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‘WORKING WITH OTHER PARTNERS: PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE’

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PARTNERSHIPS

Why act in partnerships? Well, firstly there is the ‘strength in numbers’ argument, particularly relevant when our numbers are relatively small in comparison with the tiny battalions of motoring and conservation lobbies. Secondly, it is a way for different groups to achieve shared objectives.

Then there is the matter of administrative convenience. Ministers and civil servants have time for one meeting with six people, but not six meetings with similar bodies.

Joint working is often an effective way of spreading one’s views among partner NGOs and other bodies. It may well be a way of achieving adequate funding, enabling smaller groups to access cash they might not otherwise have gained. Lastly, it is a way of achieving coherence and unity across issues of technical design, policy and advocacy.

TYPES OF PARTNERSHIP

There are in fact different types of ‘partnership’. These can be:

- ‘Working alliances’, short or long term
- Advocacy coalitions
- Joint funded time-limited bodies
- A ‘Memorandum of Understanding’ between the partner bodies
- An ‘Initiative’ which works on one particular topic
- A ‘Policy Call’, which unites a large number of bodies but does not commit them to joint campaigning.

I do not have time to discuss this in depth, but it is worth noting that the type of ‘partnership’ can greatly affect patterns of work and expectations.

TAR

The main national level transport partnership cycle groups are involved in is TAR, the Transport Activists’ Roundtable. This was set up to co-ordinate NGO work in the somewhat hostile atmosphere of the late ‘80s.

Co-ordinated by T2000/CBT, it has provided a meeting place where CPRE, RSPB, FoE, Railfuture etc can bring their own views. In return they receive the cycling/walking message, with a stern reminder that this is not just a 'local' issue but a matter of strategic regional and national importance.

Additionally specialist sub-groups at times tackle detailed items, such as Aviation, Roads, Taxation, Rural Affairs. Attempts at a Road Safety TAR often falter because of the sheer lack of available time for those involved.

An important sub-set of all this is Regional TARs. These were set up ten years ago, in response to the Government's new regionalisation agenda in England. Given the economic development remit of most regional bodies, getting sustainable transport into their policies has been a long struggle. The DfT's new system of Regional Funding Allocations – linked to policies on climate change and lower carbon – has in some places begun to inject elements of more sustainable thinking.

Regional TARs have fought long and hard in their respective regions, doing vast amounts of unpaid work. They have also provided a much-needed point of entry for cycling issues.

Local TARs: these can be formal, informal or ad hoc, as time and circumstances dictate.

CPAG/UKCA

This is one of the longest standing partnerships, the Cyclists Public Affairs Group (founded 1990) which changed into the UK Cycling Alliance in 2006.

C-PAG was activists only, and an attempt for cycle groups to form a united front in Parliament. It got off to a hectic start, tackling three pieces of legislation in six months – on potholes, on traffic law, and on canal bank access. The most time-consuming work was always the Committee stage, where Bills are discussed in detail. This sometimes involved producing agreed joint briefings twice a week.

An excellent account of CPAG's early days and the lessons learned was written by Gill Felton in the 1993 Nottingham VeloCity conference. Among her top tips:

- Package issues to politicians on one side of paper
- Have detailed info ready at a later date for researchers and civil servants
- Keep close track of what you say and to whom.

Backed by major funding from CTC, Sustrans and the Bicycle Association, CPAG ran successfully for around 15 years, employing a Parliamentary lobbyist and expanding the All-Party Parliamentary Cycling Group into one of Parliament's biggest.

Tough economic times and a much greater political penetration outside Parliament led to a decrease in funding, a lower public profile, and a change to UKCA. But this still meets monthly and has proved invaluable for joint working on key issues such as the Highway Code, 'Safety in Numbers' and Election manifestos.

SSI

The Slower Speeds Initiative was founded in March 1998 by 9 allied NGOs. It campaigned for:

- Lower and better enforced speed limits
- A higher profile for speed reduction initiatives
- Development of speed control technology
- Changes in the law to reflect the seriousness of driving offences resulting in death or serious injury.

The fundamental aim of the SSI was to get speed on the policy agenda, and in this it succeeded. For five years it had a co-ordinator, held high profile conferences, and badgered civil servants. However it lacked the staffing and resources to tackle all the wide-ranging policy issues it wanted, and to handle major high-profile issues such as the speed camera controversy. SSI lasted long enough until 20s Plenty for Us came in and gave the slower speeds issue renewed vigour.

The history of SSI gives useful lessons about partnership working. If this is for anything more than routine networking and co-ordination (and I presume CCN/Cyclenation is one of the best examples here), then thought does need to be given to funding, staff time, targets, length of campaign, and eventual fate/future of any partnership.

