The Workshop

How to talk about transport and climate action:
communications that work to build support for changes that make the biggest difference

Contents

What is this document?

This guide has communication advice and examples[1] to help you generate narratives and stories specific to climate and transport action. The document is designed to be used with Narratives for Change Principles: Communicating about transport system shifts and climate change to help you understand the theoretical principles of narratives for change and help you develop your climate and transport specific communications. The advice is based on narratives for change theory and research by The Workshop and other framing organisations internationally.

Who is it for?

This guide is for people who are advocating for changes and interventions that will make the biggest difference to:

- limiting the global temperature rises resulting from rampant carbon and preventing environmental and ecosystem collapse
- building a more inclusive and healthy transport system, along with other interventions in the places we live, work, learn, and play.

It is to help you communicate the need for these interventions and changes that make the biggest difference with the public and people in politics, to deepen their understanding, shift unhelpful mindsets and encourage action (e.g. voting) for effective climate and emission reduction policies.

How should you use it?

You can use this guide to start constructing climate and transport stories that can reflect narratives about climate, environment and transport, that help to deepen thinking and shift mindsets. The guide provides specific narratives, values, metaphors, explanations and messages to use, and others to avoid, in generating stories and creative content for your communications and campaigns.

[1]Tested transport messages from this document have been used from The Workshop research commissioned by Waka Kotahi. The resulting messaging guide from this research will soon be publicly available on our website www.theworkshop.org.nz

In a nutshell – constructing stories and narratives that help shift mindsets

If you only have a few minutes, this summary section will give you:

1. an overview of the narratives that are helpful and unhelpful to shifting mindsets and encouraging action among people open to persuasion (the landscape of thinking and communication you are navigating)

2. a helpful story formula

3. specific words and messages to use in your stories.

These examples are informed by our existing research and are shown to surface helpful and supportive thinking about climate action in **people open to persuasion**.

For more detail on the theory and findings please read Narratives for Change Principles: Communicating about transport system shifts and climate change and the following sections.

First, understand the mindsets and narratives

Cultural mindsets are ways of thinking about the world we share across our society – what the problems are, who experiences them and why, what needs to be done and whether it is possible. These shared mindsets shape people's willingness to accept the problem of climate change and support the solutions that will make the biggest difference. Narratives are shared ideas and patterns of meaning about the world that appear frequently across our conversations, communications and stories.

Our narratives reflect our shared mindsets. If people's shared mindsets are unhelpful to understanding the problems and solutions, and there are many narratives that hold this unhelpful mindset in place, we need to use narratives that are more helpful to deepening people's understanding of the issues and building their support for solutions. To do that we need to first understand the mindset and narrative landscape and create communication strategies in reference to them.

A note on unhelpful and helpful narratives

'Helpful' means the narratives help people understand and support the changes that will make the biggest difference. 'Unhelpful' narratives means narratives that get in the way of people's deeper understanding, lead people to feel fatalistic about a better future, or focus people's attention on small individual changes rather than changes that will make the biggest difference.

Narratives helpful to shifting mindsets and building support for transport and climate action

Amplify the following helpful narratives to help shift mindsets.

- **Changes that will make the biggest difference to transport (a systems narrative):** A systems narrative helps to redirect people's thinking away from transport individualism, or focusing on small-scale change within the current system.

- **Our streets are for all people:** Stories that reflect a narrative about 'streets for all people' direct people's thinking away from car fatalism and transport individualism, and towards thinking about streets as public spaces for all people.

- **Common destination:** A narrative that uses a 'bigger we' frame to speak about our shared vision for a better world where climate action has been taken, and ultimately, the things most important to us are shared.

- **Collective solutions:** Instead of leading with problems, this narrative offers solutions alongside critiques and how together (industry, government and communities) can lead bold action on long-term solutions.

- **Enjoy the journey:** A narrative that helps to highlight the benefits of different modes of transport, to reorient the freedom and thrill seeking values that transport industries have promoted.

- **Preparing for the big stuff:** Instead of splitting focus between a number of different solutions or sounding overly optimistic, this narrative is used to speak proactively about how we can be prepared for the central and big challenges we face.

See Part 2. Amplifying our helpful narratives in renewed stories for more detail.

