

UNDERSTANDING WELLBEING IN TRANSPORT POLICY

Research aims

To research aims to understand the relationships between transport interventions and changes in wellbeing, to provide input to assist the development and operationalization of wellbeing within the West Yorkshire Transport Strategy.

Wellbeing has entered the policy discourse and is supported as a policy aim at national and local government levels - but it remains a relatively new policy agenda with a lack of institutional knowledge amongst policy makers as to how to operationalize wellbeing in practice and, in turn, improve policy outcomes. Moreover, wellbeing is a woolly term, meaning different things in different policy areas, bringing added complexity.

The research commenced in February 2017. A final Report will be published in December 2017.

Background

In 2017 West Yorkshire Combined Authority (WYCA) adopted a new Transport Strategy for the period up to 2040. 'Transport Strategy 2040' was developed over 18 months with work overseen by WYCA Members and was subject to two rounds of public and stakeholder consultation.

Transport Strategy 2040 is a delivery plan for the Strategic Economic Plan, which aims to achieve 'good growth' for the region. Transport Strategy 2040 is constructed around 6 core themes containing 67 policies that describe the actions to be taken by WYCA, Local District Councils and partner organisations to transform transport in pursuit of economic, environmental and social objectives. A core theme is 'Inclusive Growth, Environment, Health and Well-being' - the ambition is to connect people to better living standards and higher earning jobs, and to significantly improve the health, overall wellbeing and environment of the people living and working in West Yorkshire.

Research questions

To help make wellbeing meaningful in policy terms the project answered 3 research questions:

(RQ1) What do key stakeholders in the region think wellbeing means and what do they think would be effective means of improving wellbeing?

(RQ2) What does the evidence base tell us about the relationships between transport and wellbeing?

(RQ3) What are the gaps in the region's policy approach for improving wellbeing and what can be done to address this?

Methodology

The research was undertaken in 3 stages

1. Interview: To understand how wellbeing is understood by stakeholders in the region (RQ1) and the governance challenges and gaps relating to wellbeing in policy (RQ3). 14 semi-structured elite interviews were undertaken with policymakers from WYCA and the local authorities (from transport, planning, public health, environment and economic policy) and with 3rd sector stakeholders and charitable organisations;

2. Desk-based research: To determine the links between transport and wellbeing as understood in existing policy and academic literature (RQ2). A workshop was also held with 25 policymakers from the Stage 1 organisations and academics from the University of Leeds ITS and School of Earth and Environment, to gain further insights into understandings of wellbeing (RQ1) and barriers, opportunities and ways to operationalise wellbeing into policy in the region (RQ3), and to raise the profile of wellbeing as a policy agenda and highlight the state of the art in terms of evidence (RQ2);

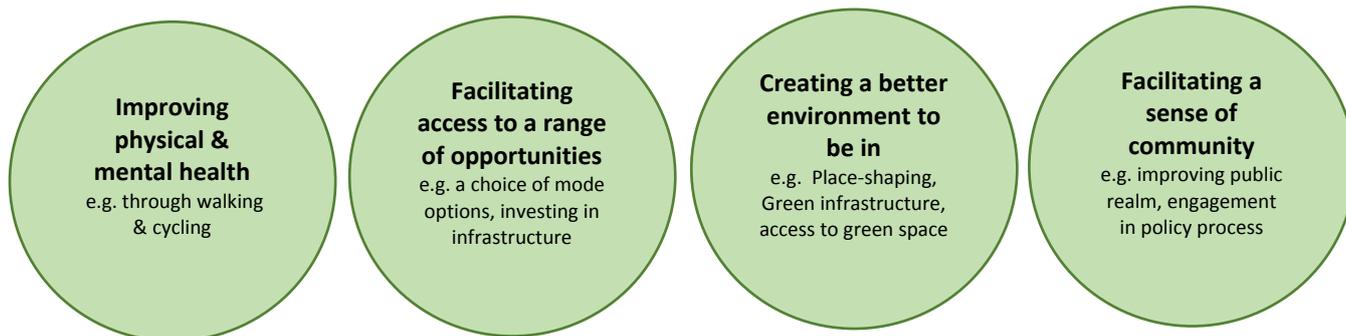


3. Gap Analysis: Drawing evidence together from stages 1 and 2 to provide a gap analysis of how the region is performing in terms of working towards wellbeing and what can be done to advance wellbeing up the agenda.

Findings

The research found that wellbeing is on local authority policy agendas and is understood by stakeholder to link to three other agendas: Place-shaping, Public Health, and Air Quality - with good examples of partnership working in each of these areas.

4 KEY THEMES - Four key themes emerged from respondents relating to their understanding of how wellbeing relates to transport policy



8 KEY LINKS between transport and wellbeing were highlighted by the evidence base



Air quality: Poor air quality increases onset of respiratory disease and exposure to higher Nitrogen Oxide levels lead to lower levels of life satisfaction

Noise: Exposure to higher levels of noise lead to increased stress and annoyance

Greenspace: Rates of anxiety, depression and self-reported mental distress are greater in areas with lower levels of local greenspace

Safety: As well as physical and mental distress caused by road accidents, the perception of danger affects mode choice, typically away from active travel

Social Capital: Ability to take part in wider community activity is linked to higher levels of wellbeing. Volume of traffic also affects levels of social interaction

Social Exclusion: Those at the greatest risk of social exclusion travel less often and have less access to travel options

Physical Activity: Those who drive for the commute are more likely to be obese or overweight than non-car users. Physical activity increases levels of life satisfaction.

Travel Experience: Those with longer commute times report lower levels of life satisfaction

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KEY BARRIERS to embedding wellbeing in policy were identified



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RECOMMENDATIONS - The research provides eight recommendations to shape and inform the further development and operationalization of wellbeing in transport policy, strategy and implementation plans

- Outline guiding principles of wellbeing
- Create 'headline' West Yorkshire wellbeing indicators
- Encourage partnership working across policy silos
- Conduct wellbeing assessments for transport interventions
- Incorporate wellbeing measures into evaluation
- Commission research into valuing wellbeing within transport appraisal
- Provide fora for exchange of ideas and platforms for training
- Engage with local communities on wellbeing

Scientific contribution:

- **Enhanced understanding of how wellbeing is understood by local government stakeholders, and the governance challenges and gaps relating to operationalising wellbeing** - with recommendations as to what can be done to advance wellbeing up the agenda; specifically in relation to transport policy.

Societal impact:

- **Policy development** - The research informed the shape and high level content (objectives and policies) of the WYCA Transport Strategy 2040.
- **Performance management** - The research is shaping on-going work to develop the performance management framework of indicators and targets for the Transport Strategy 2040.
- **Collaboration** - The research has provided a focus for WYCA engagement on wellbeing with delivery partners.

- **The research provides an opportunity for WYCA to be a thought leader with the ability to shape the agenda going forward.** The end product reflects the place where WYCA was coming from - the approach to wellbeing is still embryonic and the potential of this research is not fully exploited. Further research is required to develop and embed strategy. Remaining questions include:
 - Can changes in wellbeing be attributed with certainty to transport interventions
 - What interventions are likely to have the greatest positive impact on wellbeing?
 - How would wellbeing-informed changes to the policymaking process affect decision making and choice of policy intervention?
 - How can characteristics of different places and communities be utilised to inform transport priorities based on wellbeing?
 - How can existing data be drawn upon to create a composite wellbeing indicator for West Yorkshire?