



Commonplace case study

Leeds Transport

Project name

Connecting Leeds

Location

Leeds

Customer

WSP, commissioned by Leeds City Council and West Yorkshire Combined Authority

Started

June 2018

Ended

Ongoing

Commonplace project lead

David Janner Klausner

Background

Leeds City Council, assisted by West Yorkshire Combined Authority, are planning major investments in key routes leading into the City of Leeds. The prime objectives are to improve connectivity while supporting greater use of buses and healthy travel options.

WSP were appointed to deliver the planning and public engagement for five routes plus initial proposals for Leeds City Centre. Public engagement is a key component of Leeds Council's strategy with both the City and WSP placing a premium on wide reaching, continuous engagement to deliver a high level of transparency, communication and trust.

Reviewing the “Connecting Leeds” engagement processes in July 2018, the Chair of Leeds Transport Expert Advisory Panel, Nigel Foster, commented that *the consultation through “Connecting Leeds was regarded as a leading approach” and “it was the finest example of engaging people in the UK”.*

Leeds Transport Advisory Panel



Method

Commonplace provided a suite of nine linked websites - five to serve specific transport corridors and three for specific locations. The ninth was a regional Heatmap, enabling respondents to post location-specific comments anywhere within the area. All the sites were accessible through a Leeds Transport Commonplace Landing Page with links to them from the Leeds City Council's website.

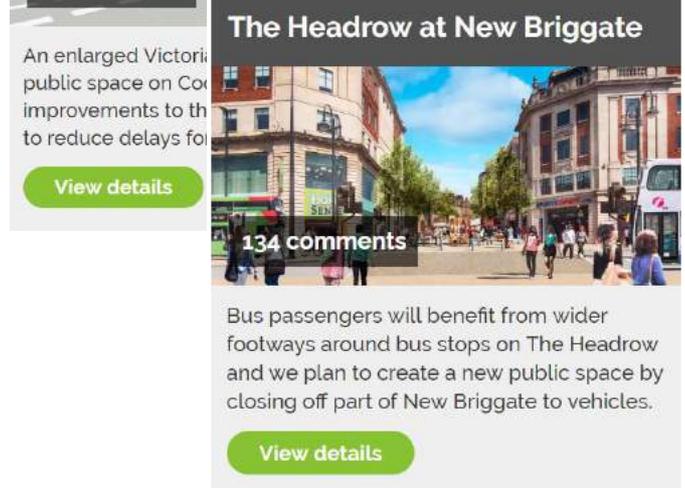
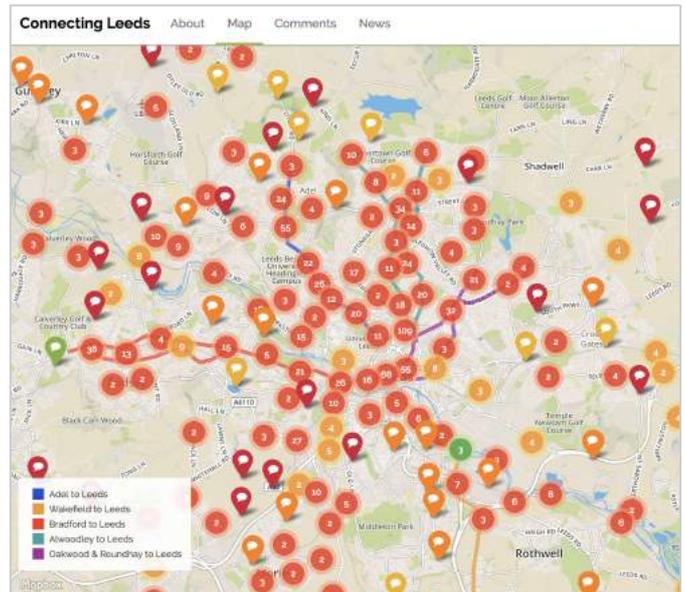
The engagements were open to the public for three periods, each at a different stage of the scheme's development. They were supported by public meetings and publicity. Commonplace's built-in news feature was used extensively to inform residents when a new phase was opened and to encourage sharing via their social media networks.

The third phase introduced "Initial interventions" - specific designs for aspects of two of the routes. Engagement at this stage had been particularly substantial because it built on the high involvement of the earlier phases.

Social media

The "continuous engagement" offered by Commonplace echoes the way many people engage with news in their personal life. Social media means that the people you are interested in and the topics you care about are always within reach. Commonplace takes this approach to the local public realm. As Connecting Leeds shows, local planning engagement can be provided openly and constantly, meeting the "always available" expectations of the public.

Social media traffic referencing the Connecting Leeds engagement was very high, providing over 10,500 referrals to the websites, almost all through Facebook.

