

## 3 Strategic Context

### 3.1 Section Overview

- This Section looks at the main policy drivers for the implementation of a rapid transit scheme in the Belfast Metropolitan Area and discusses the context of the proposal in terms of Northern Ireland and local policy.
- The Programme for Government 2008-11, Investment Strategy for Northern Ireland 2008-18 and Budget 2008-11 were published by the Government in January 2008. The Investment Strategy for Northern Ireland contains a commitment to start work on the first phase of the rapid transit network by 2011.
- The Regional Development Strategy published in 2001 by the Department for Regional Development sets out the dynamic strategic planning framework for the spatial development of Northern Ireland up to 2025. The RDS recognised the high quality, high capacity, accessible services that could be provided by the development of a rapid transit network for Belfast (Strategic Planning Guideline BMA 4.2).
- The Regional Transportation Strategy developed the transportation policy of the Regional Development Strategy at a strategic level. The Regional Transportation Strategy funding included £100million for the commencement of a rapid transit network in Belfast.
- The Belfast Metropolitan Transport Plan, which is the Transport Plan for the delivery of the Regional Transportation Strategy in the Belfast Metropolitan Area, indicated that rapid transit should be considered on four main corridors. The Belfast Metropolitan Transport Plan proposed that EWAY be considered as the pilot scheme. The success of EWAY would dictate the extent of the further development of the rapid transit network, including CITI which could be promoted as a privately financed initiative.
- The Department for Regional Development have commissioned this Strategic Outline Case for the appraisal of the options for the Belfast rapid transit schemes CITI and EWAY as well as extensions of EWAY into West Belfast (WWAY) and of CITI southwards to Queens University and Belfast City Hospital.
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### 3.2 Introduction

Sustainability is at the heart of Northern Ireland's government policy. The first sustainable development strategy "First Steps towards Sustainability"<sup>2</sup> produced in May 2006 recognises that in order to build sustainable communities there is a need for a good transport system. In particular, there is a need for sustainable communities to be "*well served – with good transport services and communication linking people to jobs, schools, health and other services while minimising the need for travel*".

The Investment Strategy for Northern Ireland 2008-2018 recognises that:

<sup>2</sup> First Steps Towards Sustainability – A Sustainable Development Strategy for Northern Ireland, Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister, May 2006

*“High quality, transport, communication and energy networks are the vital arteries of today’s most successful economies ...Investing in efficient reliable competitive and sustainable networks is critical if we are to deliver our top priority of growing a dynamic and innovative economy.”*

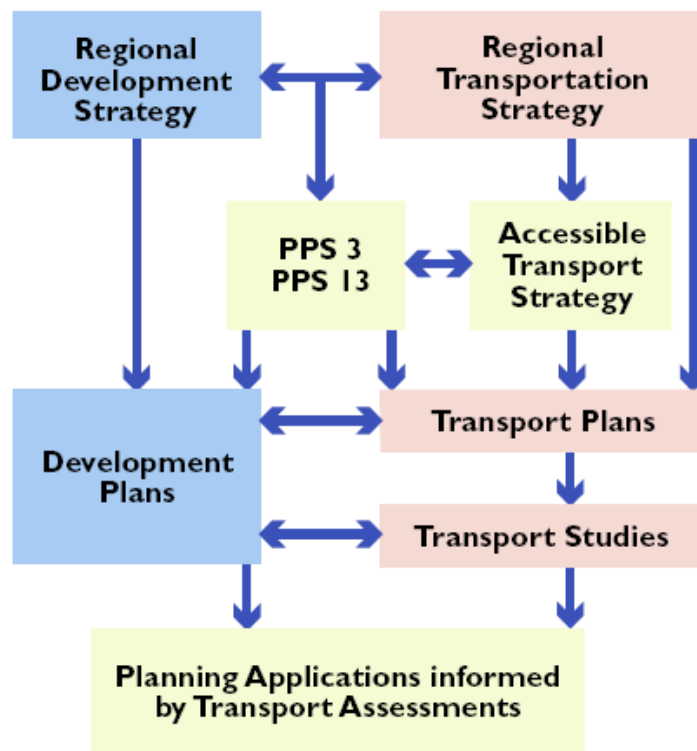
The rapid transit network and the individual rapid transit schemes are informed by policies set down at a regional and local level. The main policy thrust is to integrate closely land use and transport thereby promoting sustainable development and improving the quality of life.

