Reframing the message

How we talk about the benefits



What is framing and why it matters.

Why we started to look at our framing.

What we've done so far.

What we've learned.

What we need to do next.

Duncan Dollimore

Associate Director Cycling UK

duncan.dollimore@cyclinguk.org

CyclingUK

What is framing?

A form of **agenda setting**.

The choices we make about what ideas we share and how we share them.

About creating meaning and improving our messaging.

Making sure we are having the conversations we want to have , not someone else's.



Things cycling and walking organisations have asked their CEOs to say!

- Rather than attempting to pit people driving, cycling and walking against one other.
- It's lazy to label measures which reduce car dependency as anti-car.
- Re-thinking how we plan our cities, towns and communities is not anti-car, but pro-people.
- 15 minute cities are not a conspiracy theory.
- Tragedy on our roads is not inevitable.
- Cycling doesn't have to stop you from looking smart and feeling fresh.
- Not an anti-car scheme.

Advice from all the framing experts – start by framing the problem

Questions to ask ourselves

- Are we trying to overcome a dominant narrative, and what is that?
- Are we trying to reinvigorate energy?
- Do we want to equip our community to frame cycling effectively?
- Are we facing a new or unexpected framing challenge?
- Are we having to unlearn unproductive framing around cycling?
- Are we trying to embed a culture of framing?

Looked at this thought various workshops and conversations.

And the conclusions were

- **We are trying to overcome a dominant narrative**. We need a new perspective on active travel, because there's someone else's toxic narrative getting in the way. Solution is to displace that and replace with our own counter narrative.

- **We need to equip others to frame active travel more effectively**, because people are falling into framing traps. Solution is a **toolkit** enabling everyone to adopt frames which resonate, deepen understanding, and catalyse action.

- **We need to embed a culture of framing**, because we don't have that now in the active travel sector. Too many people think facts will eventually prevail, and that people will always make rational choices based on evidence. To help, we need to look at how other sectors have addressed framing challenges.

Then consider five story questions

- What story do we want to be told?
- What are people thinking now?
- What's the story we are telling now?
- What story should we tell?
- How do we mobilise that and turn it into useful tools?

What story do we want to be told?

What do we want everyone to hear about the benefits of cycling – what do we want to tell people?



What are people thinking now?

What are the messages landing in, and when people are asked about cycling now. What are they drawing on to form an opinion?



What's the story we are telling now?

What responses is that triggering – both productive and unproductive?



What story should we tell?

These frames need further testing – both qualitative and quantitive.



How do we mobilise this and turn it into useful tools?



A few key takeaways

- Storytelling – If you tell me, it's a lecture. If you show me, it's a story.
- Need to talk about the **outcomes, not the activity**.
- Those outcomes should speak to what people want and why it matters to them – children being able to walk or cycle to school.
- Don't go straight to the problem – talk about the intrinsic worth of cycling.
- People can't care about an issue they don't know about.
- Make change seem possible.
- Don't feed culture wars – what we fight we feed!

Conversations with Think Tanks and others

- SMF's research shows most resistance when people feel they lack choice and agency – that net zero objectives are being imposed and 'done to them'.
- Centre right Think Tank – rather than climate, better perspectives to start from are personal choice and freedom, cost of living and local economy.
- Macro-messaging (climate change, sustainability, general public health benefits) are less effective than messaging about immediate personal benefits, particularly cost of living benefits – 'this change will save you money'.
- Talking about **active travel as something that can be done locally**, for local benefit, at low cost, is a better message than one rooted in global or national climate concerns.
- Health benefits should be approached carefully. People are more responsive to health messaging about children (clean air around schools) than messaging about their own health – which can come across as preachy and **'nanny state**'.

