

20 June 2006

Geraldine O'Neill  
Sub-Regional Transport Plan Team  
Transportation Unit  
Roads Service  
Department of Regional Development  
Room 3 – 29, Clarence Court  
10 – 18 Adelaide Street  
Belfast  
BT2 8GB



Dear Ms O'Neill

### **DRAFT SUB-REGIONAL TRANSPORT PLAN 2015**

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Draft Sub-Regional Transport Plan 2015.

The Northern Ireland Tourist Board (NITB) welcomes the commitment from the Department of £2319m over the period to deliver the Sub-Regional Transport Plan (SRTP). This commitment will be of benefit to both residents and visitors through improved and enhanced transport infrastructure.

NITB, in conjunction with key partners, is currently delivering the Strategic Framework for Action 2004 – 2007 (available at [www.nitb.com](http://www.nitb.com)) which sets out the most effective response to the challenge of attracting visitors, increasing the competitiveness of tourism businesses and creating effective communication within the industry. A key element of the Framework is visitor servicing which sits under Programme Area 4 of the Framework but which crosses all areas within it.

In order to deliver and encourage high quality visitor servicing across the industry, NITB put in place in 2004 a Visitor Servicing Strategy for Northern Ireland (available at [www.nitb.com/visitorservicing](http://www.nitb.com/visitorservicing)) This Strategy and associated user Manual details best practice and guidelines for those involved in the tourism industry. Transport and the associated sectors such as walking and cycling are covered in detail in the Strategy.

NITB also currently liaises closely with DRD Roads Service in relation to Tourist Signing. The two organisations have an agreed joint policy which is available at [www.nitb.com/visitorservicing](http://www.nitb.com/visitorservicing) In terms of signage in general and destination signage, NITB hopes that the needs of visitors unfamiliar with perhaps the signage hierarchy and language will be considered.



In terms of the proposed measures:

### **Walk/Cycle Measures**

- NITB welcomes the further upgrade and enhancement of the pedestrian network
- NITB fully supports the further provision of cycle routes and cycle parking at bus and rail stations
- NITB hopes that the facility to carry equipment on buses and trains eg. bikes will be addressed
- In terms of the provision of national and local walking and cycle trails, NITB would suggest that DRD to liaise closely with the Countryside Access and Activities Network (CAAN) and Sustrans

### **Highway Measures**

- NITB welcomes the proposals to lessen the effects of traffic problems and direct traffic from high pedestrian flows
- NITB also welcomes the DRD's commitment to providing congestion relief to environmentally sensitive areas which are often key visitor sites

Related to this area is NITB's ongoing discussions of the Draft Strategic Overview of Coastal Routes and Tourist Driving Trails in Northern Ireland 2006 – 2013. in conjunction with Roads Service of DRD and local stakeholders. I have attached a copy of the Draft Plan at **Annex A** for information.

### **Parking Measures**

- NITB fully supports the proposals set in this section. The Board would also highlight the need for the provision of tourist information within car parks

### **Public Transport Measures**

- NITB fully supports the provision of and encouragement for both residents and visitors to use public transport
- In terms of the upgrade of bus stops NITB would encourage DRD to consider the provision of visitor information at these facilities. NITB is keen to liaise closely with DRD and Translink to deliver this opportunity
- Again in the refurbishment of bus and train stations NITB is keen to discuss the provision of visitor information
- 4 of the 5 major inter-regional gateways in Fig. 3.1 (p.34) are on the rail transport network. Rail is a quick, safe, eco-friendly method of transporting visitors around Northern Ireland and must continue to be improved and resourced.

### **Taxi Measures**

- Taxis are much used by visitors especially in major towns and cities. NITB supports this development of well located and organised taxi ranks
- The monitoring of illegal unlicensed taxis is a key issue and should continue to be addressed

### **Rural Areas**

- NITB supports the provision of new facilities and upgrade of existing infrastructure

### **Open Countryside**

- NITB would highlight the development of Signature Projects and Winning Themes within the Strategic Framework. It is important that visitors have access to these facilities and recreational opportunities via public transport
- NITB also hopes that the facility to carry luggage and specialist equipment eg. mountain bikes will be considered
- NITB welcomes the new Demand Responsive Transport service and hopes it will be extended to visitors

Another key areas that NITB would like to highlight is the ongoing delivery by NITB and Translink of recommendations made within the Review of Public and Private Transport for Tourists (2005) carried out by PricewaterhouseCoopers for the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment. NITB is due to meet consultants this week undertaking a Review of the Rural Transport Fund on behalf of DRD to discuss the future of the Rambler Service and other associated areas.