HEALTH

One of the most noteworthy examples of joint working in recent times has been 'Take Action on Active Travel'. Spearheaded by Phil Insall from Sustrans, and with backing from CBT, CTC and Living Streets among others, this sought to link the health and sustainability cases for active travel and bring in a very wide range of major public health bodies.

This ended up as a 'policy call' to decision-makers at local, regional, national and UK level to provide a population-wide shift towards walking and cycling. Measures towards this end should include:

- Setting ambitious targets for a growth in walking and cycling
- Investing at a realistic level
- Creating safe, attractive walking and cycling conditions
- Making 20mph or lower special limits – the norm for residential streets
- Tackling bad driving
- 'Health checking' every transport and land use decision.

It is noticeable that most of these talk about broad principles. For example, the demand for 'walking and cycling conditions' is backed up by a call for 'coherent high quality networks linking all everyday destinations, so that walking and cycling are more convenient than motor travel'.

By keeping to broad statements, the Policy Call avoided problems of detail and providing hostages to fortune, and attracted a lengthy list of high-powered public health bodies. These included the Healthcare Commission, the National Heart Forum, the Royal College of Physicians, and the Royal Institute of Public Health. Moreover, each in their turn have their own networks, so the 'active travel' message gets spread far and wide through the health and medical community. One practical result of all this is that a number of Primary Care Trusts are now working on partnership projects with some cycle groups, Liverpool being the latest example. This 'Take Action' model might well be a template for other policy areas.

DIRECT ACTION

One of the most problematic areas of partnership working is where Direct Action is concerned. Historically NGOs have taken the view that they cannot condone this but if individual members in their own right get involved, this is purely a personal matter. Campaigns against coal or nuclear power come to mind, as do others against speeding traffic and unsafe road conditions.

Probably the most long-lasting and influential partnership in recent years involved the anti-roads protest, united by the coalition ALARM UK. This had

grown out of All London Against the Roads Menace, a massive partnership against proposals in the London Assessment Studies of the late 1980s for major road-widening in the capital. Hard on the heels of this came the ‘greatest road-building programme since the Romans’, the £6 billion (treble it for today) part of Margaret Thatcher’s ‘great car economy’. From Manchester to the M11, the Gorbals to Greenwich, and Twyford Down to Silbury Hill demonstrations erupted. ALARM UK - fronted by John Stewart, Emma Must and Jonathan Bray – successfully played a classic networking role of spreading news, views, help, and policy expertise. The later radical splinter-group, ‘Reclaim The Streets’ pushed the argument further, not least the idea of ‘Streets for People.’

BOOKS

It is worth noting there are literary forms of partnership – called ‘books’ I believe. Usually several experts come together and are co-ordinated by an Editor. One particularly successful example is called ‘The Bicycle & City Traffic’ (1992). It still reads very well, partly because its Editor is Hugh McClintock.

OTHER PARTNERSHIPS

Over time CTC and Sustrans have each had a very wide range of partnerships. Among others these have involved: the AA (‘DRIVE SAFE, CYCLE SAFE’), British Waterways, Forest Enterprise, the Institute for Highways and Transportation, the Local Government Association, Environment Agency, British Horse Society, Highways Agency, the Lottery Fund, the Millennium Commission, the YHA, and the Arts Council.

Meanwhile the European Cyclists’ Federation (founded 1983) has over the years sort to deal with the myriad arms of the European Commission. A major off-shoot has been the endlessly fascinating VeloCity conferences.

PROJECTS

Some of the best examples of partnership working are in project delivery. The National Cycle Network is a classic, involving hundreds of local authorities and major interest groups working together. Co-ordinated and monitored by Sustrans, it continues to grow and now carries over one million cycle and pedestrian trips every day. ‘Connect 2’ – Sustrans’ Lottery winner by public voting – is a £50 million policy and funding package, with its many new bridges creating huge increases in non-motorised travel.

Attempts at partnership working with Network Rail and the train companies have a history that makes the Dark Ages seem simple. Dave Holladay from CTC can explain all this, whenever you have a couple of days free. One of the more coherent documents produced as a result of consultation and co-operation is Northern Rail’s ‘Cycling Strategy 2007’.

Another very lengthy (and more productive) relationship has been with the cycle trade and industry. Hardy industrialists choked on their cigars in the late '70s when the Bicycle Association funded Mike Hudson and his colleagues at Friends of the Earth. Yet both sides benefitted, and there has been a steady – if at times uneven – relationship down through the years. The Bicycle Association remains a strong supporter of the UKCA, and from here has come the ubiquitous Phillip Danton, the current Chair of 'Cycling England'

CTC/Sustrans

A similar useful statement of broad principles is the CTC/Sustrans 'Working Together' document. This states that 'we support all measures which encourage all forms of cycling, in particular:

- The safety of cyclists on the road
- The creation of safe cycle facilities
- The calming of traffic
- The protection of cyclists' rights of access on and off-road
- Defence of cycling against policies which are detrimental to cycling
- Recognition in policy areas of the importance of cycling as a sustainable mode of transport.'

