

Nottingham Partnerships - The Big Wheel Experience

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1. Introduction

There are a wide range of public-private sector partnerships established in Nottinghamshire with very different levels of cohesion and influence covering a variety of social, economic and environmental issues. Some are of a temporary nature, only established for the lifetime of a specific project while others are much more long lasting but with a wide remit and limited influence. The Greater Nottingham Transport Partnership (GNTP) seeks to be permanent in nature, to influence a wide range of transportation activities but to focus on those in which it can really make a difference. The aim of the GNTP is “to create a dynamic conurbation where people and goods flow speedily and economically”.

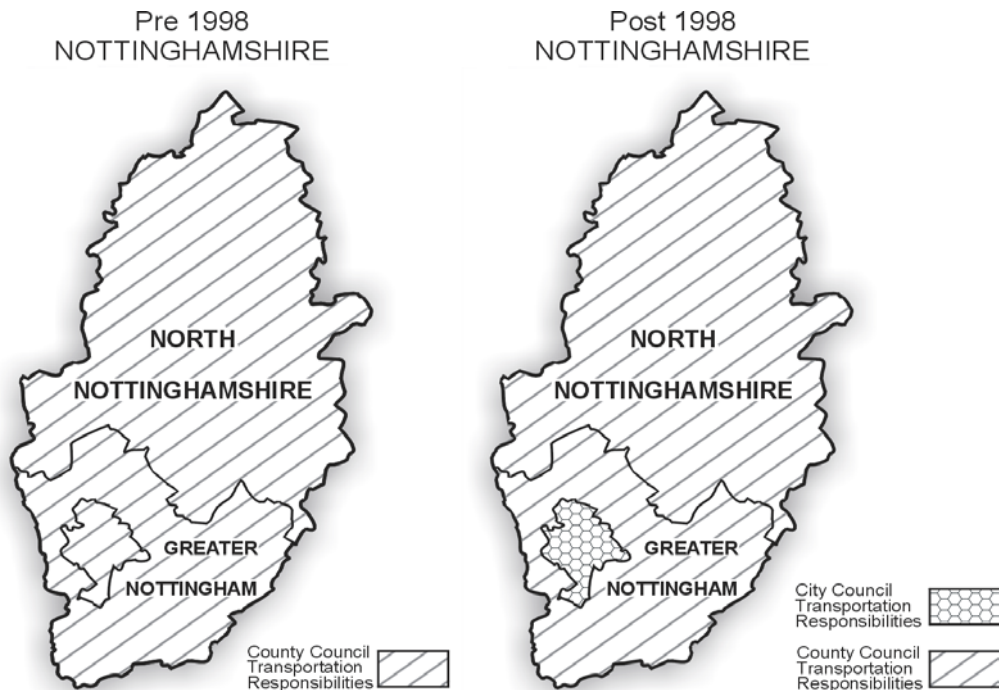
The GNTP supported the development of a campaign to raise awareness to support the need for developing a more sustainable transport system for Nottingham. The campaign operates under the brand of “Big Wheel”.

This paper outlines the background to the development of the Big Wheel approach to transport planning in Nottingham. The principles of partnership

2. The Administration of Greater Nottingham

Between 1974 and 1998 Nottinghamshire County Council had responsibility for the provision of strategic services such as social care, education and all local strategic transportation activities in the geographical area of Nottinghamshire. This covers a population of just over one million, divided into eight districts, each with a separate administrative area providing less strategic services such as housing, waste collection and street cleaning. Among the eight districts was Nottingham City Council (population 300,000) with a boundary making up the core of the Greater Nottingham conurbation (population 600,000), which also included three suburban districts each with a population of around 100,000. The relationship of the City of Nottingham to the Nottinghamshire County is shown in the following map.

Map of Nottinghamshire



In 1998, the UK Government implemented a reorganisation of local government responsibilities throughout England. The main change in Nottinghamshire was the transfer of strategic responsibilities (including local transportation) from the County Council to Nottingham City Council, as it was before 1972. In 1999 all local authorities with responsibilities for transportation were required to prepare five year Local Transport Plans (LTPs). Very importantly, in Nottinghamshire, the City and County Councils agreed to prepare a joint LTP, recognising the importance of a united approach to transportation planning over the whole of the conurbation area. There were only five such joint LTPs prepared throughout England, all of which had to be submitted to Government in July 2000.

