



## How DISTILLATE Influenced Local Transport Planning Across the UK

For the most part, transport planning in the UK is largely the responsibility of individual local authorities. This can lead to problems in widespread dissemination of research outputs, since researchers may have to influence a plurality of agents. As the story below demonstrates, DISTILLATE got around this problem in two ways – by involving local authorities in consultation events to improve the usability of their outputs and by being included in a government guidance source.



## SUE SUCCESS STORY

DISTILLATE (Design and Implementation Support Tools for Integrated Local Land Use, Transport and the Environment) was part of the first wave of SUE funded projects. Its programme director Professor Anthony May described its goal as delivering “a step change in the way in which sustainable urban transport and land-use strategies are developed and delivered.”

To achieve this, the project was broken down into sub-projects, each with a degree of autonomy but cooperating and collaborating to deliver specific outputs. One of the outputs was the *DISTILLATE decision-making tool*. This is an over-arching piece of kit, which provides a framework for local transport planners and directs them towards other DISTILLATE tools that may be of value to them. In a sense it operates as a gateway into DISTILLATE and leads planners to an appropriate bundle of tools to help implement achievable and sustainable transport and land use.

Numerous local authorities (East Sussex, Merseyside and Staffordshire to name a few) have used the DISTILLATE tool to varying degrees. One of the key drivers behind the take-up of this tool has been its inclusion in the Department for Transport (DfT)'s *Guidance on Local Transport Plans* document. Local Transport Planners (LTPs) across the UK are required to draw up periodic transport plans in accordance with central government instructions. As the principal source of central advice, the DfT guide is particularly influential. It is therefore significant that it explicitly recommends that LTPs use DISTILLATE outputs for areas such as performance monitoring, fund-raising, option generating, and establishing partnerships

### > Unexpected Benefits of Personal Contacts

DISTILLATE's story also demonstrates how personal connections can have the potential to cut across different organisations.

Murray Grant's first involvement with DISTILLATE came when he was asked, in his capacity as Chief Policy Officer at Mersey Travel, to be a part of the initial scoping study.

Grant later moved on to the Merseyside Partnership, where he personally encouraged the use of DISTILLATE in their Local Transport Plans (the Merseyside Partnership had not previously used DISTILLATE's research outputs).

Here we can see an example where a personal involvement can have unexpected consequences. Grant's involvement with DISTILLATE directly led to its use in an organisation with which it had no previous connection.



Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council

## KEYS TO SUCCESS

DISTILLATE's successful dissemination of the decision making tool was based on a two-pronged approach to knowledge exchange – through influential advocates in a centralised role, and through contributions from and consultations with prospective end users.

The advocacy from DfT developed from their representation on the DISTILLATE steering group. They were involved in steering group meetings and ad hoc consultation meetings throughout the project. DfT were therefore aware of, and had contributed to the DISTILLATE tools, and were thus able and willing to recommend them to the LTPs. Professor May had a crucial role, both in bringing DfT onto the steering group and in the decision for them to recommend use of the decision making tool. He was able to make use of the contacts he has made during a distinguished career that included time as an advisor to the Houses of Commons and Lords.

Advocacy and recommendations may draw attention to the outputs, but this is futile if the products themselves are not useful to their intended targets. To address this DISTILLATE had a thorough consultation process throughout their project, bringing the views of practitioners into their research. An early example would be the scoping study at the very outset of the DISTILLATE project; this comprised of surveys and follow-up interviews with representatives of local authorities. This study was a major factor in devising and defining the sub-projects in DISTILLATE, so in this case external partners were not used merely to fine-tune research outputs, but rather they were central to determining the purpose and structure of the project as whole.

By involving local authorities throughout the project, the DISTILLATE team were able to make certain that the decision-making tool would be usable. Usability, in combination with the advocacy from the central source of guidance on the topic, ensured that the final output would be widely accessed.

### LESSONS LEARNED

#### > **The power of influential advocacy**

Recommendations from official bodies and respected sources of advice are likely to lead to a far greater take-up of research outputs.

#### > **The involvement of prospective end-users can enhance the applicability of a research output.**

Taking on board the opinions of practitioners and policy-makers can be particularly useful in the early stages of a project – then their needs can be explicitly addressed.

#### > **Personal connections have legs**

The involvement of a single individual in the research project can lead to more than one organisation taking an interest.

#### > **Power Steering**

Take advantage of your steering group. This is an opportunity to gain allies and influence in high places.