Narratives and mindsets that get in the way of people's understanding (unhelpful narratives)

The following unhelpful narratives and mindsets can get in the way of people's understanding.

- **Transport individualism:** Problems and solutions in the way we move people and goods are down to an individual's choices and decisions.

- **Fossil-fuel based fun and freedom/we love cars!:** Cars and flying are the norm, and are assumed to be the only modes of transport to offer freedom, choice and flexibility.

- **Them vs us:** Changing our transport system means less for me and more for others.

- **Transport fatalism:** Transport equals roads and cars and can't be changed.

- **Transport financialism:** Transport is mainly an issue of time and money.

- **Transport is dangerous:** Narratives that focus solely on the very unsafe nature of roads, transport and travel, especially for children.

- **Government inaction:** Narratives about the government not doing anything or not being able to do anything.

See Part 3. What we're up against: narratives that are unhelpful to deepening understanding for more.

Second, construct your stories using the following formula to help amplify helpful narratives

A practical formula can help you construct stories to reflect helpful narratives that build support for climate action among people open to persuasion.

Aim to spend a third of each communication on each part of the story.

1. Lead with vision and values — this connects with people open to persuasion using values that both matter to them and encourage them to focus on the benefits to all of us of the solutions.

2. Provide an explanation, which contains a barrier to this vision, an initial cause and domino effects — this is an origin story that helps overcome the unhelpful reasoning people may be engaging in — how the problem started, who started it, what the impacts are.

3. End with a solution and call to action — what is needed now to overcome barriers, including what people need to do and who can do it. For example, name the people in power who need to make specific decisions or people in the population who need to lobby people in power to make those decisions.

An example story about opening our streets

An example of a story using the formula that you might use when communicating about opening our streets for more cycle lanes, or creating a low traffic neighbourhood.

Vision and values
Part of the joy of being a kid is having the independence to explore the places they live and the freedom to get around without adults.

Explanation
Right now, many children and young people are constrained in how they move around their own streets. *Barrier*

The people who designed our cities designed them to work best for cars. *Initial cause*

With lots more people in our cities, our streets have got busier with cars and trucks, making it harder to move about, and less safe for children and young people moving independently on bikes, walking or scootering. One of the leading causes of injuries and death for children are injuries caused to them by cars and trucks. Our streets now don't work well for anyone, including people who drive. *Domino effects*

Solution and call to action (names the agents with power to do something)
That's why we need people in our local and central government to open our streets to more people, including young people, walking, riding, and using wheeled transport. This means putting in a network of protected bike lanes and lowering speed limits. *Solution with action*

See a great example of this structure in use in <u>this video on voting in the US</u>.

Third, populate your stories with the following frames, explanatory metaphors, values and words shown to deepen people's understanding

Here are the most useful frames, metaphors, values, and other words to use when talking about transport modeshift, climate change, and air quality.

Transport modeshift

To redirect people's thinking away from unhelpful mindsets and narratives about transport modeshift, say and do these things.

Have a clear vision
Adapt/use these tested visions to help people see change is possible:

- **Child-led**
  "Our cities can be places children move around freely and independently on separate bike paths, spacious footpaths, and buses or trains, so parents can be free from worry. Our streets can be friendly, shared spaces where children play and we connect with each other."

- **Environmental-led vision for urban design**
  "Our cities can be calm places, full of trees and bird life. We can build warm dry homes closer to the places we work and learn and play. With more playgrounds and shared spaces open for us all to enjoy, we can live in ways more connected to each other and our environment."

These visions need to be as concrete as possible and followed up with a clear pathway to achieving them.

Include 'all of us' values
Open conversations and communications with tested "all of us" values:

- **Pragmatism and responsible management**
  "With more people in our cities, we need people in government to take practical steps to make sure our cities work for us all over the long-term, making sure our streets are open to people walking and using a bike or wheelchair."

- **Equity and inclusion**
  "When people in government make cities and streets easy to get around for everyone, including children and disabled people, we all have the opportunity to be part of the things that are important to us."

- **Freedom and independence for children**
  "Most of us want our kids to have the independence we had. We can give them that freedom by building cities and streets that allow kids to get around safely on their own, walking, by bus or by bike."

