



**From Travel Blending to Living Neighbourhoods..... A Vision for the Future**

**Liz Ampt**

*Steer Davies Gleave*

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**Abstract**

This paper presents an example of an approach to changing travel behaviour to reduce the impact of the car which demonstrates the effectiveness of a true partnership between the community and the providers of services and goods in that community (including the government at all levels).

The first of the Living Neighbourhood projects which began in Adelaide in 1999 has as its roots in the technique of travel blending – an individual action approach to the reduction of the use of the car. It is the core of the Living Neighbourhood approach with everyone who lives, works, attends school and plays in the neighbourhood being offered the opportunity to travel blend. This means that a large proportion of the community is making small changes which benefit not only themselves and their families, but also the Neighbourhood as a whole.

This first step has essentially empowered the community to ask for small changes from people and organisations providing good and services to the Neighbourhood. Similar in scale to the changes being made by individuals, the changes made by other partners are also small. Examples of these range from changes made by educational institutions (change to a curriculum unit), by the bus company (changes to bus frequencies), by doctors (introduction of green prescriptions), by real estate agents (provision of information on services), businesses (provision of signage), and by the local government (provision of signage, more readily accessible footpaths) and so on.

Results show that the community and the partners in the community have gained many personal benefits (time, money, health), the children are experiencing more independence, that there are more people in the streets, and that businesses have gained time and cost efficiencies. More Living Neighbourhoods are currently beginning in Adelaide in a programme designed to foster 'customised' partnerships between the community and all levels of government throughout the city.

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**Contact Author**

Liz Ampt

Steer Davies Gleave

Level 2, 229 Greenhill Road

Dulwich SA 5065

Phone: +61 8 8332 4000

Fax: +61 8 8332 9796

e-mail: [l.ampt@sdgworld.net](mailto:l.ampt@sdgworld.net)

## Introduction

Is it possible to reduce the impact of the car without regulation, without providing large amounts of infrastructure for alternatives, without creating more 'sticks'? Many would argue that an affirmative answer to the above question (or any parts of it) is impossible.

This paper presents an example of a 'Living Neighbourhood@' which shows the opposite. It describes an approach where the impact of the car (in terms of car kms) is reduced between 11 and 22% in Australia, where the changes to the infrastructure are extremely minor, and where not a single 'stick' is used.

How is this done? First, the focus in the Neighbourhood is on 'minimising the impact of the car'. The use of the travel blending philosophy to relay this intent has been shown to increase the use of other modes like bicycle and public transport, but *much more importantly* the travel blending has given people personal benefits. People readily recognise that the car has extended our lives in positive ways (we can go further, do more things, more impulsively) but that it has also contributed to lack of time (for leisure, for family activities, for work, to study), less disposable income, and even decreasing fitness

Secondly, since the changes are recommended on the basis of a week's activities as recorded by all individuals in the household, they fit easily into people's lifestyles and give them more of the things they acknowledge lacking (with time usually being the most important factor) And changes to individuals' behaviour readily have an impact on the neighbourhood in which they live – particularly if small changes are occurring to the face and body of the Neighbourhood at the same time

## Underlying philosophy

Rather than being based on building new infrastructure or increasing regulation of one type or another, the living neighbourhood is based on a better use of the existing 'local infrastructure' and the understanding of the balancing act which exists between the cars and us:

### The car has enriched our lives:

- we can go further – quicker;
- we can live further away;
- we can do more things.

### But – there are *disadvantages*:

- we are spending more *time* in the car (often in congestion) when we could be relaxing, working, playing and spending time with others;
- children sit in the car for long periods;
- many people report increasing *frustration* and stress as both driver, and passengers;

- we can't rely on arriving anywhere in a certain time – 20 minute trips can sometimes take 40 minutes;
- we are losing our livable streets where it used to be safe to walk and even play;

And in addition:

- while it's hard to manage without a car – it can also be expensive to run one;
- and sometimes it seems we hardly get any exercise any more.

What's more:

- despite our pride in a relatively pollution-free city, people are noticing the air we breathe is unhealthy on more and more of days in the year.

In understanding this balancing act, people and organisations involved in urban development and regeneration are looking for new ways to create livable developments. Enter the *Living Neighbourhood*® – the first of which has begun and is continuing in Adelaide!

