

The Need to Review Applicant's Traffic Data

Introduction

When a planning application is submitted the forecast of traffic generation has normally been arrived at using a system known as TRICS. The TRICS database consists of thousands of traffic counts from comparatively recent developments. When wishing to determine the likely traffic generated from a new development, traffic engineers select a number of sites from the TRICS database which are similar to the proposed development and then take the average from the sample set as that which will be generated by the proposed development.

This system is sound and has been used for many years. However, the selection of sites that are similar is critical, if the outcome is to relate to the actual traffic generated.

Clearly, where traffic generation is going to be a critical factor in an application there can be a temptation to pick data that produces as low a figure as possible. The evidence of the application for the Care Village on Quakers Walk is overwhelmingly that this was done.

Our concern is that Wiltshire Highways should examine the TRICS analysis and ensure that it does meet the recommendations made in the TRICS Good Practice Guide.

TRICS Good Practice Guide

The following is an extract from the guide:

TRICS® is a very powerful and flexible system, and allows great variation in the calculation of both vehicular and multi-modal trip rates. It is possible, therefore, that two users of the system, applying different criteria and ranges to a task, may end up producing different results.

There are many areas within the system whereby careful selection criteria and ranges are important to assist in achieving robust and reliable data calculated by the system. This guidance is designed to assist users in this task.

However, the importance of compatibility in terms of local population, vehicle ownership, location type, etc. cannot be stressed enough. It is in the areas of site and development data where true compatibility should be sought, rather than just through the exclusion of regions, which could unnecessarily remove many compatible sites from a user's selected set.

The most important data fields in terms of site selection compatibility are the main category and sub-category location types. Sites in a town centre with good local public transport accessibility will naturally, as a rule, achieve a different type of modal split to a site in the country without any public transport. Mixing sites which are clearly incompatible in a set for trip rate calculation could lead to the production of misleading trip rates.

The approach that must ALWAYS be followed when producing trip rates is to first identify the criteria for site selection, then filter the sites according to that criteria, and then produce the trip rates once filtering is complete.

Previous Experience

We examined the application for the Care Village adjacent to Quakers Walk and were able to demonstrate that the TRICS dataset used to produce traffic generation estimates did not conform to good practice. When raised at the Planning Committee meeting, the Planning Manager dismissed our concerns in a most derogatory way. It is for this reason that we are seeking reassurances that in future TRICS datasets will be examined against the Good Practice Guide to ensure that the figures put forward by the developers are fair and reasonable.

Example from Care Village Application

Table 4.1 of the Good Practice Guide is reproduced below. This defines which location types are compatible and can be used with confidence, those that are possibly compatible and those which are definitely not compatible.

Location Type	Town Centre	Edge of Town Centre	Suburban Area	Edge of Town	Neighbourhood Centre	Free Standing
Town Centre		Possibly Compatible	Not Compatible	Not Compatible	Not Compatible	Not Compatible
Edge of Town Centre	Possibly Compatible		Possibly Compatible	Possibly Compatible	Not Compatible	Not Compatible
Suburban Area	Not Compatible	Possibly Compatible		Possibly Compatible	Possibly Compatible	Not Compatible
Edge of Town	Not Compatible	Possibly Compatible	Possibly Compatible		Possibly Compatible	Possibly Compatible
Neighbourhood Centre	Not Compatible	Not Compatible	Possibly Compatible	Possibly Compatible		Not Compatible
Free Standing	Not Compatible	Not Compatible	Not Compatible	Possibly Compatible	Not Compatible	

Site Compatibilities from the TRICS Good Practice Guide

The following table illustrates how well their selected data conforms to this best practice guide for each component of that application.

