

# Community Ambassadors for Increasing Patronage on Local Railways



**Jo Guiver**

**Nick Davies**

# Interesting Project, but ....



- Vulnerability of initiatives
- Agreeing criteria for evaluation
- Getting research under way quickly



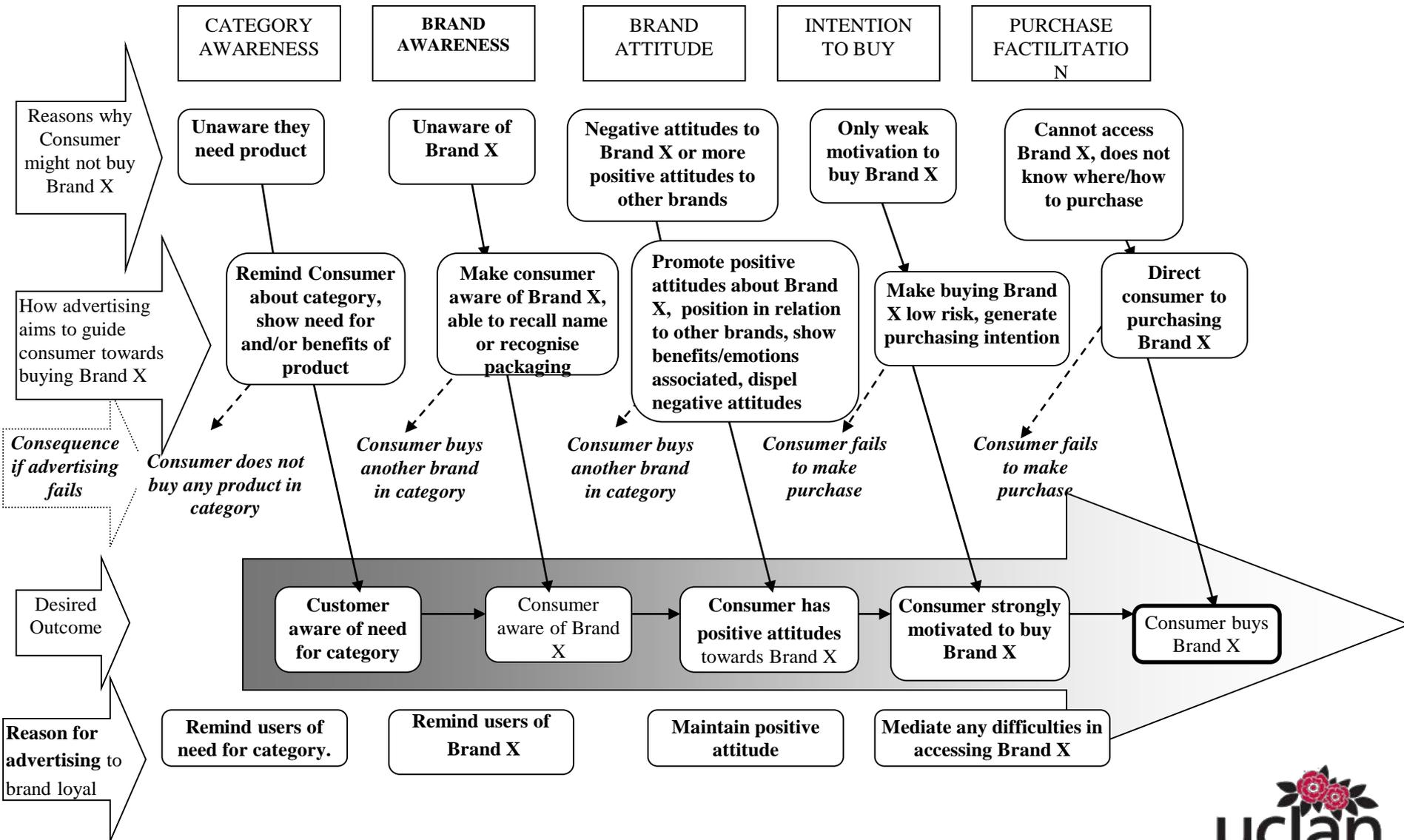
# Theory

- Perfect market: supply/demand and price reconciled
- Trade-offs between convenience, journey time and cost
- Yet, lack of knowledge, misperceptions, habits may prevent optimum choices

