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Process and partnership: factors of success for sustainable visitor transport projects in protected areas

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Process and partnership: factors of success for sustainable visitor transport projects in protected areas

Introduction

The majority of tourism’s greenhouse gases come from transport. What is more, visitors in protected areas are heavily reliant on private car use with 90% of visits to UK National Parks undertaken using this mode (Dickinson and Dickinson 2006 and Kendal, Ison, and Enoch 2011. Car-borne visitors not only contribute to carbon emissions, they create air and water pollution; encroach on habitats and landscape character and disrupt tranquillity (South Downs and New Forest National Park Authorities 2012). In environmental terms it is crucial, therefore, to address this issue of private car reliance and to attempt to reduce it.

However, despite obvious benefits few destinations have successfully tackled this challenge (Guiver and Stanford, 2014). This may not be as surprising as it sounds, given the challenging context. The mechanism for destination management is predominantly through complex partnerships operating in a ‘messy’ reality (Dredge, 2006; Hall, 1999; McCool, 2009) attempting to deliver with limited financial resources. Guiver and Stanford (2014) suggest that the lack of visitor transport planning results from stakeholders failing to prioritise transport and poor funding. Added to this, destination partnerships themselves are little understood without any “…consolidated attempt by tourism researchers to explore the implications of networks as a form of governance” (Dredge and Pforr, 2008, p. 63). Transport planning is even less well researched.
This paper examines visitor travel planning projects in three UK National Parks that successfully bid for Department for Transport (DfT) Local Sustainable Transport Funds (LSTF). The LSTF national government funding initiative, launched in 2010 invited transport authorities to apply for funding to support a range of sustainable travel measures. The bids were assessed against a number of criteria including the core objectives of supporting economic growth and reducing carbon. Only a handful of the approximately 50 successful projects received funding for visitor transport including the three projects described in this paper, the National Parks of the Lake District, the New Forest and the South Downs.

Critical factors that helped or hindered these applications and their subsequent delivery in terms of the processes and the partnerships are identified (though a detailed evaluation of the transport projects themselves is not covered). The paper starts with a discussion on the subjects of partnerships and visitor travel planning and possible influences on the success or failure of both; section on the method and context; a findings sections which discusses critical elements of the LSTF projects from the bid stage through to legacy and a discussion which draws together the key themes of the findings and includes the importance of different messages for different audiences and the influence of personal values and qualities. The conclusions discuss the efficacy of the partnerships and the roles of stakeholders and individuals. Though partnership working is inevitable, there are clear pitfalls to avoid and crucial elements which must be in place at various stages in order to ensure at least some measure of success.

**Literature Review**

This section describes previous research and theory into a number of topics which are
relevant to the visitor travel provision and planning, partnership and project working as well as two topics which emerged in the findings as important: communication and motivation.

**Visitor Travel Planning**

Providing and promoting the use of public transport or active travel for visitors within a destination area has the potential to increase the capacity of a destination, attract new markets, improve the visitor experience and encourage more sustainable travel between the tourist’s home and destination (Guiver and Stanford, 2014). Yet, it requires co-ordination of a number of agencies such as accommodation providers, attractions, local authorities (including different departments within these authorities) and different transport providers which has hampered its implementation.

Despite the existence of some apparently successful and popular schemes (see for example: Alpine Pearls (Gossling, 2010), the Konus and GUTi cards (Gossling, 2010; Hilland, 2010; Wibmer, 2012)) little is published about their effectiveness in reducing car use (Gronau, 2014) or their governance. Within the UK, Guiver and Stanford (2014) report several attempts to promote and provide more sustainable travel for visitors in rural destinations, but conclude that the need for several organisations to prioritise and co-ordinate visitor travel is rarely met. Motivating different types of organisations, frequently with different geographical boundaries, time horizons, resources and competing responsibilities, poses a number of barriers, which can only be overcome with perseverance and dedication, often through the work of an inspiring ‘champion’ (p144).
Partnerships

The need to co-ordinate promotion to and provision for tourists within a destination area inevitably requires joint working of a number of agencies, usually through some type of informal or formal partnership (Dredge, 2006) of representatives of the large numbers of private enterprises (Bramwell and Lane, 2000) involved in tourism and public organisations. Research into the practices of existing partnerships suggests that they are much messier (Dredge 2006; McCool 2009) and more changeable (Caffyn 2000) than theoretical modes such VERB (visitors, environment, residents and businesses) Climpson 2008) imply. Partnerships’ longevity (Caffyn, 2000), representativeness (Jenkins, 2001) and success (Dredge, 2006; Guiver and Stanford 2014) are also questioned. However, the high degrees of inter-dependency in tourism make collaboration through networks and partnerships necessary for destination competitiveness, progress and innovation.

Increasingly, governments are handing over duties previously undertaken by public services to partnerships of private and public organisations (Hall 2000; Kjær 2012; Reid, Smith, and McCloskey 2008) with hopes that such partnerships will be less bureaucratic, more efficient and reduce the burden on the state budget and organisation (Dredge and Pförr, 2008). The move has been seen as ideological and criticised for reducing the systematic, rational view of the public interest (Ladeur, 2004) in favour of negotiated ‘subjective, constructed rationalities of participants’ (Dredge and Pförr, 2008, 61). The new ‘interest-driven and political’ (Dredge and Thomas, 2009, p 250) context has brought new organisations to destination management (Stanford, Carter and George, 2014) and granted more power to commercial interests (Hall, 2008; Pförr, 2001; Hughes, 2003; Selin, 1999) within tourism, including corporations (Hughes, 2003; Marsh, 2002) and resulted in a fragmentation of agencies involved in tourism management’ (Dredge and Thomas 2009, p249). There has also been increasing reliance
on economic benefits as the measure of public interest with the loss of wider ideals such as equity, social justice and environment (Dredge and Thomas, 2009; Selin, 1999). The growing separation of the roles of managing and marketing protected areas (Jamal and Stronza, 2009) has weakened the conservation discourse of these areas, possibly hindering effective communication between the roles (Selin and Beason, 1991) and increased the focus on marketing (Beaumont and Dredge, 2010; March and Wilkinson, 2009).

