Waters,
National Director, Sustrans Cymru
9 September 2011