

SUBREGIONAL TRANSPORT PLAN (DRAFT) 2015

Alliance Party response to consultation paper by the
Department of Regional Development

23 June 2006

1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1.1 Alliance recognises that as a result of increased economic activity, there has developed an increased need for the movement of goods and the transportation of people to and from places of work.
- 1.1.2 Alliance recognizes that whilst the average GDP per capita in Northern Ireland remains significantly lower than in Great Britain, throughout the 1990s the region has achieved sustained annual growth, and the average unemployment gap between Northern Ireland and Great Britain has closed considerably.
- 1.1.3 Although an increase in wealth within Northern Ireland has resulted in increased car ownership, the ability for further growth remains and this will inevitably see an increase in the potential for car ownership.
- 1.1.4 In 2001, the Department for Regional Development recognised that the general cost of bus travel (fares) had risen faster than the cost of motoring. Alliance therefore believes that if the resulting favouritism for private transport continues unabated, then in addition to the negative environmental and health consequences brought about through CO2 emissions and fossil fuel consumption, there will develop increased congestion on our roads.
- 1.1.5 Alliance believes it essential that such an issue is addressed early on within planning.
- 1.1.6 Alliance is also aware that despite an increase in car ownership 30% of households are without a car and remain dependent upon public transport.
- 1.1.7 Unfortunately, as a consequence of limited funding, recent public transport policy has focused resources on a small number of core routes. The impact of this has been that those who are most committed to, and dependent on, public transport (e.g. older people and those with restricted mobility) are in danger of losing connection to vital services and community resources.
- 1.1.8 Alliance believes it essential that reforms be introduced which assist those who suffer as a result of poor public transport
- 1.1.9 The Alliance Party, in an effort to ensure the sustainability of the environment, reduce unnecessary congestion and secure the access of the disadvantaged to vital services and community resources, is committed to ensuring the development of a convenient, efficient and cost effective public transport system. For this reason the Party welcomes the Draft Sub-Regional Transport Plan 2015 and the opportunity to respond to it.

2 WALK/CYCLE MEASURES

- 2.1.1 Alliance welcomes the outlined walk/cycle measures and the goal of ensuring that those with disabilities are catered for.
- 2.1.2 In an attempt to meet both this goal and ensure priority is given to pedestrians within heavily foot trafficked areas, Alliance encourages the DRD to include within its plans the replacement of 'drop kerbs' with 'at level'.
- 2.1.3 Alliance is concerned at the reduction in the number of people who walk and the increasing number of those who rely upon their cars as their primary means of transportation.
- 2.1.4 Whilst Alliance agrees with the DRD that the number of walkers is decreasing due to the poor quality of infrastructure for pedestrians – as seen in the abundance of narrow and uneven footways – Alliance similarly believes that, safety issues are of a key concern to many parents.
- 2.1.5 Alliance therefore proposes that the DRD, in addition to the development of road infrastructure, should encourage the Government to increase the public funding of crossing guards and other road safety measures.
- 2.1.6 In conjunction with its concern for the safety of pedestrians the Alliance Party is also concerned about the perceived dangers of highway traffic to cyclists.
- 2.1.7 Alliance therefore welcomes the DRD's proposed spending on traffic calming measures in an effort to improve driver behaviour and reduce traffic speed.
- 2.1.8 Alliance supports the proposals for cycle measures.
- 2.1.9 However, in seeking to reduce congestion and the environmental and health impacts resulting from the overdependence on motor vehicles, this Party is concerned that the provision of cycle routes is largely dictated by where it is convenient to install cycle routes.
- 2.1.10 Alliance therefore encourages:
- the DRD to take more account of routes heavily used by cyclists; this in turn will avoid driver frustration at the sight of empty cycle lanes;
 - the DRD to consider including cycle paths within, and as part of, its proposed extension of footways.
- 2.1.11 Alliance additionally proposes that the proposed cycle parking at bus and rail stations be extended to other locations including schools, town centres and places of employment.
- 2.1.12 In an effort to ensure the development of secure cycle parking sites, Alliance believes that all outlined proposals should be addressed and included at the planning stage of any development.

3 HIGHWAY MEASURES

- 3.1.1 Alliance proposes that, in conjunction with the outlined DRD highway measures, any new developments within various towns and cities should

focus upon the needs of pedestrians, cyclists and the encouragement of individuals to use public transportation.

