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Business improvement districts in urban freight sustainability initiatives: A case study approach

Michael Browne^{a*}, Julian Allen^a, Penny Alexander^b

^aUniversity of Westminster, 35 Marylebone Road, London NW1 5LS, UK

^bBaker Street Quarter Partnership, 64 Baker Street, London W1U 7DF, UK

Abstract

The paper extends research into the importance of freight transport partnerships by considering the role of Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) in supporting sustainable urban freight initiatives. A review of the freight transport-related work that has been carried out in BIDs in central London is included. A detailed case study of a freight project in the Baker Street Quarter (BSQ) Partnership provides insight into work carried out in the multi-tenanted office and hotel sectors. The findings of this research in terms of freight transport and logistics activity patterns at the businesses studied together with the potential freight transport solutions identified are discussed.

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1. Introduction

The research extends work on the importance of freight transport partnerships by considering the role of Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) in supporting sustainable urban freight initiatives. A BID is a business-led body formed to improve a defined commercial area, in which the local businesses have voted to invest collectively to

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +46-31-786 6798.

E-mail address: michael.browne@handels.gu.se

improve their environment. The improvements made by a BID are selected by their business members and can include activities such as street cleaning and security services, recycling, business support, improved infrastructure, area branding and promotion. During the past 10 years a number of researchers have noted the growing importance of public-private partnerships in relation to urban freight transport (Allen et al, 2010; Lindholm and Browne, 2013). In most cases the partnerships being discussed have been established specifically to deal with freight transport matters. However, in the UK the emergence of a growing number of BIDs provides another organisational structure within which freight issues can be addressed. The BIDs in central London are typically not-for-profit companies, funded by businesses that work closely with local public-sector partners (including local councils, Transport for London (TfL), and the Metropolitan Police) to achieve the desired improvements for the area.

Several of the BIDs in Central London have now started to work on projects concerned with urban freight transport. The paper will review five such BIDs in central London explaining the structure, membership and main activities to date. The review identifies the extent to which each of the BIDs has engaged (or plans to engage) with improving freight sustainability among its business members. The review includes an assessment of the freight transport impacts already achieved and the importance of the forthcoming plans among the BIDs. The review is then followed by a case study of the Baker Street Quarter BID that focuses on freight transport and logistics activity among non-retail business organisations (in this case offices and hotels). The case study makes use of interview and survey data to provide an analysis of the freight activity patterns, issues faced, and potential solutions.

2. Review of Bids in Central London

The Mayor of London and the Greater London Authority (GLA) strongly endorse the concept of BIDs and their role in the ‘place shaping’ of local town centres and industrial estates. BIDs are included in the Mayor’s Economic Development Strategy (EDS) and the London Plan which highlight the fact that BIDs are an important way of getting diverse local businesses to work together (Shared Intelligence and the Association of Town & City Management, 2013). The GLA identifies 37 BIDs operating in London (GLA, 2014 - see Fig. 1 and 2).

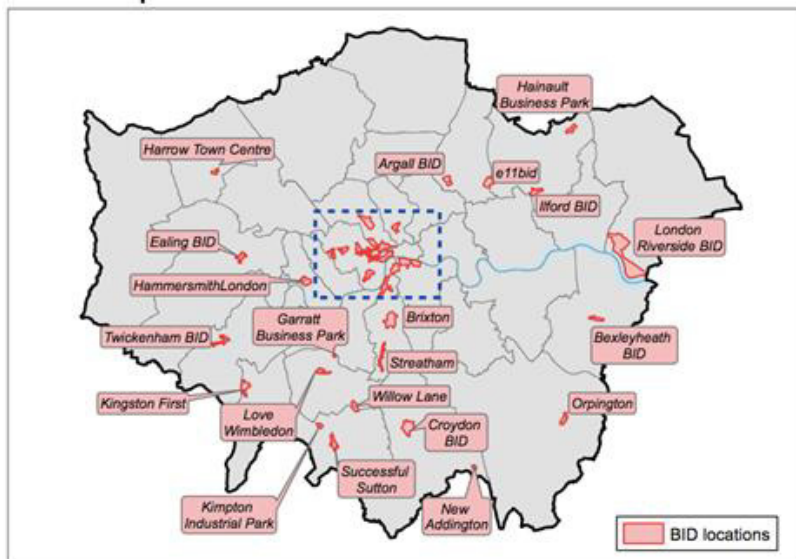


Fig. 1. BIDs operating in London (2013). Source: GLA, 2014.

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