The result has been that many partnerships include representatives from private and public organisations who need to work together, despite different organisational cultures and ways of working which can result in a clash of cultures (Wray, 2011). Russell and Faulkner (1999) argue that the different mentality, goals and world views of those working in the private and public sectors will always create tensions. They characterise the public sector employees as moderators of change, risk averse, wanting continuity, stability and consensus, who may also be less responsive to local circumstances because of bureaucracy. In contrast entrepreneurs are seen as ‘chaos-makers’, generators of change (Lewis and Green, 1998) flexible and open to new opportunities (Russell and Faulkner 1999), a view echoed by UNWTO (2007) which depicts the public sector as slow, but strategic and the private sector as quick in decision-making, but lacking in concern for the wider good.

Partnerships are formed when individual organisations cannot achieve their goals independently (Huxham and Vangen, 2008). They may be precipitated by a crisis or changes in the economic, competition or technological environment (Wang and Xiang, 2007). Motivations and objectives may be different for different members (Bramwell and Rawding, 1994) but most potential partners will ask “what is in it for me?” before joining (Purvis, Zagenczyk, and McCray, 2015, 3). This may require
tailored messaging stressing different benefits to each party. For example, visitors react more favourably to being told how they benefit from using buses, than the advantages to the environment (Stanford 2103). Different language may also be needed for different audiences to reflect their experiences and perspectives (Huxham and Vangen, 2008). Although common goals (Nooteboom 2004) are seen as important for the functioning of a partnership, Huxham and Vangen (2008) reflect that differences between partners’ purposes, resources and expertise generate critical synergies (p82).

A prevalent theme within the literature on partnerships is how they evolve through their lifetimes in response to changes in the environment in which they function but also to internal changes such as the members getting to know each other better and developing trusting relationships with other partners (Huxham and Vangen, 2008). Once established, partnerships develop through various processes such as issue crystallization, coalition building and purpose formulation (Waddock, 1989). Their fortunes may depend upon the flow of resources (Caffyn, 2000) or changes in the motivations and functions of the partners (Wang and Xiang, 2007).

Projects and partnerships can share similar trajectories, with the defining aspect of a project its temporariness (Kerzner, 2009). The initial stages of a project usually require idea-generation, conceptualisation (Kerzner, 2009; Hornstein, 2015; Labuschagne and Brent, 2005) and usually involve an intensity of effort. Next, those ideas need to be operationalised through planning, budgeting, etc. before the implementation stage, which is when the project is likely to involve the greatest number of people (Adams and Bamdt, 1978; King and Cleland, 1983). Each stage requires different combinations of skills (Pinto and Prescott, 1988; Shazi, Gillespie, and Steen, 2015). Unlike projects, partnerships may have an indefinite lifetime, but tend to follow
a pathway which increases the degree of collaboration, but reduces in flexibility over
time (Caffyn, 2000).

Motivation
There is a growing recognition of the importance of people in the successful delivery of
projects (Hornstein, 2015; Nauman, Khan, and Ehsan, 2010) ‘it is fast becoming
accepted wisdom that it is people who deliver projects, not processes or systems
(Cooke-Davis, 2002 p5) there is a ‘changing bias from tools and techniques, toward the
social and behavioral aspects of the management of projects ‘ (Leybourne 2006 p. 61).

Visionary leadership or champions with ‘drive, energy and enthusiasm’
(Speakman and Transport for Leisure Ltd, 2008; p8) feature as factors helping success
and securing the survival of a partnership (Wang and Xiang, 2007). However,
successful leadership can be exercised in many ways, not all of which are readily visible
(Huxham and Vangen 2008).

Yet, people react to different motivations including self-improvement, the
working environment, ability to use creativity and moral commitment (Pink, 2009).
Purpose is a major motivator (Csikszentmihalyi quoted in Grisanti, 2011). In their
research into responsible careers, Tams and Marshall (2011) describe how individuals
follow paths which satisfy aims other than personal progression seeking ‘to have an
impact on societal challenges such as environmental sustainability and social justice
through their employment and role choices, strategic approaches to work, and other
actions.’ (p110). They suggest this is particularly relevant in times of ‘shifting
landscapes’ when careers may cross sectors employees ‘seek to orient themselves’ as
they develop in a ‘precarious’ and ‘pluralist’ environment (109).
Communication

Communication between stakeholders is seen as key getting ‘buy in’ (Huxham and Vangen, 2008) from prospective partners and to successful partnership working, but a cautionary note is sounded by de Schepper, Dooms and Haezendonck (2014) who stress the need for careful consideration about who is communicated to and when. Early consultation may accelerate the process once decisions have been made, but can fuel rumours risking the project’s success or acceptance. ‘Proactivity and an overuse of communication tools’ (1216) can generate problems.