- 3.1.2 For example, the development of a bus lane along the hard shoulder of motorways will, as is evident on the approach to Sandyknowes, reduce congestion and improve services for all commuters.
- 3.1.3 Alliance believes that by the DRD encouraging the development of such lanes within road expansions, commuters would be offered a real incentive to use public transportation.
- 3.1.4 However, there is an essential need to ensure that such public transport is adequately invested in. Alliance believes that Northern Ireland would be better served if the money invested into the Regional Transportation Strategy favoured public transport over private car road usage. For example, in the rest of the UK the budget split is 60%/40%, respectively.
- 3.1.5 It is the Alliance Party's belief that by continuing to favour investment in highways at the expense of public transport, any laid out goals will not be as successfully achieved due to expensive, yet inadequate, public transport merely encouraging increased car usage.
- 3.1.6 Alliance is concerned at the number of lives that are lost on our roads each year due to preventable accidents.
- 3.1.7 Alliance therefore welcomes the Departments proposals to introduce reform of our roads through the investigation into, and the addressing of, the causes of collisions.
- 3.1.8 However, Alliance recognises that the common factor in most road casualties is that they occur on rural single carriageways, and most often those where the official speed limit is 60 mph.
- 3.1.9 Alliance therefore believes that if the deaths on our roads are to be avoided then a need for a reduction in the speed limit is necessary within these areas.
- 3.1.10 However, if any proposed and developed legislation is to be effective in reducing accidents then efficient enforcement of it must occur. Alliance therefore urges the DRD to discuss with the PSNI, and the Government, when and where to introduce new, yet safe, speed limits.
- 3.1.11 It is Alliance's hope that such early action, in addition to saving lives, will reduce the need for, and as a result the costs associated with, proposed programmes of collision remedial works.

4 PARKING MEASURES

- 4.1.1 Alliance welcomes the proposed parking strategy, but remains concerned that parking congestion within residential areas will continue to pose a serious problem.
- 4.1.2 Today drivers continue to stop and park where it clearly states it is forbidden. This results in obstructions for people driving home and

restricting the flow of traffic no matter what length of time the vehicle stops for.

- 4.1.3 Such congestion is exacerbated by illegal parking due to people inconsiderately parking on double yellow lines, within disabled parking bays, under no parking signs and across dropped kerbs which are used by people with prams, wheel chairs and Zimmer frames.
- 4.1.4 In an effort to combat such abuse, reduce parking congestion and encourage the uptake of public transport, Alliance proposes that the DRD to implement resident parking schemes, with limited parking times for non-residents in areas close to town and city centres.
- 4.1.5 Alliance understands that whilst the decriminalising of parking enforcement will allow for improved overseeing of parking violations, failure to enforce any parking regulations will continue to ensure the current problems remain.
- 4.1.6 Alliance therefore proposes that in addition to increased parking restrictions within town and city centres, there must develop a zero tolerance approach to any violation.
- 4.1.7 In seeking to secure the reduction in the level of vehicles entering and causing congestion within our centres, Alliance also proposes that the DRD focus its efforts on developing efficient, formal park and ride schemes – especially for those who reside within rural networks and, at present, drive their vehicles the total length into town and city-centres.
- 4.1.8 Perceiving ‘the school run’ as a serious source of congestion due to the heavy volume of traffic and the desultory parking which occurs as a result of parents waiting for their children, Alliance requests that any transport plan developed takes into consideration the essential need to invest in affordable school transport.

5 BUS MEASURES

- 5.1.1 Alliance welcomes the bus measures outlined within page 6 of the consultation document but reiterates the need for any policy to be successfully enforced.
- 5.1.2 Taking into consideration the needs of the 30% of people without personal transportation, and recognising that weekends are the times when most people travel in a social manner, Alliance wishes to see any minimum service developed for rural settlements -- regardless of their population band -- include journeys during the weekend as well as during the week.

6 RAIL MEASURES

- 6.1.1 Alliance perceives the railway as the most environmentally friendly way of moving people in significant numbers.
- 6.1.2 Alliance therefore welcomes the attitude towards the development of the rail network and railway stations.

- 6.1.3 In addition to the planned upgrading of stations to facilitate those with a disability, Alliance proposes that additional consideration be given to improving other aspects of train stations, e.g. the parking facilities for those who live outside of towns and cities but do not wish to commute the whole journey by car.
- 6.1.4 In order to encourage and support the increased use of the train, the Alliance Party proposes that the DRD review the development of a scheme similar to the bus park and ride and that ticket machines be placed at train station car parks with parking tickets doubling up as train tickets.