Visitor travel plans for countryside leisure destinations

NATURAL ENGLAND

Visitor travel plans for countryside leisure destinations

Colin Speakman, CMILT, FTS

Transport for Leisure Ltd

Project details

This report results from research commissioned by Natural England. The work was undertaken under Natural England contract PYT02/10/15 by Colin Speakman, CMILT, FTS.

A summary of the findings covered by this report, as well as Natural England's view on this research, can be found within Natural England Research Information Note RIN022 – Visitor travel plans for countryside leisure destinations.

This report should be cited as:

SPEAKMAN. C, CMILT, FTS, Managing Director of Transport for Leisure Ltd. 1999. Visitor Travel Plans for Countryside Leisure Destinations. Natural England Research Reports, Number 022.

Project manager

David Markham
Natural England
Northminster House
Peterborough
PE1 1UA
Tel: 01733455000
david.markham@naturalengland.org.uk

Contractor

Transport For Leisure Ltd.
67 Grove Road
Ilkley
West Yorkshire
LS29 9PQ
colin@countrygoer.org

Summary

Travel plans are now well developed as a concept in the UK for schools and for employees. They are being implemented (often with encouraging results) by public authorities and businesses to influence the travel choices of pupils and employees. Benefits include reduced congestion, reduced emissions and giving participants the health benefits of active travel - (ie walking and cycling).

Likewise personal travel plans (or the travel smart scenario) are encouraging individuals to look at a range of travel choices and are resulting in many individuals reducing their car dependency with obvious personal and environmental benefits.

However, in terms of changing visitor travel behaviour to countryside leisure destinations, work is still in its relative infancy. Excellent work has been done at individual sites, often in order to meet Heritage Lottery or other funding or designation requirements. A leisure destination manager has less influence over his customers than employers or schools have over their employees and students. In most cases the leisure site manager will not wish to reduce the number of visitors or their spending power by a negative attitude to car-borne visitors and as the car is the overwhelmingly favoured choice for rural leisure visits, especially by families, encouraging people to change their travel choice can be a challenge.

Most visitor travel plans have largely focused on developing and promoting new travel opportunities rather than changing travel behaviour. However, this may increase overall visitor numbers without reducing the problems of car traffic at a leisure destination and although the social and economic objectives may be being met, the environmental ones may not be, although these may be the key issues in protected and historic landscapes or Nature Reserves.

This report looks at the particular problems and challenges facing any leisure destination and suggests that a logical process needs to be followed to ensure that a travel plan has clear objectives and that progress towards meeting these objectives is properly measured.

Methodology

The study arose out of a brief literature review of available studies and reports of visitor travel plans in the UK (details recorded in the accompanying Bibliography), including recent studies of National Park sustainable travel projects and some examples of travel or transport plans for specific destinations, including studies which the author himself had been directly involved in.

As a result of this overview, a rationale was formulated which is intended to take the visitor travel plan process forward. Building on the strengths and indeed the weaknesses of previous studies, the report suggests the need for a more rigorous approach, to ensure objectives were being met, and that there was clear and effective communication with target audiences at every stage of the process.

To a considerable degree the findings of this study have been based on the parallel study of the 20 case studies of best practice, taking from the most successful examples in the UK, some of the essential elements that have made for that success, even though in most cases the success came through process of trial and error rather than the formal visitor travel plan process.

Contents

Appendices

List of figures

1 Introduction

What are visitor travel plans?

1.1 Travel planning is a technique developed in recent years, with Government support, to influence and change travel behaviour. The prime purpose of all travel plans is to reduce individual dependency on the private car, using a range of persuasion measures and behaviour-changing techniques. The emphasis of all travel plans is to introduce a range of soft measures to encourage smart travel choices so that individuals are encouraged to choose alternatives to the private car, walking, cycling, using public transport, or even cutting down on unnecessary journeys. If it can be shown to be to the advantage of organisations and individuals to do this, for example by saving time, cost or producing health benefits, it is hoped that such action will be adopted because it is in the self interest of people to do so; self-interest being a prime motivator.

1.2 The main reason for travel plans being implemented in the UK on a large scale is to help reduce the problems of traffic congestion and pollution and the costs that congestion places on society in terms of delays and lost time to business, especially in the morning and afternoon urban peaks, for example at school times. An important secondary reason is to reduce the CO_2 and other emissions that result from ever increasing use of personal motorised transport, and thereby to help the Government to meet international targets. There is also a growing awareness of personal health issues, especially the rapidly increasing problem of obesity, which is related to diet but also to excessive car-dependency to meet personal travel needs, including travel for leisure activity. Encouraging all forms of more active travel is therefore an important preventive health measure.

1.3 Persuading organisations and individuals to adopt and implement travel plans, can benefit both society and individuals, achieving perhaps considerable economic and environmental benefits for relatively low cost.

1.4 So far two kinds of travel plans are being widely adopted in the UK:

- Work place and school travel plans whereby a variety of measures including parking restrictions, financial incentives and positive measures such as cycle parking, providing changing facilities and organising a daily school "walking bus", are adopted to change the way employees or students travel from and to home each day.
- Individual travel plans where specialist advisers ask individuals to keep diaries of their travel movements and by raising awareness, encourage behavioural change.

1.5 Visitor travel plans (VTPs) created by and for managers of leisure destinations are still in their infancy. A leisure destination may vary in size from a modest country house or Country Park, to a major area of protected landscape, such as a Heritage Coast or National Park.

1.6 Where VTPs (sometimes known as Visitor Transport Plans) exist, they have, with a few exceptions, largely focused on developing and marketing alternatives to the car for leisure travel trips, with varying degrees of success in terms of achieving modal switch from cars to other forms of more environmentally sustainable travel. For understandable reasons, such plans have generally avoided measures that include any aspect of demand management which would alienate tourism providers and visitor attraction managers. However, to be successful in achieving wider environmental objectives, a mixture of promoting green networks and demand management of visitor traffic may be essential.

What is special about visitor travel plans?

1.7   VTPs differ from most other forms of travel plans (with the possible exception of retail leisure parks and shopping centres) in significant ways:

- Site managers have less direct influence over the behaviour of people who are neither employees nor students, who may choose not to travel to that leisure destination if they cannot use their favoured travel mode.
- Though some part of the clientele are frequent and repeat visitors, other visitors to a typical leisure destination are constantly changing and may therefore be more difficult to influence.
- Most countryside leisure destinations are in rural locations where public transport services may be infrequent or even non-existent, especially on Sundays and Bank Holidays, the most popular days of the week for leisure activity.
- Leisure activity is, in most western countries, a family centred activity, strongly based around the family car. This is equally true of older people who for reasons of physical frailty are more likely to be car-centred in their choice of activities.

1.8   However, an important aspect of Visitor Travel Planning for anyone involved with the conservation of the natural or built environment, is that influencing the way visitors arrive and travel around the site is, or should be, an integral part of the overall management of that site, and an integral part of any worthwhile Management Plan. This is essential to ensure the site is not damaged or dominated by the activities of visitors and their cars. The production and implementation of a VTP is therefore essential to the sustainable management of any leisure destination.

1.9   However, a VTP may also equally be about actively encouraging more visitors to a particular site, an aspect of audience development in that there may be certain groups or individuals who are unable to access or have difficulty in accessing a particular site or destination. Ensuring equality of access opportunity may be a core objective for a countryside or property manager. A VTPmay therefore be crucial to the production and development of an Audience Development Plan.

1.10   We look at these core objectives of a VTP in more detail.

Environmental reasons

1.11   All tourism is a transport-dependent activity which has a major impact on every aspect of the environment. It is now widely recognised that all forms of transport, especially the private car, have a major impact on the environment in terms of visual and noise pollution, visual impact, emissions of CO2 and other pollutants that contribute to global warming, congestion and road traffic injury to both humans and wildlife. How people travel to a destination, especially to a countryside destination, can have a very significant effect on how they behave within that site and the physical impact they have on their immediate natural and man-made environment.

1.12   For example, the issue of visitor parking at a rural destination can be a major issue in terms of the cost of provision and maintenance of car park spaces, and the visual impact that car park can have in an otherwise unspoiled landscape. The need for perhaps large overflow car parks to cope with summer peaks can be both an unwanted expense and cause serious environmental impacts. Erosion of footpaths and open space, for example woodland, can be more extreme close to large car parks.

1.13   The carbon footprint caused by visitors to a rural destination, both when driving along miles of motorway and trunk road from home to reach the destination and along local lanes or access roads close to or within that destination, can amount to several thousand tonnes of CO2 and other pollutants annually. Securing even a 10% shift to greener modes of travel can therefore produce significant savings to that total.

1.14   Natural England's objective to *increase everyone's understanding of, and ability to take action for, the natural environment* relates closely to a requirement to persuade individuals of the need to change their travel behaviour to reduce such negative impacts.

Socio-economic reasons

1.15   The availability or otherwise of other forms of transport, apart from the private car, can also have a significant effect on who visits a particular leisure destination, but more significantly perhaps, who is unable to, or who is effectively excluded from visiting that destination because of lack of transport.

1.16   A prime reason for the difference in participation between some groups and individuals is ease of access. The concept of access is intimately related to such issues as location, income, car ownership and access to good public transport networks.