# Off-Peak Travel

- High fixed costs to satisfy peak demand: can carry passengers at lower fares economically, if cover marginal costs.
- Normal incentives lower fares, rail card travel
- Often publicity
- Only reaches people with public transport in the choice set.
- Or aware of advantages of travelling to another destination

# Marketing Theory

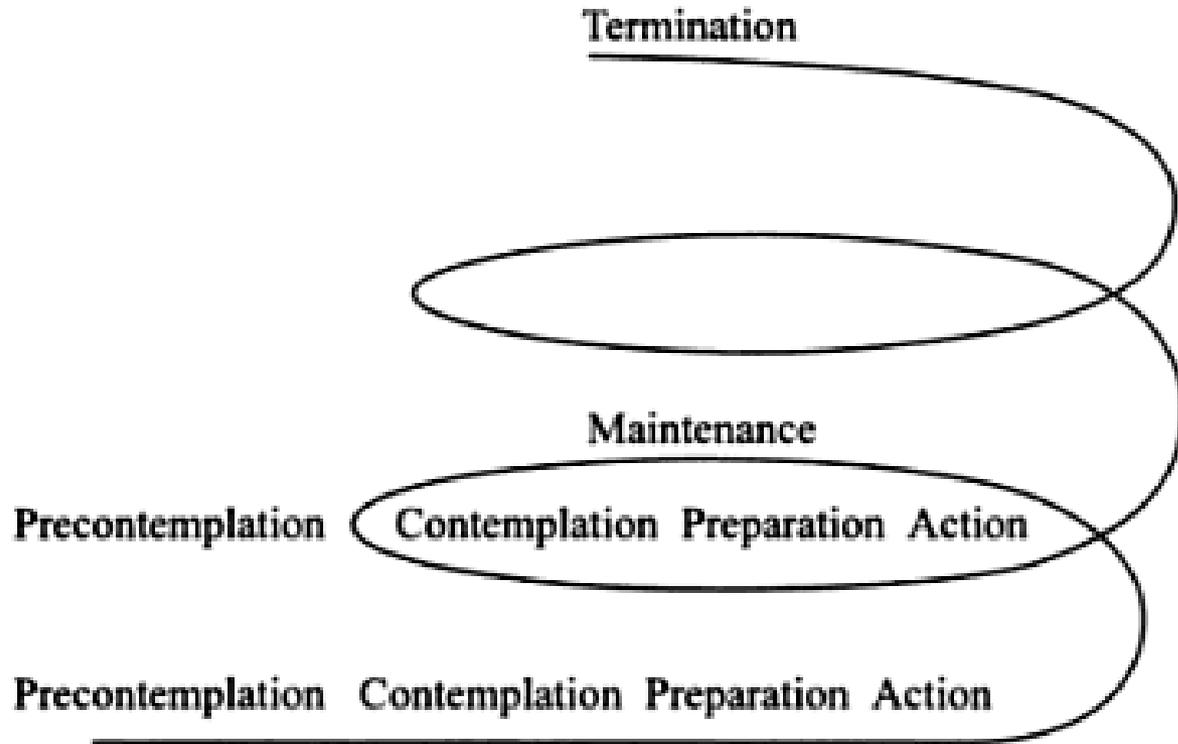


# Prochaska, Norcross and Diclemente's Model of Change/ Social Marketing

- Precontemplation
- Contemplation
- Preparation
- Action
- Maintenance
- Termination
  - of bad habit

Prochaska, J.O., Norcross, J.C. and DiClemente, C.C., 1995. Changing for good. New York: Avon Books.

