
RENEWING THE ROUTES PROGRAMME

BELFAST

What were the objectives of the programme?

The 'Renewing the Routes' programme aimed to revitalise the arterial routes in Belfast by addressing environmental decline and improving the socio-economic situation of the local communities.

Timeline

The programme began in 2002 and ended in March 2010.

Background

Belfast's arterial routes are the main transport corridors in and out the city and are therefore vital for its social and economic functioning. The routes and the surrounding areas were once thriving neighbourhoods. However, over recent decades they experienced serious decline, reflected in high rates of unemployment, poor environment quality and insufficient social infrastructure. This has led to people leaving the areas.

Who was responsible for project implementation/delivery?

The project partnership consisted of the Belfast Area Partnership Boards, the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, the Belfast Regeneration Office, the Department for Regional Development and Belfast City Council.

The coordinators ensured local ownership and support by working with local people and linking them with broader regeneration plans.

How did the programme work?

The routes covered by the programme are:

- York Road;
- Antrim Road;
- [Crumlin Road](#);
- [Shankill Road](#);
- [Falls Road](#);
- [Upper Springfield Road](#);
- Donegal Road;
- [Ormeau Road](#);
- [Albertbridge Road](#); and
- the [Newtownards Road](#).



The projects fell into five general categories:

- Commercial improvements
- Gateway sites
- Public area improvements
- Heritage preservation
- Public Art

Renewing the Routes adopted an interagency approach across both community and statutory sectors. This relationship took time to develop and was flexible enough to be adapted to the specific needs of the communities around each arterial route.

Renewing the Routes co-ordinators consulted widely in each of these areas, which allowed communities to identify and prioritise regeneration activity within their locality. This ensured that the communities could see the link between the problems of the neighbourhood and the proposed solutions. The programme recognised that physical regeneration would only be successful when coupled with social renewal and increasing community capacity. The consultations were held through public meetings, community workshops, questionnaires and door-to-door visits. The information was fed into Local Area Partnerships in each arterial route.

The programme coordinators developed guidelines and carried out an audit of the arterial routes. This data was then mapped onto a Geographical Information System. Using a 'creativity indicator', it was possible to link this project with other regeneration activities in the area.

Renewing The Routes activity was based on a plan-led approach; integrated development plans were produced for each arterial route that were tailored around the specific needs and aspirations of each of the communities. These development plans included projects that had been identified by the various Local Area Partnerships within each arterial route and therefore were essentially community led but driven by the Belfast City Council.

Further details can be found [here](#).

What are the results of the programme?

Renewing the Routes made an immediate impact, including:

- 376 shop front improvements;
- 22 lighting schemes;
- 20 refurbishments/cleaning of buildings;
- 2 new public area projects;
- 3 new street furniture projects;
- 18 landscaping projects;
- 16 hanging basket schemes;
- 19 community and public art projects;
- 1 monument;
- 20 tourism signage projects; and
- 16 alleygates (safe guarding the rear entrances to houses) schemes.

There were also some more long term impacts, including:

Facilitating economic development

- stimulating new business start-ups;
- assisting with the operation and survival of existing businesses along the arterial routes;
- encouraging local shopping e.g. better environment /range of goods.

Tackling social exclusion

- securing new and improved community facilities, activities and infrastructure;
- creating public spaces;
- ensuring adequate public safety.

Promoting physical and environmental development

- improving the management and maintenance of the public space;
- creating greater interaction between public buildings and the public - e.g. opening up public buildings and schools to the community;
- improving building facades;
- redeveloping abandoned sites and dead frontages;
- developing high quality environmental street landscape, furniture, shop fronts, street lighting and a system of signage and information.

Promoting creativity

- identifying the unique characteristics of each arterial route and use as a focal point;
- maximising opportunities and using creative thinking;
- community consultation and empowerment in planning the regeneration;
- 'making something out of nothing';
- promoting cultural understanding and identity.

Has the programme been evaluated and were there any follow-up activities?

External consultants carried out the programme evaluation and review. They evaluated the programmes effectiveness, financing and efficiency to rate its value for money.

The assessment demonstrated that the Renewing the Routes programme made a significant impact on commercial properties, local communities and other property owners along the routes. Commercial or environmental improvements benefitted the majority of those who took part. The programme was recognised as being a catalyst in stimulating activity and investment from partner agencies. Belfast City Council's leadership in the programme was identified as vital in stimulating this co-operation and investment.

The programme's operating model was considered to be working well. The research and consultation undertaken demonstrated the effectiveness and efficiency of this model. Furthermore the partnership with external agencies such as NIHE (Northern Ireland Housing Executive), DRD (Department of Regional Development), Roads Service and DSD (Department of Social Development) was considered to have worked well and have produced tangible results.

What lessons did you learn?

The Renewing the Routes Initiative represented an innovative inter-agency approach which was holistic and sought to address the upgrading of the arterial routes through initiatives that could deliver sustainable regeneration. Belfast City Council conscientiously identified, liaised with and took stakeholder considerations into account throughout the entire project. The consultation engagement was extensive, intense and productive.

The current funding programme ended in March 2010. Around £4.1 million was invested in it. Belfast City Council endorsed a two-stage approach for prioritisation of the arterial routes comprising: Stage 1- GIS (Geographic Information System) based survey and data capture to support the empirical identification of target areas across the city; and Stage 2 - considering initial evaluation results along with strategic influences to finalise target areas and inform the process of detailed action planning. The local action plans for the agreed target areas were then developed in consultation with local members and communities.

What resources are allocated to the programme?

The total budget of the project was £4.1 million (March 2010) and the funding came from the Department for Social Development, Northern Ireland. At the time of its operation, seven people worked on the programme. Capital and revenue resources were used and both were crucial to the successful delivery of the programme.

Who is the contact person for the programme?

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Renewing the Routes website: www.belfastcity.gov.uk/renewingtheroutes

Renewing the Routes overview:

<http://www.belfastcity.gov.uk/renewingtheroutes/pdfs/RenewingtheRoutesOverview.pdf>

If you have an example of a good practice that you would like to include in the database, please send an email to caroline.greene@eurocities.eu.