### 3.3 Northern Ireland Policy Context

This section seeks to describe the policy context in which rapid transit will play a key role in promoting sustainable development and improving the quality of life.

Figure 3.1 below shows the linkages between the key Northern Ireland policy documents with regard to transport. These include the Regional Development Strategy, Regional Transportation Strategy, Accessible Transport Strategy, Planning Policy Statements, Development Plans, Transport Plans, Transport Studies and planning applications informed by Transport Assessments.

**Figure 3.1: Linkages between Policy Documents**



The development of sustainable transport systems in Northern Ireland has been guided by UK and NI policy, including that set out in the 1998 Northern Ireland Transport Policy Statement ‘Moving Forward’. This statement outlined a strategy for implementing the UK Government’s White Paper ‘A New Deal for Transport: Better for everyone’ in the special context of Northern Ireland. This informed the Northern Ireland-wide strategies set out in the Regional Development Strategy and the Regional Transportation Strategy.

### 3.3.1 Investment Strategy for Northern Ireland

The Strategic Investment Board (SIB) was created in April 2003 as an agent for the implementation of Central Government’s Reinvestment and Reform Initiative (RRI). The SIB launched the Investment Strategy for Northern Ireland (“ISNI”) in December 2005 following consultation with each of the government departments over the previous year.

The objective of the Investment Strategy for Northern Ireland (“ISNI”) was to set out a ten year plan for the management of investment needs in Northern Ireland in order to resolve a historic investment deficit and deliver public sector infrastructure fit for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The ISNI set out the allocation of a potential £16bn of capital funding from HM Treasury between each of the Government Departments within the Northern Ireland Assembly over the ten years from 2005 to 2015. The ISNI identifies an allocation of approximately £541million for transportation schemes (DRD) over the three years to 2007/08 and a further potential £1.9billion for the remainder of the plan. The ISNI recognises the potential of the pilot EWAY rapid transit scheme to become a part of this strategy, subject to economic appraisal and the completion of budgetary and statutory processes

The Programme for Government 2008-18, Investment Strategy for Northern Ireland 2008-11 and Programme Budget was published by the Government in January 2008. The Investment Strategy for Northern Ireland outlines a commitment for the Department to start work on the first rapid transit scheme in Belfast by 2011.

### 3.3.2 Regional Development Strategy<sup>3</sup>

The Regional Development Strategy (RDS) was published in December 2001 by the Department for Regional Development. It sets out the dynamic strategic planning framework for the spatial development of Northern Ireland up to 2025. The RDS sets the scene for integrating land use planning and transportation, focusing on enhancing accessibility to goods, services and facilities, minimising negative impacts and reducing the need to travel.

The transportation vision of the RDS was to *“have a modern, sustainable, safe transportation system which benefits society, the economy and the environment and which actively contributes to social inclusion and everyone’s quality of life”*.

The RDS identified that if this vision was to be achieved it would be important to improve public transport services in the Belfast Metropolitan Area and it made such improvement a Strategic Planning Guideline (see panel below).

**SPG-BMA 4: To improve the public transport service in the Belfast Metropolitan Area.**

In order to provide real public transport alternatives to the car within the BMA it will be necessary to identify in corridor action plans substantially improved quality of public transport services, especially in terms of journey ambience, frequency and reliability of travel times.

