# SHAPING COMMUTE CHOICES FOR VIBRANT CITIES

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# ABSTRACT

The rebuild of Christchurch’s central city is focused on making it easier, safer and more enjoyable to get around. A key part of realising these goals is to ensure that people commuting to the central city understand the mode choices available to them and are encouraged to try different travel options, rather than reverting to habitual decisions.

Led by Christchurch City Council, The Greater Christchurch Partnership’s City Travel Planning programme (‘the programme’) is an example of large-scale workplace travel planning that is underpinned by community-based social marketing methodologies. The programme has so far involved working with over 40 organisations as they move or return to the new central city.

Survey results indicate that organisations that have taken the full programme in the lead-up to their move have averaged a quarter of staff switching to active, public and shared transport. The results show that travel planning, and associated education, is an important part of the equation to enable variety in the way people commute.

This paper outlines the targeting, delivery and results of the programme, with focus on how individualised support is achieved for customers’ needs, and on specific insights for supporting people to commute by bike, public transport and walking. The programme is also a strong case study on how to deliver behaviour change programmes that are persuasive but respectful and non-confrontational.

The enhancements to the central city and the wider cycling network have presented a unique opportunity for Christchurch to deliver such high levels of mode shift and associated outcomes in equity, but the insights from City Travel Planning are transferable to any instance of workplace travel planning.

# INTRODUCTION AND STRATEGIC CONTEXT

Travel planning is a service that provides people with information and encouragement to make better decisions on how they travel. As congestion increases―and the associated impacts on the environment, physical and mental health become quantified―it is increasingly important for Councils to ensure that communities can make informed decisions on how they commute. Like in many industries, customers’ choices of how they travel are often based on imperfect information, outdated perceptions and habitual decisions. As such, engaging with and educating people is vital to achieve a sustainable transport network and a vibrant city.

The rebuild of Christchurch’s central city has provided a unique opportunity to work with people as they switch from a commute to a suburban destination to a central city that has been master-planned to maximise opportunities for access and choice for greater variety in travel modes. This is coupled with the significant growth of dedicated cycle ways linking to the city centre, which now total over 40km. TheCity Travel Planning programme has now been rolled out to over 40 organisations, including the majority of the major employers. It is targeted at organisations that are soon to move to the central city, and covers all major travel modes: bus, bike, car/carpool, scooter and walking.

City Travel Planning is strongly aligned with Christchurch City Council’s strategic priorities of Maximising opportunities to develop a vibrant, prosperous and sustainable 21st century city; Climate change leadership; and Increasing active, public and shared transport opportunities and use.

In parallel, Waimakariri and Selwyn have become two of New Zealand’s fastest-growing districts.

Many residents work in Christchurch. It was clear that a collaborative approach between the

Territorial Authorities, Environment Canterbury and NZ Transport Agency would be needed to holistically address challenges across the transport network. City Travel Planningwas part of this collaboration― providing an intensive, hands-on approach to improve public understanding of the new central city, and the new ways to get around it―regardless of where their commute begins.

Survey results indicate that organisations that have taken the full programme in the lead-up to their move have averaged a quarter of staff switching to commuting by bus, bike, walking or carpooling. The results show that travel planning, and associated education, is an important part of the equation to enable variety in the way people commute―and it contributes to an altogether more vibrant city environment.

# PROGRAMME BACKGROUND

Each City Travel Planning engagement begins with a staff survey, which informs the delivery and provides baseline data. This is followed by a pre-move staff presentation, covering their survey results and a high level introduction to the ‘new city’, its transport options, and benefits of different modes (including mental and physical health, financial, time and stress efficiencies). The presentation is followed by 1:1 journey planning assistance for staff, including information, advice and incentives to try a new mode. This has been the critical step, as people commonly talk through questions and concerns and receive individualised advice to help them overcome real or perceived barriers for their specific situation. The 1:1 journey planning is most effectively delivered via desk visits which each individual having the opportunity to opt out of if desired.

