

Lived Experience of a Micro Hub

- A First-Hand Account



PROJECT OVERVIEW

Cross River Partnership (CRP) worked with the London Borough of Lambeth, Brixton BID and cargo bike couriers Pedal Me, to offer Brixton's businesses the opportunity to join a free micro hub and cargo bike delivery trial. The aim was to reduce the number of polluting vans in Brixton and the surrounding area, thereby improving local air quality for Brixton's businesses and residents.

This trial was part of CRP's Clean Air Freight (CAF), an Impact on Urban Health-funded project, helping the freight sector to deliver clean air as part of the Guy's and St Thomas' Foundation. The project aims to minimise the harmful emissions from freight within the London Borough of Lambeth and the London Borough of Southwark.

Between April 2022 and Spring 2023, 8 businesses in Brixton redirected their deliveries to CRP's micro hub. From there, Pedal Me couriers delivered these goods from the hub to the businesses on electric cargo bikes at a time that's convenient for the businesses, for free. Goods could be stored at the hub through the project to encourage bulk-buying, consolidation and free up storage space, and businesses could use the scheme to deliver to their customers across London whilst stopping at the hub, benefitting from a free journey from Brixton to the hub.

Inbound Deliveries (Supplier → Brixton)



Outbound Deliveries (Brixton → Business Customer)



*A micro hub is a small site that couriers use for their day-to-day deliveries as a place to receive, sort and then send deliveries to their destination.





DIARY - EXAMPLE WEEK 1

MONDAY

Weekly task:

- Gather deliveries' tracking information from businesses
- Update CRP rota to support deliveries to the hub
- Bi-weekly meeting with external evaluation consultants

TUESDAY

- Business engagement (phone, email)
- Update CRP engagement spreadsheet



WEDNESDAY

Weekly task:

- CRP team member to visit the hub to receive and store deliveries
- Inform Pedal Me of delivery to hub via Google Chat spaces & book onward journeys to businesses

THURSDAY

- Plan face-to-face engagement for next week incl. printing flyers and creating route on MyMaps to target potential businesses in Brixton



FRIDAY

Weekly task:

- Check when businesses will order items to the hub the coming week
- Check in with Pedal Me to feed back/improve current activities

DAILY

- Monitor Google Chat spaces and messages related to deliveries every day

DIARY - EXAMPLE WEEK 2



MONDAY

Weekly task:

- Gather deliveries' tracking links
- Update CRP rota to visit the hub

TUESDAY

- Face-to-face business engagement in Brixton
- Update engagement spreadsheet



WEDNESDAY

Weekly task:

- CRP team member to visit the hub to receive and store deliveries
- Inform Pedal Me of delivery to hub via Google Chat spaces & book onward journeys to businesses
- Answer any questions from external evaluation consultants



THURSDAY

- Email and phone follow-ups from face-to-face business engagement incl. gathering sign up information if successful



FRIDAY

Weekly task:

- Check when businesses will order items to the hub the coming week
- Check in with Pedal Me to feed back/improve current activities

DAILY

- Monitor Google Chat spaces and messages related to deliveries every day

DIARY - EXAMPLE WEEK 3

MONDAY

Weekly task:

- *Gather deliveries' tracking links*
- *Update CRP rota to visit the hub*
- *Bi-weekly meeting with external evaluation consultants*

TUESDAY

- *Business engagement (phone, email)*
- *Update CRP engagement spreadsheet*



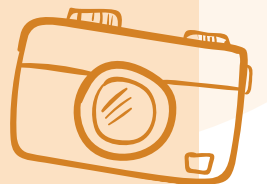
WEDNESDAY

Weekly task:

- *CRP team member to visit the hub to receive and store deliveries*
- *Inform Pedal Me of delivery to hub via Google Chat spaces & book onward journeys to businesses*
- *Email Brixton BID and send CRP content about this project for their newsletter*

THURSDAY

- *Organise photo opportunities in Brixton to create social media content*



FRIDAY

Weekly task:

- *Check when businesses will order items to the hub the coming week*
- *Check in with Pedal Me to feed back/improve current activities*

DAILY

- *Monitor Google Chat spaces and messages related to deliveries every day*




DIARY - EXAMPLE WEEK 4

MONDAY

Weekly task:


- Gather deliveries' tracking links
- Update CRP rota to visit the hub

TUESDAY


- Business engagement (phone, email)
- Update CRP engagement spreadsheet
- Summarise monthly hub activities and brainstorm solutions for any hub challenges 