A Living Neighbourhood is a community where the quality of life is improved for everyone and there is:

- less time spent in the car;
- more time for family, friends and neighbours;
- where travel costs are lower;
- there are better local shops and activities;
- where all levels and branches of government can participate; and
- where there is a better local and community environment.

### **Background**

As part of an ongoing strategy to reduce the impact of the car in Adelaide, Transport SA began a series of studies in 1996. At that time the focus was to assess the usefulness and relevance of *Travel Blending*® – an approach in which change begins with individuals, rather than the traditional top-down view (Ampt, 1997). Each of two subsequent projects (Steer Davies Gleave, 1997, 1998) has been progressively more encouraging in effectiveness and acceptance levels - by members of the public, by Transport SA, and by other government departments.

Consequently, Transport SA commissioned a much larger scale project in which the entire community of Dulwich and Rose Park in Adelaide is participating. This *Living Neighbourhood*® project involves everyone who lives, works, plays, and goes to school in the neighbourhood.

### Travel Blending

As noted earlier, the underlying principle in a Living Neighbourhood is the programme of travel blending. In brief, it can be described as an approach which

*empowers people to reduce the impact of the car today by making small changes that benefit themselves, and fit into their life-styles*

This philosophy has the following advantages:

- since the changes fit into a person's lifestyle, and are almost always congruent with their values, there are almost always personal gains (e.g. saving time) in addition to environmental gains. These are sufficient to a) ensure that changes are sustained, and b) that new ways are invented;
- it is almost always possible for every person to make some small change – whether or not they initially thought it was possible;
- since the whole household is targeted, changes made by one person are less likely to be neutralised by changes made by another;
- it is assisted by, but does not need, small changes to the existing infrastructure;
- it therefore provides a setting for other government measures, since people are behaving in a framework in which they are aware of personal as well as community or government responsibility.

Travel blending in its most advanced form is described in detail elsewhere (Ampt and Rooney, 1998) and involves:

- thinking about activities and travel in advance (i.e. in what order can I do things, where should they be done, who should do them?) and then:
- *blending modes* (i.e. sometimes car, sometimes walk, sometimes public transport etc.);
- *blending activities* (i.e. doing as many things as possible in the same place or on the same journey, or getting someone else to carry out the activity as part of another journey); and
- *making small sustainable changes over time* – as little as once a week or once a fortnight.

People and households who take part in travel blending choose to change their behaviour by:

- *observing their own current travel patterns* – measuring the way they and their households use the car for one week;
- *receiving detailed suggestions* customised to those travel patterns, and giving them personal benefits;
- setting their own *targets*.

- spending some weeks trying to reduce the impact of the car.
- observing the changes they have achieved, and
- being given a simple, ongoing system of monitoring and motivation.

### From Travel Blending to Living Neighbourhood

#### Self-Organising Systems

Another concept inherent in the Living Neighbourhood approach is that of self-organisation. The concept of self-organisation stems from the work of physicists and biologists and sees systems as open rather than closed, self-organising rather than necessarily cause and effect based. Portugali (1997) says that 'out of the self-organisation of inanimate material systems, emerged applications which portrayed the animate systems of humans and urbanism as open, in the sense that they exchange matter, energy, information and people with their environment ...'

It is clearly intrinsic in travel blending where people are given ideas which are intended to fit into their lifestyle (as far as this can be gleaned from the diaries), and where these ideas are picked up and *built upon* by the participants in a self-organising way (Rooney, 1998). An example of this might be the participant to whom it was suggested that 'walking is good for fitness' and who decided to embark on a weight loss programme based on walking – losing 3 kg between the course of the 2 diary weeks!

It turned out to also be a key ingredient in the Living Neighbourhood in terms of self-organising community initiatives. This occurred both at the level of individuals who organised community initiatives as well as at the local government level where ideas and actions were generated in a self-organising way. For example a group of people in one of the streets, when hearing that other people were being invited to participate in the programme (approaches were made incrementally) phoned to say they had organised a street party on Friday evening, and could we please come along and tell them about travel blending and the Living Neighbourhood. And the Burnside Council, of their own volition, drafted a letter to residents (under the Living Neighbourhood banner), asking them to cut back overhanging branches so that it was easier to walk along the streets

#### Adapting the Procedures

In some respects, when the project was begun in about October, 1998, it seemed as if it were simply an extension of the previous travel blending studies. However, the Living Neighbourhood concept brought with it many new aspects, and we had also learned many things from the most recent travel blending project which were important to change before commencing the new initiative.