Methodology

The purpose of this study was to explore the processes and relationships involved in successful visitor travel panning partnerships, to understand the how and the why. Because this is an under-researched topic, it required an exploratory approach. Thus, it was decided to adopt an in-depth case study methodology which allows the researcher to “...retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events” (Yin, 1994, p4) and understand the relationship between the object of study and its context (Cavana, Delahaye, and Sekaran, 2001). It also lends itself to the generation of theory (Finn, Elliot-Whyte, and Walton, 2000) which can then be tested in other contexts and has been successfully employed in similar transport research (see, for example Pearce, 2001 1404).

However, one criticism of the case study method is that generalisations from one example are virtually impossible (Robson, 1993). Studying more than one case study allows a comparative approach which can identify similarities and differences as well as advance analysis beyond mere descriptions of what, when and how towards the more fundamental goal of explanation – why? and improves the basis for the development of
theory (Przeworski and Teune, 1970). For this reason, three study areas in receipt of LSTF grants were selected for investigation: the Lake District the New Forest and the South Downs. All three areas were successful in winning a second round of funding and also received another Department for Transport grant to explore the added-value of visitor-focussed travel schemes, increasing their comparability. These areas also provided well-defined administrative areas (Manning and Dougherty, 2001; March and Wilkinson, 2008; UNWTO, 2007) grounded conceptually in geographic place (Pearce 2014) suitable for case studies.

Qualitative research was more appropriate than quantitative, as it can explore complex situations, with multiple viewpoints (Robson, 1993, p52) and can generate data which reflects the views of the respondents rather than those of the researcher (Bryman, 1995). Semi-structured interviews were conducted with key stakeholders in the development and delivery of the projects. These allowed the respondent flexibility to “...to speak in their words on issues that they consider to be important rather than responding within the predetermined categories identified by the researcher” (Miller 2001, p592). The semi-structured nature of the interview allowed both for comparability, but also for interviews to deviate at points of particular relevance and interest to the respondents (Finn et al, 2000).

The interviewees were chosen on the basis that they were identified as partners in the original funding application and the initial respondents were asked to identify other useful interviewees according to snowball selection (Robson 1993). In total 17 participants were interviewed, including a mix of representatives from the public (10 respondents), private (5 respondents) and voluntary sectors (2 respondents).

Interviewees were initially contacted by email or telephone and a time arranged for the interview. Most interviews were conducted by telephone, a few took place in the
interviewee’s workplace. They lasted from between 45 minutes to 2 hours and were recorded with the participant’s consent. The interview schedule included questions relating to the success and failure of the initial bid, the partnership and the process of the delivery, based on key stages of Realist Evaluation (Pawson and Tilley 1997). Notes were taken during the interviews as an initial impression of the content and the recordings were transcribed. Each transcript was numbered to preserve the anonymity of the respondent.

A thematic method of coding (Ryan and Bernard, 2003, p. 88) was adopted allowing “…themes to come both from the data (an inductive approach) and from the investigator’s prior theoretical understanding of the phenomenon under study (an a priori approach)”. An iterative approach was used in the analysis of the data. The content was then coded more thoroughly to identify key themes based on repetitions, similarities and differences. Finally, these results were re-coded to produce broader meta-themes.

Context

As mentioned above, the three chosen case study sites are all UK National Parks. Table 1 summarises the key characteristics of the parks.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Lake District</th>
<th>New Forest</th>
<th>South Downs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td>North England</td>
<td>South England</td>
<td>South England</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Area</td>
<td>2,292km²</td>
<td>300 km²</td>
<td>1,600km²</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Established as National Park</td>
<td>1951</td>
<td>2005</td>
<td>2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residents</td>
<td>40,800</td>
<td>34,500</td>
<td>107,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visitor days</td>
<td>15 million</td>
<td>13.5 million</td>
<td>39 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visitor contribution to economy</td>
<td>£2.2 billion</td>
<td>£123 million</td>
<td>£333 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jobs created by tourism</td>
<td>15,244</td>
<td>2,451</td>
<td>5,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% visitors arriving by motorised vehicle</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Cumbria Tourism (2013), LSTF Cumbria Bid (no date), LSTF South Downs and New Forest Bid (no date), New Forest National Park, Tourism and Recreation Facts and Figures (2005)

Each project ran for three years. In total, £6.9m was awarded for the Lake District and £3.9m awarded jointly to the South Downs and New Forest National Parks. In all cases the bids were set up and run through partnerships. Of note is the South Down’s complex administrative environment which comprises of 15 local Authorities and 183 parishes.

English governance of tourism destination management changed in 2010 from
centrally-funded Regional Development Agencies to less powerful (and less funded) Local Enterprise Partnerships, run by local authorities and businesses. This has increased the role of the private sector in delivering destination management and the political rhetoric now suggests that the private sector will take on a greater role in ensuring the quality of the destination. This contraction of public sector funding and change in strategic direction has caused many DMOs to restructure their activities and some are struggling to deliver on aspects of the management role (Stanford et al, 2014).