The RDS stated that if public transport was to become a real alternative to using the car then these improvements needed to be substantial and it recognised the high quality, high capacity,

<sup>3</sup> Shaping Our Future – Regional Development Strategy for Northern Ireland 2025, Department for Regional Development, December 2001

accessible services that could be provided by the development of a rapid transit network for Belfast – see Strategic Planning Guideline BMA 4.2 (see panel below).

**SPG-BMA 4.2: Rapid transit, both guided bus and light rail based systems, has a potential longer term role in delivering integrated transport solutions for the BMA.**

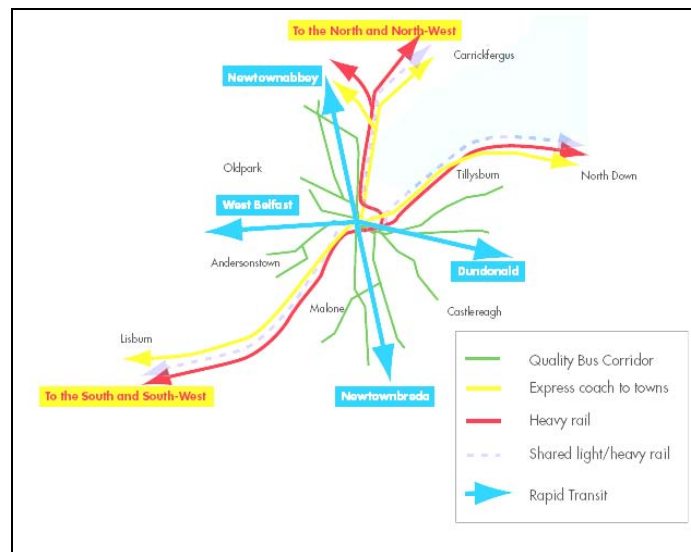
Keep rapid transit options under review for addressing future transportation requirements of the BMA. Examine the development of a BMA Rapid Transit Network in order to offer high quality, high capacity, accessible services using a mix of bus priority, guided bus and light rail, operating on-street and utilising existing and new rights of way.

### 3.3.3 Regional Transportation Strategy<sup>4</sup>

The Regional Transportation Strategy (RTS) developed the transportation policy of RDS at a strategic level. It identified that the future development and prosperity of Northern Ireland depended on a step increase in the level of provision of transport infrastructure and services. The RTS did not include commitments on individual schemes; this was to be done through three Transport Plans. However it did include an indicative future integrated public transport network for Belfast, incorporating a rapid transit system.

The funding included a total cost of £100million for the commencement of a rapid transit network and the example given was a high profile, innovative system linking Belfast city centre, Dundonald and the west of the city<sup>5</sup>. It was assumed that PPP/PFI funding would reduce the contribution required for this by £60 million within the 10 years covered by the Strategy. The RTS also identified a 2025 vision for a rapid transit network which included 4 routes extending from the city centre – to Dundonald, West Belfast, Newtownabbey and Newtownbreda (Figure 5.8, Page 85) – this is shown in Figure 3.2 below.

**Figure 3.2: Wider Rapid Transit Network outlined in Regional Transportation Strategy**



<sup>4</sup> Regional Transportation Strategy for Northern Ireland 2202-2012, DRD, July 2002

<sup>5</sup> Regional Transportation Strategy, Table 5.3 (Costed Initiatives by Mode: Belfast Metropolitan Area), Page 77.