1.17   Equally, persuading even a small percentage of visitors to use a local bus service to and within a destination can boost the earnings of that service significantly, reducing subsidy, and enabling rural services to be retained or even expanded. This in turn benefits the local community, helping to reduce even further their own carbon footprint by reducing car journeys and unwanted chauffeuring, and offering better travel choice for all. This may also have significant benefits for less affluent members of the local community by enabling more comprehensive bus services to be available, for example on Sundays or during the winter months.

1.18   However, there is often the need to balance the economic benefits brought by the substantial majority of car-borne visitors with the damaging impact of their transport choice. Without the income from motorised visitors, many National Trust or English Heritage properties, for example, would have to close or would not have sufficient income for the property to be adequately maintained. However, better planning for those visitors, for example with a bus-based park and ride scheme to the property, or by the creation of attractive level walkways from fringe park-and-ride car parks or bus stops, can achieve a necessary balance, especially if the park and ride or shuttle bus service can be designed to also benefit non-car travellers by linking to a local bus or train service.

1.19   It should not be forgotten than many visitors to the countryside who do not have access to a car, including many overseas visitors, contribute significantly to the local economy. By definition sustainable tourism is tourism which is based on non-car travel - walking, cycling, riding, canoeing and using local public transport networks. Recent research by the University of Central Lancashire Tourism on Board project (2007) has indicated greater spend from visitors travelling without a car, who tend to spend longer in a particular area and are more dependent on local services and facilities.

1.20   There is a further practical reason for producing and adopting a robust VTP within the framework of a visitor management plan. Many funding authorities, for example the Heritage Lottery Fund, now demand a VTP as a condition of funding in order to ensure that visitor traffic is managed efficiently and does not harm the heritage qualities of the site. It is important in all funding bids to ensure sustainable travel opportunities - walking, cycling and use of local buses - are maximised so that non-car owning individuals and families are not excluded from visiting the site. This is equally true for many international designations, such as World Heritage Site inscription or Europarc Sustainable Tourism Charter award.

Health and active travel reasons

1.21   Enjoyment of the countryside and outdoor activity benefits the health and well being of the community. It is recognised that increasing levels of physical activity within the natural environment can help to achieve major benefits to individuals' physical and mental health and well-being. Whilst something like 50% of the UK population regularly visit the countryside or urban green space for recreational activity, and 20% of people actively engage with countryside

conservation bodies (source: Natural England), a significant percentage of the population do not, and there are also significant regional variations.

1.22 This is an issue which closely relates to a core objective within Natural England's theme of increasing enjoyment and understanding and that is *to increase the number, diversity and frequency of people enjoying the natural environment*. This is turn will depend on reaching the stated Natural England target of developing programmes for people in each Region of England to *increase opportunities to visit and experience the natural environment*. Ensuring sustainable travel opportunities from catchment communities to a leisure destination is therefore also about ensuring equality of access.

1.23 Car dependency is a major threat to overall personal health, contributing very significantly to problems of physical obesity. Changing behaviour, for example to encourage people to take more regular exercise, or active travel such as walking or cycling, in the countryside, especially for shorter, local journeys into their local countryside, is therefore related to effective health education. This can be assisted by improving services and facilities for people when they reach the countryside, including implementing Rights of Way Improvement Plans and by improving the network of National Trails and bridleways.

1.24 Visitor travel planning can be defined as the process by which the benefits of sustainable access to a visitor destination can be maximised to participants, and in many cases to host communities, whilst disadvantages to the destination and to the wider environment and to local communities of all travel modes are minimised.

2 Key stages in developing and implementing a visitor travel plan

Creating a stakeholder partnership

2.1   To be effective, a VTP has to be created and implemented not only by the managers of a leisure destination, protected landscape or National Nature Reserve, but also by all their key stakeholder partners who have a direct or indirect interest in sustainable development and sustainable access to that particular site or leisure destination. Transport, like tourism, is an area of activity which crosses both physical and metaphorical boundaries. There are many stakeholders who are likely to benefit financially, personally or politically from the implementation of a successful VTP. Many of these stakeholders have representative organisations that need to be engaged at an early stage in the creation and the implementation of the VTP.

2.2   The main reason for a partnership to be created is to secure the effective production and implementation of the VTP by ensuring everyone with an interest in seeing a growth of greener travel activity to the leisure destination is able to contribute. It will give all partners greater involvement and therefore ultimate ownership of the VTP. This will make implementation easier as individual partners regard the plan as their document and one which reflects their own concerns and priorities. This will in turn release staff, paid and volunteer, and other financial resources for plan delivery purposes, and ensure that partners share the vision that will drive the VTP forward.

2.3   The exact choice of partners and the nature of the partnership are crucial and will depend on several factors.

2.4   It will depend on individual organisations and individuals within those organisations. Some local authorities will, in some cases, be prepared to play a very active role and even wish to lead or jointly share a leading role. Others may have a more passive role or even need to be persuaded of the relevance of the operation, but their involvement is equally important if only to ensure that communication remains positive and supportive. If any aspect of traffic management, such as parking restrictions, traffic regulation or speed restrictions on narrow roads or byways is likely to be a factor, it is essential to get the local highway authority as an active and supportive member of the partnership from the outset.

2.5   Government agencies and voluntary bodies are also equally important, and their support, for example in funding applications and in promoting specific projects, can be critical in achieving eventual success for the plan.
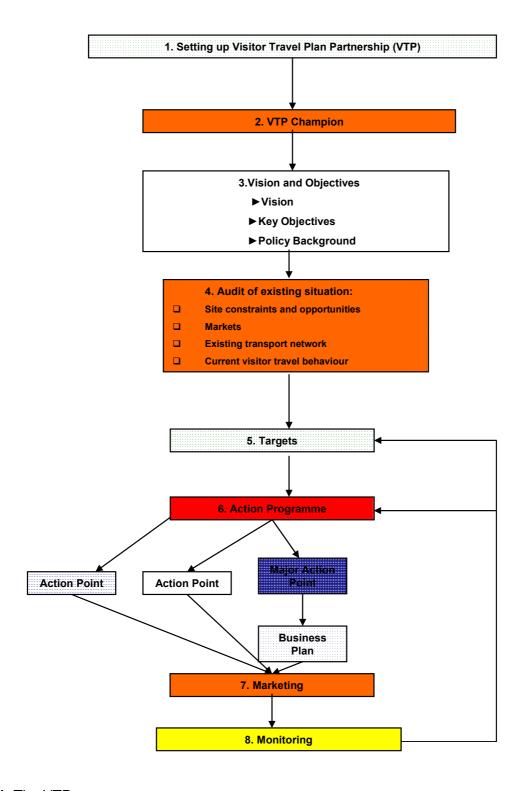
Figure 1 The VTP process

2.6   A partnership can work on an informal level, usually with one of the main stakeholders taking on board the role of secretariat or convenor, and carrying out the required tasks of booking the rooms and circulating minutes and agendas of relevant meetings, and in the case of a VTP, producing and circulating the drafts.

2.7   It can be formalised with a written constitution, which makes it easier for the body to take on a more independent role, which could mean that rather than merely co-ordinating the work of its parent bodies, it could take charge of key areas of work on behalf of the partner bodies, in such areas as operations and marketing.

2.8   One valuable, relatively new mechanism to achieve this is the Social Enterprise or Community Interest Company, a fully incorporated body and legal entity, which can receive and disburse funds, co-ordinate professional and voluntary effort, employ full or part time staff, and take on the implementation of specific actions within the VTP. Stakeholder partners can also engage with the work of a Social Enterprise Company through the appointment of Directors or Shadow Directors who can in turn report back to the parent organisation.

2.9   Whilst this is relatively new model in terms of the creation and implementation of VTPs, there are some interesting developments in England, for example in Wiltshire and the Yorkshire Dales.

2.10   Participants in a VTP partnership might include:

- Local authorities, including National Park Authorities and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, Joint Advisory Committees or Conservation Boards. These may be represented by sustainable tourism specialists who may be from economic development departments within their authority, by public transport teams and by local Area Highway Surveyors. The involvement of the relevant local authority Public Transport Officer and colleagues is invariably essential for the success of any public transport-related project, even if the local authority is not directly involved.
- Transport (bus, rail or even boat) operators.
- Government agencies including Natural England and bodies such as English Heritage.
- Tourism interests; this might include representatives of the local tourist associations or chamber of trade, private tourism businesses and tour operators with an interest in the area.
- Voluntary bodies, including bodies such as The National Trust, amenity and user groups such as CPRE, RSPB, the YHA, National Park Societies, The Ramblers, Cyclists Touring Club, Sustrans and British Horse Society.
- Transport campaigners, such as the Campaign for Better Transport, CPRE, and National Park Societies and similar local amenity groups.

2.11   Partnership and shared values are central to gaining the essential co-operation needed to achieve mutually agreed objectives. A VTP enables these shared values to be expressed and agreed in a mutually supportive way, prior to the delivery of an agreed programme of action.

A plan and project champion

2.12   One of the main reasons why some sustainable VTPs work, and their related sustainable travel projects succeed, is that the plan and its implementation has a champion.

2.13   By champion we mean a particular individual, perhaps an employee of the local authority, agency or a voluntary body producing the plan, who has been given the task and has individual responsibility for producing the plan and overseeing its implementation.

