

Evaluation report – unfinished ITS implementation

BITS Extension – Active Towns and Traffic and Parking Pilots
East Riding of Yorkshire Council

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Short description

During the extension period of the BITS project, we sought to expand the geographical coverage of the data collection using ITS through two initiatives within the council: the Active Towns bike lending scheme and the day-to-day work of the Traffic and Parking team. During the extension, we also provided more trackers to the Withernsea-based bike library pilot because our delivery partner, SHoRes, were able to attract funding to add another 20 bikes to the scheme in an effort to meet demand. In total, we procured 50 trackers for these three extension activities: 20 were allocated to Withernsea; 26 to the Active Towns scheme; and 4 to the Traffic and Parking team.

Type of ITS

See.Sense trackers and lights

Timeline

April to December 2022

Hypothesis

The Withernsea-based bike library was experiencing a high demand for bicycles and they had a waiting list of residents who wanted to join the scheme. Because of this, SHoRes obtained external funding to purchase 20 more bikes for the extension period. These cycles were fitted with the See.Sense trackers and lights – like the initial 50 bikes – so as to enable the cycle buddy to monitor and work with more cyclists and to enlarge the dataset we have now established for the town. Having more residents participate in the scheme also meant that we would be able to gather more feedback from these stakeholder for our social value analysis.

The Active Towns bike lending scheme, which is not part of the BITS project, was delivered by the council's Active Towns team in partnership with bike charity R-evolution between April and October 2022. A series of pop-up events were organised where residents could take out bikes reconditioned by R-evolution on loan free of charge for up to a year. These events took place in four towns: Goole, Howden, Market Weighton and Pocklington. Twenty-six trackers were allocated to this scheme in an attempt to widen our coverage and collect cycle data in local areas where cycle usage was perceived to be different than Withernsea.

The Traffic and Parking team comprises officers who are responsible for monitoring and enforcing parking rules in the East Riding and issuing penalty notices where applicable. The officers are normally driven to the locations where they are working on a given day and then they patrol the area on foot. However, in October 2022, the Traffic and Parking team started to test the use of bikes to enable the officers to use a more sustainable mode of transport (e.g. replacing the need for use a car/van to transport them to their patrol locations) and make their patrols more efficient by allowing them to cover more ground in a given shift. We agreed with the Traffic and Parking team to equip these bikes with trackers and lights to help

the officers monitor the wellbeing benefits from their cycling activity and to provide us with cycle data for different parts of the East Riding.

Causes for unfinished ITS implementation and/or evaluation

Withernsea Bike Library

- With the extension, the aim was to get all 70 bikes out on loan to residents in the town. However, as new people were signing up for bikes, some of the original participants were returning their bikes. The reasons for the return of bikes included:
 - Some people bought their own bikes and did not want to use the trackers anymore.
 - A few individuals developed health issues or had long-term injuries which meant that they could not take part anymore.
 - Some people lost their enthusiasm for cycling and were resistant to the buddy support on offer through the scheme.
- The upshot was that we were not able to get all 70 bikes out as anticipated. However, there has been enough interest to encourage SHoRes to apply for more funding to continue the bike library scheme, albeit without the ITS due to the costs of licensing.

Active Towns

- The pop-up events for this scheme commenced in May 2022 and by the time we received the trackers in June, residents had already signed up for their free bikes and taken them away. We endeavoured to reach out to the participants and equip their bikes with the new trackers and lights through additional pop-up events, telephone call and emails. However, the response and uptake were low. In total, we ended up only deploying nine sets of trackers and lights.
- The Active Towns scheme was not supported by a dedicated cycle buddy. There was an officer in charge of this scheme, but it was a minor part of her role, and she was unable to dedicate the time needed to support deployment of the participants. The absence of a cycle buddy meant that it was difficult to get information out to participants and form a relationship with them whereby they could have been encouraged them to cycle more.

Traffic and Parking Team

- The team had to seek corporate approval to implement the use of bicycles fitted with the trackers and lights because of concerns about the potential for conflict that these officers face while carrying out their duties. In particular, approval was needed to ensure that senior managers were satisfied with the appropriateness and health and safety aspects of the pilot. This caused a delay in starting this pilot: it commenced in September opposed to the spring when we had hoped it would commence.

- Corporate approval was given with the caveat that it would be trialled in one town only – Bridlington. One bike equipped with a tracker and light was used by members of the Traffic and Parking team working in that area. Due to the success of this pilot, senior management has approved the roll-out of the other three trackers in other towns elsewhere in the East Riding. Unfortunately, though, the BITS project is now coming to an end.

Lessons learned

- We had not anticipated some of the issues around procuring the bikes, for example delays relating to Covid-19 at the start of the Withernsea pilot and supply issues affecting the extension activities. Supply issues included long waits for specific parts and in some cases faulty devices which need to be replaced.
- A dedicated cycle buddy has been deemed essential for the success of the two bike lending schemes in Withernsea and through the Active Towns programme because we learned that participants required a lot of support and encouragement to keep them cycling.
- With regard to the Withernsea bike library, a number of staff changes meant that we did not have a consistent cycle buddy during the project. In light of this, we should have factored succession planning into the cycle buddy element to avoid gaps in support due to these changes.
- Taking the point above about the need for a cycle buddy, the Active Towns scheme was not as successful as the Withernsea bike library because there was no dedicated buddy.
- We experienced technical issues with the ITS, in particular relating to charging the trackers. The need to remind participants about the importance of charging the devices to obtain the data became a large part of the buddy's role. Despite the effort that was made, many journeys were made without the trackers being charged and so we lost a considerable amount of data from these trips.
- Due to the fact that the trackers need regular charging, we discovered that it would have been better to use See.Sense's Dynamo wheel charging system on the bikes to keep the trackers continuously charged. The cost of a wheel is around £70, which was not within our original budget but would be factored for other similar projects.
- The trackers use mobile service provided by Vodafone to gather and transmit data back to See.Sense. Unfortunately, we learned through the cyclists' experiences that Vodafone's coverage in the area was not consistent and so we lost data from journeys taken through locations where the signal was poor. One such location was the disused railway line, which is a very popular off-road route.
- The pilot with the traffic and parking police was successful. After initial delays and a careful start with just one bike with tracker, a roll-out of the project was approved with three tracker-equipped bikes to other towns elsewhere in the East Riding. Here, the bikes clearly replace cars, which otherwise would have been used to transport the police to their locations.