In summary, NITB welcomes DRD's innovative and positive commitment to the development of measures to support transport, both public and private, in Northern Ireland. NITB hopes to work closely with DRD and other key partners to deliver some areas of mutual interest.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Draft Sub-Regional Transport Plan.

Yours sincerely



**ALAN CLARKE**  
Chief Executive

**A STRATEGIC OVERVIEW OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF COASTAL ROUTES  
AND TOURIST DRIVING TRAILS IN NORTHERN IRELAND  
2006 – 2013**

**Background**

Under Section 4.1.4 of the Northern Ireland Tourist Board (NITB) and Roads Service, Department of Regional Development joint policy "Tourist Signing in Northern Ireland (2004) there is scope for the provision of White on Brown Tourist Signing routes and trails which have been agreed between Roads Service HQ and NITB.

The Northern Ireland Visitor Servicing Strategy (2004) considered the area of driving trails in Section 8.3 (and in the Visitor Servicing Manual under Section 7). In summary, the strategy highlighted several key points:

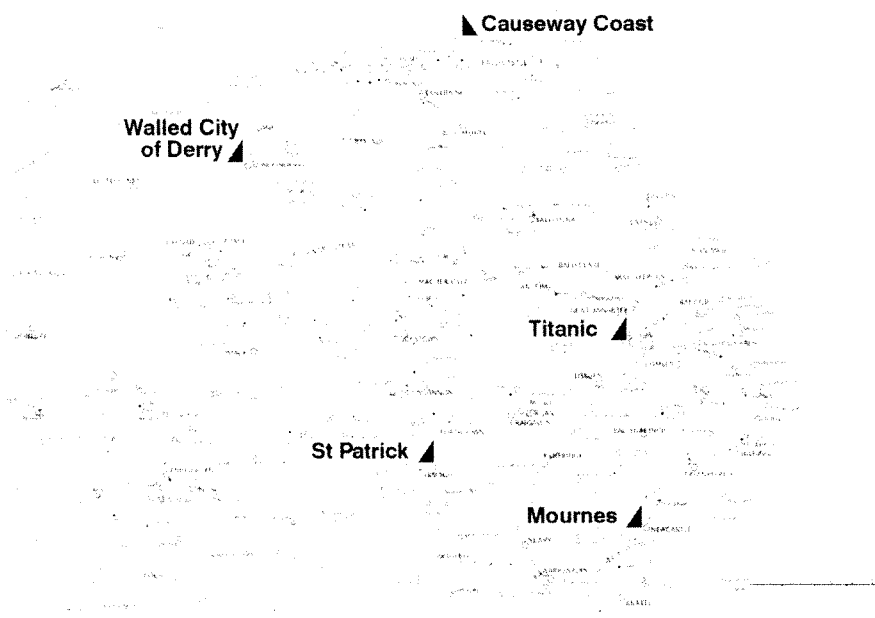
- Strategic routes have not yet been developed in NI
- Local routes have been developed sparsely and have not demonstrated significant usage
- There is recommendation that several major internationally known car touring routes are developed

In discussions with Roads Service, they have highlighted the need for a strategic approach to the provision of these routes to be agreed between the two organisations. Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to set a plan for the development and implementation of strategic routes and trails in NI for the period 2006 – 2013. The time period also fits with the ongoing development of NITB's Product Development Strategy. It is envisaged that the development of these trails will be a key product within the Product Development Strategy in terms of associated facilities and infrastructure.