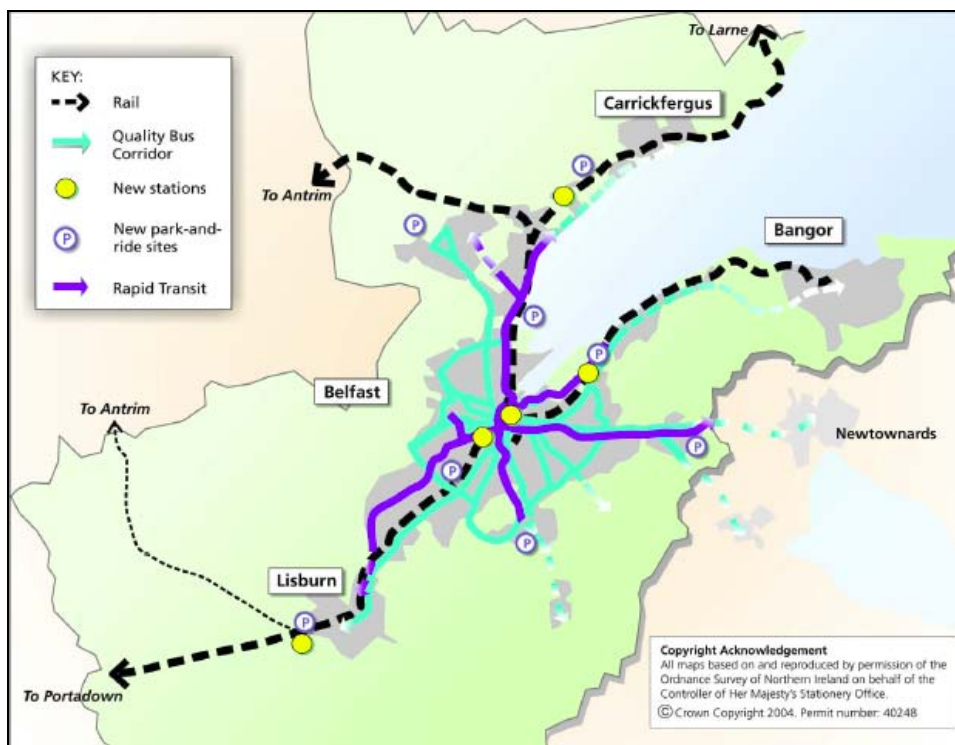
### 3.4 Local Policy Context

#### 3.4.1 Belfast Metropolitan Transport Plan<sup>6</sup>

As previously noted, the Belfast Metropolitan Transport Plan (BMTP) is the Transport Plan for the delivery of the RTS in the Belfast Metropolitan Area (BMA). It went through a systematic process of problem identification, consultation, plan development and appraisal which included consideration of a range of public transport solutions in each of the BMA’s main transport corridors.

The BMTP process identified that there were significant opportunities to substantially improve the quality and scope of public transport provision across the BMA. The future public transport network, envisaged within the 2025 Strategy for the BMA is shown in Figure 3.3 below. The wider rapid transit network envisaged for the city is shown as a purple line.

**Figure 3.3: BMTP 2025 Strategy – Public Transport Network**



(Source: BMTP, Figure 5.1, Page 5-2)

It was considered that Belfast had a major opportunity to deliver the type of sustainable transport system with high levels of public transport use, walking and cycling, that other UK towns and cities could, perhaps, only aspire to, for a number of key reasons:

- Many transport problems were not, yet, so bad or patterns of activity and travel behaviour so entrenched that they could not realistically and substantially be addressed with solutions such as rapid transit; and

<sup>6</sup> Belfast Metropolitan Transport Plan 2015, DRD, November 2004

- As consultation on the RTS and BMTP identified, attitudes to sustainable transport solutions in NI are very positive.

There had been improvements to transport in Belfast e.g. commencement of the roll-out of a Quality Bus Corridor (QBC) network, improved facilities at bus stops, etc. However while these changes were important the RDS and RTS had identified the need for a step change in public transport provision; something more radical needed to be done. Specifically they identified the strong strategic case for considering the potential of a new public transport mode – rapid transit – that sat between the type of service offered by rail and that offered by conventional bus.

Many UK towns and cities have been looking at rapid transit. Certain cities have introduced Light Rail Transit (LRT) schemes – though with mixed financial success. The sheer cost and complexity of LRT has forced most locations to now look at bus-based rapid transit – or BRT – as a more feasible alternative.