This section reports on these procedures and adaptations.

### *Gathering a Project Team*

While we had a good understanding of what type of project team would be needed for travel blending, we needed to estimate the staff needs for the creation of a Living Neighbourhood®. We believed that these would involve recruitment at the schools and in the neighbourhood (both households and businesses) although, of course, we did not know exactly what form the recruitment would take until the project had commenced.

Aside from the project director and manager, the team also had a feedback manager, a recruitment manager, and two 'neighbourhood officers' – one of whom assumed responsibility for the large businesses and the other for small businesses and the school.

### *A Shift in Emphasis of Benefits and Redesign of Kits*

One clear lesson which had emerged from evaluation and discussions with participants in previous project was the importance of a shift in emphasis in the way travel blending was presented.

More and more people who actively participated in travel blending told us in comments and evaluations that the biggest benefits they had experienced through travel blending were the *enhancement of things they valued – as opposed to benefiting from less negatives of the car.*

For example, while people would concede that less time in the car did mean that they were worrying less about the unreliability of the journey time, they were much more willing to tell of the extra time they spent with their friends, or the pleasant discussions they had with their children while walking together.

While the travel blending method has not changed, the presentation now clearly begins from the stance that the car is a benefit – but it just happens to give us niggling problems now and then. Furthermore the presentation stresses that, not only can these niggles be addressed, but that benefits which are congruent with your own value system are likely.

Evaluation of the programme suggests that this approach led to a much better understanding of the programme, and hence to much better feelings of achievement among participants.

### *Understanding response*

After the previous project we also believed that it was possible to learn more about 'non-response' or take-up rates at the initial phase of the programme. For this reason, various analyses were undertaken and while it was difficult to find differences in terms of most socio-economic variables, there were indications that lack of understanding by non-recruited people may have been higher than desirable.

*Development of a video*

The travel blending methodology to date has involved explaining the programme to one person from a household (either in the workplace or at a school) and asking them to relay the method and philosophy to the remainder of their household. In order to facilitate this, each initially recruited person was given a small 'brochure' which had the rudiments of the programme described.

Given the current environment where television and video is becoming the most common way of presenting information, and the above findings on uptake levels, we believed it was timely to develop a short video (5 minutes) which the initial recruit could take home and show to the rest of the household/family

The video reflects the way in which travel blending is now presented:

- the car has many benefits;
- but some frustrations – and problems (e.g. pollution);
- and here is a way to deal with these;
- and give yourself some benefits at the same time.

*Recruitment methods*

In previous projects recruitment had been either through a workplace or through a school. In both of these instances the process, while different in each situation, was fairly straightforward in that a group of people were captive at a given site.

In the case of the Living Neighbourhood, however, there was a completely different situation since we estimated that up to 2000 households lived, worked, played and went to school in the area. Clearly it was not possible to get them together in a single group, and certainly not at a single time!

For this reason we addressed the process by searching for groups through which we could begin. The groups identified were:

- the Primary School;
- Neighbourhood Watch;
- the small businesses and shops dotted throughout the area;
- the larger businesses in the area; and
- some activity groups (e.g. churches, scouts, art groups etc.)

For each of these we needed a slightly different approach.

*Feedback – information and ideas*

The most important component of the travel blending programme is undoubtedly the feedback which individuals and households receive at the end of both diaries 1 and 2. At the end of the previous project (as after all projects to date) we had made numerous observations regarding both layout, presentation, wording and type of tips/ideas which were standard parts of the programme.

In order to address some of these issues, several weeks were spent adjusting the feedback to ensure the highest level of acceptance in the current project.

*New Initiatives for a Living Neighbourhood*

One of the characteristics of a Living Neighbourhood is that in each case *appropriate* initiatives are developed. This means understanding the culture of the community and looking for ways to tap into that culture in the most innovative and effective way. Several new initiatives were developed – some through our initiatives but, more importantly, some through the initiatives of the people in the community itself. Some of these are described below.

*A curriculum for the school*

Recruitment at Rose Park Primary School had two phases. In the first, all 4 teachers who would be teaching the new curriculum, as well as the Principal, took part in the travel blending programme at the end of 1998 while they were assisting with the development of the curriculum. Then, in week 3 of the curriculum all children in Grades 5,6 and 7 took home diaries for themselves and their families.

