

Institute for Transport Studies
FACULTY OF ENVIRONMENT

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Influencing Policy and Practice

Lessons and Reflections from the Transport Sector


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Key Messages

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- Commit
- Short
- Clear
- Relevant
- Use Coalitions...
- Difficult
- Persistent
- Time consuming
- Rewarding



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Characterise the problem

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“There remains considerable scope to improve the effectiveness of public policy making through use of humanities and social science research”
(British Academy, 2008)

“Many researchers do not think through the policy implications of their research”
(Brownson et al., 2006)




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Experiences to draw on

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- House of Commons Select Committee
- Study of uptake of research in city transport planning
- Action research project (transport planning tools)
- SPARC project working with older people
- Observation




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Influencing Policy

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- Policy is not...
 - the rational search for some optimal solution
 - evidence led (discuss!)
 - what is written on paper
- Policy is
 - contested and influenced
 - open to interpretation
 - played out over many spatial scales




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Routes to Influence

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- Academics can influence policy makers directly
 - Expert advisory committees (reputation)
 - Commissioned research (price, delivery and reputation)
 - Departmental briefings (luck, contacts and reputation)
 - TYPICALLY FILTERED
- More indirect routes also exist
 - Policy consultations
 - Select Committee Inquiries
 - Press Releases/Technical Press
 - Publications (.....?????????)
- Can influence action on the ground
 - Joint 'action' research




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Concessionary Travel

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- Free travel for over 60s on local bus services
- Northern Ireland and Wales (2002)
- Scotland (2006)
- England (2008)
 - Many spatial scales
- What happened
 - 42% of over 60s in England use their pass at least once a month
 - £600m to upgrade from previous 50% concession
 - Treasury initiative
 - Not influenced by academic research until implemented



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Accessibility Planning

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- National Initiative – all local authorities to plan to improve access for disadvantaged citizens
- Guidance issued
 - No specific guidance on older people
 - Focus on access to work, healthcare and shopping
 - Investment in technological mapping tools



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SPARC Project

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- Worked with older people
- Engaged the local authority
 - Chronic staff shortages
- Organised policy seminars
 - MPs, older people, bus operators, policy makers, researchers
- Wrote practitioner journal articles (3)
- Presentations to Festival of Science, LARCI, PTEG....
- Policy briefing for Help the Aged
- Attended Help the Aged pre-White Paper policy briefing
- Impacts on policy and practice.....?

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What do policy makers tell us

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- Keep it short
 - “Nobody reads the thick reports...They read the front page”
- Do not hide the message – clarity
 - “some research reports are as big as a phone book of New York.....and about as interesting... I did not really understand what it was saying.”
 - Acknowledging uncertainty is part of our tradition
- Relevant
 - Not always easy – timescales of academics and policy making are different
- Difficult
 - Policy questions cannot allow us to “assume away” difficulties

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What do academics tell us

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“My experience as an editor of two journals is mostly the policy thinking in those paragraphs at the end of papers called “the policy implications” is poor quality.....”

Academic

“...in terms of journal papers you don't always get rigorous outputs when you do policy relevant research”

Academic

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Lessons

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- Persistence is crucial
- Design it in from the start of research programmes
- Know who you are targeting and with what
- Knock on doors, pick up the phone
- It is partly luck and ‘windows of opportunity’
- Get help
 - Communicating with policy makers is not everyone's cup of tea
 - Other groups have louder voices – do you have to do it all?

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Concluding Moccasins

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**Any
Questions?**

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