- **Creativity and problem-solving**
  "Humans love to solve challenges, like making space for everyone in our cities. By thinking creatively, we can make cities better for everyone."

- **Protection of health and the places we love and that sustain us**
  "It's important that we protect people and places from harm by solving the transport issues in our cities that are causing problems like climate change."

Use tested metaphors

Use these tested explanations and explanatory metaphors to overcome unhelpful reasoning people may have:

- **Redesigning our cities**
  "The people who designed our cities designed them to work best for cars. With lots more people in our cities, our streets now don't work well for [anyone - even people who drive / people who don't drive]. That's why we need people in government to create options for people to ride bikes, walk, and take public transport, so that there are many different easy ways for people to get around."

- **Gears metaphor**
  "Just like we need different gears for cycling up and down hills, our cities need different transport solutions for different challenges. Until now our cities have been geared towards one form of transport: cars. We can solve our communities' transport problems by using different solutions, making it easier for people to walk, ride a bike or get a bus."

- **Open our streets**
  "We need to open our streets to more people walking and using bikes, and wheeled transport."

Use these words and phrases:

- 'Streets are for all people', 'better together' and 'we have a common destination', 'public good', 'calming our streets'.
- Talk about the constraints the transport system puts on people, limiting their options and opportunities.
- Talk about providing options instead of people's choices.
- Talk about 'streets' instead of 'roads'.
- Talk about 'meeting people's different needs' and building cities that enable all people to get around, including disabled people, children, older people, people without transport, people who live far away, and people on low incomes.

- Talk about responsible management and working for the public good for the long-term.
- Consider saying 'freeing' rather than 'freedom' for adults, or name the context specifically 'freedom of riding an e-bike'.

Climate change

To redirect people's thinking away from unhelpful narratives about climate, say and do these things.

Use tested values
Use and adapt these tested values:

- **Protection**
  "It's important that we protect people and places from harm. Concern for the welfare of others and preserving our habitats are the hallmarks of a protective approach."

- **Responsible management**
  "It's important that we take responsible and practical steps to manage the issues facing our environment. Open-mindedness and long-term planning are the hallmarks of responsible management."

- **Interconnection**
  "Our fate is intertwined with the fate of the ocean/climate. What happens in the ocean/climate reflects and affects what happens on land: it's one interactive system."

- **Creativity and problem solving**
  "We have the capacity to solve difficult problems through innovation and ingenuity. We have a history of being resourceful, clever and thoughtful to solve problems and generate new ideas."

Metaphors can help you explain complex things
Use the following tested metaphors:

- **Heat-trapping blanket of CO_2**
  "When we burn fossil fuels for energy, the carbon dioxide that is released builds up in our atmosphere and acts like a blanket that traps heat around the world, disrupting our climate."

- **Regular versus rampant CO_2**
  "Regular levels of CO_2 are created by normal life processes but rampant levels of CO_2 are produced when we burn fossil fuels for energy – we need to reduce rampant CO_2, it's out of control."

Include in your stories the following ideas and words:

- Local and relevant impacts and actions, places and things that have meaning for people, e.g. sea level erosion in local communities and local council adaptation responses.

- Showing local collective level action in progress, the sort of action that can be scaled up to a level people feel is proportionate to solving the problem of climate change (for example, lawyers for climate action groups worldwide, or cities converting to non car based transport systems).

- Strike a balance between urgency and hope.

- The ability of people to solve this challenge and urgency to accelerate action.

- Adaptation and progress frames, e.g. our ability to adapt and progress and solve this problem and that we are already taking action.

- Telling people we are already adapting and making progress on climate action and others need to get on board or be left behind.

- Naming human agents, e.g. "people in government have failed to commit to policies to transition us to an economy that doesn't rely on carbon".

Air quality

To redirect people's thinking about air quality, say and do these things.

"All of us" values help people understand why it matters
Use these "all of us" values.

- **Fairness across places**
  "No matter where we live, all of us deserve clean air to breathe and the opportunity to live in healthy neighbourhoods."

- **Protection of the environment**
  "It's important that governments and businesses act to reduce harmful and greenhouse gas emissions to protect people and places."

- **Responsible management**
  "Responsible management of our air quality means thinking long-term for future generations. This means taking practical steps, relying on common sense and all the evidence we have, to look after our surroundings and our communities."

