

People Power



George Marshall, in *Carbon Detox*, classified the personal or household emissions that we are responsible for into a number of different activity sources - one of the more significant that we use being the emissions arising from the public services, i.e. services provided for out of taxation.

Altogether the health and education services, local authorities, the police and the armed forces, and all the other services provided for out of taxation result in about 60 million tonnes of carbon dioxide emissions in the UK each year (according to Marshall). Public services therefore give rise to about one tonne of carbon dioxide emissions per person per year in the UK.

But, you may ask, what can we as citizens do about it? Most of us have little or no direct influence on the decisions that give rise to these emissions. We can wash our hands, can we not, and moan about waste in government etc?



People Power Module

In this unit, we suggest otherwise.

How can we influence governmental carbon expenditure – and bring about 'environmental efficiency savings' in the public services?

Firstly, we may have one or more roles in relation to the various public services:

- 1 As consumers of one or more of the services – as students, parents of pupils, patients, library or park users, pensioners, members of the local criminal fraternity (well, perhaps not too many among CEL members...)
- 2 As employees of one of the public services – and if we have managerial or professional jobs we may have considerable decision making discretion in these roles. If, for instance, you are a medical GP and you take on a patient from outside your catchment area – think how that might increase travel demand and therefore increase carbon emissions. Even if not in such a role, you may be able to influence decisions through your trade union, or through your informal influence on your colleagues.
- 3 As members of a managerial or advisory body for one of the public services – most obviously as a school governor or a PTA member; or as a district or parish councillor, as member of a 'friends' of a park or library, or on some other public body.
- 4 As citizens we have the right to contact MPs, Local Councillors and MEPs, e.g. if a Post Office is to be closed down. The person(s) performing the 'environment scanning' roles for the *ecocell* group will hopefully be keeping up to date with the latest environmental campaigns, and recommend a few strategic issues to support. These members or others might also represent *ecocell* on any local inter-faith or secular environmental network?

Some of us may also be in positions where we can influence the policies and practices of commercial firms and of voluntary organisations – for instance as employees, as influential customers, or as members of consumer panels. Many of the strategies for influencing the public services discussed here may also be applicable to influencing these organisations.

Activity 1: Each member identifies what roles they may play in relation to any of the public services.

This should result in a list like this:

- John, who is retired, is a governor of his local primary school. He is a frequent user of the local library and park. As he has a recurring health condition, he visits his GP practice very frequently and knows the staff there quite well. designed to match - cut and paste at least two, then put in what you need
- Mary is an administrator in the police station. Her two children attend the local secondary school.
- Chris is in the civil service, in the HMRC office in nearby Bloggstown. He has a particular interest in the arts and is a member of the Friends of the Bloggstown Art Gallery.
- Terri is on the environment committee in the large IT firm that she works in.

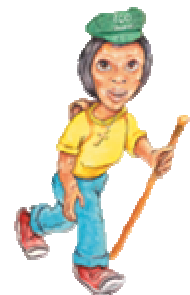
Secondly, we can identify the 'levers' that we may be able to pull in these roles, levers that can result in emission reductions.

All the public services use buildings, which require heating and lighting. Many provide food for their staff and/or clients. They purchase a range of services – from office stationery, to staff uniforms to fertilisers for parks and gardens. Someone, somewhere, makes decisions about how the central heating is controlled, at what level it is set, about the type of food or the type of computer equipment to purchase, etc. Can we identify who these decision makers are, in the public service organisations where we have most influence?



We will illustrate the range of potential 'levers of influence' with staff or work-related travel¹ as an example (see Appendix 1). This is an exhaustive list of all the ways that any type of employer might be able to influence the travel of their staff. Not all will be relevant to the particular public service unit that you might be looking at – for instance, not many public services provide company cars for their staff (thankfully).

But if you go through this list, you may see quite a few that are relevant to the school or surgery or library that you are looking at. For instance, how much of that school land is devoted to car parking – and therefore providing a 'subsidy in kind' for staff to drive to work – at the expense of playspace for the children? If you are looking at a medical surgery in an urban area, how do the GP's, district nurses and health visitors travel to see their patients or clients? Most drive – but an increasing number now cycle; so there is real potential for change. Should a local authority encourage its staff to live within its area, thereby reducing commuting distances – and perhaps a greater sense of community engagement among local authority staff? Many Dutch firms encourage 'close-in residence' among their staff. ¹



¹ From Tony Emerson's MPhil on work-related transport completed in 2000. Note the great variety of ways that an employer might be able to influence the travel behaviour of their staff – not just their business trips or 'journeys for work' but also their journeys to and from work.

Activity 2: Each member identifies at least one decision (of environmental significance) which they may be able to influence through their particular public service role(s).

