



Report on the Innovators' Workshop
24 February 2009
Royal Geographical Society, London
10.30-12.30
www.ideasintransit.org

The 'Ideas in Transit' project

Ideas in Transit is a five-year project that applies User Innovation to the transport challenges faced by individuals and society. It is a unique collaboration between government, commercial and academic thought leaders and their networks. It will influence intelligent transport decisions at policy, social, personal and commercial levels.

Ideas in Transit includes within the concept of 'user innovation' any development which is not top-down (i.e. not driven by a major commercial or public organisation). One of the project's objectives is therefore to discover, understand and promote current innovations that are 'bottom-up', unconventional and/or involve collaboration amongst users.

Pre-workshop activity

In the first year of **Ideas in Transit**, the project team has already uncovered many user innovations in the transport domain. These are logged in the **Innovations Portal** as a showcase of original and exciting current developments. To better understand the people and processes behind these innovations, the research team at Loughborough University selected some diverse services and products from the Portal and carried out detailed interviews about the innovation process with the innovators themselves.

The questions posed were:

- Q What was the process by which the user-innovation came about?
- Q Who were the people involved and what were their roles and motivations?
- Q What were the barriers and enablers to the innovation?
- Q What was the role of technology?
- Q What were the influential trends?

The interviews generated a significant amount of knowledge, particularly with respect to: the enablers and barriers for user innovation and the measures of success. In addition, the activity enabled a better understand of user-innovators, what their needs are and how the project could continue to engage with them as part of the research.

Workshop aims

The specific aims of this workshop were:

- To present the findings of the interviews back to the user innovators for validation, comment and addition.
- To identify the future needs of user innovators and, particularly, how the **Ideas in Transit** project remit could fulfil some of these needs.
- To begin to build a 'community' of user innovators in the transport domain to enable exchange of ideas and a common forum for debate.

A wider aim was to bring the user innovators into a forum (of industry, government and academic stakeholders) where the contribution of mass collaboration was being debated and to raise their profile within this environment. To achieve this, the workshop was held immediately prior to the Terra future 09 conference run by Ordnance Survey (an **Ideas in Transit** partner). Workshop attendees were provided with a complimentary pass to the conference, were showcased within a presentation session and exhibited publicity materials on the **Ideas in Transit** stand.

Workshop outline

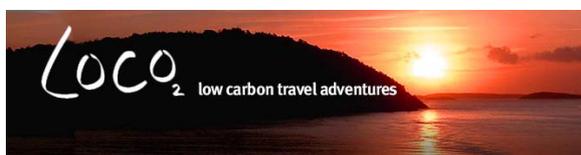
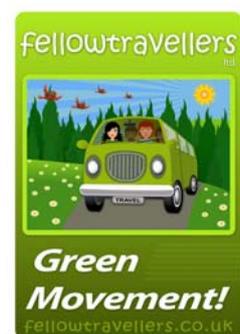
The workshop began with introductions to the **Ideas in Transit** project and team, followed by an introduction from each innovator.



After a presentation of the barriers & enablers to innovation identified during the interviews, the innovators were asked to comment on the accuracy of the findings and contribute any other barriers/enablers. Next, the innovators were asked to identify what they had perceived as *personal* successes. Then followed a discussion of what would constitute success for the innovation in *tackling transport challenges*. The final part of the workshop focused on what future activities the innovators would find useful and how the project might continue to engage with them.

Workshop participants

Eight user innovators took part in the workshop. Their motivations for attending were varied but two key reasons were: (i) to meet other like-minded individuals and exchange experiences; (ii) to have the opportunities to make contact with and influence policy makers (at the subsequent Terra future conference).



In addition to the innovators, 5 members of the **Ideas in Transit** project took part:



Tracy Ross
Val Mitchell



Glenn Lyons



Peter Miller



David Overton

Enablers & Barriers in User Innovation

Based on the interviews conducted to date, the **Ideas in Transit** project has identified some key enablers and barriers. These were presented to the participants and they were asked to discuss any misconceptions that the project had and any additional points we had missed. The enablers and barriers already identified by the project prior to the workshop are listed below.

Enablers identified from interviews

Characteristics of the *innovator*:

- **Having a motivation**; particularly altruistic, the technical challenge or the enjoyment. The desire to develop a business was not necessarily a pre-cursor to this but in some cases it was an additional motivation.
- **Immersion in the problem space**; particularly with respect to it providing an understanding of the intricacies of the problem itself and the characteristics of the end-users.
- **Personal traits**; especially being a problem-solver, single-minded, persuasive and a 'doer'.
- **Having the necessary skills or knowing how to find them**; whether these are business, technical or marketing.
- **Having the time to devote to it**; due to work/financial/personal circumstances.