2.14   Very often this person is an existing employee of the organisation who has been able to prioritise this task within an existing job portfolio. It may, however be someone of suitable experience and ability who is specifically recruited by the organisation in order to lead the project, co-ordinating

effort, meeting deadlines and giving the whole process the drive, energy and enthusiasm that is essential for it to succeed.

2.15   There are two aspects of this. For a plan to work there needs to be someone with the vision, dedication and energy to make it happen. Without this driving force, even the best VTPs do not usually make any impact and remain on the shelf, a mere token exercise with little influence over subsequent events.

2.16   This individual also has to be given sufficient time, by the organisation's senior management (if indeed they are not actually part of that senior management) to deliver what is required. There must therefore be a strong commitment at the most senior, political level within an organisation that the process has priority in terms of staff and other resources and will succeed. Without this degree of priority and commitment, producing a VTP is merely playing lip service to the concept of sustainable development, and will almost certainly fail to achieve any practical outcomes.

Identifying the vision and key objectives

2.17   An early task of the plan champion is to create a vision or mission statement for the plan. A vision is essential to motivate, inspire and enthuse both the stakeholder partnership itself and the wider audience for the VTP, enabling them to share the ideals which lie behind the plan. The statement can be little more than a sentence or paragraph, but it will probably emphasise the plan's commitment to the values of sustainability and social inclusion, with perhaps a specific need to protect and enhance the special area or property under the managing organisation's care.

2.18   Having agreed a vision, the next stage is to agree specific objectives to deliver that vision.

2.19   Objectives will focus on specific outcomes which the plan will need to achieve to realise the vision - for example to secure an increase in the number of visitors coming to the site by more sustainable forms of transport, walking, cycling and using local bus and train services, reducing the impact of traffic and parking to and within the area or property, an increase in the number of visitors who cycle and walk in the area, or greater representation from people from less advantaged or special needs backgrounds.

Policy background - national, regional and local

2.20   Going through existing local transport and site management policy documents relevant to the site is a necessary chore, but one which is essential when it comes to ensuring political support and funding for the deliver of a VTP. If it can be demonstrated that the objectives of a particular VTP closely reflect the stated policy objectives, at national, regional and local level, as outlined in for example in:

- DfT Public Service Agreements and performance indicators.
- Regional Spatial Strategies.
- Regional Transport Strategies.
- Local Transport Plans.
- Local Area Agreements.
- National Park/AONB Management Plans.
- The destination's own Management Plan - if it is not one of the above.

2.21   There is a greater chance of support through existing national agency, regional and local authority budgets, and any potential new funding streams that the partnership may feel it appropriate to bid for.

2.22   It is not normally necessary to summarise such policies in detail, rather pick out key points and references which support the case for action in the locality in question on such issues as traffic

restraint, public transport improvement, encouragement of cycling and walking for both health and environmental reasons, increasing social inclusion and reducing carbon emissions.

Where are we now? An audit of the existing situation

2.23   Before any VTP can have any meaning, there needs to be a careful examination of what is currently happening in terms of visitor movement to and within the site or property.

2.24   This audit should have four key elements:

Site constraints and opportunities

2.25   As most protected landscape or individual site or property managers have a prime concern or duty to maintain the special qualities of the area under their care, the first requirement for any VTP is to identify exactly what these special qualities and constraints are and to what degree they are, or could be, compromised by heavy visitor use, be that the erosion caused by feet or tyres on vulnerable ecosystems, the pressures of traffic on narrow roads and verges, the less tangible but still very real of loss of quality of experience if too many people, with or without their cars, crowd into too small an area of natural or built environment. Such information should already form part of the destination's overall management plan and the VTP may well be a crucial part of that Plan's implementation. However, it is also important to consider the wider global impact of increased emissions caused by the total travel activity from the home area to the destination whether by car, train, bus or plane and, if necessary, attempt to make an estimate of its total level, for example in terms of tonnes of CO_2 produced by visitors' cars, as part of a baseline service of the negative impacts of visitor travel.

2.26   Reducing such pressures should therefore be one of the prime objectives of a VTP. Solutions might include directing visitor activity to more robust areas of a particular site by physical measures, such as reducing car parking, closing footpaths, by signing of alternative measures, or even by a pricing mechanism which offer discounts at off-peak times or to visitors who arrive by more sustainable forms of travel - train, bus, on foot or by cycle. These measures are outlined in greater detail below.

Local markets for the VTP - catchment communities and holidaymakers

2.27   Travel has points of origin as well as destinations, and site managers are usually aware of where most of their visitors are coming from and by what means they travel by. This is essential information in order to influence their travel choice and behaviour.

2.28   Most visitor attractions, especially countryside destinations, have long established catchment communities, who may vary from local dog walkers, to citizens of towns and cities who, since Victorian times have gone to what is now a National Park, AONB, Country Park Heritage Coast, or Country House by tram, train, cycle, or bus. For most destinations in deeper rural locations, such journeys are now probably almost exclusively by private car or coach. Whilst such corridors of established leisure travel to destinations are generally well known and understood, there may be interesting and sometimes surprising variations, because of a particular attraction or even a particular transport mode, such as a long established bus service or popular scenic railway line.

2.29   Holidaymakers, that is visitors staying away from home, may be more difficult to assess in terms of their journey patterns, but paradoxically can be easier to influence in terms of their travel behaviour, as visitors are often more prepared to try new ways of leisure travel, compared with local people who may have been travelling to the attraction concerned for decades and are less likely, and often unwilling, to change well established travel habits. Local dog walkers, for example, are notoriously vociferous in not wishing to change their established routines which

inevitably mean parking their cars free of charge as close as possible to a local beauty spot for their daily visit.

2.30   However, holidaymakers can often be influenced in advance by tourist literature and web sites into making 'greener' travel choices, and again close co-operation with tourist industry partners, most notably local accommodation providers and tourist associations, can be crucial in the success of any VTP. Essential for such co-operation is the stressing of positive travel choices rather than any potential travel or parking restrictions which may have to be imposed, and the personal benefits such travel will give to users in terms of relaxation, better views from the higher window seats of a bus or train, lack of worries about parking or historic features to be enjoyed. Sadly, most visitors are less likely to be influenced by environmental gains resulting from their travel choice, though these must also, of course, be stressed. There is also evidence to suggest that public transport users spend longer in specific destinations and spend proportionally more money in so doing.

2.31   Methods of marketing VTP and specific project outputs to catchment communities are looked at in greater detail in section 7 of this report.

Utilising existing public transport and green travel networks

2.32   Providing any kind of new transport facility is an expensive process. Bus services in particular take a long time to become successfully established even where demand can be demonstrated to exist, and there are few immediate success stories. A general rule of thumb is that it requires at least three years for a new public transport service to be properly established and trusted by visitors and local people, and most new leisure bus services vanish well before such a period has elapsed as promoters and funders lose their nerve.

2.33   However, if an existing rural bus or train service can be utilised, this is a very different story, as the additional revenue from visitors can often enable a rural bus service to survive and even expand.

2.34   A problem is that countryside managers are often largely unaware of the existing local public transport network, which on weekdays at least may serve their property or site effectively, often connecting with services from major catchment towns and cities through the local and regional bus and rail network.

2.35   Producing a detailed audit of all local bus and train services, including community transport, which operate to, within or even close to the site, is therefore a high priority. Contrary to popular mythology, rural England has an extensive network of local bus services - at least on weekdays - many of which are seriously underutilised for their leisure potential. Increasing the use of these existing networks for leisure travel, even if they only operate on an irregular basis, is an important win-win situation for operators, local authorities and local communities, as even small additional use by visitors can help safeguard an otherwise struggling rural service by increasing fare box revenue.

2.36   Even if the bus or train doesn't actually serve the site, there is often a good walking route from the bus stop or bus or rail station which, with better signing, could be promoted as a positive part of the day-out experience. In other cases there may be opportunity to create new links with a local bus service, for example a mile away along a main road, where a relocation of a bus stop, or the operation of a courtesy car or minibus to meet visitors at certain times of the day, would be far less of a financial risk than running a new service along the whole route and duplicating services that already exist along a particular transport corridor.

2.37   There may well be good, if under promoted, networks of footpaths, bridleways and cycle paths close to or even within a site which can be utilised, perhaps with the right kind of signing or physical improvement. Such improvements can be undertaken by the local authority countryside teams, or in the case of major improvements or changes to the network through the mechanism of a local authority Local Transport Plan Rights of Way Improvement Plan which might be able to

create missing links, for example to avoid the need to for pedestrians to walk along a section of dangerous road or for cyclists to face dangerous road crossings.

2.38   Recording such networks, and considering how they can be better utilised to both access and to experience the destination, is a vital part of the VTP.

Visitor travel behaviour and activity - baseline surveys

2.39   Postal codes within catchment communities can often give useful socio-economic data and together with census information on such issues as car ownership and indices of social deprivation. This can also help managers to decide where intervention is necessary to encourage perhaps less advantaged groups - who may for obvious reasons be missing from visitor surveys - to visit the destination.