Type of Development	Compatible	Partly Compatible	Not Compatible
Nursing Homes	1	4	
Sheltered Accommodation	4	5	1
Residential Homes (Private)	1	10	
Residential Homes (for Rent)	2	5	
School		3	
TOTAL (%)	8 (22%)	27 (75%)	1 (3%)

Analysis of sites chosen from the TRICS Database

This table clearly shows the method used to select sites for the TRICS analysis did not follow the Good Practice Guide. Not only was one site specified as not compatible but only 22% were definitely compatible. The TRICS database is very large and it would not have been difficult to select more fully compatible sites.

This was not the only issue. The stress placed in the guide that “the importance of compatibility in terms of local population, vehicle ownership, location type, etc. cannot be stressed enough” was totally ignored as the characteristics of the sites selected for the Extra Care Housing detailed in the table below clearly show.

Location	Type of Location	Bus Stop	Bus Frequency	Shops	M&S Store	Hospital	Rail Station	Population
		metres	mins.	metres		km	Km	
1	City Centre	320	5	180	Y	2.8	1.3	229,000
2	Local Centre	23	12	18	Y	1.5	1.3	106,000
3	Suburban	482	3	320	Y	1.1	0.5	145,000
4	Edge of Town	137	60	800	Y	5	1.6	75,000
5	Edge of Town	45	5	55	Y	3.2	2.3	301,000
6	Edge of Town	550	11	730	Y	2	1.6	301,000
7	Town Centre	320	2	160	Y	4.3	1.1	184,000
	Devizes Site	704	30	562	N	34	20	13,000

Analysis of Sites Chosen from TRICS Database

If good practice had been followed, none of these sites would have been chosen. They are all in much larger conurbations (on average 15 times bigger) with all the benefits of local services that brings. Public transport services hardly compare; the proposed site was 432 metres further from a bus stop than the average and the frequency of buses is only half the average. Devizes is the only town without a railway station and an acute care hospital. We also consider the presence of a full branch of Marks and Spencer indicates a town where the vast majority of items can be purchased. All the selected sites has one, Devizes does not.

In short, those characteristics cited in the Good Practice Guide as important for a good match were totally ignored with the result that the sites chosen would generate far fewer car borne trips because:

- Bus stops are closer and services more frequent
- Acute care hospital is a short bus-ride away
- A railway station makes it easier to travel long-distance without the need for a car
- The proximity of a large town centre reduces the need to travel to other towns to shop

There have been other examples in previous applications. In the Spitalcroft case, one of the chosen sites was in Northern Ireland, where, at that time, car ownership was 20% lower than in the South-West of England. To the best of our knowledge none of the selections has ever been questioned.

Conclusions and Recommendations

We can only conclude that had the TRICS analysis in the case of the Care Village been examined, any reasonable person would have concluded that the dataset did not conform to good practice and, since all the sites were in much larger conurbations, the resultant estimates of traffic generated would be lower than would be the case in Devizes.

The Trust fought hard to ensure that our Traffic Model is accurate. If, however, the data used is that provided by applicants based on illegitimate data then the old adage “garbage in, garbage out” applies.

It is for this reason that we wish to have assurances that in future applications, the methodology used by the applicants to arrive at their estimates of traffic generation be subject to detailed scrutiny.

We appreciate that resources are limited and, in order to minimise any additional workload on officers we suggest the applicants putting forward data derived from TRICS should be asked to provide the following information:-

1. A statement that in producing the data they have conformed fully to the TRICS Good Practice Guide
2. How many of the sites used in the data compilation
 - a. Were fully compatible with the site matching criteria
 - b. Partially compatible
 - c. Incompatible
3. The following details for the conurbation in which each selected site resides:
 - a. Population
 - b. Is there a rail station within 5 kms?
 - c. Is there an Acute Care Hospital within 10 kms?

The answers to these questions will enable the officers to decide whether a further investigation is necessary.

Finally we would remind you that Devizes is an Air Quality Management Area and the damage to people’s health from polluted air is considerable. We deem it vital, therefore, that our elected representatives have accurate traffic data on which to base planning decisions.

Tony Sedgwick – Traffic Advisor the Trust