Tested explanations and frames help deepen understanding
Use these explanations and frames.

- **Our collective capacity to address air pollution**
  "Reducing air pollution and improving the quality of the air we all breathe is something we have all the tools to do. During COVID-19 we saw how, by acting together, we could reduce air pollution in our cities."

- **Health and wellbeing as a public good**
  "People in government can ensure that businesses operate in ways that ensure we have clean air to breathe and deliver health and wellbeing for us all."

- **Redesigning cities and systems for wellbeing**
  "People in local government can design cities and ways to travel around them so our children are not breathing in toxic particles from cars and buses."

Metaphors can help you explain complex things

Use these explanations and frames.

- **Environmental ground crew**
  "The ground crew at an airport makes sure everything goes smoothly and safely on the runway and in the air. There is a highly trained and skilled ground crew for environmental health that helps to ensure that we build and maintain environmental conditions that are healthy for people to live and work in."

- **Upstream/downstream**
  "We all live 'downstream' from environmental factors such as air pollution that negatively affect our health. We need to work together upstream to create positive environmental conditions for human health. This will make sure that what flows downstream builds a healthy and safe environment for all of us."

Use these words to make clean air visible:

- 'air quality' with 'clean air', 'healthy air' or 'dirty air'
- 'air pollutants' with 'harmful particles or gases in the air'
- 'pollutant' with the specific issue, e.g. carbon monoxide from car exhausts, coal dust, harmful particles from industrial processes.

The following sections provide in-depth information on unhelpful narratives that we want to direct people away from with your stories and potentially helpful narratives that you can direct people towards with your stories.

Part 2. Amplifying our helpful narratives in renewed stories

Narratives helpful to shifting mindset and building support for change are everywhere — you are probably already using many of them. They need more amplification, and more detail to work against the unhelpful narratives.

Helpful narratives can redirect people's understanding so they see the changes needed to make the biggest difference to all our lives. Helpful narratives can give people better explanations for problems and show solutions and influence shared mindsets and support.

The following narratives can be woven like a golden thread through your stories to help deepen people's understanding of changing the way we move people and goods.

Stories are told and narratives are understood. Together all your different stories can add up to bold new narratives. Here is an image of different COVID-19 stories that together reflect the narrative of a larger us.

"What tiles are to mosaics, stories are to narratives"

Source: From megaphone to mosaic by Thomas Coombes

Helpful narratives about transport and climate

Use these helpful narratives about transport and climate.

Changes that will make the biggest difference to transport (a systems narrative)

A systems narrative helps to redirect people's thinking away from transport individualism, or focusing on small-scale change within the current system. Stories that reflect a narrative about systems changes can talk about making changes or interventions that make the biggest difference. They can use values, frames and explanations that talk about the wider public good that a new transport system can create — physical, social and environmental benefits. They can use explanatory metaphors that help people see the constraints and limitations that are brought to bear on different groups of people — the limited options they have. Stories should name agents within the system who can bring about change and the policies, practices, and actions they should take.

Our streets are for all people

Stories that reflect a narrative about 'streets for all people' directs people's thinking away from car fatalism and transport individualism, and towards thinking about streets as public spaces for all people. They have a strong focus on equity. A 'streets for all people' narrative also directs people's thinking towards moving people and goods in ways that meet the needs of all people to move about and be included. Stories would use values that focus on including all people in our society, including helping them move around easily, focus on people currently excluded and harmed by the transport system and name how they are, and help people envision more people-friendly streets in practice.

Common destination[2]

A narrative that uses a 'bigger we' frame to speak about our shared vision for a better world where climate action has been taken, and ultimately, the things most important to us are shared. This narrative is strongly focused on the public good aspect of transport and climate action. We all care about people, about our future generations, and the health of the planet.

Stories that reflect this common destination narrative will include references to the public good aspects of a transport system, the benefits to most people, it will reference what most people have in common and share about cities, moving about, people we care about, e.g. there is more that is shared between us than we might realise. Protecting people and the places we love are good values to lead in your stories reflecting this narrative, as well as meeting the needs of all people in our communities. Use the words public good also.

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[2] Common Destination, "Reframing Aviation to Ensure a Safe Landing and Lay the Tracks towards a Fair Planet," 2022, https://reframeaviation.stay-grounded.org/.