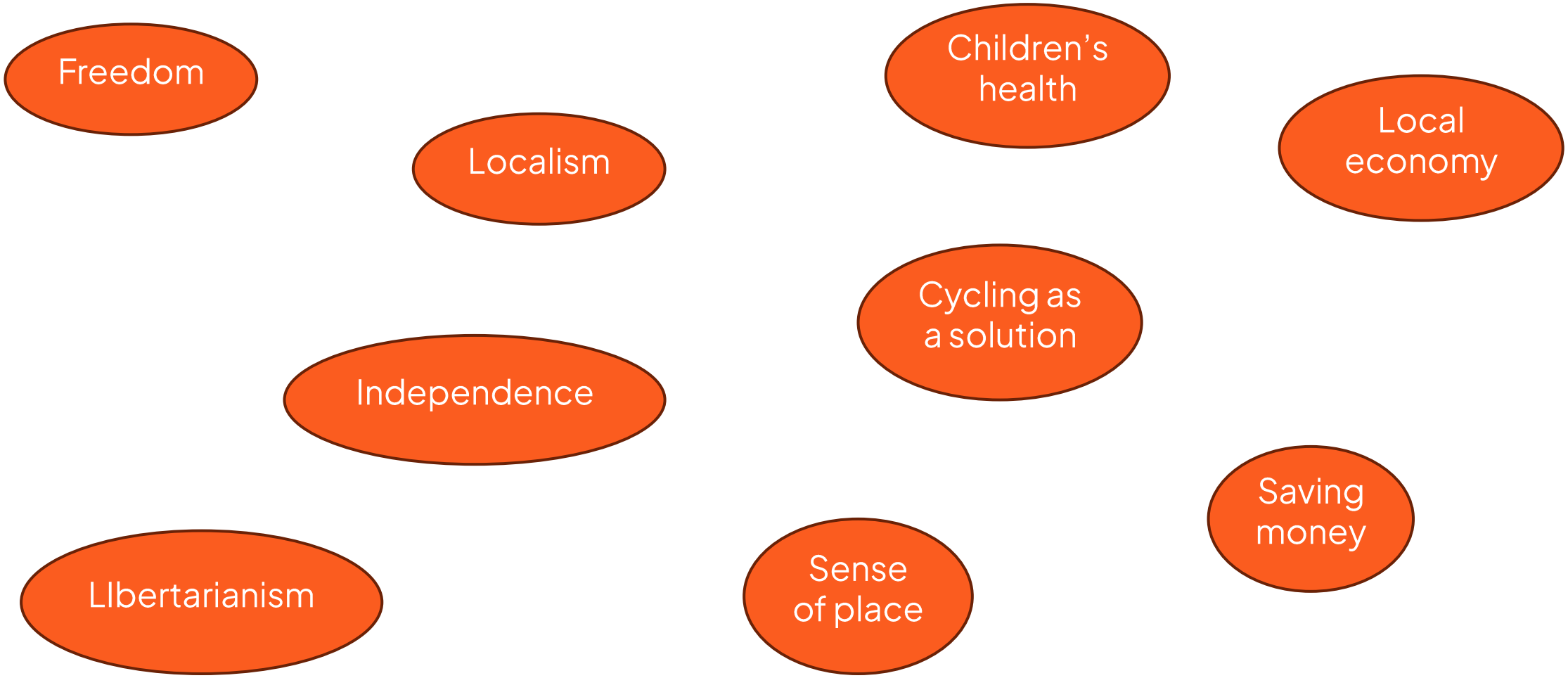
Some round table takeaways

- Data and facts alone are not enough – we need to **appeal to emotion** to resonate.
- Populism is rooted in local grievances, so it's vital to engage on a local level.
- We should be wary of media rebuttals and 'myth-busting' and instead seek to tell 'crossover stories' which transcend party politics – using relatable human stories as much as possible.
- Pragmatic reasons to cycle, and those which make a difference on an individual level, like efficiency and cost of living, will appeal more than societal issues such as climate and health.

Where does that leave us?

- We have a good sense of the messaging mistakes we've made previously.
- We know what we need to avoid – feeding culture wars, leading with data and evidence, being preachy.
- We have a good sense of the **audiences** we need to focus on –the persuadables.
- We know our framing needs a solution focus.
- We know from our own **BBR survey data** that' saving the planet' is no longer a key motivator for people engaging with the programme – it's cost of living.
- We have a good sense of the **frames we need to test** – to see how they resonate and whether they have any collateral implications.
- **We need to do that testing**.

Frames & universal values which keep coming up



CyclingUK

What next?

Develop a plan for refining and testing those frames and messages.



Develop a toolkit!

Reframing cycling

Duncan Dollimore, Associate Director Cycling UK
duncan.dollimore@cyclinguk.org

CyclingUK
Ride with us