# Change Spiral



Prochaska, J.O., DiClemente, C.C. and Norcross, J.C., 1992. In search of how people change: applications to addictive behaviors. *American psychologist*, 47(9), p.1102.

# **BUDDY AND AMBASSADOR SCHEMES**

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# Bike Buddies



Bicycle ambassadors promote cycling in Randers (Denmark)

# Bike Buddies



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**Bike Buddying**

Cycling Together to work and University

**CYCLE TRAINING IN EALING  
Bike Buddy Scheme DSC9**

Commute from Acton to Old Street



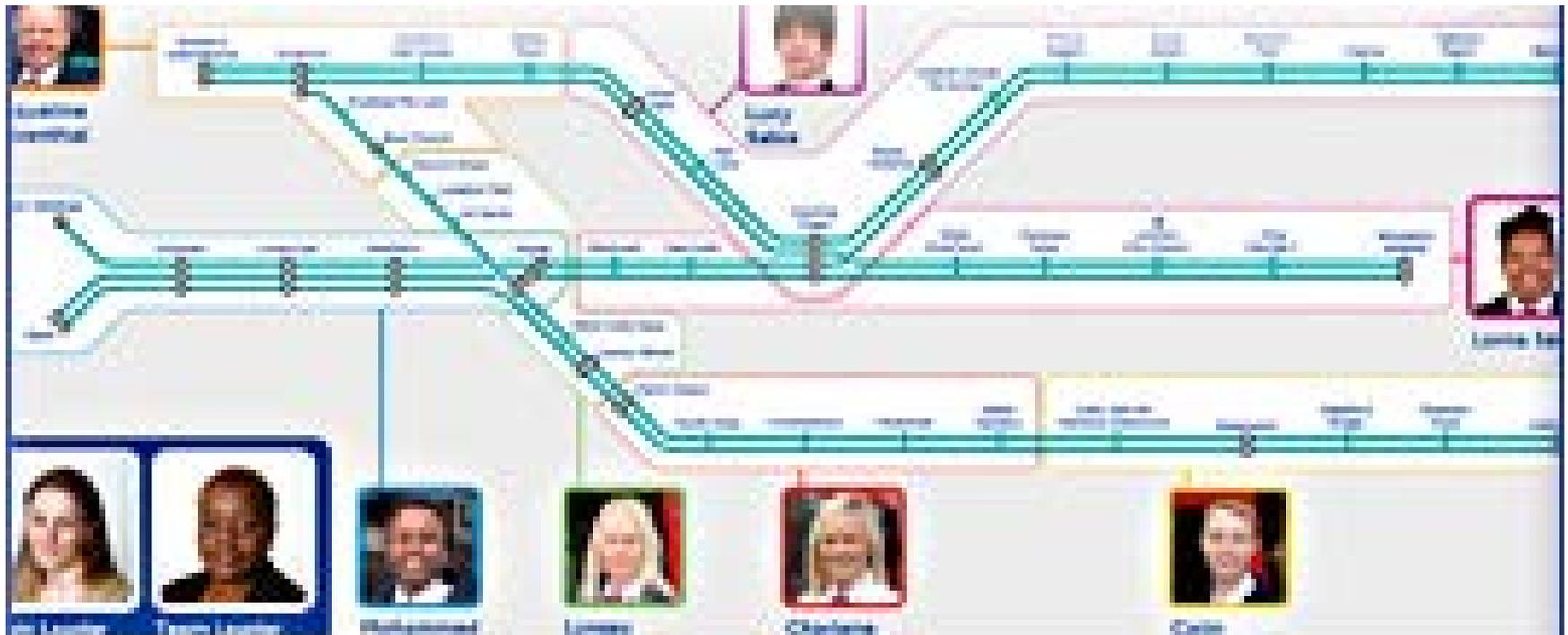
# Helping Older People use Public Transport