Characteristics of the *innovation*:

- **A proof of concept**; which facilitated user-uptake as well as increasing funding opportunities and publicity.
- **Scalability**; i.e. the possibility, through the nature of the innovation or its implementation, to start small, at low risk, and grow organically; with the utility of the innovation remaining high at all stages.

- **The contribution of user-generated data;** which enhanced growth as well as forming/engaging with a 'community' of users.

Business factors:

- **Low/free development costs;** i.e. labour, software, overheads.
- **A clear business model;** not necessarily from the start, but at some point during the development.
- **Publicity;** commonly via awards, networking, press interest and hence usually free.

Trends:

- **Technological trends;** the internet, opensource software, Google search/maps/API, mobile devices and GPS.
- **Societal trends;** environmental concerns/desire to change, social networking, social enterprise.

Barriers identified from interviews

Lack of some key enablers;

- **Lack of time;** to devote to the idea
- **Lack of money;** even a small amount at the right time
- **Lack of skills;** or the knowledge of what skills are needed and how/where to engage the people with them

Business factors:

- **Legal issues;** including liability, data protection.
- **Balancing the voluntary & the commercial;** e.g. where user-generated data has a commercial application or where there is a sound case for *some* volunteer contributors to become salaried.
- **Intellectual property;** striking the balance between sharing the ideas (for social or business reasons) and keeping them confidential (which may stifle the innovation).



The participants were largely in agreement with the enablers and barriers already identified; although not all would apply to each innovator/innovation. However, they did mention some *additional* factors as identified below.

Enablers raised at workshop

- **Financial Motivations;** some from the start, some later, during development.
- **Competitive motivations;** i.e. being the first to achieve a successful innovation tackling that specific problem space.
- **Being commercially savvy;** even if altruistic motivations are at the forefront of the development, it must be commercially sustainable if it is to survive.
- **Community engagement;** particularly the enthusiasm and goodwill from contributors/end users.
- **Investor engagement;** particularly re goodwill and the desire for the innovation to succeed (not necessarily for financial reasons alone).
- **Being supported by infrastructure characteristics;** e.g. lift sharing services being made more attractive by the provision of 2+ lanes.
- **The ability to adapt to trends;** i.e. modify the innovation accordingly.
- **Showcasing of exemplar proofs of concept;** e.g. the Carplus model of showcasing car sharing schemes.

Barriers raised at workshop

- **The invisibility of potential competitors;** which can hurry along the development (which can have positive or negative consequences).
- **Large capital costs;** e.g. purchase of vehicles for car clubs, where investors require a viable business plan.
- **Adoption of the wrong business model;** for the type of service being offered (this is a particular issue where the service is conceptually unique).
- **Exclusive business relationships;** they can be counter to developing a 'solution for all'.
- **The complexity of IPR;** particularly re data issues and the current financial context.
- **Transience of influential trends;** which can require a re-engineering of the concept/innovation.
- **Openness of the tools used;** which can put it at risk of being copied/bettered (if the innovators aim is purely altruistic then this may not be problematic but if there is a commercial motivation then it will be).
- **Funding for proof of concept;** commercial investment is often difficult to secure without a proof of concept, although some innovators have had success here. Conversely, public money can fund proof of concept (particularly for socially beneficial ideas) but the funding rules for such programmes can exclude some user innovators (as they often do not exist as commercial organisations) or the timescales for the funding programme are too long.

Measures of Success

A discussion of perceived 'successes' was split into 2 areas: personal successes and successes in terms of impact on UK transport challenges (which may exist or be an aim). The points below reflect a very quick snapshot of the successes identified by the participants and is not comprehensive. The project aims to further develop these measures of success (particularly the latter ones) in order that they may be used to assess the innovations uncovered by the project.

Personal successes

- Once the innovation had moved beyond the initial 'local' area of coverage.
- When users gave positive feedback.
- Finding the first collaborator.
- Getting local government support.
- Rapid growth of the membership base.
- Complimentary invitations to major conferences on the basis of the innovation.
- Press accolades (e.g. being named by the Observer as a 'bright young star for travel')
- Other public accolades (e.g. having the innovation exhibited at the Science Museum as 'the first carbon computer')
- Meeting people you admire who then listen and are genuinely interested in your idea.

Transport successes

- When a local council cancelled their lift sharing scheme (the innovation) because it was not needed any longer as people were sharing for themselves (the altruistic goal of the innovation).
- When a public transport system exists that people have no excuse not to use.
- Profitability – so that the service/product is sustainable.
- To be able to generate a volume of real data on carbon emissions.
- To achieve an attitude change re what is acceptable in terms of transport choices (comparable to the attitude change to drink driving or smoking in public).
- Affecting one individual's travel behaviour equals success.

