Case study:
Pedal Peak District
1. Summary

This case study demonstrates the delivery of objective 4 of England’s Strategic Framework – to facilitate greater engagement between the visitor and the experience. It shows how the Peak District National Park, working with public and private sector partners in the destination, are implementing the Rural Tourism and Wise Growth Action Plans, in particular the development of low carbon and low impact products and experiences in rural areas and the use of underutilised and redundant rural assets to deliver visitor economy growth. By integrating sustainable transport planning with the visitor economy Pedal Peak District has enhanced the visitor experience and its economic impact. Furthermore, the project has created a direct connection between leisure experience and people’s lifestyle.

Pedal Peak District was launched in 2010 as an 8.5 miles cycling trail within the Peak District National Park. The so called Monsal Trail belonged to the National Park Authority and had been run as an informal, low key trail, interrupted by major, closed tunnels. The National Park Authority wanted to help under represented groups discover the joys and benefits of cycling by creating an easily accessible, high quality trail. Funding had to be found to open the tunnels and make the 8.5 miles viable whether on bikes, foot or horse. There is now a commitment to open the remaining trail amounting to a further 17.5 miles. The project was fully supported by Derbyshire County Council, High Peak Borough Council, Derbyshire Dales District Council and Visit Peak District.

Approach

‘Firstly we had a sense of vision – says Jim Dixon, Chief Executive of the Peak District National Park Authority. We had thought for many years about a transport policy for the park fit for the 21st century’.

Through developing positive leisure cycling experiences, early evidence has shown that more people have been encouraged to take up everyday cycling as a viable, sustainable alternative to car use (The Finding New Solutions Leisure cycling programme interim evaluation report, February 2011).

The National Park Authority worked with local councils, local communities and the private sector in order to create a high quality, easily accessible trail. Non-cyclists, occasional cyclists and returning cyclists were targeted as well as under represented groups such as young people, people from black and minority ethnic backgrounds, people from disadvantaged or inner city areas as well as visitors and local residents.

Local businesses saw the opportunity of many people accessing the trail and have overall been very successful. One new business - Hassop Station – combines a bookshop, a restaurant, a café and a cycle hire facility.
Measuring Success

Between 11 May and 31 December 2010, 50,000 people used the trail to cycle and double that number for walking, so approximately 200,000 to 250,000 users per year. That doubled the people using the Peak District trails overall.

In terms of changing people's behaviour and introducing people to cycling, the project extended its reach to 3,000 people 12 months after the project launched. A very high proportion (around 60%) were continuing to cycle throughout the year. Public events included:

- Organised cycle rides (e.g. 5 miles to Fabulous, Women on Wheels)
- Supported group rides from a cycle hire centre
- Family Fun Days
- Cycle skills training (children and adults)
- Bike maintenance courses

The project has had direct and indirect economic benefits. Pedal Peak District worked with Visit Peak District on a ‘Saddle up for Summer’ campaign which resulted in 1,425 bed nights being booked with local accommodation providers and an estimated economic benefit of £160,000. Hassop Station alone increased its turnover by 60% from year 1 to year 2 and now employs 35 people. They launched a new bike hire business and one other is about to start. A considerable indirect impact also exists especially on food suppliers, hotels and other retail, amounting to at least 100 jobs.

Funding

In addition to using its own funding, the National Park Authority spotted an opportunity in the newly created ‘Finding New Solutions Fund’ from the Department for Transport.

“We were the only countryside based project - says Jim Dixon - as most funding was available for sustainable transport in cities but this made our project really unique and distinctive.
Challenges and Lessons Learnt

Technical issues were encountered in opening up the tunnels and in identifying the right lighting. These were resolved only by hiring ‘best in class’ engineers with relevant expertise and experience. Balancing the needs of different users was also an issue. With hindsight, more work with the existing users to introduce a code of conduct should have been done upfront as initially the project experienced some negative perception.

‘For anyone considering a similar project – says Jim Dixon – I would suggest they first think of the way in which they are going to sell to all of their stakeholders, ensuring they attract a wide range of visitors. Secondly, ensure you have some really high skilled people to address the challenges. Lastly, think of the whole trail as a route from where the visitor starts to where they end and make sure it is fully integrated.’

The future is very positive because we have created a high quality, extraordinary experience. Key decision makers now want to see the job finished and a feasibility study to open the rest of the trail is expected to start soon. So in 5 years time our vision is that you get off the train in Buxton, you hire a bike and within the hour you can be cycling in the most beautiful places. You have lunch in a local café or pub and then maybe you stop at a museum or do a nature walk and then you cycle back to your hotel or you catch a bus with your bike on it. You have made yourself healthier and happier and have spent more time enjoying the surrounding destination and contributed money to the local economy.

Jim Dixon - Chief Executive, Peak District National Park Authority

TOP-TIPS

• First, think of the way in which you are going to sell the benefits and outcomes of your project to all stakeholders, including local communities, local organisations, businesses and visitors.

• Second, invest in really high skilled people that can address any specific challenges.

• Finally, consider the whole visitor journey from the moment the visitor leaves home to their final destination.

Visit:
www.pedalpeakdistrict.co.uk
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