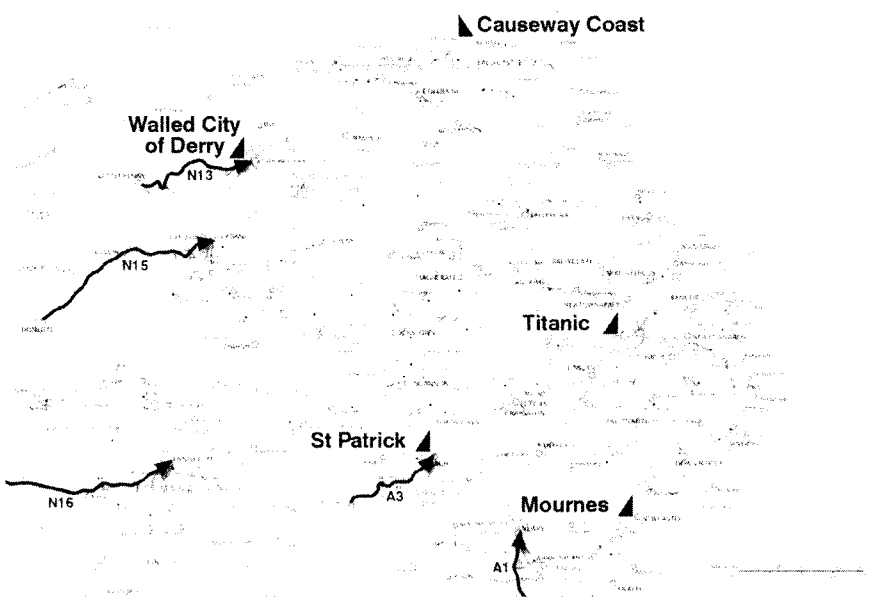
**Strategic Framework for Action 2004 – 2007**

The Strategic Framework for Action 2004 – 2007 (SFA) sets out 5 Signature Projects which have the capability to deliver international "stand out" for Northern Ireland.

- Giant's Causeway / Antrim and Causeway Coast area
- Titanic (Maritime) / Belfast
- The Walled City of Derry
- Christian Heritage / Saint Patrick
- Mourne National Park area



The major driving routes into and out of Northern Ireland to the Republic of Ireland are detailed on the map below highlighting their spatial relationship to the Signature Projects.

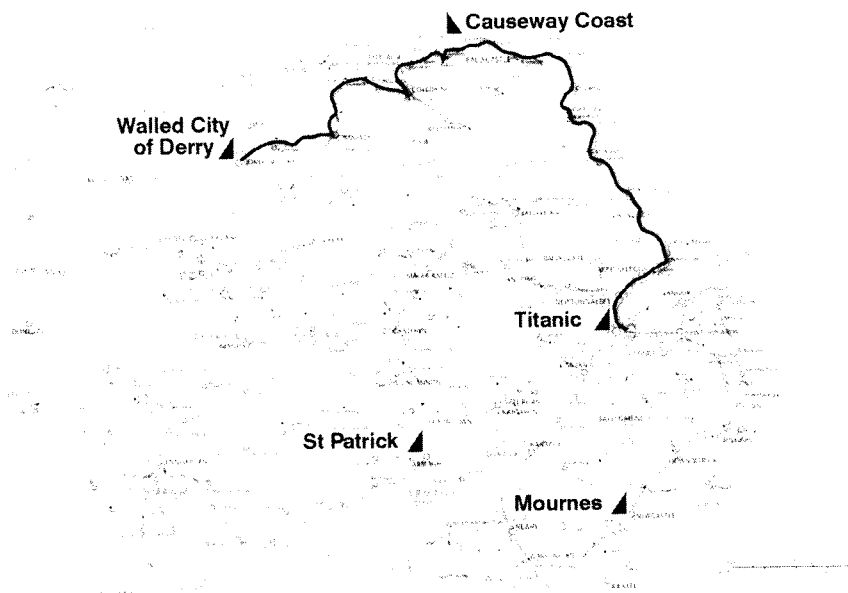


## Strategic Routes

It is proposed that a 4 phased approach be adopted for the implementation of routes over the period. While there are potentially many loops and trails off the main routes (as with the 9 on the Causeway Coastal Route), for legibility and to try and avoid confusion for the purpose of this paper only the major route will be highlighted.

### Phase I – Causeway Coastal Route (implementation 2006)

One of the key recommendations of the Causeway Coast and Glens Tourism Masterplan was the development of a tourist trail designed to help spread the benefits of tourism derived from the Giant's Causeway around the region. The Causeway Coastal Route was devised, market tested and a technical report prepared and it is now due for implementation during summer 2006. In an attempt to provide strategic network linkages to the Signature Projects of Titanic (Maritime) Belfast, Giant's Causeway / Antrim and Causeway Coast and Walled City of Derry, and to the Causeway, the trail was extended to include Belfast and Londonderry.