2.40   Robust and frequently updated, visitor travel surveys are, however, essential to understand the existing and changing customer base, and again strong partnership working is crucial. For example, the local highway authority can provide valuable information about the use of local roads, which if summer and winter traffic flows are compared, can give a useful indication of the degree leisure car travel is coming into an area. With the right kind of approach, local area surveyors can sometimes be persuaded to put traffic counters on key access roads to enable this kind of accurate localised information to be gathered. Travel operators, such as bus and rail companies, can often give valuable information in terms of visitor travel patterns, even though some of the information on commercial services may be sensitive. However, as most rural bus services are tendered by local authorities, detailed passenger flows can be ascertained. Local passenger transport teams are usually more than pleased to co-operate with passenger surveys on buses, especially if it is made clear that joint marketing support through the VTP can help increase passenger revenues. More importantly, they also often have professional survey teams available who can easily be persuaded to ask other questions in passenger surveys than basic origin and designation information. Alternatively, there are a number of academic and professional market research institutions, for example the University of Central Lancashire's Institute of Transport & Tourism's Tourism on Board project team, who are able to provide survey and analysis services for an appropriate professional fee.

2.41   However, much can be achieved on site by site managers using local staff or volunteers, and self completed questionnaires, especially if these can be incentivised, for example by means of a prize draw with a suitable locally donated prize.

2.42   Visitor surveys at the destination, for example in visitor centres or in popular honey-pot areas, and even on busy access paths, are also crucial in order to discover such important baseline information as the modal split between forms of travel such as private car, bus, train, walking and cycling, size of group, age/gender profiles, and above all the kind of activity done on site, again an important clue to travel behaviour and the scope that might exist to influence or change that travel behaviour . These can often be done by volunteers.

2.43   The gathering of this information is essential for several reasons.

2.44   It will enable countryside managers to formulate an action programme, within and part of the VTP, to help change visitor behaviour. It will enable them to target their principal markets, and to decide if there is a need for a new or enhanced bus service to create new access opportunities, or to create better off-road cycleways or footpaths to allow safe access by visitors to and within the site. It will also have an influence on the kinds of messages that need to be communicated both to existing and to potential new visitors. It will give guidance as to the most effective medium for that message, whether printed leaflet, face-to-face contact through community groups, press releases, web sites, or programmes of events, such as guided walks.

2.45   If perceived changes in visitor travel behaviour following the implementation of the VTP are to be proven (increasingly a requirement of funders) repeat surveys compared with the base line

survey can provide an evidence base on which to justify hopefully long term on-going support for a service or facility.

Defining specific targets to achieve objectives

2.46   Having established the vision, clear objectives, the national, regional and local policy context, and an understanding of what is actually currently happening in terms of visitor travel behaviour to a destination, in order to create a VTP which is workable and will have credibility, specific targets are required.

2.47   A target can be defined as a measurable output to realise one or more key objectives, to be achieved within a given period of time as a result of a programme of agreed actions. Targets are therefore quantifiable. They also need to be realistic and achievable, and inevitably are subject to external forces which may be beyond the sponsoring bodies' control, such as weather events, financial cuts, withdrawal of local bus services. As we suggest below, they also need to be supported by good base-line survey information, which in turn is an essential part of monitoring. Without reliable information about visitor activity and behaviour at the start of the implementation of a VTP it is impossible to know whether or not a particular objective has been achieved or is being achieved.

2.48   For example, if your objective is to have a switch in the number of visitors arriving by non-motorised means, then for that objective to be meaningful, you must decide an appropriate target.

2.49   If the target is to achieve a 3% annual switch from motorised to non-motorised travellers (a realistic target) you must first translate that 3% into the actual number of visitors from the current totals, which will have been ascertained by the visitor surveys. If, say, there are an estimated 100,000 annual visitors to a site, and currently an estimated 5% coming by bus, on foot or by cycle, to achieve the objective, you need to have an additional 3,000 people coming by these alternative modes, and ideally 3,000 less coming by car - unless the objective is not to decrease the total number of visitors, but to maintain the 95,000 coming by car. In this case to achieve 3% you will need to increase the total of non car travellers to a slightly higher figure to compensate for the higher total number - namely 3% of the additional 3,000 which would be 3,300.

2.50   This would score well in terms of a social inclusive objective, with a higher proportion of non car owners coming to the site, but make no difference whatsoever in terms of CO_2 emissions. In fact there could be slightly more emissions, especially if additional bus services have to be introduced to encourage the additional 3,300 visitors.

2.51   On the other hand, if modal switch and reducing CO_2 emissions are also key objectives, then demand limitation measures, such as car park charges or even parking restrictions, might also have to be used. An objective to reduce the environmental impact of visitor traffic might have a target of a 20% reduction in CO_2 emissions from visitor travel activity in the same period. This might require several Actions - for example making parking more expensive at peak times, whilst at the same time developing a new cycling route, improving walking trails and developing a new bus service - and promoting the 'greener' modes energetically through web sites and leaflets.

2.52   There has to be realism. Small percentage switches to greener modes are relatively easy to achieve, given often strong suppressed demand, for example for better bus services, better promotion, and a percentage of reluctant drivers with a guilty conscience, who are relatively easy to persuade. Decisions will have to be taken on the fare structure of any bus service it is hoped to promote or encourage modal switch to for all or part of a journey. Most drivers price their journey on the marginal cost of any trip, often for three or four people, based on petrol costs and car park charges, if any. Unless bus ticket prices are close to this perceived cost, for example with a family ticket, even the more favourably disposed will not switch mode.

2.53   Getting major behavioural shifts is more difficult. The bulk of the UK population is now almost totally car-dependent for all leisure journeys and would find any attempt to change travel

behaviour simply incomprehensible and impractical. However, there are circumstances, for example where parking is restricted or impossible, where park and ride services are being implemented, which most people understand from their application in traffic management measures to and from city centres.

2.54   This is where dividing the VTP into different time-frames is helpful. You can decide what is achievable within 1 year (the short term), in 2 - 5 years (the medium term) in 5 - 10 years (the longer term), with inevitably, the focus being on the medium term, and the long term being more of a wish list - and subject to perhaps rapidly changing external circumstances.

2.55   Targets that are going to take more than one year to achieve might therefore be broken down into annual milestones which need to be realistic and achievable, but can also be revisited if, for example circumstances change, and in order to respond to feedback from experience and visitor reaction.

2.56   Long term targets may be more radical but may actually be achievable if they depend on achieving key annual milestones - for example a 30% modal switch may appear wildly ambitious but if broken down by annual milestones of 3% per a year over 10 years might be seem less extreme. However, it has to be said that whilst some early targets or quick wins dependent on persuasion and provision of new services and facilities might be easy to reach, as a VTP progresses, the targets can become more difficult to achieve, as resistance can increase among that significant majority of less persuadable drivers and their passengers who regard the freedom to use the car anywhere in the countryside as their inalienable right. It is in these later stages that more draconian and politically difficult demand measures may have to be employed - linked to the kind of effective, constant marketing effort which is outlined later in this report.

2.57   However, if sufficient momentum is built up by the carrots of more positive measures - for example better buses, better waymarked paths, new cycleways - then it is easier to win political support for the sticks of restriction, especially if all measures are fully explained in terms of the need to protect wildlife and the planet from imminent destruction.

The action programme to achieve the targets

2.58   If a prime objective of a VTP is to enable and achieve behavioural change by visitors, a combination of mutually supporting actions may be required, each to be incorporated into a specific technical action point or project. Some may be relatively easy to achieve; others may be major projects - for example a new bus service or traffic management scheme - in their own right. Actions are likely to include:

- Physical measures - using barriers, gates, fences, ditches, to prevent or reduce access, or by improving or closing roads, creating new or removing existing formal and informal parking spaces, creating new footpaths and bridleways to encourage access by more sustainable means. It may also be a project to improve existing or even to initiate new public transport services to ensure equality of access opportunities.

- Legal measures - preventing access or parking by imposing legal restriction, enforced by the threat of legal action and fines.

- Fiscal measures - by charging for access or for use of facilities or services and fixing rates at a level which will influence travel or destination choice. This may involve higher car park charges, road tolls, reduced fares on local transport or reduced entrance fees for those arriving by greener modes.

- Educational measures - these involve the use of a wide variety of communication and marketing skills and educational techniques, such as careful route signing, using promotional and interpretative literature which feature green travel as a central focus, web sites, offering discount ticketing or packages of travel and accommodation and activity, and arranging events, such as guided walks, which are easily accessible for people travelling by more environmentally sustainable modes.

2.59   The appropriate mixture of measures and implementation of those measures requires careful thought. Given that typically over 90% of visitors arrive at a rural destination in their own or their families' car, it is important not to alienate this often vocal majority by measures which are too easily perceived as anti-car or discriminatory against those who have genuine mobility difficulties.

2.60   Ultimately this means that at least in the early stages of plan implementation, the carrots of educational or psychological measures are more important than the stick of physical, legal and fiscal restraint. However, there are many circumstances, for example to protect a vulnerable environment, where such measures to reduce access, on wheels and on foot, simply have to be used if the pressure of visitor activity is not to destroy a fragile environment.

2.61   The process of producing a VTP can identify these contrasting pressures and produce a rationale for whatever measures are needed and then can outline the mechanism by which those measures can be implemented.

2.62   By stressing the positive aspects of sustainable travel, and presenting a car-free journey as an enjoyable and appropriate way to experience the natural environment, attitudes, and ultimately behaviour, can be made to change.

Quick wins - targets to be achieved by action points within a year

2.63   By adopting a list of specific targets to achieve VTP objectives, the next stage is to break these targets down into key action points which site managers and their partners can implement.

