

Case Study

Park and Ride in Winchester

Background

Winchester is a small and tightly drawn historic city with a resident population of around 40,000. Its cathedral, college and water meadows make it an attractive day out for UK and international visitors, and it provides important secondary shopping opportunities. It is easy to navigate and walk around the city centre and the suburban areas extend only modestly compared with other county towns.

Despite its small size it is a major employment centre. The County Council, City Council and county constabulary are based in Winchester, and it is also home to a major hospital, the University of Winchester, the University of Southampton school of art, a crown court and a large prison.

The issues

Because Winchester is an expensive place to live and has relatively limited residential development many people working in Winchester have to commute. 28,000 people arrive in the town everyday to work creating significant issues for parking, air pollution and the practicalities of getting around. The majority come from the south using the M3 which passes Winchester and has convenient access close to the city centre.

Winchester is also changing – a new retail quarter is planned to commence development in 2012 and there are major upgrades of public buildings and the High Street under way.

The challenges

What we are trying to achieve in our transport planning work is to improve air quality, moderate congestion and make the historic environment of the city centre more attractive to visitors. The overarching aim is to contribute towards the economic vitality of the city – because without that it is not possible to achieve our other goals.

Economic vitality means low unemployment, strong retail and food and drink sectors and a willingness on the part of private and public sector to invest in their services and facilities. We don't want to be a 'slow town'.

Inevitably there competing demands around parking and traffic and conflicts that have to be resolved. Most retailers want lots of cheap town centre car parking and claim that they will die without it. They want easy access for deliveries as well, although this is one of the primary causes of congestion. They also want a pedestrian friendly environment without much traffic to put off shoppers! Bus companies want frequent services with stops on busy streets; pedestrians don't want to be run over by the bus they've just got off. We have a statutory duty to improve air quality which cannot be achieved by relying on engines getting cleaner. We want car use to be a matter of choice (which means people don't have to make it) rather than necessity.

The solutions?

So we adopt a strategic approach in partnership with the County Council, large employers and businesses to try to reconcile these competing agendas. Our car parking strategy is based upon the principle of reducing long stay parking in the town centre through gradually reducing spaces and constantly increasing charges and moving this to peripheral car parks (which would still be considered central by many people). All day parking we try to move to park and ride facilities and as part of this strategy a new 800+ park and ride car park is being constructed now south of Winchester to provide an option aimed mainly at the staff of large employers.

We try to make a direct link in the minds of businesses between reducing car access and increasing the number of events and activities taking place in the town – creating vitality by creating reasons for people to visit the city for entertainment, enlightenment and exercise rather than making a trip to Argos as cheap as possible.

To get park and ride to work our experience, like others, is that it must be competitively priced (and *other car parking options must be priced to make park and ride attractive*), provide clean, smart facilities, feel safe, run at appropriate hours and at frequent intervals in busy periods. There is a time cost to the user – we have to take steps to overcome the resistance this creates. It is also important to work directly with your customer base – in Winchester we are tailoring the service at the new park and ride to the needs of employers whose staff we want to use the facility. We discussed the specific routing with them, the timetable and we have offered ‘block bookings’ of spaces at a discount which employers can then make use of as an effective replacement for on site parking for staff and visitors.

If we succeed we’ll have a vibrant city centre with little growth in traffic but without anyone feeling that this has been achieved by compulsion. Our employers will still be able to get the staff they want, air quality will have improved and the City Council will be held in high regard. Easy really.

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