Findings

**Getting started: motivations and processes**

Of note is the role the National Park transport officers played in the early stages of the bid with several respondents mentioning their energy, vision, expertise, creativity and innovation. However, these qualities alone are not sufficient to account for the development of the successful bid and there are a range of other factors which are important. This included calling on the existing expertise within the organisation, with a previous history of successful LSTF bids, buying in outside expertise from specialist consultants who ‘spoke the language of DfT’ and being part of an organisation where a senior member of staff gave those tasked with putting the bid together licence to ‘get on with it’. This was true for both the public and private sector, with examples given of middle management level staff being enabled by the commitment and values of an influential senior member of staff:

*The Park authority have a culture of just go and get on with it, if it’s a good idea…. I would argue that giving money to non-transport organisations to do transport solutions is a highly cost effective way of getting staff done because transport authorities are large, cumbersome authorities that take a 1000 years to*
 decide to do anything. Whereas we just think, let’s get on with it... We’re solutions focussed…. People recognised that in order for it to work it couldn’t be designed by committee. The CEO was brave to allow me to do this. [3]

However, the above approach meant that essential elements of the delivery including the specific roles for delivery were overlooked. This was problematic once the money had been awarded:

They had a difficult time with that [the delivery] because they hadn’t really sorted out the governance before they submitted the bid. Cumbria County Council was the accountable body and once they got the money they talked about how it was going to be delivered and they hadn’t really bottomed that out before. [5]

Nevertheless, those close to the work remain convinced that this approach was the only option:

But if we had done everything as we should we would never have got the bid submitted, let alone been successful. Sometimes, you just have to get on with it. £5M it’s the biggest single amount of money to go the Lakes. The scale of it was worth taking the risks. [3]

For the other bid a different approach was taken:

It was very much a partnership approach ... The approach worked quite well, there were various meetings, lots of email, and phone calls, delegated responsibility, tasks divvied up. ..It had to be signed off by all highways authority and local authorities. Some went to formal committees. Others didn’t show it to members. Whatever each authority felt comfortable with. But it had to get letters of support and that was difficult. ... 90 organisations giving support, which were
named – we got these to put the letters in. The main thing was that everything in
the guidance was addressed in the bid. And to make it sound exciting and
innovative and inspiring. That can be difficult in local government, but that was
something that I wanted to achieve. [10]

Both individuals and organisations discussed a range of motivations to get
involved. For the private sector, the seed funding allowed for risks to be taken that
would otherwise have been unattractive. This was certainly the case for one of the bus
services that was considering converting some of their fleet to bike buses, the LSTF
funding allowed them to take the risk to do so and was seen as an opportunity to
reinvent and diversify the business.

For other respondents (including the private sector) a love for the area, a desire to
see it well-cared for and a personal commitment to sustainable transport was crucial:

*Personally and professionally we’re interested in understanding how we can get
visitors to spend less time in their cars. We’re passionate about this. This can
help people learn more about the area, not just drive past it. You can really get a
feel from this from public transport, you can experience more... The company
brand is not cheap, it offers good value for money. But the staff quality, customer
handling, the friendly staff enhance the whole experience. That’s what we’re
about as a company.* [7]

Similarly the pursuit of personal goals was a big motivating factor:

*It wasn’t about me meeting the organisational objectives. I choose my jobs
according to the roles that will let me do the stuff I want to do, to meet my own
values and objectives.* [3]
Many respondents saw providing a positive visitor experience as crucial to their involvement. Visitors were considered easier to influence because they did not have the time pressures of residents, i.e. they did not have to get to work by a certain time. Visitors may also try out behaviours and continue these when at home. Visitors outnumbered residents so could make a relatively larger contribution to carbon and traffic reduction:

...there is a resident population of x and 16 million visitors a year, so if you really want to achieve some significant carbon reduction in terms of travel behaviour you need to work on visitors... We always went into it that it would be easier to influence visitor travel behaviour than residents. They have more time and are more amenable. Open to new experiences perhaps.... There is also the link between a behaviour change on holiday and carrying on with that behaviour at home. [1]

**Delivery: enablers and barriers**

*Partnerships – good and bad*

Not surprisingly the role of the partnership, both good and bad, was discussed at some length with partnership working seen paradoxically as both one of the biggest challenges and also crucial to success.

The challenges included negotiating political and administrative boundaries; the numbers of people involved and the difficulties of coordinating partners; uneven levels of commitments from partners; conflicting priorities; a dilution of the vision and the
need to compromise; the complexity of the management structure required and the number of local authorities involved (in the South Downs).

Key amongst the challenges was the slow nature of partnership working and an inability to carry over funding if projects were delayed. This was illustrated by one example from the Lake District where it had taken almost 18 months to get bus stop flags along a cycle route approved. Permission had been requested from the highways authority in the Spring of 2013. This involved a site visit which could not happen until September 2013. There was then a requisite consultation process which some months later was approved, but subsequent delays and changes in staff meant the loss of the allocated funding for that year and the application arriving back at the starting point without progress. At the time of writing, this was still unresolved.

Some of benefits of working in partnership include commitment to a collective vision; the fact that different partners can take different responsibilities according to their expertise; the experience of working across administrative boundaries; the opportunity for highways to work with the National Parks and a general sense that despite differences the synergy that partnership working offers is worthwhile.

A good partnership required common goals and values, a strong personality and committed individuals who got on well. As with the formulation of the bid, the role of a significant individual was highlighted:

*You need a key personality or person who can keep things balance, keep people motivated, keep people encouraged...you need a nucleus of like-minded people committed to what you are trying to achieve and you need people who are in influential positions.*[15]

With regards to involving the private sector, identifying a long term financial opportunity was important:
...we’re dependent on them [private sector] for the long-term legacy. If they see it as having possible potential for their business for the future then they are far more cooperative. [4]

Several respondents cited the importance of a strong governance structure for the success of the project. The structure ensured information passed between partners, obliged them to report on progress and discuss differences and reach compromises.