This should result in a list like this:

- John, as a primary school governor, notes that there is unused land within the school grounds. An officer in the local council is trying to promote food growing projects.
- Mary cannot see the justification for the size of the police station car park – which is mainly occupied by the cars of staff with office jobs in the building
- Chris has noted that the Bloggstown Art Gallery is uncomfortably hot at times, and that little or no insulation work has been done on the building. Mary is an administrator in the police station. Her two children attend the local secondary school.
- Terri is not happy with the travel practices that seem to be encouraged by her firm, despite their espoused environmental policy. Lots of overseas business trips by air, lots of company cars.

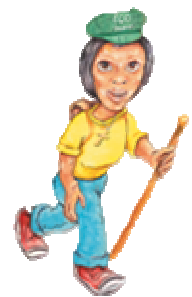
But now we come to the really difficult bit: actually bringing about these changes.

Activity 3: Each member uses the group as a 'sounding board' to plan how they will bring about the changes.

We can guarantee that someone will be offended by whatever you are trying to do. The Head may think that John is trying to tell her how to run her school. The staff who drive may be outraged – 'It's my right to drive to work, isn't it?' Never mind the cost to the employer of providing a free car parking space – up to £1,000 per year, depending on location. The facilities manager at the gallery may use language about Chris that we cannot use in a Christian publication. Terri likes to be liked – has she the courage to risk unpopularity by questioning these travel practices?

So there are certain considerations that you might take on board before taking on any action:

- Make a list of the people you need to talk to, both potential allies and potential opponents.
- Talk to people before writing any documents or tabling resolutions at committees.
- Find examples of similar projects that have been carried out elsewhere.
- Use your ecocell group as an on-going support and challenge group – because you may not get too much active support among your colleagues on the governors or in the staff group or among the 'Friends'.



For more detailed ideas on how to go about such campaigns or change management project, I asked sustainability consultant Penny Walker to recommend some reading:

'For an organisation where you have some connection / influence, then I would say that my IEMA (Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment) practitioner contains a lot of useful information.

http://www.iema.net/shop/product_info.php?cPath=27_29&products_id=8455

Also some articles which you can access via my blog and website, for example:

<http://penny-walker.co.uk/helping-you>,

<http://penny-walker.co.uk/blog/2009/10/who-can-help-me-make-this-change/>



Activity 4: Members report back to the group at future meetings on their progress in bringing about the changes.

We would like to acknowledge contribution to this module from sustainability consultant Penny Walker, <http://penny-walker.co.uk/helping-you>

Appendix 1: Decision Points in an Organisation Relevant to Work-Related Transport

1. To review the function and necessity of particular business journeys
2. To consider the possibility of alternatives to travel such as teleconferencing
3. To review the number and types of jobs for which the firm specifies 'must have driving licence'
4. To reconsider remuneration packages which include 'company cars' or 'lease cars'
5. To consider teleworking, working from home
6. To consider the use of flexible working hours as a means of reducing commuting
7. To review staff travel expenses, allowances, and charges and any variations between transport modes
8. To review allocation of space and resources to car parking – and whether the opportunity cost is taken into account
9. To reconsider the modes of transport used for (various) business journeys
10. To consider subsidised staff public transport season tickets up (to a certain distance or value?)
11. To consider organising staff car sharing schemes
12. To consider provision of employee mini-bus service
13. To consider provision of pool cars
14. To consider arranging/allowing taxi use for specific types of difficult journeys
15. To consider provision of specific facilities for cyclists – e.g. secure parking, showers
16. To consider setting up a bike user group or cyclist buddy scheme
17. To consider training for (essential) drivers to enable them to minimise fuel use
18. Where to locate premises, in relation to centres of population (of actual or potential employees), and to PT access of transport
19. Where individual employees decide to live
20. Whether (the employer) specifies that staff live within a certain distance from work (as some health service agencies do)
21. To consider relocation packages for new staff, or staff being transferred, to encourage them to live nearer work
22. To consider provision of staff accommodation (a practise in hotel, health and police services)
23. Whether staff contracts are permanent/secure or temporary/insecure (effecting decisions on moving closer to work or otherwise)
24. To consider provision of information for staff on greener means of travelling – e.g. PT services, or cycle routes
25. To consider inclusion of a discussion of transport in environmental or health awareness training
26. To consider inclusion of a discussion of the role of market research and advertising in an environmental awareness training programme
27. Large firms (or consortia of smaller firms in a locality) to consider negotiation of service provision agreements with PT operators to match the needs of their staff
28. Large firms (or consortia of smaller firms in a locality) to consider negotiation with local authorities on measures to promote cycling on routes leading to their premises
29. Health service or education providers: to consider 'healthy' or 'responsible' transport campaigns targeted at patients, visitors, students or parents as well as staff