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SUMPs for BSR

Digital campaign to promote cycling for short-distance commuting in Gävle

SUMPs for BSR - Enhancing Effective Sustainable Urban Mobility Planning for Supporting Active Mobility in BSR Cities

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Imprint

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Project note

SUMPs for BSR project supports cities shifting their planning practices towards people-centred sustainable urban mobility planning, focusing on active mobility modes to fight the climate crisis. The project aims to increase the uptake of Sustainable Urban Mobility Plans (SUMP) as a strategic tool for sustainable mobility planning by developing tools and offering extensive capacity building for local authorities, especially in small and mid-sized BSR cities. A common framework on monitoring and evaluation for sustainable urban mobility planning will be developed to set up sound local processes suitable for smaller cities. Together with a unified model for testing and experimenting with innovative mobility solutions, it will help to evaluate the performance of the local mobility system and to provide crucial information for planning and decision-making.

1.1. Digital campaign to promote cycling for short-distance commuting in Gävle

City profile

Gävle is a medium-sized city on the east coast of Sweden, with around 104,000 inhabitants. It serves as an important regional centre for employment, education and services in Gävleborg County. The city has a relatively compact urban structure and flat topography, creating **favourable conditions for walking and cycling**. Despite this, car use remains common for short-distance trips, particularly for commuting to work.

Gävle has **a SUMP** that prioritises active mobility, climate-friendly transport and healthier travel habits, but it has to be renewed to meet today´s mobility, climate and inclusion challenges. Behaviour change measures have been identified as a key complement to infrastructure investments. The small-scale experiment described in this case study contributed to this approach by testing a digital campaign aimed at encouraging cycling for short daily commutes.

Objectives of the pilot

The pilot aimed to explore whether a digital, app-based campaign could **motivate employees to replace short car trips with cycling and walking**. Prior to the experiment, surveys and local data indicated that a significant share of work-related journeys in Gävle were under five kilometres, yet many were still made by car.

The **specific objectives** of the pilot were to:

- Encourage employees to use sustainable commuting options for short-distance commuting.
- Test a digital platform as a behaviour change tool.
- Assess participation, engagement and motivation levels during the campaign.
- Collect data and feedback to understand what works and what does not in digital cycling promotion.
- Generate lessons for future behaviour change initiatives in Gävle and other cities.

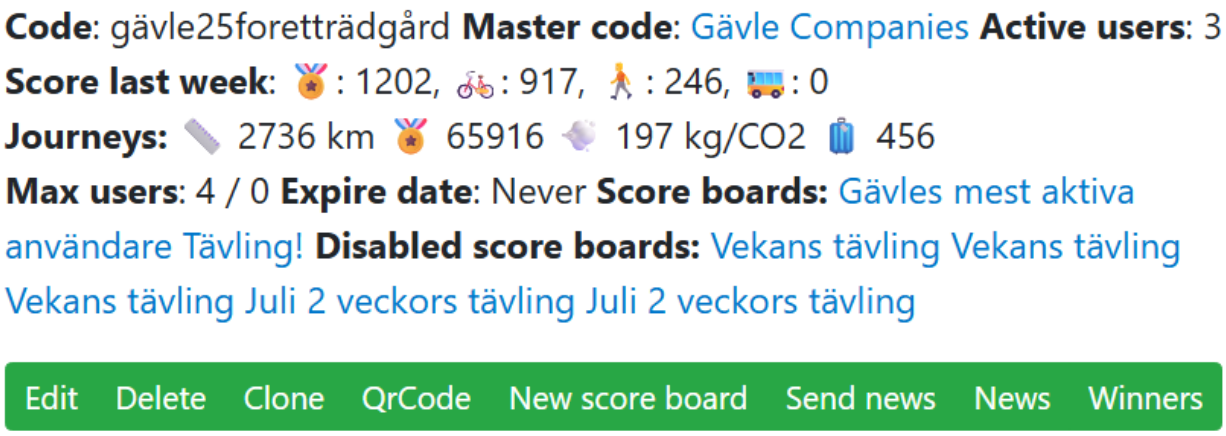

Figure 1. Screenshot of the app. Source: Gävle municipality.

Pilot activities

The small-scale experiment was implemented as a time-limited digital campaign. It relied primarily on a mobile application and focused on individual motivation rather than physical infrastructure changes.

Campaign design and preparation

The city designed the campaign around the idea of tracking mobility and rewarding sustainable commuting through a digital platform. Employees from companies participating in Gävle's Climate Contract were invited to join the campaign and register their cycling activities using the app.

Preparation included adjusting the existing digital tool to the circumstances in Gävle, defining the campaign period and setting basic participation rules. The city also prepared communication materials explaining how the campaign worked and what participants were expected to do.

Recruitment of participants

Employers played a central role in recruiting participants. Information about the campaign was shared through internal communication channels, such as newsletters and emails. Participation was voluntary, and employees could decide individually whether to join.

While initial interest was expressed by several organisations, actual participation levels were lower than anticipated. This highlighted the importance of strong employer engagement and clear incentives in digital behaviour change campaigns.

Campaign implementation

During the campaign period, participants used the app to record their mobility. The app automatically tracked distance and frequency, allowing users to monitor their own activity and compare it with others.

The campaign ran without in-person events or additional promotional activities, relying entirely on the digital platform to maintain engagement. This minimalist approach was chosen to test whether low-effort, low-cost digital tools could deliver meaningful behaviour change.