2.64   The first year of a VTP will inevitably include the kind of base line information gathering which will both inform and develop the plan and provide the base line against which progress can be measured. However, there will also be opportunity for a number of quick wins, especially those linked to the active promotion of what the travel audit has revealed to be already there on the ground or in operation, and which can be undertaken in the first year.

2.65   These action points must, however, be clearly linked to the overall objectives and targets agreed and approved by the travel plan partnership.

2.66   Some of these action points can be achieved quickly, by partners, as part of their regular work, often at little or no extra cost in terms of human or physical resources.

2.67   For example, measures to meet a target of getting 3,000 more visitors to arrive per annum by more environmentally sustainable forms of travel might have a number of relatively simple action points which can be implemented in the first year of a plan. These might include:

*   Ensuring all promotional material in print and on web sites aimed at visitors and local people produced by the lead organisation and partners carries information about local bus or train services, including bus service route numbers, location of nearest bus stops (perhaps with a map or diagram) or railway station, approximate frequency of service, phone/web site details for precise travel information.
*   Building visitor destination information into travel information in printed timetables and web site information.
*   Having up-to-date bus timetables and other local travel information on display in visitor centres and honey pot sites, including on external notice boards accessible when centres are closed and at bus stops.
*   Signing of local attractions, including local waymarked walks, from bus stops and rail stations.
*   Starting guided walks and events close to bus stop or railway stations, not just car parks, and at times which coincide with the arrival of a local bus or train.
*   Ensuring self guided walks leaflets are designed to be bus and train friendly, and not invariably start with the words *From the car park*; having some linear walks linked to public

transport services - though motorists can be catered for equally well by emphasising park and ride opportunities.

2.68   These practical measures, simple and achievable as they are, will ensure those without access to a car, even though they may be a small minority at the start of the VTP, are not automatically excluded from formal and informal countryside leisure activities. It will also give the plan credibility as visitors see something happening.

2.69   Promotional work is generally perceived to be a revenue not a capital cost, and there is a great deal to be said for prioritising expenditure on promotion and educational activity with a strong green travel message by the partners to a visitor travel plan at the outset of the plan process, as changing hearts and minds is the highest single priority.

2.70   Each of these specific measures can be realised by action points which will identify what has to be done by whom in order to achieve the measure and at what financial cost - though many of the items suggested above can be done by existing personnel within existing budgets.

2.71   A list of specific action points is therefore a useful way of producing a programme of committed projects or agreed actions by the VTP partners in order to meet a specific target within, in this case, the first year of the life of the travel plan.

2.72   Each action point needs to be listed within the plan, together with its likely budget implications and, most important, indicating the lead partner who will have agreed to deliver or at least co-ordinate the delivery of the project or action. In some cases this may be something within an existing, budgeted work programme which is simply being co-ordinated, given a new emphasis or perhaps prioritised by the VTP. In other cases it will be a new action or even major new project initiated by the plan which meets travel plan objectives, but which has now been given greater priority.

Medium term - 2 to 5 years

2.73   If the initial audit has indicated serious gaps in provision, both in terms of green travel infrastructure and in terms of public transport services, some of these gaps in provision may be addressed within the life of a travel plan in the medium term.

2.74   This is because it typically can take more than a year to identify the projects needed to meet the targets, to scope the action required and more importantly to work with stakeholder partners to get the right kind of funding package in place.

2.75   Infrastructure projects may be easier to achieve than new public transport services. This is because it is easier to find funding for capital projects, such as new stretches of footpath or cycleway, improved pedestrian or cycle or bridle gates, a signing programme, a highway management scheme, including for example traffic regulation orders and changing car parking regimes.

2.76   Wherever possible, each of the action points need to identify not only realistic cost estimates but also existing or likely funding sources, for example within the local transport plan or the organisation's own management plan. If new external funding is needed, it is essential to have a clear understanding of the time frame for grant or other applications within the proposed period of the plan. There also needs to be realistic estimates of maintenance costs required for any infrastructure improvements and these need to be built into partners' budgets, as well as monitoring costs for all projects.

2.77   Typical among new projects likely to be identified as a result of the audit and of any visitor surveys is the provision of a new bus or train service - minibus or conventional bus service - where there is a gap in provision and clear need for such a service, for example especially on Sundays when provision of rural bus services is generally sparse. A new service might simply be an additional morning or afternoon bus added to an existing route, or the rerouting of part of an

existing service. Often it will, however, be a completely new service on the day of highest demand in terms of visitor activity, a summer Sunday or even a Bank Holiday where no bus service exists, or no longer exists because of recent cuts in service.

2.78   At the outset it has to be said that the establishment of a new service is an expensive and somewhat financially risky undertaking. Operating costs are high - currently upwards of £300 per day for a minibus, or £400-£425 for a conventional single-decker bus or coach, and perhaps even higher if high quality, low floor, low emission buses are specified - plus marketing costs which can be significant in terms of print, timetable and PR activity. Even getting a train to stop at a rural station can be a slow process to achieve and have not insignificant costs to the operator.

2.79   As rural bus services, by definition, serve remote areas of countryside with smaller populations, generally with high levels of car ownership, the chances of such a new service covering more than a modest proportion of its operating costs are not high. Fare levels have to be geared at affordability, especially if there is an intention to attract people who would otherwise use their car for all or part of a journey, or, conversely, attract low income groups to the destination.

2.80   It is also a recognised fact that it can take up to three years for a new bus service to reach its optimum level in terms of passenger confidence - knowing that the service is there, understanding the service and trusting it. This needs a long-term commitment from funding partners, and this is not easy to achieve in the current economic climate, and therefore has a real element of risk if, for example, after a shaky start owing to a poor summer, funders decide to axe the service before it has time to be established.

2.81   Ideally there needs to be high quality market research undertaken before launching any new bus service. However, market research is an expensive process and whilst may be excellent in terms of measuring visitor attitudes and requirements in terms of the potential for a new service, is notoriously unreliable in terms of predicting actual travel behaviour. People will invariably say they would use a bus service when in practice they will continue to choose the perceived comfort and convenience of the car, and even those without a car will find reasons not to travel. Often simply running the service as a pilot project and seeing who uses it, is the most cost effective and reliable form of market research.

2.82   Such a pilot, if it is a summer seasonal service, should run for at least 12 weeks, which would allow the service sponsors to make a judgement about the future of the service in the light of that experience. If it is clear that the service is a success, this may be used to release further funding to ensure the service has at least a three year initial lifespan. The danger is that even after only a successful pilot, if funding is not available for a more extended service, expectations will have been raised but disappointed, resulting in a loss of confidence and credibility, making further experiments in sustainable travel more difficult to achieve in future years. This is inevitably a risk and sometimes that risk has to be taken for a project to have any chance at all.

A business plan for major projects within the action programme

2.83   Any major project, including for example a seasonal weekend leisure bus service to serve the visitor plan destination, should, however, be developed through a carefully prepared free-standing business plan.

2.84   A business plan is not necessary for most small-scale capital schemes or activities by partners that may form most visitor travel action points, undertaken within current work programmes and budgets, but is essential for a major scheme where both new external capital and revenue support is required, such as the operation and marketing of a new bus service. Such a business plan (usually essential for additional external funding) can be regarded as part of the VTP, but treated as a free-standing project dealt with separately from the main visitor plan action programme as an appendix, perhaps with new or additional partners involved in its delivery, including other existing or potential visitor attractions along the same bus route that might also be served.

2.85   An outline model for such a business plan is suggested at Appendix 2. This should offer a clear 'road-map' of what is intended to be achieved by the new or extended service by when, and at least in principle where initial funding is likely to come from both for the first pilot and the later more extended "experimental" phase. The project's outputs should, however, be fed back into the main plan in terms of progress towards the overall VTP's agreed targets.

2.86   Beyond this experimental period of say three years, it is important to have one of two strategies in place - the first being an exit strategy, basically if the service does not reach its targets (which need to be realistically modest) to cease operation. This is inevitably a damaging outcome for reason stated above. A succession strategy, however recognises that if a service can be seen to be achieving its stated targets, it should be continued either by the existing sponsoring body perhaps with continuing external funding, or adopted by the local authority because it meets funding criteria for rural bus operation and has gained sufficient political support so to do.

Longer term outputs 5 - 10 years

2.87   This part of a VTP needs to return to the original objects of the plan and identify some major issues not yet fully resolved in the short and medium term, and which may take a longer period of time and/or more resources to resolve.

2.88   It will also look at the targets and consider to what extent these can be taken forward towards the optimum level of modal switch, or to what extent there will be an inevitable levelling as initial milestones are reached. It may also consider wider scenarios that may occur through changing external forces - rising fuel costs, economic change, the impact of climate change and shifts in investment priorities and perhaps major shifts in cultural values towards more sustainable future lifestyles - or indeed the reverse. Equally, there could be major funding crises which leave VTP vulnerable to the funding cuts, for example for existing and rural new transport services, which may become less affordable.

2.89   It may offer scope to bring forward perhaps ambitious new projects to realise the vision, based on the success of the first two stages of the plan, if sufficient funding resources can be identified and made available.

2.90   To some extent it will therefore be a bidding document, identifying elements that need to be in place in order to build on the success of the earlier stages.

