



Cobalt Business Park

“We have a strong commitment to sustainable travel options which is proving a successful element in our business strategy. Cobalt now has a number of initiatives in place to assist those employed on Cobalt in making their way to and from work in the most environmentally friendly way possible.”

Mark Ashall, Highbridge Business Parks, Cobalt Development Team

Summary

The Cobalt Park Travel Plan is designed to deliver an effective and tangible shift in travel behaviour that accommodates the travel needs of all users of Cobalt Park, whilst ensuring that operational efficiency is maintained. The Travel Plan aims to reduce the number of staff driving alone by car and increase staff awareness and use of sustainable modes.

Strategic context

The introduction of travel planning was deemed necessary at Cobalt to:

- Establish with new occupiers that Cobalt Park is accessible to their workforce;
- Improve staff retention as existing occupiers had cited transport as a key reason for staff leaving; and
- Mitigate a foreseen potential problem with increasing congestion as Cobalt develops.

The transport strategy adopted by Cobalt is designed to: -

- Reduce unnecessary car travel to and from Cobalt;
- Discourage rat running traffic through Cobalt; and
- Address residual congestion issues.

The work site

Cobalt Park is located approximately seven miles north-east of Newcastle-upon-Tyne and approximately three miles south-west of Whitley Bay. There are good pedestrian and cycle links to nearby residential areas, Cobalt Park is close to a Metro station and several bus routes run through the park and serve a wide area. Cobalt Park also adjoins the A19 trunk road, which provides a strategic north-south link via the Tyne Tunnel (see Appendix 1 for further details).

Cobalt Park currently comprises over 1.25million ft² of high specification office space, with a further 1 million ft² planned. Each plot at Cobalt Park has its own on-site car parking. There are already 7,500 people employed at Cobalt Park and this is likely to increase to up to 20,000 people when fully developed and occupied.

Measures / policies in place

A comprehensive Travel Pack has been produced describing available travel options and is freely available, together with bus timetables and other promotional material, from the on-site Travel Centre, where two Travel Co-ordinators are able to provide travel advice, offer personalised journey plans and sell a wide range of travel tickets.

The Travel Co-ordinators liaise with occupiers and other businesses/business organisations locally, regularly hold travel “roadshows”, and operate an induction programme for new employees.

Cobalt is also a partner in a four year project called "Getting Moving North Tyneside" working alongside North Tyneside Council and Sustrans. Started in January 2008, the project aims to provide and encourage people to walk and cycle more by delivering lead activities, volunteer training and raise awareness of active travel. A member of Sustrans is based at Cobalt to co-ordinate the project and aims to achieve a target of 1,000 staff walking or cycling to work by the end of the project.

To achieve the transport strategy, Cobalt are already: -

- Encouraging all employing organisations on Cobalt to endorse the Travel Plan and the measures within, and to adopt their own “Action Plan” in support by committing to travel measures tailored to their specific situation that can be incorporated into their working culture, designate a manager to be responsible for its promotion and to monitor progress
- Working with bus operators and Nexus to develop a comprehensive network of direct bus services to and from Cobalt
- Actively promoting walking and cycling as viable travel options for those living close enough
- Actively promoting car sharing
- Restricting through traffic on the internal road network to buses only
- Working with the local authority to secure infrastructure improvements that benefit bus operation on the local road network
- Working with the local authority to identify and resolve shortcomings in facilities in the local area for pedestrians and cyclists

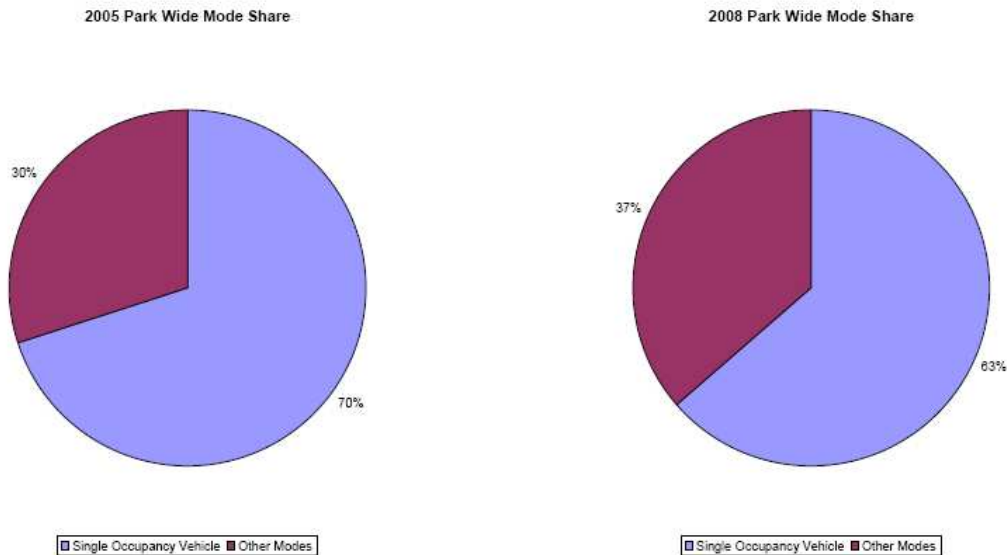
Each building at Cobalt is provided with its own on-site car park, which are managed by individual occupiers, therefore any restrictions in operation are those put in place by the occupier and not Cobalt Park.

Benefits realised

Since 2005, results from staff travel to work surveys suggested that there has been a 7% decrease in the number of employees travelling alone by car to Cobalt (see Figure 1). Any reduction in costs and increase in profits have been indirect and difficult to quantify. It is considered that the improved transport provided at the Park is now a major factor in securing new occupiers to the Park and reducing staff turnover within employing organisations.

No quantitative data is available concerning staff retention, however, qualitative data in the form of informal feedback from occupiers suggests that the improvements to transport at Cobalt has reduced absenteeism, increased staff wellbeing and improved recruitment and retention.

Figure 1- Change in Single Occupancy Vehicle Modal Share



Costs

Initial costs involved with setting up the Travel Plan and initiatives are unknown, however, the annual running costs can be broken down as follows:

Travel Consultancy	£ 60,000
TC Management	£ 60,000
Bus Subsidy	<u>£150,000</u>
	£270,000

Funding

Funding for the Travel Plan and its management is substantially recovered from the service charge placed on each building.

Co-ordination and management

Travel Planning at Cobalt Park is managed by the Travel Team, who include two full time on-site Travel Co-ordinators who manage the day to day aspect from the dedicated Cobalt Travel Centre. They are assisted by Travel Consultants, who provide advice on a number of different aspects relating to travel planning and management at Cobalt including liaising with public transport providers on services operating through the Park.

Future initiatives

There are a number of future initiatives that will be put in place at Cobalt Park to encourage further mode shift.

- Future bus service with 'kickstart' funding
- Formalisation of bus-only link within Cobalt using rising bollards
- Highway infrastructure improvements to provide public transport advantage

Appendix 1 – Site Location