Collective solutions[3] (better together)

Instead of leading with problems, which can further embed fatalism mindsets about people in government or the ability to address the problem, this narrative should offer solutions first, the ability of people to work together to creatively solve problems, alongside critiques/barriers to urgency and appropriate action. The focus is on how together (industry, government and communities) can lead bold action on long-term solutions. Stories that highlight the good work of people in power and asking them to scale it up and others to join them, as well as stories of local collective action can reflect this narrative. It is a narrative in which stories should focus on building hope, while being clear about the urgency of the need for action.

Other helpful narratives you can adapt

You can also adapt these narratives for the story you want to tell.

Enjoy the journey

A narrative that helps to highlight the health benefits, freedom and joy of different (non car or plane) modes of transport, to reorient the freedom and thrill seeking values that transport industries have promoted to encourage people to enjoy areas that are local to them, and take time to enjoy the process of travelling so future generations can as well. Stories that reflect this narrative might reflect the health and wellbeing aspects of new modes, the joy of e-bike riding, and the freedom and independence children and young people get from exploring local areas on their own.

Preparing for the big stuff

Instead of splitting focus between a number of different solutions or sounding overly optimistic, this narrative is used to speak proactively about how we can be prepared for the central and big challenges we face. Stories that reflect this narrative might use values about responsibility, pragmatic long-term planning for cities that address multiple needs (for example, housing, climate, transport). Talking about creating public good, and protecting the places we love can also reflect this narrative. This is a narrative in which stories are told about accelerating the decision making of people in power and about long-term investment over short-term dollars and cents.

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[3]FrameWorks Institute, "Topic #10: Talking about Climate Action in the Era of COVID-19," 2020, https://www.frameworksinstitute.org/article/topic-10-talking-about-climate-action-in-the-era-of-covid-19/.

Words to embrace

- Use phrases like: 'Streets are for all people', 'opening our streets', 'better together' and 'we have a common destination'.

- Talk about 'meeting people's different needs' and building cities that enable all people to get around, including disabled people, children, older people, people without transport, people who live far away, and people on low incomes.

- Talk about responsible management and working for the public good for the long-term.

- Consider saying 'freeing' rather than 'freedom' for adults, or talk specifically about the 'freedom of riding an e-bike'.

- Talk about 'options' rather than 'choices'.

- Talk about 'calming our streets' rather than 'lowering speed limits'.

Part 3. What we're up against: narratives that are unhelpful to deepening understanding

Before creating new stories, it's good to understand the unhelpful narratives that can dominate conversations and work to maintain the status quo. Unhelpful narratives can get in the way of people's deeper understanding, lead people to feel fatalistic about a better future, and focus people's attention on small individual changes rather than changes that will make the biggest difference.

Unhelpful mindsets about transport and climate

The following unhelpful mindsets can get in the way of people's deeper understanding and prevent them from supporting changes that will make the biggest difference.

Unhelpful mindset: Transport individualism

Problems and solutions in the way we move people and goods are down to an individual's choices and decisions.

Dominant, unhelpful narratives that reflect this mindset sound like:

- Narratives that emphasise lifestyle choices, behaviour change, or consumer-driven solutions, for example, narratives about individuals choosing to ride a bike, walk, or buy an electric vehicle.
- Narratives that emphasise individual 'carbon footprint' and choices people can make to reduce it.
- Consumerism narratives are similar to transport individualism and they emphasise consumer choices.

Why are these narratives unhelpful?

- People concentrate on individual behaviours and can't see and support the transport system that shapes how people and goods move.
- These narratives make invisible the upstream changes that will make the biggest difference.
- These narratives imply that systemic solutions aren't effective because, 'if that guy was able to choose to ride a bike, it must be possible for more people to do so'.
- Consumerism narratives imply that problems can be solved with economic solutions, like the laws of supply and demand.

- Consumerism narratives imply that if people want change, they can 'vote with their wallets'. But this gives more power to people with more money, and less power to those with less.

Counter transport individualism with this narrative: [Changes that will make the biggest difference – an inclusive systems story (see part 2 for details)](#)

Unhelpful mindset: Fossil fuel based fun and freedom/we LOVE cars

Freedom and fun are associated with flying and cars.