2.91   It also has to be recognised that changing visitor behaviour in terms of travel to a leisure destination without alienating the majority of existing car-borne visitors is a complex, often long term task, and there are few quick wins.

2.92   Experience shows that to get such changes of behaviour requires a total commitment by the destination manager and partners to the wider sustainability agenda, of which travel forms just one, albeit major, part. Such internal issues as energy conservation within the site, use of renewable energy, recycling, building insulation need to be in place and the inclusion of staff and volunteer activity within the plan as much as visitors, need to be addressed. This has to be at every level of an organisation, in some cases requiring a cultural change, so that a VTP is seen to be part of the overall philosophy, fundamental to the conservation ethic that should permeate through every aspect of an organisation's work, and most especially with all its communications with the public - in all literature, in all web sites, through all arranged events and presentations.

2.93   Mere tokenism simply will not work. However, there is a case for having a flagship project - most obviously a dedicated weekend or summer holiday 'green' bus service - which highlights and encapsulates the overall strategy being adopted even if that bus service is only used by a very small percentage of visitors. The existence of such a service can, however, be used to get across the wider 'green' travel message, for example in a scheme to restrict car parking in sensitive areas within a site, or to close a road or track to motorised access.

Marketing the plan and its outputs

2.94   As a VTP is about changing hearts and minds, and ultimately behaviour, effective marketing of the VTP and its key outputs is essential.

2.95   Marketing is about more than just promotion. It is about understanding your markets, knowing how your product or service can meet the needs of those markets, and how you can communicate your product to those markets - in fact by developing your audience.

2.96   VTP may have several different markets to target, in terms of different socio-economic groups or market segments and different geographic spread, for example both urban and rural communities.

2.97   A core part of the market for any VTP is the 25% or so of households in England without access to their own car. This is likely to be the case within most VTP catchment communities - though there are considerable regional variations depending on the socio-economic profile of the local communities.

2.98   Large as this percentage of the population is, it is dominated by people on low incomes, including the elderly and infirm, for whom any kind of leisure visit without very specialised transport provision is physically or financially impossible. But there also are many people living in households without cars who, given the right kind of encouragement and confidence-building support, may become enthusiastic participants in existing or future green travel networks. There are also many people, including young people, elderly relatives or partners, living in car-owning households who do not have access to the family car for independent travel. From April 2008, the nationwide free off-peak travel scheme for people resident in England and over 60 years of age on local buses will also significantly improve opportunity for many senior citizens currently unable to afford the cost of leisure travel on the bus network, an especial boon where cross-local authority boundary travel to reach a leisure destination is required.

2.99   There is also a growing awareness that provision of leisure travel at weekends and holiday periods is also a crucial factor in younger peoples' lifestyle choices. By encouraging young urban single people to delay the purchase and use of a car by offering car-free leisure opportunities to leisure destinations outside town and cities at weekends, there are wider community and environmental benefits to be gained in terms of reduced urban traffic and congestion. There are also significant numbers of overseas visitors to most UK leisure attractions, especially from northern mainland Europe, who have a far stronger public transport using culture than typical UK citizens. These are important market segments for greener travel options, and these can be targeted both through tourist literature and green travel web sites targeted at UK and international markets.

2.100   However, in terms of achieving major environmental objectives, a VTP also has to change the behaviour of the bulk of leisure drivers. To be successful this needs to persuade a proportion of visitors currently driving to the destination to make all or part of their journey by more sustainable means. It is also a question of changing behaviour when motorised visitors arrive at the destination in terms of speed of their travel on access roads and location of parking.

2.101   It has to be recognised that changing existing driver behaviour is not an easy option. Drivers are consumers, and the motor industry invests heavily in brilliant techniques of persuasion to encourage drivers to invest in a particular brand closely linked to feelings of confidence, security, power, freedom, the latter often linked to subliminal imagery of the very natural environment the motor car puts under threat.

2.102   Any promotional material aimed at changing driver behaviour which stresses negative impacts of the car on the environment contradicts these feelings of self-esteem and can often result in a strong and even emotional backlash from drivers, strong enough to threaten the viability of an otherwise excellent VTP. Several UK sustainable travel or traffic management schemes in UK

National Parks have failed, because they have been perceived, invariably falsely, as being anti-car, and stimulated by the local press, this has provoked an emotional hostile reaction with negative political repercussions. Ensuring that local communities in particular are not alienated by any measures in a travel plan is therefore vitally important. This is often a question of presentation as much as detail, in carrying out consultation, for example with local parish councils and village community groups so that concerns about, for example unhindered local access, are addressed rather than emerging at a late stage when material is printed or published.

2.103 It is therefore essential to present a VTP and specific action points in delivering that plan in positive ways in all literature and web sites, stressing relaxation, health and even novelty or fun benefits. Demand-management measures, such as roadside parking or speed restrictions, must be presented as safety measures or to protect nature. Pioneering work to create 40 mph zones in the New Forest in the 1980s succeeded not as a campaign to save human lives, but to prevent death and injury to New Forest ponies.

2.104 This presentational care needs to be built not only into the plan itself but in specific proposals so that positive aspects dominate. It is also vital to respond quickly and effectively to press and political comments that dwell on negative aspects of limitations and restraint, by positive messages, with such aspects of health, safety and conservation of the natural environment as key themes.

2.105 Promotional techniques available to deliver VTPs are many and varied and a suitable package of promotional activity needs to form part of each of the specific action points within the action programme, the level of such activity depending on the scale and size of the project in question.

2.106 Such techniques are likely to include:

Printed literature

2.107 Though we are in an electronic age, there is still a continuing, crucial role for good quality, visitor friendly literature, both individual leaflets and posters, widely distributed into catchment communities and around visitor centres as well as at destinations. Attractive design, information which is easy to understand, using adequately-sized typefaces, timetables which are either simplified or single-dimensional showing just departure times, clear information on actual fares and bargain tickets, simple maps showing the relationship of bus stops/train stations with walking and cycling routes and the main attraction(s), opening times, location of toilets, cafes and shops, and the avoidance of too formal language and official jargon are all key requirements.

Web sites

2.108 The web is now a major means of communication and increasingly essential for visitors from further a field and overseas. Once again information needs to be clearly and attractively presented. But the web also offers opportunity to be able to download accurate local detailed timetable information which can be constantly updated, as well as instant news of developments such as a new travel facility or service.

Press activity

2.109 Local press coverage is essential for all VTP outputs, and it is invariably possible to get positive editorial coverage in local newspapers for well presented stories rather than paying for expensive advertising. Most local authorities and countryside organisations are skilled at using press releases. Using the house magazines and newsletters of partnership members for travel p-lan related stories is also often highly cost effective.

Local radio and television

2.110 Like local newspapers, local radio reporters are important potential allies, and there are often specific local radio stations for key community groups, such as ethnic minorities.

Face-to-face contact

2.111 Face-to-face contact with key groups and group leaders is time consuming but can be of critical importance with, for example, disadvantaged or ethnic minority urban communities for whom standard means of communication, such as leaflets, are less effective but who can gain from initial confidence building contact with site managers. This contact can be linked to specific sustainable transport opportunities from close to where they live to the destination where welcome activities can be arranged. Similar face to face informal consultation meetings with local community groups are also essential at an early stage to build up good relationships and empathy and shared support for the plan's objectives and outputs.

2.112 It also has to be recognised that different areas of the UK enjoy different levels of what can best be described as a public transport-using culture. Using local buses for leisure is a strong tradition in the north of England, for example in Yorkshire and Lancashire, but is less evident in the Midlands and South though both London and Brighton are conurbations where such a culture thrives. Creating or building on such a bus-using culture, linked to walking and cycling, within catchment communities should be a prime long term aim of an effective VTP, and one which to succeed, needs to be based on continuous, imaginative marketing of every aspect of the plan.

Monitoring

2.113 Monitoring is the process by which success of the action programme in meeting agreed targets can be assessed.

2.114 Monitoring is required at every stage of the implementation of a VTP to ensure a healthy feedback loop driven by user experience as revealed by surveys to make services, facilities and their marketing more effective in meeting the targets. For example, it may be necessary to adjust timetables or routes to make better connections or offering special fares or discounts to attract key groups or individuals. This will also help to provide an evidence base for continued political support and with that support, continued public funding.

2.115 Travel plans are about behavioural change and to prove that the plan is having an impact, regular visitor and user surveys are required. These should preferably be undertaken annually, or at least every two years, to record what changes in behaviour patterns have occurred compared with the original base line surveys.

2.116 Some measures may be purely quantitative - numbers of people using the bus network, numbers of parked cars in particular locations, numbers of walkers going across a stile on a key walking route, numbers of people cycling past a roadside counter or drivers using particular country road, using the bus to take part in a guided or self guided walk, or visiting an attraction, staying in local accommodation without having a car available.

2.117 Qualitative information is more difficult to assess, as it is invariably subjective, and people are more likely to write in favourable terms or speak to surveyors in more positive ways than express dissatisfaction unless the situation is really poor such as buses not turning up or footpaths being blocked. That having been said, open ended parts of self-completed surveys can often bring more honest comments than might be given to a surveyor.

2.118 Questions can also be attitudinal, using face-to-face or self-completed questionnaires to gauge visitor reaction to the quality and level of service provision and overall visitor experience. Questions may be concerned with other aspects of the visitor experience as well as travel behaviour, and can offer valuable help to managers on a regular basis on more than just transport matters. Sample sizes can be fairly modest, but consistency in type and range of question on key travel choices is important in order to have a direct measure on behavioural change.