The BMTP process included investigation of the role of different forms of public transport in each of the main transport corridors – termed Metropolitan Transport Corridors (MTCs) as per the RDS. It concluded that, longer term, there would be the demand for and opportunities to introduce BRT in most of the MTCs radiating out from Belfast city centre – complementing rather than replacing existing rail and bus services.

Analysis of value for money, needs and feasibility indicated that four main corridors should be considered first:

- The Newtownards corridor including Dundonald – known as EWAY;
- The corridor to Bangor including the Harbour Estate and Titanic Quarter – known as CITI;
- The Downpatrick corridor along Stranmillis Road to Cairnshill / Carryduff – known as SuperRoute; and
- An extension of the scheme proposed as EWAY westwards into West Belfast – known as WWAY.

Of these options the BMTP proposed that EWAY be considered as the priority – confirming the view set out in the RTS. This corridor offers very real opportunities in the form of a disused transport route; the former Belfast-Comber railway line. It is also one of the MTCs that is most constrained in terms of highway capacity and public transport options (since it has no rail service).

However, because of the rapidly evolving plans for the regeneration of the Harbour Estate – specifically Titanic Quarter – BMTP also recommended that the option be retained to promote the CITI route as a privately funded scheme in tandem with the redevelopment.

The following section briefly summarises the other aspects of the BMTP that are most relevant to the assessment of rapid transit in the Belfast area.

### **3.4.1.1 *Quality Bus Corridor Network***

Local bus services will form the backbone of the BMA's public transport system, focused on the main MTCs. The BMTP proposals include an extensive roll-out of Quality Bus Corridors (QBCs) on fourteen radial corridors, including the Holywood Road, Upper Newtownards Road, Falls Road, Springfield Road, Great Victoria Street and University Road as well as a number of

orbital routes. QBCs will offer a substantial improvement in the quality of bus provision. The proposals can be characterised as comprising:

- Proposed infrastructure measures such as the provision of bus priority measures; the use of bus lane enforcement cameras; the provision of high quality bus shelters with real time information; and the improvement of walk access/egress to/from bus stops;
- Proposed service improvements such as the use of modern, accessible buses; an increase of at least 25% in service frequency on all routes using the QBC infrastructure (and an up to 50% increase on the highest demand routes); and the distinctive branding of services both on-bus and through signing at stops; and
- Proposed operational improvements such as greater emphasis on buses from different radial corridors linking across Belfast city centre; the continued roll-out of integrated ticketing; the effective enforcement of bus priority measures; and more customer care training for staff operating QBCs.

#### **3.4.1.2 Long-Distance Bus and Coach Services**

The Regional Strategic Transport Network (RSTN) Transport Plan sets out the proposals for improving long distance coach services that link other parts of Northern Ireland to the BMA. Within the context of the BMA, the BMTP proposes that the frequencies of longer distance bus and coach services are enhanced on the major, or ‘spine’, routes and are supported by regular interval timetables such that they can better integrate with rail services, local bus services and with the proposals for rural bus services.

#### **3.4.1.3 Railway Improvements**

The BMTP 2025 Strategy recognises the need to maximise the value of the investment in the rail network that has already been committed following the outcome of the work of the Railways Task Force. The 2025 Strategy includes the improvement of facilities and access to stations; substantially improved service frequencies of up to 100% on all routes; and the provision of new stations at key locations as part of the wider objective to increase the catchment area for rail-based trips.

The BMTP proposes the provision of a new railway station at Tillysburn to serve the airport as well as the D5 Holywood Exchange Development site. The implementation of the new railway station is closely linked to that of the CITI rapid transit scheme (to the airport and Belfast Harbour Estate). This would enable the new railway station to serve the dual functions of rail-air and rail-rapid transit interchange. The BMTP identifies the implementation of the railway station as being within the BMTP Plan period (2015), although it is not currently identified on any of Translink’s short to medium term programmes.