Knowing the strengths and weakness of the different roles of the partners was also considered important. The private sector, for example, saw their role as enabling and side-stepping the laborious bureaucracy of the public sector:

One of the beauties of our involvement is that we are largely free of bureaucracy that the County Council and the National Parks have and that allows us to respond quickly. [2]

while the public sector saw their role as facilitating and enabling others by creating an orderly frameworks:

The real world is quite messy and complicated and what we like to do is create frameworks for working so that it makes the real world a bit less complicated, so that other people have a clearer understanding of what our shared priorities or aligned priorities are. [3]

In summary, it was acknowledged that it was unlikely for any one partner to be able to do everything:

People who are effective deliverers are not necessarily good at writing bids. You need good bid writers, good engagers and good delivers. And it is difficult to find people who can do all that...If you were advising different stages – you need motivated people, people who are willing to push the boundaries. At the early
stages you need people who can convince local people and politicians. Good creative innovative writers, good at getting innovative projects, but you also need number crunchers. [10]

Before moving on from the findings on partnerships, it is worth noting that there were specific issues with the National Parks and their involvement in the partnerships. It was considered useful for the National Parks to work with the highways authorities and to be involved in transport planning. The parks were good at partnership working and provided a strong lead and knew the different partners well, so were both able to communicate with them and identify who would be good at what. The parks were also considered less parochial than local authorities and therefore could be more creative and less cautious.

A final, and more general point, was the lack of response from National Parks to the LSTF call for proposals:

*My view was that it was a once in a generation opportunity and I was amazed that only a handful of National Parks participated. This was a wasted opportunity. But if they had all applied it would have sent out a powerful message.* [10]

The visitor experience

One of the initial needs for the project was to ensure a positive visitor experience, which could be compromised by excessive car use. Making the experience more attractive also ensured that it would be used and would become sustainable in the long-term:

*If we are going to create world-class visitor experiences with prosperous economies which drive sustainable communities then sustainable tourism has to be central to that, to the world-class visitor experience. Being stuck in a traffic jam is not a world-class experience.. so it is key to improve the sustainable*
transport alternative...if you can make the journey part of the day out then people will use it.... And if you give people a world class visitor experience they will pay a commercial rate for that and therefore you can sustain that. [9]

There were numerous ways in which the experience could be enhanced: by making bus route information outline attractions along the way; by adding value, for example some visitor interpretation; by using integrated ticketing and by making it easy:

We need integrated ticketing and to make it easy. It’s our spare time and we don’t get loads of it, the car keys are right by the front door, we can’t be worrying what ticket will work where...we need inspiring journeys, linking attractions to routes and making the journey more appealing. We just want to have fun in our spare time.[16]

Having undertaken some of these measures, one respondent gave an example of a successful bus service. In the following quote it is important to note the fact that the service helps support communities and is on track to become commercially sustainable:

We took a failing rural service which only ran 3 days a week in sparsely populated rural areas in the summer months, we rebranded it and reinvented it, tweaked the route to take in more attractions, offered a free ice-cream, and gave it a retro feel. It’s on track to be commercially viable for the summer at least and it connects all the communities and services on that route. We don’t see it as a bus, we see it as a visitor experience...if you think of it as a bus it requires a subsidy, if you think of it as a visitor attraction, it will make a profit. [9]
Focussing on the visitor experience is also a good way of motivating the private tourism sector to be involved:

*The private sector see transport as a secondary thing. They see the visitor experience as the most important thing. It’s difficult to engage them by saying how important sustainable visitor transport is, but they are interested in the visitor experience.* [2]

**Resident’s: tensions and opposition**

Resistance and opposition from residents were mentioned as significant issues. In the Lake District, for example, one respondent told how the local council did not prioritise visitors and visitor transport, because visitors do not vote:

*The county council pay lip service to visitor transport, they are much more interested in moving residents and the business community around and frankly they are not that bothered about the visitor because they don’t vote. They have no statutory requirement and they tend to back off. If you look at their objectives outside of the LSTF bid, it’s about ease of access to work or schools or doctors and shops. But if they really want to make some bite sized chunks into carbon reduction, congestion, air quality, then they should be going for the visitor.* [2]

The New Forest National Park faced challenges because the focus was on visitors and local communities needed to be convinced of the benefits:

*For the New Forest, the biggest barrier was convincing local communities...that this investment would benefit everybody. Because in order to get the money we had to make the focus in the bid on visitors which made residents feel uneasy because there is a tension between residents and visitors. We had to demonstrate*
that the benefits were for everybody and not just visitors. But for DfT the focus clearly had to be visitors. So there was some careful communication which needed handling... We stated that this would enable people to make a choice and that it would make sustainable transport easier and that residents could use that too. [10]

The issue of communication was crucial with regards to managing the relationship with residents:

Some community groups have complained ... but when we speak to them they realise there is a benefit. It’s more a perception than a reality....Communicating with the local community was not built into the project, and that perhaps was a weakness particularly at the beginning as there wasn’t any lead time. The announcement came, the money was available, and ... that turned very quickly into we need to deliver and spend the money. I think we missed an opportunity to engage local residents after the bid announcement had been made. [5]

Cyclists were a particularly contentious issue for some residents, with reports in one case of residents putting tacks on the road to deter them. This negative attitude was attributed to the fact that cycling opens up quiet, tranquil areas which would otherwise be inaccessible and because big cycling events increased visitor numbers. Respondents believed the view of the cyclist as nuisance was more of a perception than a reality, perpetrated by a vociferous minority of objectors.

Residents were not universally seen as a problem, and some of the projects involved local residents as volunteers to help create new walks and rides while one of
the community rail partnerships employed local volunteers to help enhance the visitor welcome at stations.