Dominant, unhelpful narratives that reflect this mindset sound like:

- Cars and flying are the norm, and are assumed to be the only modes of transport to offer freedom, choice and flexibility. Drivers and jetsetters have been designed over many years, by marketing companies, to be a part of our identity alongside freedom and excitement values.
- Associated narratives draw on an image of excitement and adventure and the individual freedom of quickly accessing far away places.
- "Kiwis love their cars."

Why are these narratives unhelpful?

- Implies that the only way to get around is fossil-based fuel transport and limits interest and investment in other modes of transport that are better for our health and planet.
- Creates an us-versus-them mindset where modes of transport are associated with particular identities and more for another group is assumed to mean less for me and mine.

Counter fossil fuel-based fun and freedom with this narrative: [Enjoying the journey (see part 2 for details)](#)

Unhelpful mindset: Them versus us

Changing our transport system means less for me and more for others.

Dominant, unhelpful narratives that reflect this mindset sound like:

- Narratives that emphasise different transport groups, for example 'cyclists' need protection, car drivers are the problem. Only lycra-clad middle-aged men ride bikes.
- Narratives that imply competition for limited resources.

Why are these narratives unhelpful?

- Puts people in silos and people find it harder to think about 'better together' solutions that work for everyone. Makes people feel that a gain for 'them' is equivalent to a loss for 'us.'
- Roads are not a rope in a game of tug of war for different groups to win or lose, rather than a thing that provides benefits for the whole community.

- People find it harder to see the collective 'all-of-us' and solutions that work for everyone.

Counter them versus us with these narratives: [Collective solutions and Common destination (see part 2 for details)](#)

Unhelpful mindset: Transport fatalism

Transport equals roads and cars and can't be changed.

Dominant, unhelpful narratives that reflect this mindset sound like:

- Narratives about people needing to drive cars. Transport problems are just a normal part of life. Mode shift solutions might work in other countries, but not in Aotearoa.
- Narratives that emphasise cars, car culture, roads, transport jargon, carparks, and problems with drivers. The solution is more road space for cars.

Why are these narratives unhelpful?

- These narratives focus people on cars and roads as solutions rather than changes that open the streets and make it easier to move people and goods.
- People's normalcy bias (a mental shortcut that favours the status quo) tells them that cars are the only viable way of getting around. If you talk about making things worse for people who drive cars, people can't see how mode shift would work and think it means they wouldn't be able to get around at all.
- Instead, talk about opening the streets for people to walk, ride bikes, and take public transport, and moving goods and people around in better ways.

Counter transport fatalism with these narratives: [Our streets are for all people and collective solutions (see part 2 for details)](#)

Unhelpful mindset: Transport financialism

Transport is mainly an issue of time and money.

Dominant, unhelpful narratives that reflect this mindset sound like:

- Narratives that emphasise transport shifts as an issue of cost, loss of efficiency, for example, congestion is a productivity and loss of money issue.

Why are these narratives unhelpful?

- These narratives direct people away from transport as a critical infrastructure for public good that shapes social and environmental health.
- These narratives make solutions that have higher upfront costs, but long-term wellbeing benefits, be 'too expensive' or a nice-to-have luxury.

Counter transport financialism with these narratives: [Common destination and preparing for the big stuff (see part 2 for details)](#)

Unhelpful mindset: Transport is dangerous

Dominant, unhelpful narratives that reflect this mindset sound like:

- Narratives that focus solely on the very unsafe nature of roads, transport and travel, especially for children.

Why are these narratives unhelpful?

- These narratives direct people's thinking to how to protect themselves from, or make changes to, dangerous elements within the existing transport system, for example, to drivers, roads, or cars, while keeping the system itself the same.
- These narratives direct people to think non-car car options are too dangerous, so they would drive their children in bigger cars. These narratives make it harder to see solutions other than more and bigger roads and cars. People are less likely to think of other transport options.

Counter transport is dangerous with these narratives: Our streets are for all people and changes that will make the biggest difference (see part 2 for details)

Unhelpful mindset: Government inaction fatalism and status quo

Dominant, unhelpful narratives that reflect this mindset sound like:

- Narratives about the government not doing anything or not being able to do anything.
- Narratives that suggest people in government tend to be unable to act or make changes that make a big difference.