2.119   Another technique that can be used is that of a focus group, where representative individuals are encouraged to talk abut a particular service or facility. These are both expensive and time consuming to operate but can give valuable insight into visitor experience and perception.

2.120   Measuring actual conservation gains may be more difficult in terms of, for example, enhanced biodiversity because of reduction of traffic or trampling, there may be scope for determining some indicators which can form part of regular site condition surveys where tangible benefits, for example reduced erosion and trampling resulting from traffic management regimes, can be measured and assessed.

2.121   Regular summary reports on the progress on all the action points contained within the constantly revised VTP will not only keep partners, stakeholders and funders firmly behind the project but can be communicated to the local press and through web sites and newsletters to confirm the success of the plan and, if necessary, help to secure changes in individual elements to ensure that the objectives are being met. This itself can help secure positive feedback, and behavioural change as people identify with travel plan aims, and give greater support for their positive outcomes.

2.122   The constant updating of the VTP is, therefore, necessary in order to take on board changes but even more importantly enable the partnership to be able to respond to new external circumstances that may arise in a rapidly changing world. This is probably best achieved on the basis of a three year cycle with the preparation of a new revised VTP taking place during the third and final year of the initial and subsequent plans.

3 Conclusions

3.1   The preparation and delivery of an effective VTP to increase levels of sustainable tourism and travel in a leisure destination requires, at every level of the lead organisation and its partners, a commitment to the wider and deeper values of environmentally sustainable travel. This is a commitment which has to be central to the overall philosophy of an organisation, a part of its wider commitment to sustainability at every level, as well as ensuring the VTP is a fully integral part of its management strategy, not an optional after-thought. This has to be translated into firm commitment for action, linked to financial commitment and officer time requirements through clearly identified budgets. It must not remain as a series of vague if worthy, aspirations which are ultimately of little value, except, too frequently, as a cloak for the do-nothing scenario where the car and car-dependent behaviour remain dominant and those without their own motorised transport are effectively excluded or marginalised.

3.2   A VTP can help achieve this necessary commitment or conversely can identify where gaps in commitment or funding remain. A prime audience is the organisation itself so that at every level - from Chairman and Directors to operational staff and support teams, members of the organisation share this commitment and understand its purpose. It is also essential for partners and stakeholders to share this commitment through the partnership and in their own activity, in order for them to support bids for funding for specific projects. It is also invaluable for external funding bodies so that resources can be released, in full confidence that outcomes can and will be achieved.

3.3   Visitor Travel Planning is an on-going process, not a one off project, achieving its objectives usually through a large number of specific small cost-effective actions, as well as through larger, continuing projects.

3.4   With careful monitoring, an imaginative and properly resourced VTP can be demonstrated to achieve major changes in patterns of leisure travel to a destination. In rural areas of England this can help achieve a more sustainable, more accessible countryside for all, with long-lasting social, environmental and economic benefits to rural host communities as well as to their visitors.

4 References

DAVIS, A., SKINNER, S. 1999. Delivering changes in travel behaviour - Lessons from Health Promotion. Institute for European Environmental Policy (IEEP).

CLEARY HUGHES ASSOCIATES 2001. A Guide on How to Set Up Travel Plan Networks. Energy Technology Support Unit (ETSU).

SMITH, R. and TRANSPORT FOR LEISURE LTD 2001. Experience and Best Practice in the Planning and Managing of Transport within National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty in England and Wales. Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH).

COUNTRYSIDE AGENCY 2001. Great Ways to Go - Good Practice in Rural Transport (CA62) Countryside Agency.

TRANSPORT 2000 2001. Trust Tourism without Traffic - a Good Practice Guide Transport 2000 Trust.

CHRIS BLANDFORD ASSOCIATES 2005. Transport for Leisure Bromley Borough Access Plan (Down House) London Borough of Bromley.

COUNTRYSIDE AGENCY SUSTAINABLE ACCESS 2005. Sustainable Travel Building on the Countryside Agency's Recreational Transport Experience. Countryside Agency.

TRANSPORT FOR LEISURE LTD, LYDIA SPEAKMAN ASSOCIATES 2005. An Evaluation of Access Solutions to Recreation Sites by Wider Welcome Countryside Agency.

LILLI MATSON TRANSPORT & ENVIRONMENT, TRANSPORT FOR LEISURE LTD AND LYDIA SPEAKMAN ASSOCIATES 2005. Making Tracks to Tyntesfield - A Travel Plan for the Tyntesfield Estate National Trust.

DEPARTMENT FOR TRANSPORT/DEFRA 2005. Integrated Transport in National Parks Department for Transport/Defra.

VARIOUS AUTHORS 2005. Jurassic Coast World Heritage Site Transport Study Dorset County Council, Devon County Council.

TRANSPORT FOR LEISURE LTD 2005. Walberswick National Nature Reserve - Access and Green Travel Plan English Nature.

R.ELWYN OWEN ASSOCIATES 2006. Sustainable Transport in National Parks in Wales. Countryside Council for Wales (CCW).

TRANSPORT FOR LEISURE LTD 2006. Sustainable Visitor Access to the Giant's Causeway National Trust Northern Ireland Region.

COUNCIL FOR NATIONAL PARKS 2006. Tackling Traffic - Sustainable Leisure Transport: an overview of National Park Authority Involvement. Campaign for National Parks (CNP).

JMP CONSULTANTS 2007. Sustainable Transport for Tourism: Forest of Bowland Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Forest of Bowland AONB. Joint Advisory Committee (JAC).

TRANSPORT 2000 TRUST 2005. Tourism Without Traffic - Visitor Travel Plans - checklists for action (and other briefings).

Appendix 1 A hypothetical outline "model" of a fictional visitor travel plan for Big Stone Country Park, Loamshire

The Big Stone Country Park Visitor Travel Plan Partnership

Members

Big Stone Trust (managers of site - lead) Angela Brown, Site Manager.

Big Stone Trust - George Williams, Secretary.

Loamshire County - Bill Dunn, Countryside Access Officer.

Loamshire County Council - Seth Smith, Public Transport Officer.

Loamshire County Council - John Smith, East Division Area County Surveyor (some meetings when required).

Middleden District Council - Beth Turner, Sustainable Tourism officer.

Middleden Red Bus Company - Fred Biggs Commercial Manager.

Ramblers Association Loamshire area - Alan Bentley Access Officer.

Middleden Wildlife Group - Helen Brant, local member.

Sustrans - Alan Spencer, Regional Officer.

Middlesden CPRE - Jane Benwell, Secretary.

Friends of the Earth Donald Bailey - Chairman, Mudtown Group.

Campaign for Better Transport Loamshire Branch - Liz Jones Secretary Bus Group.

National Trust (also own some land adjacent of the estate) Dr Sue Dove, Regional Officer.

Natural England, Regional Office - Jo Hanson, Deputy Regional Officer.

The visitor plan champion

Angela Brown, Big Stone Country Park Site Manager.

The vision and key objectives

Big Stone Country Park will continue to welcome the present number of visitors whilst safeguarding its unique natural heritage and special environmental qualities. The Park will work to reduce its carbon footprint by attracting a greater proportion of those visitors by sustainable forms of transport and, at the same time, endeavour to ensure less advantaged communities have greater access to the Park. It will also work to minimise the negative impacts of visitor traffic on the Park's unique ecosystem and on surrounding communities.

Objectives

- To ensure equality of opportunity for access to the Park, including making the Park more accessible to people with disabilities or from disadvantaged backgrounds in the Park's catchment areas.
- To double the number of visitors coming to the Country Park by more sustainable forms of transport.
- To reduce environmental damage to the Country Park by vehicles parking on areas of vulnerable chalk grassland.
- To reduce peak summer parking problems by better use of available parking space.
- To reduce on-road parking on the main access road to the park, and to reduce the speed of traffic along the access road.

Policy background

Key documents referred or to or summarised in the Visitor Travel Plan:

- The Big Stone Country Park Management Plan, 2006-11;
- East Loamshire Local Area Agreement;
- Loamshire Biodiversity Action Plan;
- The Loamshire Local Transport Plan; and
- The Loamshire Rights of Way Improvement Plan.

Audit of existing situation

Site constraints and opportunities

Big Stone Country Park covers 32 hectares of rolling Loamshire downland, with a small lake and visitor centre, notable for wild orchids on an area of open chalk downland, with some semi-ancient beech and oak woodland close by - about 6 hectares of the site is a Site of Special Scientific Interest. Access to the woodland is restricted but the downland is common land and part of a Countryside and Rights of Way Act Public Open Access area. The lake is notable for its birds and waders, with great crested grebe and goosander regularly seen, as well as seasonal migrants. It, therefore, attracts a large number of bird watchers throughout the year.

Three public rights of way cross the site including one footpath, a bridleway and a short stretch of Byway Open to all Traffic. There are a number of permissive paths through the site maintained and waymarked by the Big Stone Trust.

Markets

The Country Park is situated some 10 miles from Mudtown, a former mill town with around 50,000 inhabitants, and there are also several large dormitory villages close by. Mudtown is characterised by former industrial areas, some with a high degree of social deprivation and low car ownership, and with ethnic minority communities formerly employed at the now closed textile mills. The local villages are more prosperous with historic village greens, cottages, old inns and medieval churches but surrounded by growing outer residential development owned by commuters and retired professionals, many of whom come to the Country Park daily to walk their dogs or to watch birds.