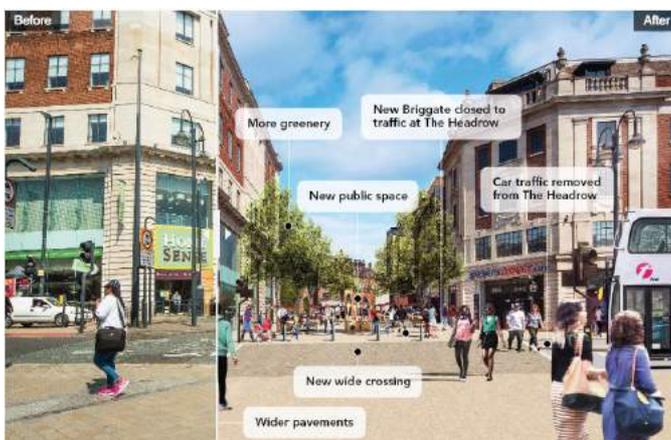


Above
Screenshots from the Leeds Transport Map and proposal Commonplaces.

Developing continuous engagement

The Leeds Commonplaces represent a significant shift from traditional stand-alone consultations to an emphasis on engagement. Leeds City Council has created a specific branding - Connecting Leeds - for this major infrastructure project, which is also used by Commonplace. The resonance is not just through the graphics, but also, the ongoing presence of the online platforms. These are not surveys that disappear from view once completed. Rather, Commonplace is providing always-available information and communication sites for engagement, which at specific times also offer interactive consultation.

The use of highly accessible tools for illustrating proposals and for receiving feedback is central to this engagement. Through using Commonplace, Leeds City Council and WSP have set out to be as open as possible and to enable residents to see each other's comments and so hold their local authority to account. The combination of physical presence through WSP's public meetings and the transparency and durability of the Commonplace websites, create a template for open communication in a sensitive setting.



'Before and after' view

Respondents can slide the white vertical bar to compare the current and proposed view.

3 months ago

Why do you feel this way?

- Will benefit pedestrians
- Will benefit buses and bus users
- Safer
- Will benefit air quality
- Will benefit local businesses
- Bus shelters need improving

If other, please explain more... (no more than 100 characters, please)

Excellent Proposal, totems with real live info is welcomed. It is important that Service 2,3,3A,12,13,13A are served by longer shelters and grouped together. This new bus shelter must also be located on North Street outside Lovell Park and at Sheepscar Interchange with North Street as it will help create an attractive and safe experience and have urban regeneration benefits for Chapeltown & Harehills. These bespoke bus shelters must be introduced to Moortown Corner, Chapel Allerton and Street Lane in Roundhay and Oakwood incorporating Digital Totems.

1 person agreed with this comment.

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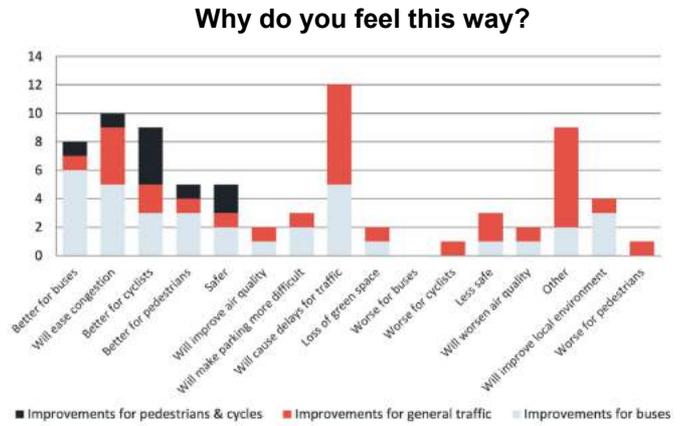
An example comment from a member of the public.

Digital benefit - measuring those who engage but don't respond

Over 17,000 people engaged with content but chose not to comment. This highly significant number is one that is almost impossible to trace in traditional engagement. A leaflet drop can only be measured by forms returned with no insight as to whether people read it, you only know the number of people who attended an event - not those who contemplated the issue but could not attend.

Outcomes

Feedback received via Commonplace has been used to refine and develop each scheme. In some cases, this means minor tweaks to maximise benefit or limit impacts. In other circumstances schemes have changed entirely. This type of engagement, aligned with the Gunning Principles, promotes positive community involvement, gives decisions makers confidence and clarity, and helps designers clearly understand the needs of the community.



Example analysis of one of the areas including themes of free text comments.

34,092 Total visitors	22,853 Read the content	5,179 Responded
7,591 Comments	9,863 Agreements	2,208 Subscribed to project updates

The above totals are the sum of all projects, if an individual visited or contributed to multiple projects they may be counted twice.

With the massive uptake of social media, the way promoters engage the public and stakeholders in the planning and design process is changing dramatically.

WSP are working with a range of clients to ensure the voices of as many of those who stand to benefit from, or are impacted by, schemes are heard. The Commonplace platform has helped us do just that. Online engagement complements traditional face-to-face and paper consultations, and especially benefits the many seldom-heard groups. The added benefit of Commonplace is the adaptability of its service allowing us to mould and shape the platform to maximise engagement across a range of quite different engineering schemes.

Tom Hacker, WSP

Learn more about the Leeds Transport Commonplace

<https://leedstransport.commonplace.is>