Although more of a 'working relationship' than a formal partnership, such statements can be very useful in smoothing over local flare-ups. Maybe similar statements between cyclists and representatives of young people, the elderly, people with disabilities, bus companies and rail firms might be useful?

OTHER EXAMPLES

The Schools sector has proven to be a very successful area for partnership working. Safe Routes to School, Bike It! and cycle training have all been successes in increasing cycle use and changing travel culture. These have usually involved CTC, Sustrans and DfT collaboration, in recent years partly channelled through Cycling England.

Links with local authorities are worthy of volumes in their own right. Their parent body the Local Government Association, has worked with CBT and Sustrans on joint publications. Local Area Agreements are a new and fruitful form of 'partnership working'; make certain you check out the full list of indicators – available from CTC. Local Strategic Partnerships have been less satisfactory, as they have no financial powers.

FAILURES

What failures have we had? I still think overall relationships with the media are poor, with them still too keen to stir up pointless controversy – often to the point of printing hugely irresponsible articles. With them and with others the idea of a real low-carbon society, with a major shift towards cycle use still seems fanciful and unreal. At a higher strategic level, cycling is still seen as a ‘local’ matter, rather than as an agglomeration of short trips which adds up to a major impact. Housing, retail, and industrial development planners still mostly seem to live in the 1980s. Design issues with disabilities groups remain as difficult as ever, not least because they are often more divided internally than ourselves.

Traffic Law and its enforcement: it may be ‘partnership’, it may be ‘working relationship’, it may be ‘mutual contact’ – but trying to have sensible discussions about road danger reduction, cause and effect, balance of liability, victim-blaming, and matters of ‘negligence’ remains difficult. To achieve success a long-term commitment is often required. Also with the example of the A.A. I have quoted above, we should perhaps have devoted more time here. Another example, I would suggest, is the Police.

RECENT EVENTS

- Physical Activity Alliance. This is a DH-led body ‘comprised of leading physical activity promoting organisations’. It does seem rather similar to the same Department’s ‘Coalition for Better Health. Both are majoring on lifestyle, tackling obesity and aiming to get 2 million people more active by 2012.
- Sustainable Development Commission: their recent ‘Carbon Management Plan for Schools’ proposes ambitious schemes for promoting walking and cycling.
- ‘The Future of Urban Transport’: this recent Cabinet Office report argues that congestion prevention is not the sole main issue. It also sees a greater role for non-motorised travel.
- ‘Cycle to Work Guarantee’: this is a DfT initiative, promoting the ‘Cycle to work’ tax break scheme, high quality cycle parking at work; and good locker and changing facilities. Led by Lord Adonis, it has an impressive list of public and private sector companies involved. Early signs are that this is a rare example of a Government success story.
- Active Travel Strategy: this a DfT/DH project - with input from CTC, Sustrans and Walk 21 among others – to be out fairly soon. It is not terribly clear how it will differ from the National Cycle Plan, but is likely to build on schemes like the ‘Cycle to Work Guarantee’, could bring in useful private sector involvement, and create examples of best practice.

NEW NATIONAL CYCLE PLAN

Unfortunately one partnership which is not currently up and running is to develop the above. This is unlike the 1996 National Cycle Strategy which was so democratic it was unwieldy and not able to take firm decisions on resourcing and policy linkage.

As I am sure you know, the CTC has instigated its own consultation on what should be in the Plan, and received 1,800 on-line responses. The 3 key themes emerging are:

- Create attractive conditions for cycling
- Tackle bad driving and other deterrents for cycling
- Provide the encouragement, incentive and opportunities for people to give cycling a try.

Lacking any new money, the Plan will urgently need partnerships to help it succeed. Many of these will be based on proven success stories of 'what works', some of which I have listed above. So Partnerships = Progress, I think.

THE FUTURE

As I have indicated, future partnership working might well seek to build on the 'Active Travel' model. Major topic areas for this could include:

- Tackling the many diverse groups who cycle
- Housing development – Land use planning
- Low carbon travel
- Tourism
- Colleges and Universities
- Energy issues/Peak Oil

Successful partnerships do require joint buy-in, commitment and enthusiasm. They need to be properly funded and to have a clear view of their long-term future. They need clear co-ordination, and often leadership.

I hope I have indicated above that we now know 'What Works'. We do have examples of proven success in partnership working, and these should be the building blocks of future progress.

Don Mathew
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