Of the Country Park's estimated 100,000 annual visitors, about 40% of visitors come from Mudtown. Most of these visitors come from the more prosperous residential suburbs but relatively few from the poorer, town centre areas.

55% of visitors, including many repeat visitors, come from the nearby villages, such as Thropton, and this includes many regular local dog walkers and also volunteers at the Country Park. About 5% come

from further afield from all over Loamshire - mainly because of the range of birdlife, and orchids in late May and early June. This includes a few overseas visitors and people visiting friends and relatives.

Existing transport networks

The Country Park is just three miles from the main A98 dual carriageway from Mudtown, but the main access road to the Country Park from the A98 also goes through the centre of two of the villages.

There is no direct bus service to the Country Park, but a local Hopper bus service runs to the nearby village of Thropton about a mile away. But pedestrians from the main bus stop in Thropton have to share a busy access road which lacks a pavement with traffic to the Country Park. There is no Sunday or Bank Holiday bus service.

The Sustrans National Cycle Network Route 47 Cycle Way runs within two miles of the Country Park, but there is no safe crossing of the A99 to reach what otherwise might be an excellent bridleway route linking to the Public Byway leading into the Park.

The Loamshire Way, a 63 mile recreational path from the county town of Loamington to West Transfield in the north also serves the edge of the Country Park, with a direct link by permissive path into the Park itself.

Visitor travel behaviour

Of the Country Park's 100,000 visitors per year, 92% come by private car or van, (2007 survey) with 3% on foot, 3% by cycle but only 2% by local bus. Usage of the Park is heaviest on Sunday and Bank Holidays when there is no bus service. The roads are relatively narrow and there is anecdotal evidence of speeding traffic as local commuters rat-run between the villages. Some congestion can occur on the busiest days and on fine Sundays and Bank Holidays there can be tailbacks as car parks fill up and vehicles have to turn round in a restricted area.

The Byway Open to All Traffic suffers from damage caused by motor cyclists and 4x4 users, whilst the bridleway is regularly used by horse riders mainly from the surrounding village where there are livery stables.

Targets

Targets to be achieved within five years

1) To triple the number of visitors arriving by bus to the Country Park within 3 years from 2,000 to 6,000 per annum.
2) To double the numbers of people cycling to the Country Park from 3,000 to 6,000 per annum.
3) To double the number of people walking to the Country Park from 3,000 to 6,000 per annum.
4) To reduce measurable damage to chalk downland by 50% by restricting parking within the overflow car park and reducing pedestrian movement over the affected areas.
5) To reduce the median speed of traffic on the main access road by 10%, to eliminate all on-road parking at peak times and to achieve modal switch by reducing car parking, introducing car park charges and encouraging drivers to use alternative modes.
6) To remove motor traffic on the Public Byway to allow the surface to recover and be more attractive to walkers, cyclists and horse riders.

The action programme

Short term action points - within one year

Action point one - improving local bus service information:

- To ensure bus timetables are placed at the Visitor Centre giving times of bus departures to and from Mudtown.
- To promote use of a bus stop closer to the Country Park where there is traffic free access along the footpath into the Country Park emerging at the main Visitor Centre. To get a signpost erected at that point showing pedestrian access into the Country Park.
- To persuade the bus operator/County Council to include Big Stone Country Park as a destination identified on the bus timetable.

Action point two - to promote the local bus service as a means of access to the Park:

- To work with the bus operator and County Council to produce a third A4 leaflet promoting Monday-Saturday day trips to the Country Park from Mudtown and villages en route, indicating best times to travel there and back, and indicating the day return fare. The leaflet to show the location of the bus stop and linking route to the Park.
- To encourage Park volunteers to use the bus and to distribute literature within the local community and to contacts within Mudtown.
- Carry the leaflet on the Country Park web site as a PDF, with links to other Partners' sites.
- Launch the new leaflet with a Press Release and once a week programme of guided walks, circulated to groups within Mudtown.

Medium term action points - within 3/4 years

Action point three - to work with Loamshire County Council, through the Local Transport Plan to develop a traffic management programme for roads to and within the Country Park:

- To carry out traffic and visitor surveys in the coming summer months on the Access Road in order to have a fuller understanding of visitor behaviour, and to prepare (year two onwards) specific measures including the introduction of car park charges (charges used for conservation work and to support sustainable transport initiatives), on-road parking restrictions on the access roads, speed restrictions, together with the creation of a possible new car park away from the most vulnerable areas, linked to new walking and cycling routes into the Park.
- To process a Traffic Regulation Order on the Byway Open to All Traffic to restrict its use within the Country Park to non -motorised traffic.

Action point four - to work with Loamshire County Council and the local bus operator to provide a new Sunday and Bank Holiday bus service from Mudtown to the Country Park:

- To prepare a business plan for a Sunday bus service, which would identify suggested routes, schedules, costings and opportunities to combine the bus with a day time park-and-ride service within the Park. To work with Loamshire CC public transport team to identify funding for a pilot scheme, a suitable local operator and to handle the necessary contractual details.
- To work with community and user groups in Mudtown and intermediate settlements to promote the service to target communities.
- To prepare a new Sustainable Travel guide-leaflet and map of the Country Park which will show access routes, walking, horse riding and cycling routes to and within the Park, bus routes and bus stops, toilets, refreshment facilities and local services, such as shops, cafes and pubs, as well as local attractions. Any specifically environmentally fragile areas might be omitted from this guide.

Action point five - to improve cycle access to the Country Park:

- To work with Sustrans and the County Council to create a "safe" crossing of the A98 to connect the Country Park and the National Cycle Network route to Mudtown.

- To promote cycle access from the National Cycle Network route and Mudtown through a printed leaflet and web site route guide.

Action point six - to improve pedestrian access into and through the Country Park:

- To work with the County Council and voluntary groups, such as the Ramblers, to upgrade and waymark key routes through the Country Park, including specific links to and from the Loamshire Way and key bus stops.

Action point seven - to broaden the visitor base by targeting ethnic minority and disadvantaged groups:

- To work with ethnic minority and disadvantaged groups and communities in Mudtown and to organise a programme of events in and around the Country Park linked to weekday and the new Sunday bus service to create greater involvement in events and activities, including conservation activities in the Country Park, based around more sustainable forms of access.

Marketing

A new "Green Guide" for the Country Park and immediate surrounding countryside should be prepared, to include a map including main villages, which shows bus routes, bus stops, car parks, walking and cycling routes, and local facilities, such as toilets, cafes, pubs, shops and local accommodation. As well as the usual visitor information and environmental interpretation, information on green travel options from Mudtown will be emphasised. The same publication in PDF format to be carried on the Country Park and County Council web sites.

Launch of the publication together with any new or improved bus service will be managed as a major public relations event, with coverage in the local press and other media, and local politicians as well as the Chairman of the Big Stone Trust to travel on the bus and to lead a guided walk from the bus service.

A local schools' art competition to design a poster to illustrate the need to travel to Big Stone Country Park in 'greener' ways, to help protect nature - winners to be displayed in the Visitor Centre, the prize-winning poster to be the focus of another media event, again tied in with travelling to Big Stone Country Park on the local bus.

Monitoring

A detailed annual report will be made to the partnership to record progress on meeting VTP targets based on a programme of baseline and repeated annual surveys undertaken by or on behalf of the partnership. This will in turn inform funders of progress on specific action points and act as a feedback mechanism to secure modification or, as required, new action points, to meet emerging new priorities as circumstances change.

Appendix 2 A suggested template for a three year business plan for a recreational bus service

The need for the service

- Background - the VTP cross referenced.
- Plan objectives and related targets to be met.
- The core market(s) and proven travel needs - summary of evidence - market research, travel surveys, user feedback.
- Why a new bus service is necessary to meet those needs.
- Targets for the service - passenger numbers, key market segments, percentages of car owners/non car owners.

The proposal for a service

- The route - noting links with walking/cycling trails and key visitor attractions.
- Proposed draft timetable - days/period of operation.
- Proposals for a pilot service and subsequent experimental service in the light of the success of the pilot project.
- Costs of service operation (based on average local tender prices for an appropriately sized vehicle).
- Marketing activity and costs - promotional print, web sites, events, press/public relations.
- Recommended ticket pricing, including discounts for families and target groups, and senior concession pass holders.
- Target passenger journeys for the service in the pilot and experimental phase.
- Anticipated revenue and anticipated net costs of the first phase of the service.

Project partners - lead body to be identified

- Local authority transport team;
- National Park Authority/AONB Conservation Board;
- Site managers;
- National agencies - Natural England, English Heritage;
- Tourism Partnerships;
- User/amenity groups; and
- Partner contributions in cash and kind.

Monitoring

- How usage can be assessed against agreed targets;
- What can be done in house and what needs external expertise and funding; and
- Feedback mechanisms.

Funding

- Level of funding anticipated for the service for a one year pilot and three year experimental service;
- Potential/actual funders; and
- Exit or succession strategy.

Timetable for action

- Start date for the new service;
- Preparation and distribution of publicity;
- Ensuring monitoring mechanisms are in place; and
- Launch details.