WEDNESDAY

Weekly task:

- CRP team member to visit the hub to receive and store deliveries
- Inform Pedal Me of delivery to hub via Google Chat spaces & book onward journeys to businesses
- Carry out tasks to solve hub challenges (incl. creating new signs, buying equipment, arrange meetings with stakeholders) 

THURSDAY

- Prepare content about the project for Brixton BID's Enhanced Environment Meeting and for upcoming CRP events 

FRIDAY

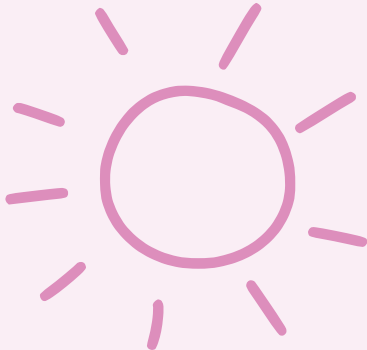
Weekly task:

- Check when businesses will order items to the hub the coming week
- Check in with Pedal Me to feed back/improve current activities

DAILY

- Monitor Google Chat spaces and messages related to deliveries every day

PHOTOS: THE HUB



Battersea Hub - Located at WOW Storage Battersea

Inside the 20ft Shipping Container



CRP's Shipping Container / Hub



Initial SEI Hub - Located at Pedal Me's HQ

VIDEO: BUSINESS ENGAGEMENT

Business Engagement in Brixton



VIDEO: PARTICIPATING BUSINESSES



OUR LEARNINGS: ENGAGEMENT



Flexible Businesses



It is important to keep in mind that after speaking to a business for the first time it can sometimes take several weeks or months for this business to decide whether they would like to participate in schemes like these. They often need to discuss this internally. It can then take another few days to receive all required information for them to officially sign up. Businesses that reacted quickly and flexibly were most of the times able to then be part of the project!

Word-of-Mouth



Local champions that were using the scheme were key to engaging with new businesses in Brixton. We saw that a business was more likely to sign up if other traders and business owners, which they know and trust, have mentioned the project to them. Local champions could share their own experiences and recommend others to participate in the project too. Thank you to our local champions for shouting about the project!

Motivations



We have been adaptable in how we have highlighted the benefits to businesses using the scheme. Some businesses have been focussed on the environmental benefits, others have been keen to benefit from the additional space that this project could offer, whilst others re-organised their supply chain to benefit from the cost-saving benefits of free deliveries and storage. When engaging with businesses, we tapped into different motivations that the businesses had to be part of the project, and saw that towards the end of the project, storage and cost were the key motivating factors for businesses considering joining the project.

OUR LEARNINGS: OPERATIONS



What is in the project's control?



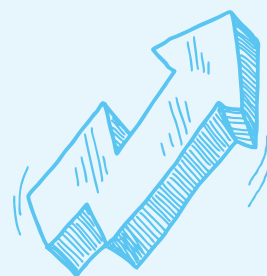
The move of the hub to Battersea brought new learnings from whether many suppliers and couriers could deliver to an unstaffed hub, compared with the staffed operation at Pedal Me's SE1. Couriers found delivering into the container challenging. CRP installed clearer signage and reinforced delivery instructions, a Ring Doorbell so that couriers could easily reach us, and an out-of-hours contact number, but some of these challenges still persisted. The project had many factors out of control of the CRP team, and future unstaffed micro-logistics hub projects should focus on working strategically with a small number of suppliers that deliver extensively to the local area with in-house logistics that could involve partnerships with zero emission/cargo bike couriers to deliver the last mile.

Communication



The CRP team was reliant on clear and accurate communication from the businesses, suppliers and courier tracking information for deliveries to the Battersea hub. This information was not always reliable from couriers, and couriers found delivering into the container challenging, perhaps disincentivised to unlock the container as instructed on the delivery notes. One of the learnings is understanding whether the courier pay-per-parcel model is most effective to integrate with unstaffed-local micro-consolidation projects, especially if this were to be a scalable operation.

Future Hubs



Many of the challenges that were faced operationally from this unstaffed hub trial can be mitigated with the full appointing of a courier to fully manage and run the micro-logistics hub space. The selected operator can incorporate the new hub into their own existing logistics model and are responsible for the deliveries coming into and out of the micro hub for deliveries to the local area. This would give more control, responsibility and autonomy to the logistics operator, who are specialists in this project delivery, and reduce the factors outside of the project's control.

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