rTown: a project in the Innovate UK SBRI competition "Re-Imagining the High Street"

Content Proposal in Bid for Phase 2 - Implementation

In Phase 1 of rTown we tested the feasibility of integrating user navigation; real time parking data; merged parking/transport & incentive technology; goods-handling services; and tourist attraction and events. Our proposal for Phase 2 is that we proceed as envisaged in our Phase 1 proposal but with two significant areas of amendment, and one further area still requiring a decision in or before Phase 2:

- in view of trader ambivalence (in spite of consumer approval), reduction of the technical ambition   related to the original LockerPoint to pilot a manually handled (but IT facilitated) town-wide collection, locker and delivery service (WP5);

- addition of IT facilitated tourist and accessible-to-all visitor guidance services (WPs 2 & 6);

- as the feasibility project concluded the Department for Transport sent a letter to all local authority parking managers which has placed an unexpected regulatory constraint on contract operation of off-street parking.
  We have identified options for addressing this in WP3 so that the original 'incentives to park' premise (WP4) can be retained in an elegant, 'single touch' manner using an integrated IT approach.
  If these options prove unviable a separate kiosk approach is still applicable in some locations, & worth implementing in Ross.

Our work will therefore comprise the following workpackage (WP) elements:

Workpackage 1

To ensure that we can validate the effects of our work we will again gather benchmarking data (repeating our 2012 and 2014, Phase 1, work) (and for Phase 2) using the People&Places (formerly Action for Market Towns) methodology. Project success criteria will be: increased footfall, longer stay, and better qualitative rankings. We will also compare the turnover and profit data from the members of the Association of Ross Traders participating in 2014.

Workpackage 2

The purpose of rTown is "the development of solutions that will enable regeneration [of the town centre], not ones that will provide the answer to specific infrastructure problems". However, it is important to ensure that infrastructure shortcomings highlighted by 2014 Benchmarking, the Town Plan and the GVA report are not a barrier to attracting footfall. If they are, then no amount of additional innovation will stem decline. Our feasibility study used user-centred consultation to develop a high level masterplan focussed on accessibility, congestion, signage, traffic routing and parking; this has been integrated into the Local Authority transport plan and we shall take forward only the signage aspects (including wireless access to guidance & WP6 apps).

Workpackage 3

This element seeks (following from WP2) to optimise use of existing car park facilities to encourage town centre use – including navigation guidance for the best route to suitable available places. Parking Data & Research International (PDRI) will build on its

comprehensive existing data and lead work to integrate personal parking management, new parking payment, occupancy measurement and guidance systems.

Workpackage 4

Payment for parking in the town centre provides a reason to use out-of-town shops. In Phase 1 we validated that offering incentives to park would increase footfall. If the legal vehicle can be established we wish to use new technologies to associate parking with a credit voucher that can be repeatedly used in businesses in the town centre. In other words, a consumer's gain from paid-for parking accumulates, and businesses encourage footfall; we intend to implement this using ProxiSmart technology integrated with Parkeon parking systems - or as stand-alone kiosks. ProxiSmart have invested a further 540 days and £37500 in addition to Phase 1 work to take this forward.

Workpackage 5

The rise of internet shopping is inexorable and is certainly less controllable than out-of-town shopping. We shall build on the 'click & collect' paradigm (again, integrating incentive vouchers) but extend that to a physical 'hub' location where goods can be received, stored & then collected by customers (or, for a premium, delivered locally from there at a specified time). This addresses: a) consumers who wish to purchase from local businesses but whose lives prevent them from making face-to-face purchases; b) visitors wishing to make impulse purchases, but without transport immediately available; c) out-of-locality suppliers needing to make deliveries for those out at work. Such services are available on a limited & disjointed basis – we will provide a comprehensive solution for a Locality with our rTown 'TownTrolley' (intra-town porter) system and 'TownTeam' services.

Workpackage 6

Phase 1 Benchmarking reinforced the need for physical attraction & reasons to visit the town centre so innovation validated in our feasibility work will take place on visitor engagement. This activity will develop & deploy content using physical, electronic & augmented reality media, adding new reasons to spend time in the town. The physical signage (WP2) will enable location-specific visitor information to be delivered in multiple languages, & to those with physical and cognitive disabilities.

Workpackage 7

A TownTeam hub will act as an information, and service request & delivery, focus for the town centre. In Ross it will be located centrally so that a) public transport users can receive town vouchers as credits against their travel tickets; b) disabled High Street users can access mobility scooters; c) others needing assistance can engage a personal shopper for the town centre. The hub will be the base for local updating of the IT systems enabling (WPs 2 to 7); the town centre manager; maintenance; TownTrolley services; etc.

Melvin Reynolds, Melvin@rTown.org.uk: 2015-04-01