- Offenbach-am Main, Germany:
  - Maintain mobility
  - Encourage sustainable travel
- Zeeland, Netherlands:
  - Help with e-ticketing
  - Combat isolation
- Both schemes
  - Used volunteers aged 55 and over

# Olympic Volunteers



# Docklands Light Railway



Locate our DLR Ambassadors  
using our Ambassador Map



# **NORTHERN RAIL'S COMMUNITY AMBASSADOR SCHEME**

# Context

- Northern Rail found large populations, often close to lines and stations, who never considered rail travel
- Set up Community Ambassador scheme to approach those groups in 2011

# Northern Rail's Scheme

- Employed 4 ambassadors for stations,
- Later three focussing on different routes
- Two from minority ethnic groups with variety of languages

# The Research

- Citizens' Rail
- Institute of Transport and Tourism asked to evaluate the Community Ambassadors' Scheme 2013-2015
- Desktop search of Literature
- Interviews with Community Ambassadors
- Shadowed their work
- Met a few user-groups
- Intention to interview people after their access trip
- No criteria established

# Types of groups

- Ethnic minorities
  - Particularly women who might travel in the off-peak periods
- People new to the area:
  - Students
  - English Language learners
  - Immigrants
  - Refugees
  - Women in refuges
- People with special problems using trains:
  - People with disabilities
  - Parents with children in buggies
- Others who might benefit from wider horizons
  - Job-seekers
  - Retired
  - Parents with young children

# How Ambassadors Worked

- Looked for groups who might not use local trains
- Approached organiser to find out needs and whether could address the group
- Tried to fit in with needs of group
  - eg language learning, building skills, confidence
- Also attended open days, community meetings, fairs, etc with stalls and information.

# How Ambassadors Worked

- Attended group several times
- Arranged an accessibility trip
- Did a pre-trip explanation
- Talked to the group on the train
- Arranged an activity at the destination
- Return trip
- Feedback
- Returned to the group and kept contact

# Emphasis on trust

*'if I've made contact with a particular group, established a relationship with them, I've taken them out, gone back to them for feedback and we've had feedback forms filled in, then I try to go back, show my face, so it is refreshing the contact.'*

However, one ambassador, a part-time conductor was always being pulled from his ambassador duties when conductors needed.

# ACCESSIBILITY TRIPS

*'I try to turn every journey into a very positive experience in its own right'*

*if they are not aware of the journey and I have provided them with that experience, they've then turned round and said to me that they now know where they are going and they feel confident to be able to go back and do that journey on their own ... then that's to me, you know, a very positive impact.*











# What they explain

- How to find information
- How to buy a ticket
- Types of ticket
- Using escalators
- How to know which platform to wait at



# What they explain

- Which train to catch
    - Not always the first one
    - your destination is not necessarily the train's destination
  - Safety measures
    - fears of train moving as getting on/off
  - Role of conductor
  - What happens if there is a delay
- 'the buttons need to be illuminated before the doors open. Simple tips which we found that people do not always adhere to'*

# Feeding Back Information

- Difficult for 'experts' to understand the perceptions of a novice train user
- Need for conductor to make regular trips down train
- Card for people with disabilities

*'if you have not got a ticket and you have got a disability, it can then become a problem because at the barriers and this is something that we are making people aware of, ...if you have it written down that you have a disability on a piece of paper or you've got a card.'*

*'I and Sultana have offered our advice, support services to British Transport Police'*

# Successful?

- Certainly
  - popular with groups they worked with
  - increased awareness of train services amongst ‘hard to reach’ groups
  - enhanced reputation of Northern Rail



**Northern Rail's Community Ambassadors Scheme triumphed over nine other European entries to win recognition of its Customer Service Excellence at this year's European Rail Congress Awards.**

The scheme has flourished in the North West, introducing thousands of people in 'hard to reach' communities to the opportunities of travelling by rail with Northern.