#### **3.4.1.4 Park-and-Ride**

Park-and-Ride is a key element of an integrated transport system for the BMA. The aim of park-and-ride is to provide an alternative to using the car for journeys all the way into central urban areas. Two broad forms of park-and-ride provision exist:

- Local park-and-ride, usually provided using dedicated bus services and operated from park-and-ride sites located on the edge of the main built-up area; or
- Strategic park-and-ride, usually provided by existing rail or bus services from stations/stops located further away from the main built-up area.

The BMTP identifies the implementation of local park-and-ride sites with either bus-based or rapid transit-based park-and-ride services in each of the MTCs supplemented by rail-based park-and-ride in MTCs which have rail routes. The sites proposed include Fortwilliam, Kennedy Way, Cairnshill, Millmount and Tillysburn. The Tillysburn park-and-ride site would have the most impact on the proposed CITI rapid transit proposals whereas the Millmount park-and-ride site is specifically linked to the implementation of the EWAY rapid transit scheme.

The BMTP also includes proposals for the creation of a number of strategic park-and-ride facilities at locations further away from the urban centre they serve and includes sites at railway stations / halts and informal sites served by existing bus services. It is proposed that the provision of strategic rail-based park-and-ride facilities is pursued at all railway stations and halts in the BMA and in particular, facilities are envisaged to be developed or expanded at Bangor and Holywood on the Belfast-Bangor line.

The BMTP also proposed the creation of a number of informal park-and-ride sites to provide opportunities for car users to transfer to public transport where they find it most attractive to do so. These sites are likely to be smaller in size than the local park-and-ride sites and will be served by existing bus services rather than by dedicated park-and-ride services. Potential sites are identified at Sprucefield, Sandyknowes and Carryduff.

#### **3.4.1.5 *Parking Measures***

Parking restraint measures under the BMTP are largely focussed on Belfast city centre and include:

- Reduction of the availability of public long-stay commuter parking in central Belfast, phased over time in conjunction with the provision of park-and-ride spaces outside the city centre;
- Maximising the utilisation of public short-stay spaces to support commercial vitality, though not significantly expanding the supply of short-stay spaces;
- Effective control and enforcement of parking measures by establishing a Controlled Parking Zone (CPZ) covering Belfast city centre. This would be supported by the recent decriminalisation of parking offences that has taken the responsibility for enforcing parking controls away from the PSNI. Effective control of parking would also necessitate the establishment of residents-only parking schemes in areas adjacent to the city centre;
- Controlling the growth of private non-residential (PNR) parking in and around central Belfast by restricting the amount of additional parking that can be provided as part of new commercial developments; and
- Maintaining the provision for parking in the city centre for the mobility impaired.

### **3.4.1.6 Congestion Charging**

Congestion Charging, also referred to as road pricing or road user charging, is another form of demand management. In the urban context, congestion charging would require the payment of a fee for driving within a particular area, such as central Belfast. It could be employed to influence peak commuter journeys to central Belfast, with the potential for application to a wider area.

The BMTP does not propose the implementation of congestion charging within the BMA. Congestion Charging, however, is an evolving area and it will be further reviewed within the BMTP period, drawing upon the experience from other parts of the UK.

### **3.4.1.7 Strategic Highway Network**

The BMA's highway network is one that is typical of most large urban areas comprising a set of radial routes that converge on a central hub represented by Belfast city centre. Its performance is fundamental to the economic vitality and social well-being of the BMA and, in its strategic context, Northern Ireland as a whole.

As defined in the BMTP the 2025 Strategy aims to enhance the strategic highway network such that it can:

- Safely and efficiently cater for longer-distance movements of people and freight to, from and between different parts of the BMA; and
- Support the reduction of traffic and the impact of traffic on the non-strategic highway network – particularly in built-up areas.