*Communication*

Communication was seen by several respondents as both the greatest challenge and the single most important key to success. There was much discussion about the importance of speaking ‘the right sort of language’, both with regards to marketing to encourage visitor behaviour change and to get partners involved by articulating the benefits to them and ensuring they understood the value of the project. Sending the right message was considered crucial to engage with all of the stakeholders.

For example, the private sector and visitors:

> *Engaging with private sector is always interesting. There has to be a measure of getting to them to understand the possibilities and why they should get involved making it worth their while...Why has the private sector been engaged? It’s a very practical project. It speaks their language. It’s about growing their numbers.... Visitors are fundamental, they have to use the services and that is where the marketing and promotion is so crucial. [7]*

To visitors:

> *We need to market behaviour change to visitors or we can’t change anything. So marketing is crucial and it was a big part of the bid. We worked with existing brands, rather than developing new ones. We supported marketing through existing brands which already had consumers aligned to them. [10]*

With businesses:

> *We [public sector] need to be a bit less lazy and talk more business speak, frame whole propositions, questions and problems in the language, context and ethos of*
the private sector because if the private sector don’t want to pick it up we just end up pouring public money down a hole. [3]

The Local Economic Partnerships in order to gain their support:

The LEPS are all about economic growth. Our focus is on sustainable tourism and we need to attract new types of visitor – ones who have economic contribution but not arriving by car and the offer has to appeal to them. If you can make the economic case then the LEPs are supportive. Sustainable travel is not high on the agenda, they want to build roads as they see this as crucial to the economic growth of the area. [13]

And with residents who were opposed to planned changes:

...if anything does look like it is presenting a change it has to be carefully communicated. We stated that this would enable people to make a choice and that it would make sustainable transport easier and that residents could use that too.

So we had to communicate carefully. [10]

Success, for the New Forest and South Downs, was attributed in no small part to the governance structure, and in particular the opportunity that this afforded for partners to report back, to discuss their differences and to find a compromise or solution where disagreements occurred. Success in the Lake District was attributed to the effective communication of Cumbria Tourism and the Go Lakes project:

The single most important factor of success? The communication. The projects are great, but if they happen alone, then it’s not good enough. Because if people aren’t aware then they will fail. I think Cumbria Tourism have done some really good comms work as have the Go Lakes partnership. And really got the communication out. [7]
Indeed, the right marketing strategy was considered very important for all sites in order to ensure behaviour change and to attract the right sort of visitor - one that would engage with and use alternative forms of transport.

*A big thing was that we weren’t doing a big marketing bid. We didn’t want lots of mass tourism, it’s all about getting the right sort of visitors.* [9]

Difficulties were mentioned with communication not being embedded in the projects from the start, working with local authorities who did not see marketing as their role and changes in communications staff resulting in discontinuity:

*The authority had 3 different communications Managers during the period of the project so consistent comms decisions was challenging.* [17]

*Politics*

Even before the bids were won, the shift in national level political thinking was acknowledged as crucial in the first instance.

*There has been a shift in government policy thinking…. One, towards revenue based sustainable transport and funding sustainable transport generally and two, through Government shifting from strategic policy from which funding followed to chucking money at deliverable projects, which then led to the fund, which led to the NP getting money for visitor travel.* [3]

This shift, in part, may be attributable to a National Park transport officer lobbying government to include National Parks in LSTF funding, which emphasises the
first point that was made in these findings – the importance of a passionate individual.

Though not acknowledged by all respondents, the ethos of the national government was considered by some to underpin all major developments in transport and visitor transport planning, and some considered that the messages currently given from national government continue to facilitate car use.

At a local level, feelings were mixed. Some respondents did not see the local political environment as important or influential at all, at best having no influence at all, at worst, being obstructive:

*If the bid had value distinction and quality, it’s because it was unencumbered by local politics.* [3]

The same attitudes prevailed during the delivery stage:

*It’s best to leave local politics out of it and we try not to involve local councillors... we try to get on with things... you should not have councillors running schemes as they become political and we want to get on without interference.* [15]

However, with time and commitment from some of the project staff, local councillors could become more involved:

... *the political environment wasn't easy. The National Parks has a board which is made up of elected members and nationally appointed... all are meant to operate in the interest of the National Park as a whole but obviously this doesn't happen in reality and some want to fight for funding to be spent in their particular area. I remember examples of x being called up directly by members asking what was happening in their constituency, she spent much time on the phone talking to members about this, thus allowing the political culture to develop where members*
Timing
The nature of the LSTF funding, and in particular the timeframe was an issue. For t, it was felt that the time allowed to write the bid was insufficient. It was felt that more advanced notice was required in order to spend more time on the proposal. Rushing the process might lead to the wrong priorities being identified and that the quality of the projects would be compromised. The money was awarded for a three year period, some staff could not be put in place immediately to take advantage of the funding and, in any case, three years is not long enough to tackle and change a firmly entrenched behaviour (visitor car dependence) or for some business ventures to become commercially viable. What is more, the funding could not be carried over from one financial year to the next and there was a universal recognition that though partnership working was requisite and inevitable, it was a slow process. Finally, there were concerns that expertise was lost as staff start to look for alternative employment before the three years has ended:

Funding should not be time-limited. It takes longer than three years and then it ends up being not about what needs to be done, about what money is available and what can be done in that time. [15]

The future
For the ongoing success of the projects and for sustainable visitor planning in general, the different roles of different stakeholders were discussed. There was a general feeling that the public sector needed to continue to promote schemes, facilitate partnerships and
fund infrastructure maintenance, while the private sector should take on the responsibility of ensuring that commercial initiatives are sustainable.