Co-incidental with the requirement to prepare LTPs was the provision of powers by the UK Government to local authorities to raise funds for transportation activities through local charging schemes. Such schemes could contribute to the mobility management policies of local authorities while raising additional funding to improve public transport systems. Two specific charging mechanisms were proposed, one relating to road user charges on entering urban areas, the other to a levy on the provision of workplace car parking. The Government encouraged local authorities to consider the introduction of such measures within their areas and required that the money raised to be “ring-fenced” for local transport improvements. Nottingham City Council is setting the lead in introducing the introduction of a workplace parking levy. Nottinghamshire County Council did not consider such a levy was appropriate for the suburban area under its administration but recognised that the special circumstances of the “core” of the conurbation could merit the consideration of some charging scheme.

3. Emergence of the Nottingham Transport Partnership

In early 2000 the City Council established a Nottingham Transport Partnership (NTP) with the local business community comprising of no more than 10 persons and with majority representation from the business community. The Partnership included representatives from some of the major employers in the City who were also members of the very successful

Nottingham Commuter Planners Club. These companies already had a firm grounding in the mobility management approach to local transport planning and were therefore committed to the integrated transport strategies being developed for the Greater Nottingham area in its LTP.

The Partnership was set up after a delegation from the Nottinghamshire Chamber of Commerce and large businesses met the City Council about the proposed Workplace Parking Levy. The business representatives oppose the levy, but agreed to work with the City Council on developing a vision for improved transport in the City. Nevertheless the Government provided the City Council with an annual budget to develop its WPL proposal and some of this funding was used to develop the work of the Partnership.

In 2000 the Partnership commissioned three important research projects:

- (i) A “Structures” study of the current working arrangements of the Partnership.
- (ii) A scoping study to identify a marketing strategy for the Greater Nottingham Local Transport Plan.
- (iii) A study of the Business Impacts of Road User Charging and Workplace Parking Levy.

4. Greater Nottingham Transport Partnership

The “Structures” study involved interviews with key elected members and officers, transport operators, major employers and the private sector. It reviewed the present arrangements for the development of new transport infrastructure and passenger services and considered whether they were sufficient to deliver the LTP effectively. It explored good practice relating to management structures both in the UK and abroad. It identified a number of alternative scenarios with an assessment of their relative merits, advantages and disadvantages.

It concluded that the NTP contributes to well informed decision making, provides good public/private sector communications and has the support of Central Government. However, it proposed two developments to the current arrangements. Firstly it should have a remit for the whole of the Greater Nottingham area, consistent with the Local Transport Plan and secondly it should have a stronger advisory role with clearer responsibilities.

As a result of the Consultant’s review of working arrangements a new partnership was established building on the strengths of the earlier partnership but to cover the wider Greater Nottingham area. This required an input from the County Council to match that of the City Council. The first meeting of the new Greater Nottingham Transport Partnership (GNTP) took place in July 2001 at which it agreed that its role should be as follows:

- (a) To be a strong advisory organisation that carries out research, marketing, publicity, consultation, bidding for external funding and lobbying government.
- (b) To be concerned with policy rather than implementation helping the development, review and prioritisation of the LTP.
- (c) To seek a fair balance between representing a wide range of interests while focussing on specific issues. This is achieved by having a “core” membership of around 20 involving the local authorities and the business sector (equal numbers of each but under a Chair selected from within the business community) which meets

every 6 weeks and a wider forum including transport operators, broader business interests and environmental groups which meets 6 monthly.

- (d) To be consulted on all relevant reports on strategic transport issues that are to be considered by the City and County Councils.
- (e) To advise on the establishment of new organisational structures in the Greater Nottingham area which have a significant impact on local transportation activities.

5. Current activities

The GNTP has been established for less than two years but has already made a major impact on transport activities in the area. While it has had the advantage of one year of development as the Nottingham Transport Partnership, it has now been able to take full advantage of its wider remit. It has continued to develop the work that was initiated by the NTP particularly regarding the marketing strategy for the LTP.

It has now implemented the first phase of its marketing strategy for the Greater Nottingham LTP. This is seen as an essential element in building consensus between the public and private sectors. It has been too easy in the past for the local authorities to assume a comprehensive understanding of the transport strategy and for the local business community to oppose any measures which could be seen to have short term negative impacts on the accessibility of private cars and lorries. The GNTP has therefore focussed its marketing strategy on communicating the vision for the integrated movement of people and goods in the area over the next twenty years. In particular it emphasises that accessibility to jobs, shops and other services in the City and district centres can only be maximised by major improvements to public transport infrastructure and services. This is based on the LTP strategy and the objectives and transport targets included within it.

The GNTP is also exercising an important lobbying role in influencing the investment programmes of national and regional agencies. In the U.K. investment in the motorway and trunk road network is undertaken by the Highways Agency while the rail infrastructure is the responsibility of train operators, Railtrack and the Strategic Rail Authority. At a recent meeting of the GNTP, representatives from all three agencies from the rail industry were invited to outline their investment programmes which would impact on the Greater Nottingham area and to listen to the views of GNTP members on the need for greater priority for the local projects.

