

**Traffic Advisory Leaflet 4/02**  
**April 2002**



# Benchmarking of Local Cycling Policy

## Introduction

In February 2000, the CTC (Cyclists' Touring Club) launched a new initiative to adapt the technique of benchmarking to support local authorities in the implementation of their cycling policies. The process entails assessing policy and practice to determine what actually works in encouraging cycling in the UK context. It considers all aspects of cycling policy, from promotion to engineering design, and from training to maintenance of cycle tracks.

Initially the project, which is funded by the Ashden Trust, extends over three years, with up to ten local authorities participating in the benchmarking process each year. The CTC is acting as facilitator, providing technical advice throughout the process.



## Benchmarking and Best Practice

Benchmarking involves studying organisations recognised as leaders in their field, in order to establish best practice. In general, it has two aspects. As an auditing tool it offers measurement and accountability, assessing the performance of an organisation compared to others, identifying its strengths and opportunities for improvement. This can be achieved with limited resources and for this reason is the most common application of benchmarking. However, the greatest benefits of benchmarking are as a tool for constructive networking, offering a two-way process to learn how others achieve their results. Participants are able to probe into the processes behind examples of good practice to understand the key factors that contribute to their success - to engage in "licensed theft" of ideas to take away and apply in their own situations. Continuous improvement can be encouraged through the creation of future reference groups.



# Benchmarking Cycling Policy

The application of benchmarking techniques to cycling policy is a very recent development, and has been largely confined to auditing participants against a range of criteria. The current CTC project has broken new ground by using it as a tool for peer involvement between local authorities.

All aspects of cycling policy are being audited within the project, looking beyond the provision of infrastructure to the integration of cycling in wider policies and projects. A Framework has been adapted from the European Foundation for Quality Management excellence model, which has been widely used for benchmarking organisations in both the public and private sector in recent years. This explicitly recognises the diversity of criteria that can influence the successful delivery of cycling policy at a local level.

## Benchmarking Process

### Overview of Phase 1

The key elements of the benchmarking process comprise:

- a self-audit by each participant of cycling in their own area
- a two-day workshop, introducing participants to the process of co-operative benchmarking
- a series of structured two-day visits to each authority by participants, to investigate how each authority is implementing its cycling policy
- a consolidation exercise of the results of the benchmarking process, including a final workshop for each participant to develop an action plan

At the outset of the process, each participating authority carries out a self-audit of cycling in its own area, that gives an overview of the current situation. As well as making comparisons between participating authorities, the process of completing the questionnaire has been found to be of considerable value in itself, providing a

'position statement' for the authority, and developing an awareness of what information is, or often is not, available.

All the partner authorities then participate in a two-day workshop to initiate the networking process and introduce the techniques of benchmarking. At this, the results of the self-audit are reviewed and the structure of the auditing process agreed.

Central to the benchmarking method adopted is a series of structured two-day visits to each authority by participants, to investigate how they are implementing their cycling policy and the results they are achieving. Participants have the opportunity to probe into the processes behind examples of good practice to understand the key factors that contribute to their success, and to identify best practice through a process of peer review.

On completion of the programme of visits, participants attend a final workshop to draw together the findings and develop an action plan for their authority. At the workshop, participants agree the results of the project for wider dissemination, and how they can support each other in the effective delivery of their action plans.

### Phase 2

Following this, local authorities have the ongoing assistance of the benchmarking group to take forward the relevant opportunities and actions for their authority over subsequent years of the project. Benchmarking will continue by bringing participants together periodically and by monitoring progress with the action plans.

## Peer Review

The availability of data is a bottleneck for transport benchmarking generally. This is particularly so for cycling, where many local authorities have only recently started to collect even basic data. Feedback from the self-audit also highlighted the limitations, even where measurement is available, of making meaningful comparisons of data between different local authorities. Whilst measurable indicators have been compared

where available, central to this project is the use of peer review to provide a professional assessment of qualitative issues that do not lend themselves to direct measurement. This has been achieved through the use of performance improvement grids in a workbook, and the benchmarking session at the end of each visit.

## Outcomes

### Overview

On completion, the project should have the following outcomes:

- detailed study of a number of local authorities;
- network of experienced cycling officers; and
- practical action plan for each authority;
- set of best practice examples



### Identified Best Practice

The visits during the first year identified some 280 specific examples that impressed members of the group. Over 100 were rated as outstanding, offering benchmarks of best practice. Many of the remainder caught the

interest of the group as promising initiatives that could be developed into potential benchmarks. Some of these are high profile, such as the development of a Cycle-Friendly Design Guide in Edinburgh, or the identification in Leicester of five indicators to assess how well an area is connected to a range of key facilities by safe cycle routes. One of the benefits of a visit is that it can pick up small but significant ideas. The examples of best practice are described on the CTC web site ([www.ctc.org.uk](http://www.ctc.org.uk)).