The private sector and businesses making the most of opportunities. We [the public sector] say to them we have put infrastructure in, now that is up to you. We’ve tried to put things in place that they can carry on using. Their role is to use these and sell the experience to the visitor. [5]

For many, the LEPs were seen as synonymous with the private sector and that the future of sustainable visitor travel planning would be largely dependent on their leadership, driven by the interests of individuals:

Spending and decision marking power has evolved to the LEPs. It’s possible they will take on a more important role in delivering transport schemes, and the focus of the LEPs will depend on the individuals within the board. But sustainable visitor transport is not very important to them, urban and rural resident transport is more important, sustainable visitors transport is not a priority for anybody. [14]

The issue of prioritisation was also referred to by the respondent below, who felt that the value of the projects and of visitor travel planning had to be clear if it was to become a priority for anyone, particularly in the context of financial austerity:

In the situation if something is squeezed [financially] this will fall by the wayside. ... In order to make it a priority all the current partners have to see the value in what we’re doing and that may see some results. [15]
Moving visitor travel planning up the agenda could also be achieved by intervention from supportive senior colleagues:

*Intervention from senior colleague can help, or taking a strategic view,*

*particularly when it comes to prioritisation and your stuff is way down the line.*

*But if the importance of it strategically and financially is brought home to them by someone higher up that can move it up the priorities.* [4]

There was some debate regarding whether not sustainable visitor transport could be commercially viable. Some felt that a small amount of seed funding from national government was important to establish commercial operations which could, given time, become financially sustaining. Others felt the issue went beyond debates of financial success and would never be commercial.

*Visitor transport is not commercial because it is of a wider remit than a company or business can provide and I don’t think it will ever be commercial.* [15]

There was a lot of discussion generally about the bottom line and that though the bottom line should consider social and environmental factors, the emphasis was very much focussed on the economic bottom line.

*The growing influence of the private sector is a problem, because of their focus on making a profit... I fear that the focus on economy, economy, economy will be at the expense of the environment.* [13]

The current LEP structure was seen as particularly problematic with this regard because of their primary focus on economic growth and imperative to understand benefits only in terms of financial benefits:
I hate the LEP and local growth fund, because it is all driven by economic growth... You get prosperity through a better quality of life not solely from economic growth.... The political agenda has shifted to economic growth and transport is not seen to help the economy. So it’s difficult to justify transport stuff for other reasons like health or the environment, unless you can show it is good for the economy. To make the economy healthier you have to do the other things too – maximise the quality of the experience, and you can do this in part from transport. But you can’t measure that. Carbon is only of interest if it is monetised. The economic benefits of cycling such as the health savings. We shouldn’t have to monetise this. We should just be able to proudly to say there are health benefits.

It warps and skews priorities. The LEP structure is insidious. [3]

It would be misleading to leave this section on the findings with a sense that the private sector does not care about the issue as illustrated by this quote from one of the bus operators:

From both a business view and from a sustainable view we need to get cars off the road. Cars off the road helps us, it helps the tourists, it helps the economy. And a person who likes to visit here will like that feel of less traffic... I think it is on the agenda now and has moved up peoples priorities...Pollution is a big priority for the councils and there is a commitment to reduce that. So something ’s got to be done you can’t just keep letting the numbers increase...I’m keen to work with anyone, I’m passionate about it. Let’s get everyone one on a bus and ensure that everyone benefits. [6]
Discussion

Two clear factors for success have emerged from the findings: the influence of values and the importance of different messages for different audiences at different stages. Each of these is discussed in the following section.

The influence of values and culture: individual and cultural

A common theme emerges frequently from the data, that of the core principles and values of both the organisations and the individuals working within them.

At an organisational level, the ethics of the organisation can clearly help or hinder progress. For example, the slow, bureaucratic and cautious nature of the local authorities was a source of frustration for many, while the freer, more creative opportunities afforded by the organisational culture of the National Parks was considered positively. Indeed, much of the success of the projects was attributed to the creativity, and licence to ‘get the job done’ culture of the National Parks demonstrating characteristics more typically associated with the private sector. The Parks may be better placed to deliver management as, unlike the private sector, they have objectives with broader social objectives that are not predominantly economic. Local political values were considered a mixed blessing, with some support offered from local politicians, but also with a great deal of obstruction noted by councillors wanting to appeal to voters, rather than visitors. The literature leads to expectations of conflict between the values and aspirations of the public sector and private sector. Russell and Faulkner (1999) argue that the different mentality, goals and world views of these two ‘always’ result in tensions and Wray (2011), writing about the clash of culture between the private and public agencies. In fact, the most evident clash of culture was between two public sectors: the National Park and local authority. Contrary to the expectations generated by the literature, consensus was common between public and private sectors,
and respondents from both sectors demonstrating similar characteristics, ideals, goals
and motivations.

This agreement between the public and private sector may result from the
passion and commitment of individuals, which manifested itself in passion for the
specific project, be it car use reduction, bus transport or cycling and a commitment to
and love of the specific geographic place where they worked. This reflects the findings
of Speakman and Transport for Leisure Ltd (2008) that partnerships need champions
with drive, energy and enthusiasm and Wang and Xiang (2007) who stress the
importance of visionary leadership. The examples above provide plenty of evidence of
these enthusiastic champions. These champions alone may not be sufficient to account
entirely for success and individual enthusiasts need to be enabled by a supportive
organisation and senior staff, some initial funding and a good governance structure. In
term of a legacy, therefore, it will be the individuals within the organisations who are
crucial in continuing these projects. It is unfortunate then, that the short-term nature of
the funding means that this passion, commitment and expertise is fragmented at the end
of the funding.