The 1:1 journey planning assistance is conducted by a team of Travel Planners (contracted through a third party) who are recruited based on their communication and people skills, positive can-do attitudes and existing knowledge, enthusiasm and experience of a range of transport modes. Travel Planners are provided with training to ensure a thorough understanding of not only this particular programme, but of Behaviour Change theory in general. They are trained in the motivational interview process developed for this programme, and given a solid knowledge of Greater Christchurch’s public transport system, the Major Cycleway Routes programme and local network cycle infrastructure, and carpooling tools. Training is ongoing and Travel Planners are kept informed of developments and relevant changes. They in turn give valuable feedback on ways to tweak the Programme, based on their conversations with and observations of individuals they engage with.

The 1:1 consultations allow individualised attention to each customer, taking into account their personal circumstances, residential location, childcare and other care responsibilities, disabilities and health issues, confidence and personal preferences and motivations. Customers are encouraged to talk about the barriers they face to see if solutions to these can be found, as well as encouraging them to articulate the benefits they would get from making changes to their habits in order to build motivation. The customer and Travel Planner work together to come up with a solution or solutions that may include different modes on different days, in different weather conditions, different shift hours etc, often including multi-modal solutions like busing/walking, busing/biking (all buses on the Greater Christchurch network have 2 free bike racks), driving/scooting, and so forth.

There is no pressure exerted to change, or judgement of those for whom driving to work solo remains the best option. The focus of the conversation varies significantly for each mode, as each have different barriers and the awareness/consideration levels for each mode vary significantly. Recent research has indicated that around 40 percent of Christchurch adults cycle recreationally or occasionally, and the services provided through the programme are focused on supporting those people to try commuting by bike. This can be as simple as talking through the routes most suitable to their confidence level and providing some basic safety equipment. For public transport, basic awareness of the service is low in Christchurch and the general perception of the service is not high. As such, the focus of the conversation is to introduce people to what route they could take to get to work and provide them with a pre-loaded bus card. All incentives provided follow a commitment made by the customer, in alignment with best practice Community Based Social Marketing.

There is increasing focus on the ongoing partnership with participating organisations to ensure that changes in behaviour are sustained. Practically speaking, this usually includes re-surveying staff about their new/current travel habits, making a second presentation to all staff to communicate and celebrate their mode shift success, and providing another round of 1:1 travel planning sessions. The purpose of these is to reinforce positive change, reach new staff, assist people with any barriers they are experiencing with active and shared modes, and help those who haven’t yet changed modes but would like to. The annual surveys show there is still latent demand to switch modes, and with Christchurch’s central city still redeveloping at pace, re-engagement with staff is an excellent opportunity to promote improvements such as new dedicated cycle ways, pedestrian linkages and bus routes.

# PROGRAMME GOVERNANCE

As a cross-agency initiative, the programme requires a clear governance structure. The project is governed by a Steering Group including representatives from Environment Canterbury, Waimakariri District Council, Selwyn District Council, NZ Transport Agency and Christchurch City Council. The representatives have strategic oversight over Greater Christchurch transport activity. The project had a dedicated Project Lead for its pilot phase, and is now managed by Christchurch City Council’s Travel Demand Management Team Leader who is accountable for the results, regularly reporting back to the Steering Group. In parallel there is a cross-agency Project Coordination Group for partners to discuss any updates on relevant Travel Demand Management work streams (both strategic and operational) and identify further opportunities to collaborate.

The project is co-funded by all partners mentioned above. The primary costs are staff resource including the Travel Planner contractor staff, complimentary bus fare payment cards and credit, complimentary bike safety checks and puncture repair workshops, some smaller budget going to biking and walking safety collateral, and some advertising to support recruitment of new participants.

Project monitoring comprises of delivery levels versus target and the results of annual surveying to customers, which provides detail on the mode-shift changes. These, alongside day-to-day feedback, have led to ongoing improvements to the presentation content, engagement approaches and incentives, and support offered. For example, a number of services such as guided bike rides have been piloted but pulled due to low uptake. The on-site staff presentation too has undergone constant improvement, based on formal and informal feedback from audiences and key contacts at participating organisations. The main change has been to simplify content, and to cater the areas of focus to the main areas of interest identified in the survey.