The school had announced the Travel Blending and Living Neighbourhood programme in its weekly newsletter in advance, and all parents of participating children received a special letter signed by the Principal.

*Design of New Suburb Signs*

During an initial meeting with our liaison person from the City of Burnside, we had asked about the possibility of having the old Dulwich 'gateway' signs replaced by the newer ones with the Burnside logo which had begun to be used in the Council area. This was readily agreed to. At that time the Council officer also suggested that we add the Living Neighbourhood logo at the bottom of each of the 3 new signs – one of the many examples of changes which were initiated by people involved in the Living Neighbourhood.

*Riding to School Alone*

One example of a group of people who began to make a change (ride with their children to school) but were experiencing some difficulties was a group of families living near the school.

The initial enquiry was from one of the mothers who had spoken to several other parents living in nearby streets (stimulated by the curriculum in the school) who wanted to allow their children to ride their bikes to school independently on some days – but negotiating a roundabout along the way was proving formidable. She suggested that marking bicycle lanes may be an appropriate solution.

We contacted a person from Transport SA's Bike South group who specialises in children's cycling and who agreed to meet the parents and children one morning before school, ride with them, and see how the problem could be addressed.

After one morning's ride with parents and children, it emerged that the problem had been that both children and parents had been negotiating the roundabout in a way which was stressful – ensuring that there was no traffic on any entrance before moving into the roundabout. This had meant scanning about 180 degrees. With the simple advice (and practice) of scanning just the relevant entrance to the roundabout, the children and parents are now happy about the daily ride. In the true philosophy of travel blending, the parents noted: *'it gives the kids more independence – and us the occasional day when we don't have to drive!'*

And the solution (for the moment anyway) did not require bike lanes – although even they would have been a relatively cheap solution if necessary and possible.

*Street Party*

Shortly after the Neighbourhood Watch Zone Leaders had begun holding gatherings at which travel blending and the Living Neighbourhood was explained to the people in the relevant street, we received a phone call from someone in Albert Street. She said that after she had heard of the presentation to Tudor Street she had decided that 'our street shouldn't miss out, so I've organised a Street Party for Friday and was wondering if you'd come along and tell us about the project!'

Everyone (except 1 household) who attended was recruited – nearly 80% of the street.

*Business Newsletter*

To build on the Living Neighbourhood partnership approach, and at the instigation of one of the businesses in the community, a monthly newsletter was developed for the Dulwich Business Precinct. Its aim was to link businesses together, and also keep them informed on recent Living Neighbourhood developments. Called the *Dulwich Business Partnership Update*, the first edition of the newsletter was distributed to businesses door-to-door, and in travel blending feedback.

One of the outcomes of the newsletter was giving information to businesses which allowed them to choose services from their precinct (e.g. local graphics design, local accountants, local law services). This has the potential not only to promote local business, but also to save large amounts of time and money spent travelling across the city to obtain the services elsewhere

### **Outcomes of the Living Neighbourhood**

The transition of Travel Blending from a stand-alone intervention to an integral part of a community has meant that there is a high level of input and activity from many diverse sectors of the community. In the first instance the residents are making changes to their own behaviour and gaining the associated benefits. This has empowered many of them to make wider community changes and to make suggestions to other groups in the community (e.g. local government and businesses) on simple ways to enhance the neighbourhood (and usually to gain benefits for themselves as well). Local government, even though not initially involved, has begun many new initiatives and the role of ongoing 'Neighbourhood Champion' will now be a person from the council.

From the perspective of state government, the project represents many diverse areas – transport, education, planning, community services, health and even the arts. It was particularly telling that when the children from the Primary School invited the entire Living Neighbourhood community to their celebration of the changes they had made several things occurred:

- the people who attended represented all levels of government (including the Minister) and the community;
- the presentation of the effects of the Living Neighbourhood was in the form of poetry, theatre and choreography;
- the emphasis was not only on the reduction of the impact of the car but on the increase in community spirit, on the improvement of personal and road safety, and on the increase in interpersonal communication within the family.

### **Ongoing Development**

Living Neighbourhoods® are now commencing in more Councils throughout Adelaide with the emphasis on transmitting the skills of neighbourhood selection, set-up and travel blending® implementation to the Councils and their communities.

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