**Northern Ambassadors Scheme - Evaluation Research - Jungle Green**

- The Northern Community Ambassadors scheme was created to promote the use of local rail services with BME and socially excluded groups. Together with colleagues at the DfT, Transport for Greater Manchester and the East Lancashire Community Rail Partnership, Northern recruited Ambassadors to be based in the heart of the communities, working to understand, and then overcome barriers to local rail travel. The Ambassadors actively engaged with well over 4,000 people in twelve months. Janice Guy led the research team involved in evaluating this Ambassadors Scheme.
- The specific information gathering objectives to be covered by the research were to:
  - Evaluate the extent to which the Northern Pilot community ambassador initiative was **meeting its objectives**
  - Identify what types of ambassador interventions were most and least successful, and why; **what transferable lessons about the design and delivery of a successful community ambassador scheme can be drawn** from across the pilot areas, and can be applied to other similar areas.
- This first wave of research was used to set a **baseline to measure against** and provided information to aid the Ambassadors in their work. The second wave of research, was conducted to measure and explore the impact that the scheme had over the course of 12 months.
- The research involved both quantitative and qualitative research. **Face to face interviews and focus groups** were conducted with a **vast range of community groups**:
  - *Asian women's groups, carers groups, those with learning disabilities, parent/ toddler groups, old peoples homes, women's refuge groups, job clubs, housing associations, walking groups, children's centres, schools, community centres, church groups, students groups and individuals*



[www.northernrail.org/ambassadors](http://www.northernrail.org/ambassadors)  
 a serco and obello joint venture

**Northern said....** the research not only identified the key measures we needed but also transferable lessons which could be used by other train operators/ organisations wanting to establish a similar scheme elsewhere in the country. This covers lessons learned from establishing the scheme with community group leaders, which activities were the most and least successful and suggestions from the Ambassadors for future improvements. We are collating these lessons into a booklet which will be available for all stakeholders and interested parties. As well as our recent award, the DfT also won the prestigious Diversity and Equality award (at the annual Civil Service Awards) for their involvement.

# **SLIDES FROM EDDIE FISHER'S PRESENTATION 2012**

# Our Ambassadors



a serco and abellio<sup>®</sup> joint venture

## Results to Date



- Engaged with over 4000 people to date
- Over 1000 people already taken on group accessibility trips
- Numerous group bookings as a direct result of the accessibility trips



# The Future



- Feedback from the communities has been extremely positive
- Further research to be undertaken during February
- Hope to continue attracting new customers to rail and building closer relationships with the communities we serve



# Bums on seats?

*'Rail usage at the targeted locations has grown by 14 per cent, with half of this growth directly attributed to the ambassadors. New users have usually come from the C2DE social grades, are mostly female and mainly from BME communities.'*

Civil Service World (03/04/11)

# April 2014

- Community Ambassador Scheme dropped by Northern Rail at a week's notice
- An easy option, when cost-cutting needed?
- Research incomplete
- Very difficult to find and talk to groups they had visited

# Return to Theory

- Groups mainly at pre- category awareness or precontemplation stage
- Ambassadors supported them through:
  - Contemplation
  - Preparation
  - Action
- Long-term process, lead time
- Affects not only those in direct contact with Community Ambassadors

# Conclusions about Community Ambassador Scheme

- Successful on many criteria
  - Popular
  - Reputation
  - Inclusiveness
- Probably would make good sense for a state controlled railway to ensure citizens' access to facilities and interested in equity and wellbeing.
- Lack of monitoring data from start made it hard to prove effectiveness at increasing off-peak patronage
- Needs more evidence to make sense for a commercial transport provider.
- Pioneering schemes likely to be vulnerable to cost-cutting measures

# Conclusions for Research

- Lack of evaluation criteria also made it difficult to evaluate
- Do your research early!
- Lack of criteria makes it difficult, lack of project to evaluate makes it nearly impossible.