# RESULTS

The primary metric of results is from the annual customer survey, which gathers data on current travel to work by mode and whether this has changed. As per Figure 1 below, the 2017 survey showed a 31 percentage point reduction in commuting by car alone amongst participating organisations that had participated in the full programme. Commuting by bus, bike, walking and carpooling now comprises the majority of commuting. Subsequent surveys that followed the pilot survey have showed similar results amongst organisations that have moved into the central city, and indicated that the changes in travel behaviour were generally sustained amongst those that had taken the programme prior.

Not all organisations elect to take the full programme, and the mode-shift is significantly lower when elements are taken out, or if the 1:1 journey planning is “opt in”.

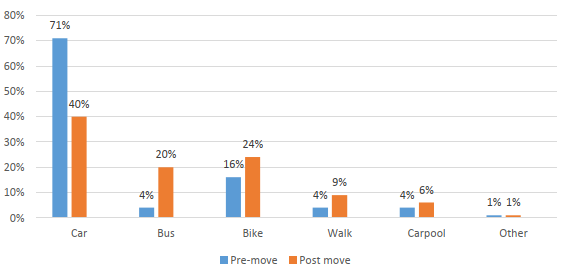


Figure 1: Pre and post-move travel habits of staff in participation organisations (2017 survey, 1127 responses)

Of those that had 1:1 journey planning, 63 percent agreed/strongly agreed that the conversation was useful overall, and 45 percent agreed/ strongly agreed that the Programme gave them the information they needed to change the way they travel to work, indicating that the Programme was a key driver amongst those who had changed their travel habits.

The exceptional success of the Programme delivered is linked to its comprehensiveness―starting with the transport survey of staff, the results of which feed into the all-staff presentation, and the 1:1 travel planning desk visits to help individuals with their transport options and journey planning.

# CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The development of City Travel Planning, and its subsequent delivery, has provided an important opportunity to refine a process of workplace travel planning on a large scale. The following are key learnings from the programme to date, that would apply to other cities’ development of similar activity

* **Have a clear, structured programme, but retain flexibility.**

While the process of a staff travel survey, presentation and 1:1 travel planning is well refined, we make changes to the delivery model and/or focus depending on the needs or internal culture of the organisation.

* **Make the 1:1 Travel Planning sessions ‘opt-out’ wherever possible.**

The ‘opt-out’ approach to 1:1 sessions is fundamental to the high success rates of the Programme.

Experience shows that the ‘opt-in’ sessions (i.e. where Travel Planners are available for drop-in consultations) require too much motivation and proactive energy from staff to leave their desks to go and speak with a stranger. A typical ‘reach’ for desk visit 1:1 sessions is 65 percent of staff, whereas drop-in sessions more commonly reach around 5-10 percent of staff.

* **Work with the willing.**

While the Programme is designed to be as easy as possible for participating organisations, there is a minimum level of internal support and buy-in needed. After a small number of engagements had poor outcomes due to a lack of engagement from key contacts, we learned to address such concerns clearly, and to prioritise elsewhere if there is insufficient interest and motivation from the organisation.

* **‘Push’ factors as well as ‘pull’ factors are needed**

While many customers are interested and motivated by the benefits of active, public and shared modes of transport (mental and physical health benefits, financial savings, lower stress), if car parking is freely and easily available nearby, mode shift can be expected to be very minimal.

* **Keep things simple.**

While successful, early results of the Programme indicated that there was too much detail in the content delivered. Following this, the team worked to ensure that the Programme was simplified and that the resources were focused on the modes of transport and support initiatives that would have the most uptake.

The Programme was initially focused on organisations moving back into the central city, to make the most of the ‘change moment’ when transport was ‘top of mind’. Follow-up staff surveys showed there was a further desire to switch to active or shared modes post-move, and we work with organisations on an ongoing basis to see how we can realise the potential. While the programme continues to prioritise organisations returning to the central city, the value of the re-engagements led to the project also extending to incumbent organisations in the central city that missed out initially. We have recently expanded the programme to work with new staff at major employers as part of their orientation and induction processes, which is another opportunity to engage with people at their own individual change moment when questions around transport options are at the forefront.