Communication during the campaign

Communication during the campaign was limited to reminders and updates sent via digital channels. The city monitored participation and app activity but did not intervene actively to boost engagement once the campaign had started. This approach provided insight into how participants interact with digital campaigns when external stimulation is minimal.

Stakeholders and interaction activities

The main stakeholders in the pilot were the City of Gävle, **participating employers and their employees**. The municipality coordinated the campaign, managed the digital tool and analysed results. Employers participating in Gävle's Climate Contract acted as intermediaries, sharing information with staff and encouraging participation. In addition, local retailers played a key role by offering discounts and benefits through the app, contributing to increased motivation among participants.

Interaction with participants was mostly indirect and digital. There were no workshops or meetings, and feedback was collected primarily through the app and follow-up reflection. This limited interaction was intentional, as the pilot aimed to test a lightweight and scalable model.

Evaluation and monitoring activities

Evaluation focused on understanding participation patterns, user engagement and the strengths and limitations of the digital approach. Also, based on monitoring, activities carried out to prepare and implement the pilot were modified, if needed. Therefore, the monitoring framework combined app data (incl. questionnaires) with qualitative reflection.

Monitoring app-based data

The digital platform provided quantitative data on the number of registered users, recorded trips and total cycling distance. These indicators were used to assess overall engagement and activity levels during the campaign. The city reviewed this data regularly to track participation trends and identify drop-off points.

Participant feedback and reflection

Qualitative feedback was collected through informal channels and internal reflection. Employers shared impressions of employee interest, while the city reviewed comments and reactions received via email and app interfaces. This feedback helped interpret the numerical data and understand why participation levels remained modest.

Internal evaluation and triangulation

The municipality triangulated app statistics with qualitative observations and reflections from employers. This internal evaluation process focused on identifying enabling and limiting factors, rather than on measuring direct behavioural impact. The results were discussed within the municipal team and used to refine thinking around future digital behaviour change initiatives.

Success stories and best practices

+ Some participants were very engaged and provided regular feedback to the pilot implementation team, helping to improve the campaign along the way.
+ Midway through the pilot, external communication support was hired to improve outreach and increase participation.
+ Gamification (offering incentives and rewards) helps to gradually encourage changes in behaviour.
+ The local retailers' association promoted the campaign to its members, encouraging some retailers to add offers and rewards in the app.
+ Cooperation with employers created a potential channel for future initiatives.

Challenges and deviations

– Participation levels were lower than expected, limiting overall impact.

- Technical challenges related to the mobile app - at the start of the campaign, several functions in the app did not work properly, and this created an instant overall negative emotion among users.
- The app used a lot of battery, required users to register their trips manually, and cheating was detected in its use, discouraging participation.
- The Climate Contract companies had already committed to other climate-related initiatives, thus not prioritising this particular campaign.
- The amount of human resources needed to implement the pilot was underestimated.

Results and impacts of the pilot

The pilot generated valuable insight into the **role and limitations of digital campaigns** in promoting active commuting. While the behavioural impact was modest, the experiment clarified what conditions are needed for success.

Key **results and impacts** included:

- Indication that digital tools alone are unlikely to trigger large-scale behaviour change, but an app with incentives has potential for nudging users in that direction.
- Confirmation that employer involvement is necessary but not sufficient without incentives.
- A clearer understanding of participant motivation and engagement dynamics.
- A realistic assessment of the effort required to sustain digital campaigns.

Sustainability and scalability

The digital campaign model is technically easy to replicate, but its effectiveness depends on **design and context**. Without additional incentives or engagement mechanisms, sustainability remains limited.

From a **sustainability** perspective:

- The app can be reused, but the related maintenance, communication and coordination costs are high.
- Campaigns can be repeated or extended if better engagement strategies are applied, but this also needs strong support and coordination within the municipality and with its partners.

In terms of **scalability**:

- The model could be scaled to more organisations if combined with rewards, team-based competition or in-person activities.
- The pilot provides a clear baseline for improving future campaigns rather than a finished solution. In its current form, Gävle does not see any potential in scaling up the pilot.

Lessons learned

The pilot offered several important lessons for cities considering **digital sustainable mobility promotion campaigns**:

- Technology needs to work well from the start – technical problems at launch can quickly harm user trust and interest.
- Digital tools are useful enablers, but not drivers of behaviour change on their own – the pilot showed that people prefer to operate with as few apps as possible, rather than having a separate app for everything.
- Relying only on a mobile app for data collection may not be the most effective approach.
- Relevant target groups need to be identified and engaged early on – for instance, Gävle found out that involving internal communication experts (with experience in digital mobility campaigns) and sustainability officers working at partner companies was actually key for disseminating such a campaign.
- Active employer involvement and visible incentives are crucial – the pilot showed that having non-monetary incentives can considerably increase people's motivation to participate and change their habits.
- Communication must be active and continuous to maintain engagement (need for a communication strategy), and this needs adequate resources.
- Sufficient human resources should be planned from the start, not only for project management and communication, but also for data analysis and follow-up. Flexibility to bring in external support when needed is very valuable for the success of the pilot.

If repeated, the city would improve technical testing and user experience validation, integrate more incentives, increase employer responsibility for engagement and combine digital tracking with face-to-face elements.

For more information about this case study, you are welcome to contact Gävle Municipality:
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