The delivery of this strategic network within the 2025 Strategy will comprise:

- Major capacity enhancements at key locations in the network in the form of road widening and junction improvements to address 'bottlenecks' and provide a consistent and safe standard of road; and
- Traffic management in the form of Route Management Strategies (RMS) to better facilitate the safe and efficient movement of longer-distance traffic.

Within this longer term framework the 2015 BMTP proposals for the strategic highway network includes the following schemes that are relevant to the rapid transit schemes under review:

- The widening of the M1 Motorway and the grade-separation of the Broadway and Grosvenor Road roundabouts;
- The widening of the A2 Sydenham Bypass between Tillysburn and the M3 Lagan Bridge from a 2-lane dual carriageway to a 3-lane dual carriageway;
- An improved connection from the A2 to the Harbour Estate (to be developer funded) which will replace the existing Dee Street link. The Dee Street junction onto the Sydenham Bypass is likely to be closed;
- The widening of the A55 Outer Ring Road at Knock Road to a standard 4 lane single carriageway;

- The implementation of the Hollywood Arches Bypass (non-strategic) to alleviate congestion at this location (to be developer funded); and
- The Connsbank Link providing a new connection to both the A2 and the Harbour Estate from the Newtownards Road (to be developer funded).

The A2 – Belfast to Bangor route has been identified as a corridor which will benefit from the development of a RMS. The RMS for the A2 will consider a broad range of measures including the rationalisation of junctions to remove uncontrolled right turn movements; the implementation of measures to provide consistency in lane widths; the review of speed limits; the provision of safety cameras; and the application of limits on the creation of new accesses.

## **3.5 Other Relevant Strategies**

### **3.5.1 Accessible Transport Strategy<sup>7</sup>**

The Accessible Transport Strategy (ATS) stems from the Regional Transportation Strategy and has been prepared by the Department against the background of wider transportation policy in Great Britain and the European Union. The Accessible Transport Strategy's vision is *"to have an accessible transport system that enables older people and people with disabilities to participate more fully in society, enjoy greater independence and experience a better quality of life"*.

The Accessible Transport Strategy has given further guidance to the development of the rapid transit schemes on issues of accessibility, specifically regarding issues faced by people with disabilities and older people.

## **3.6 Conclusion**

The development of sustainable transport systems in Northern Ireland has been guided by UK and NI policy, including most recently the Draft Investment Strategy for Northern Ireland 2008-2018 and that set out in the 1998 Northern Ireland Transport Policy Statement 'Moving Forward'. This statement outlined a strategy for implementing the UK Government's White Paper 'A New Deal for Transport: Better for everyone' in the special context of Northern Ireland. This informed the Northern Ireland-wide strategies set out in the RDS and the RTS. It is evident that a rapid transit scheme in Belfast is not only supportive of the RTS and local policy strategies but will also play a key part in the delivery of wider transport strategies in the UK.

The RDS made improving public transport in the BMA a Strategic Planning Guideline and it specifically recognised the high quality, high capacity, accessible services that could be provided by the development of a rapid transit network for Belfast. The RTS reflects the transportation principles in the RDS and seeks to address the effect of years of under investment in transportation and promote sustainable transport options and to encourage modes of travel other than private car for appropriate journeys. The RTS funding incorporates £100million for the commencement of a rapid transit network in the BMA.

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<sup>7</sup> An Accessible Transport Strategy for Northern Ireland, DRD, April 2005

The BMTP provides a local transport plan for the BMA up to 2015 and sets out how the RTS will be implemented in the BMA. As guided by RDS and RTS, rapid transit is a key element of a preferred transport strategy for the BMA, and the implementation of the EWAY, CITI and WWAY rapid transit schemes is a significant component in that strategy. Thus the policy context for rapid transit in Belfast is well defined and the opportunity to develop a rapid transit scheme in the Belfast area is important, the scheme could become the centre of transport development and urban regeneration in Northern Ireland.