### Issues to Address

As well as identifying best practice, the benchmarking process has also highlighted issues for the participants to address. Some are very specific to the authority concerned, others apply to several, if not all of them. In addition, it was clear that the examples of best practice in an authority are often patchy in their application, and need to be more comprehensively implemented within that authority. The most common challenges identified were:

- provision of adequate staffing for cycling, and raising the profile of the cycling officer/team;
- maintaining the continuity of cycle routes;
- upgrading or removal of old substandard cycle facilities;
- adequate cycle parking of a suitable design;
- better attention to detail, such as dropped kerbs that are flush, facilities not being blocked by parked cars and avoiding use of "Cyclists Dismount" signs; and
- adequate revenue funding for maintenance of routes, including surface quality, sweeping and cutting back vegetation.

### Benefits to Participants

The benchmarking process has proved itself to be an invaluable training tool. Participants have been exposed to a wide range of conditions and cultures in other authorities, and have developed a structured approach to evaluating these. They have also

undergone the experience of having their own progress reviewed by their peers.

The action plan is the key output for each participant. The benchmarking exercise highlights opportunities for each authority to enhance its cycling strategy, in the knowledge of the processes and resources involved. This provides the basis for identifying a set of actions and priorities relevant to its own situation. The draft action plans are then taken back for formal endorsement by their authorities.

The project will facilitate on-going networking, as authorities move forward to implement their action plans. The peer review of each visit offered notable benefits, as did the opportunity to review and update performance indicators and targets. Participation in the project had raised the profile of cycling in their authorities, and served to increase officers' confidence in many of the policies they are pursuing, as well as providing a stimulus for fresh ideas.

### **Further Development**

There is considerable interest amongst local authorities wanting to exchange information and experience, but unable to commit themselves to the full benchmarking process. In parallel with the main project the CTC is looking into ways of involving some of these authorities.

Authorities may also be able to use some of the benchmarking tools informally, for example by working with neighbouring authorities. In addition, the National Cycling Strategy web site has information on professional development and networking, which includes details on the Local Authority

Cycle Planning Group, as well as a Cycle Planning e-mail Discussion Group. ([www.nationalcyclingstrategy.org.uk](http://www.nationalcyclingstrategy.org.uk)).

### **Conclusions**

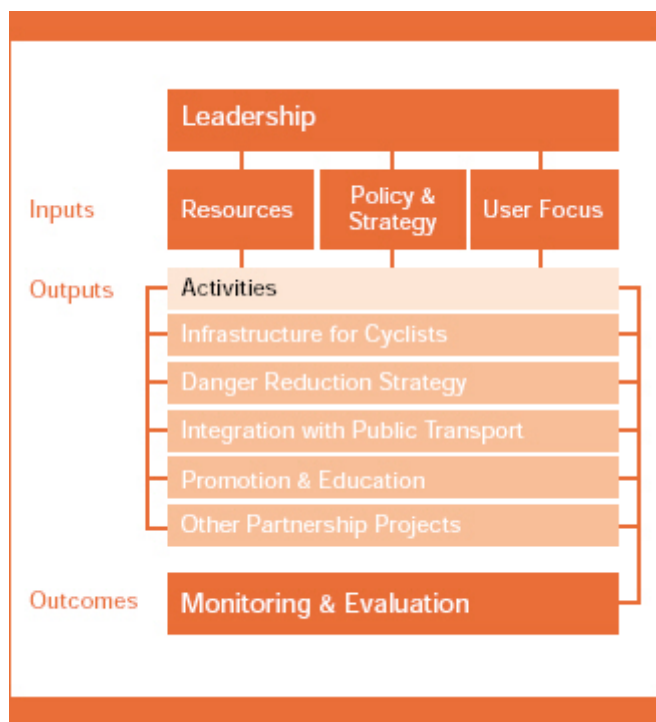
The CTC project uses benchmarking as a tool for peer involvement between local authorities, based around series of visits. This opens up the opportunity to make comparisons with others (an essential part of the Best Value process), and provides hands-on training beyond scope of formal courses.

A strong networking relationship has developed between participants from the first year authorities, who are already using what they have learnt. As well as picking up new ideas through the visits to other authorities, participants have benefited from hosting a visit, which has raised profile of cycling in their authority and increased their confidence as cycling officers in what is often an isolated role. The process of peer review by a group of practitioners has proved to be a very powerful tool in assessing the achievements of an authority. The feedback from participants is that, whilst the time commitment is substantial, the benefits have been well worth it.

The findings so far have clearly shown that there are practical examples of best practice in most aspects of cycling policy in the UK. Put together, these demonstrate a positive commitment to cycling and illustrate what a best practice authority might look like. The CTC is now starting to disseminate the results from the first two years wider audience of local authorities. This will focus on the CTC web site at: [www.ctc.org.uk](http://www.ctc.org.uk), allowing new examples of best practice to be added as the project progresses.



## Cycling policy framework



## References

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