Future Needs & Activities

The **Ideas in Transit** Innovations Portal was the first step in *discovering* user innovators; and the interviews were the first step in *understanding* them. To enable **Ideas in Transit** to *build a community* of user innovators, the project sought ideas from the participants regarding what further engagement/activity/support would appeal to them. The list below summarises some of the key ideas that were generated during the workshop:

Access to knowledge/skills

- Mentoring on relevant topics.
- Free research on aspects of the innovations through undergraduate/postgraduate dissertations.
- Awareness of, and access to, other relevant academics/skills.
- Transport-related masters courses.

Funding issues

- Opening up possibilities for funding, beyond those which exclude some user innovators/micro SMEs because of their business status and other funding rules (e.g. Technology Strategy Board state aid funding rules).
- An R&D 'free pass' to access public transport to enable testing/proof of concept activities.
- Support in applying to large funding programmes (large corporates have the resources and skills to devote to such calls, many user innovators do not).

Data issues

- Having the ability to bring together data sets by working with owners/providers.
- Enable this sharing/combining/storing of transport data and the formation of personal profiles without being hampered by the Data Protection Act.
- Tackle issues re who 'owns' certain data (e.g. lift sharing data).
- Explore the concept of data intermediaries, possibly including authorities.

Policy issues

- The development of a collective voice for user innovators. Particularly re a dialogue with policy makers (note the Carplus model for car clubs was mentioned as an exemplar but others are needed).
- A discussion re the mindset of the ITS industry and government which can be incompatible with innovations of this kind.
- Someone to listen and understand, at grass roots, how these businesses start and grow.
- Routes to getting involved in major UK/European initiatives (e.g. the INSPIRE initiative)

Publicity/promotion

- Someone to independently prove/demonstrate/measure the impact/value of the innovation to stakeholders.
- Promotion of the innovation through existing academic and related networks.
- Further development of the Innovations Portal as a showcase.

Key findings

The workshop attendees fully engaged in the discussion topics covered in the session; validating, and adding to, the emerging findings of the interviews.

There was a strong willingness to continue to engage with the **Ideas in Transit** project - and the other innovators - through future activities. The need for this continued activity was keenly demonstrated by the frequent need to curb the discussion within the workshop for scheduling reasons!

Some of the notable outcomes were:

Key Finding 1

Although many of the user innovations investigated were triggered by altruistic motivations, it quickly became clear to the innovators that a sustainable business model was key to the continuing success of the idea. However, being purely motivated by profits was not deemed to be a route to success when tackling transport challenges.

Key Finding 2

User innovators in this domain can sometimes be 'stuck between a rock and a hard place' when it comes to funding. Public money can, in theory be sought for 'proof of concept' but is not easy to obtain because: the funding rules often exclude user innovators (as they often do not exist as commercial entities); the timescales for such programmes are invariably too long for the fast-paced nature of user innovation; and the application process is often complex and resource-heavy. Conversely, commercial investors inevitably require (a) proof of concept (which user innovators cannot fund for the reasons above) and (b) a financial return on investment ('profit' tends not to be a feature of user innovations – see Key Finding 1). This finding did not apply to all innovators but does point to the need to provide guidance on accessing alternative funding sources and/or the creation of new funding models.

Key Finding 3

High on the innovators wish list was awareness of, and access to, free (or externally funded) knowledge/skills/research. Particularly, this pointed to the need for (a) professional mentoring and (b) access to academic experts and/or student projects.

Key Finding 4

User innovators do not currently have a 'collective voice' that can be used to influence stakeholders. The idea of building a community of user innovators that can work together to promote user

innovations, to get key messages across and eventually bring about change - in policy, in public funding, in the transport industry, in public behaviour – was welcomed by the workshop participants.

Key Finding 5

One very specific issue in the transport domain is that of data ownership, data protection and privacy. The user innovators were keen to see a debate of these issues and a resolution that removed barriers to data sharing/combining and storing that can hamper the progress of user innovations in the transport sector.

Next Steps

As stated, this workshop was the initial step in building a community of innovators with which the **Ideas in Transit** project can engage. As such it was successful and generated many ideas for future activities as detailed in the 'Future Needs' and 'Key Findings' sections above.

The project will now consider the output of the workshop and use it to influence future activities. Specifically, the key findings will be used to:

- Identify opportunities for the **Ideas in Transit** Project research team to work with the innovators individually (e.g. to assist in the development of their innovation) or as a group (e.g. with workshops on specific issues such as data)
- Identify other activities outside the remit of **Ideas in Transit** where there might be a case for new funding.
- Report to the **Ideas in Transit** sponsors the key findings that have relevance to government policy and funding programmes.

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Project sponsors

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