Different audiences: different messages at different stages
As discussed in the literature review, communication is a key theme in collaborative
practice and different messages need to be tailored for different audiences (Huxham and
Vangen, 2008). Engaging potential stakeholders often means spelling out the benefits
they will derive from involvement (Purvis, et al., 2015, Stanford 2014). This has been
confirmed in the examples and Figure 1 summarises the customised messages needed
for different audiences.
This figure shows two key messages which need to be communicated: the information needed to use alternative transport and marketing; and an articulation of the benefits. The first is relatively straightforward. It is clear that without marketing or the correct information to those who will be using the services (visitors and residents) that
these stakeholders are unlikely to engage. This task is the responsibility of multiple stakeholders: tourist boards, businesses, operators, local Authorities and the National Parks.

The second, articulation of the benefits, is more complex and arguably more interesting. Articulating the benefits to different stakeholders is crucial to the success or failure of the project and must be included at the bid, delivery and legacy stages. It should be noted that the message will be different depending on which stakeholder is being targeted. Residents need to understand the benefits of the project before inception and during the delivery, it is essential that they understand that the services will benefit them in terms of being able to use the amenities themselves and in the potential reduction of localised car-related pollution and congestion. This is/was communicated largely by the National Parks. Visitors need to be targeted with messages that promote the novelty, reliability and value added nature of the services. Local councillors and officers need to be sold the message of less pollution and the advantages to their voters. Businesses and operators need to be persuaded of the commercial potential. LEPS want to know of the opportunities for economic growth. The DfT want to know precise information about the benefits delivered for the money invested, this will need to be communicated to them in language with is appropriate. The role of communicating with visitors is largely the responsibility of the private sector, though the National Parks will also play a role. For the other stakeholders and messages, the lead on the communication comes from the National Parks.

Central to the majority of this communication is the emphasis on the visitor experience. To highlight with a quote from one of key informants:

*How do we re-pitch and rephrase travel planning so we can get businesses to engage? We need to be outcome focussed – what is their corporate and business*
incentive to achieve our outcomes? We need to show them the benefits. It’s
down to the language you use, the semantics, you need a linguistic. The New
Forest tour doesn’t mention it is a bus. It’s about visitor experience, not about
transport. The good stuff is about the visitor experiences, that’s what we want, we
want visitors to have a good time and come back, it’s not about telling them to get
on a bus. It just isn’t. [3]

Table 2 below provides a summary of the different messages which need to be
communicated at different stages of the process.
<table>
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<th>Project stage</th>
<th>Desired Communication</th>
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| Bid Preparation| • Bid written ‘in the language’ of funder (Department for Transport)  
• Getting support from local politicians  
• Explaining importance to local stakeholders asking them for letters of support  
• If possible set up procedures for governance. |
| Set up Phase   | • Explain benefits to stakeholders, particularly those not involved in pre-bid discussions, e.g. local residents.  
• Make sure partners share goals and understand roles.  
• Communicate urgency of getting projects working quickly to make use of project time. |
| Execution      | • Put new schemes into action and market them to visitors and residents.  
• Need for factual information in variety of modes.  
• Allay fears of residents.  
• Report of project progress and find compromises as required through governance structures |
| Closing        | • Ensure projects are bequeathed to organisations able to continue them, selling them in condition and in terms that will interest new owners, e.g. infrastructure development to LEPs, benefits to community to local groups, commercial benefits to private sector.  
• Debrief project staff as they leave, to ensure continuity of knowledge. |
| Afterwards      | • Evaluation from monitoring.  
• Messages to other who want to try to emulate schemes |
Conclusions

Although communication was seen to be critical both for the smooth running of the project and ensuring its success, this was not uniform communication to every party, but a careful targeting of different messages to different audiences. Thus, it was critical for the bid’s success to convey to the DfT that the project would address visitor modal shift and help the local economy but, once successful, residents needed to be brought on board through explanations about what the project offered local people. Visitors needed logistical information and messages which outlined the value-added of the experience. Tourism and transport operators responded more to the incentive of a better visitor experience and increasing trade. The LEPs, who might inherit the infrastructure at the end of the project had to be convinced of it importance for local growth, although this was not the message which motivated many of the team members.

The problems of private and public organisations working together manifested themselves in different ways from the predictions in the literature. While there was recognition of the slow working and bureaucracy of local authorities, particularly at a time of job-cut and reduced budgets, National Parks, also part of the public sector were seen quite differently, often as the innovators and risk-takers, who pushed the project into fruition and then drove the projects to achieve environmental and social goals. These motivations, particularly a personal passion for the area, were also shared by people working in the private sector.

However, as seen from some of the challenges of the projects described above, although passionate individuals can and do achieve a lot other factors limit their achievements. There was recognition that other discourses, such as value for money and local growth had become the legitimated criteria for government and other
organisations. This and the short-term funding raised doubts about the long-term survival and success of the schemes: the bigger the imperative for change has to come from commitment at a national political level.


Cumbria Tourism (no date). LSTF Cumbria Bid. Cumbria.


New Forest and South Downs (no date). *LSTF South Downs and New Forest Bid*


Shazi, R., Gillespie, N., & Steen, J. (2015). Trust as a predictor of innovation network ties in project teams. *International Journal of Project Management, 33*(1), 81-