Why are these narratives unhelpful?

- People feel they can't do anything to effect change because people in government won't listen or will be prevented from acting in other ways.

Counter government inaction with these narratives: Common destination, collective solutions and preparing for the big stuff (see part 2 for details)

Words to avoid

Try avoiding these words and sayings as they reflect unhelpful narratives that surface for people the unhelpful thinking listed above.

- Avoid talking about identity groups, for example 'cyclists' or 'car drivers' and switch to talking about the whole community.

- Avoid referring to restrictions on cars, like 'closing streets to cars', 'removing car parks', or 'lowering speed limits'. Instead, talk about practical steps to open the streets, calm the streets, or protect the people we love and care for.

- Avoid leading with a 'better for business' frame or mythbusting about the financial costs of change — instead talk about meeting people's different needs, including everyone, or helping people to be independent.

- Avoid using fear to motivate people, for example, using injury statistics as a reason for safer infrastructure — instead, use fostering independence, protecting the people we care about, making good pragmatic responsible decisions for long term wellbeing.

- Avoid using unhelpful metaphors like war metaphors 'cyclists battling for space' or sports metaphors 'competing for funding.' It surfaces unhelpful us versus them thinking.

Part 4. Audience, messengers, tone and channels to reach people open to persuasion

Focus on your base and people open to persuasion

Your narratives and stories should be ones that connect with people who are open to persuasion on this issue, and they need to be liked by your base so they will share them into the channels of those open to persuasion. Forget about engaging with the unhelpful narratives and stories of people who it is hard to persuade – it's exhausting, wasting your precious time and energy you need for developing your own narratives, and amplifies the unhelpful narratives. However, you can engage with these people who are hard to persuade using your own narratives should you need to respond (just don't expect them to shift, the main purpose is to place your own narrative in the line of sight of people open to persuasion).

Shift to effective messengers

A good messenger will do the heavy lifting of an effective story and helpful narrative because trust and credibility in the messenger is a mental shortcut people use to assess whether information is believable. We tend to trust people who are more like us, who we think share our values, who we have had positive experiences with, who share our background or experience, who are more attractive, who we believe are qualified to comment. And because many different types of people are open to persuasion on opening our streets, we need a wide range of messengers.

Consider these things when selecting the right messenger for your message.

1. Use messengers from across the political spectrum and show people from across the political spectrum taking action.

2. Unexpected messengers are powerful.

3. Try using people who don't ride bikes as messengers.

4. Children and younger people make great messengers for older people.

5. 'Experts' are not always effective messengers for people open to persuasion.

6. Politicians are not always good messengers if they are already signed to climate action (however, a conservative politician talking about climate action works because they are surprising).

7. Trusted messengers provide social proof of changes that have worked in other cities and neighbourhoods.

8. Repetition gives credibility and persuades people.

9. Pair the right messenger with messengers who bring trust and credibility for your persuadable audience.

Examples of unexpected messengers

In the UK a group of businesses came together as messengers and talked about the value of an integrated cycle network for the wellbeing of their staff. It's hard to argue with someone who says 'we care about our staff getting home safely'.

"Every worker must have access to safe transport at all hours of the day" – Get ME Home Safely Briefing

Example of social proof

This article Newtown locals on their new cycleway: 'It's amazing, I love it' is a good example of speaking positively about changes that have already happened.

Choose tone and channels for people open to persuasion

The tone you use for your stories will depend very much on the people you are trying to reach. Remember that people open to persuasion on these issues come from a wide range of backgrounds, demographic and income groups. This means that you can apply your own lived experience and expertise in communicating with different groups of people to build stories in an appropriate tone reflecting the narratives you want to amplify. The same applies to your channels. If you want to reach parents who are open to persuasion, create stories that draw on one of the more helpful narratives, but do it in a way that is appropriate to this group and on channels that reach your base.

Top tip: never assume that because someone is a member of a particular group, or votes a certain way, or uses an unhelpful narrative that they are not open to persuasion.

More resources

Narratives for Change Principles: Communicating about transport system shifts and climate change

How to Talk About Climate Change: A Short Guide, 2019

How to talk about air quality and environmental health, a short guide, 2022