There are a range of other activities being undertaken by GNTP which make up a varied and challenging work programme. These include mobility management initiatives such as:

- Smartcard strategy to identify the most effective means of achieving integrated ticketing for all transport modes. This includes consideration of setting up an independent company to progress the work and relate it to mobility management centres and interchanges.
- Flexible Working Demonstration Project by major employers in the Greater Nottingham areas to reduce commuter journeys to work.
- Travel Vouchers and Taxation pilot project to consider ways that employers can encourage employees to use sustainable modes of transport within current national taxation system or with changes to the system itself.

- “TransACT”, an innovative grant scheme to provide financial assistance to small and medium sized companies in Nottinghamshire to develop and implement their Travel Plans. Grants come in two phases, firstly for consultancy purposes and secondly for expenditure on infrastructure projects. The local Chamber of Commerce and Industry not only promotes the scheme but assists with the administration and consultancy advice.
- Feasibility Study into alternative road user charging schemes.

6. Big Wheel Campaign

GNTTP commissioned and managed the development of the Strategy by a local strategic marketing consultancy, which recommended a private sector led initiative to develop and implement the innovative and unique strategy. It was agreed GNTTP would ask the Nottingham Development Enterprise (NDE) to recruit a Marketing and Communications Manager to client manage the development and implementation of the strategy. This approach was taken as NDE have a successful track record in partnership working across the two unitary authorities and between the public and private sectors. The manager was jointly recruited and appointed to a specification developed by the Councils and the GNTTP. A service level agreement and a budget to support the programme were agreed between NDE and the City Council.

The integrated transport vision developed by GNTTP formed the basis for the Big Wheel campaign. This provided the direction and the manager employed by NDE provided the means to deliver the campaign.

The key achievements during the first year were:

- The Big Wheel launch to 250 business people.
- The Big Offer promotion in the Evening Post with Profile Nottingham and Nottingham City Transport (NCT) – the Post's most successful promotion ever, generating discounted sales of over 7,000 NCT family bus-cards, potentially used by 28,000 people.
- Three public awareness campaigns on roadsides, buses, bus stops, train station, taxis, radio and on street parking tickets.
- The Big Day Out for European In Town Without My Car Day.
- 20,000 copies of Freewheel magazine, an accessible version of the LTP.
- Over 100,000 hits on the Big Wheel website.
- PR has included articles in The Observer, Radio 4's Today programme, East Midlands Today and Central TV, as well as coverage in the Nottingham Evening Post, Radio Trent and Radio Nottingham.

Additional projects completed since October 2001 are listed below:

- The Big Wheel has marketed the integrated transport strategy contained in the LTP to a variety of audiences - and in doing so has encouraged modal shift.
- A Marketing Strategy was drawn up and agreed by the GNTTP.
- The business community and the general public have both been targeted through a number of projects (details below).

- The Transport Marketing and Communications Manager has set up regular meetings with other involved in transport marketing initiatives, including NCT, NET, the City and the County Councils.
- General research - events, website, feedback forms etc - show a good level of empathy towards the Big Wheel concept and aims. The business response as expressed at GNTP has been very favourable. National comment from the Government's Commissioner for Integrated Transport and URBED has been extremely positive. Since the website was launched in mid-December 2001 it has had over 100,000 hits. These have peaked during the advertising campaigns.
- TTR produced a baseline familiarity and favourability study in December 2001. This exercise will be repeated early in the New Year, helping us to gauge the success of the early part of the campaign and to plan the next stage. A limited number of focus groups examining why people change modes of transport are also planned.

7. Workplace Parking Levy

The proposed introduction of the workplace parking levy has created tension within the partnership. The prime reason for this is the lack of support by the business community for the imposition of a levy and levy collection process on the business community. In other words, the workplace parking levy is not seen by all partners as a win win situation.

8. Responses

A number of responses to the work of the GNTP's Big Wheel have included the following:

"Integral to Nottingham's transport's strategy is one of the best hearts and minds campaigns ever undertaken in the UK".

Professor David Begg, the Government's Commissioner for Integrated Transport at the National Transport Awards.

"Nottingham's Big Wheel CD Rom and document is an excellent example of how to communicate the benefits of integrated transport imaginatively".

Government's Urban Policy Unit and URBED.

9. Conclusions

The experiences of the partnership in Nottingham have been both very positive and difficult. The positive outcomes include a very effective Big Wheel campaign that helped Nottingham achieve the "Transport Local Authority of the Year for 2002". The difficult aspect of the partnership has been the development and adoption of the proposed workplace parking levy.