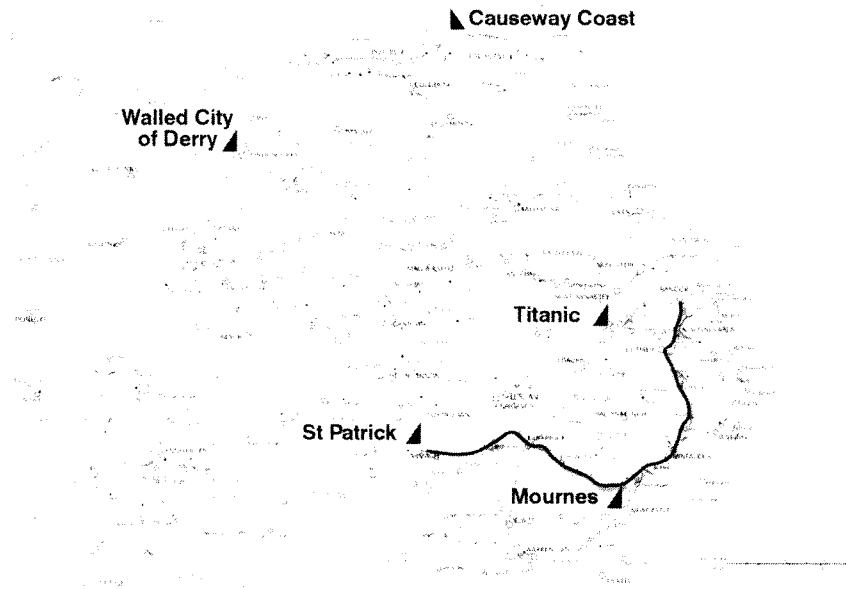


In a strategic context and in a perfect world, it was envisaged that the next stage in the development of strategic touring routes for NI would be the creation and implementation of the Mournes Coastal Route connecting the Mournes National Park project with Titanic /Belfast and therefore creating a total coastal trail around NI incorporating 4 of the 5 Signature Projects with direct access from Dublin and Donegal.

However, due to the timescales involved in development of the National Park it is suggested that NITB progresses immediately with the development and implementation of the Christian Heritage / St. Patrick's trail, although setting the development of this trail in the context of the Mournes Coastal Route to avoid potential confusion in terms of visitor servicing and signage issues.

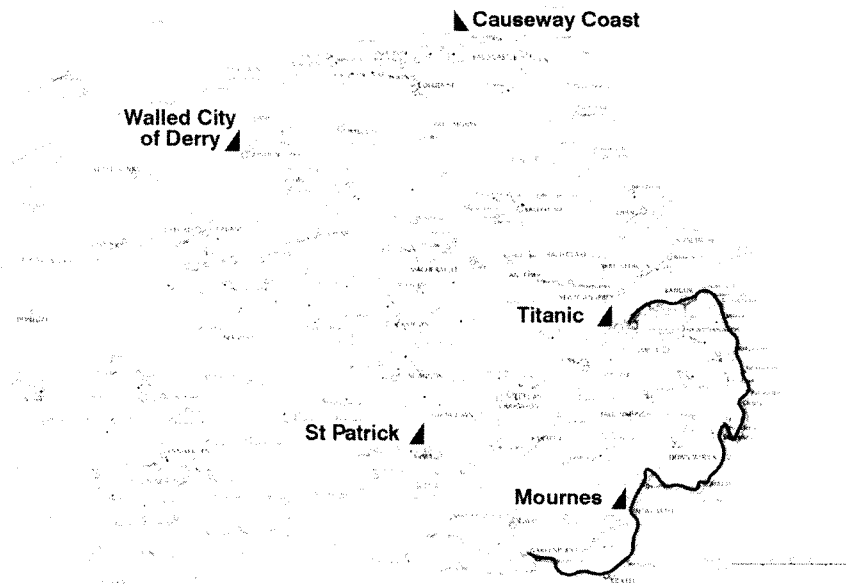
### Phase II – St. Patrick’s Trail (implementation 2008)

The St. Patrick’s Trail differs from the others in the sense that it is a “product trail” as opposed to either a clear “coastal route” or “scenic drive”. However, the product has been fully market tested and associated feasibility work carried out. The trail has full multi council and stakeholder support. This trail is essential in terms of linking Signature Projects and creating the full potential touring picture for NI.



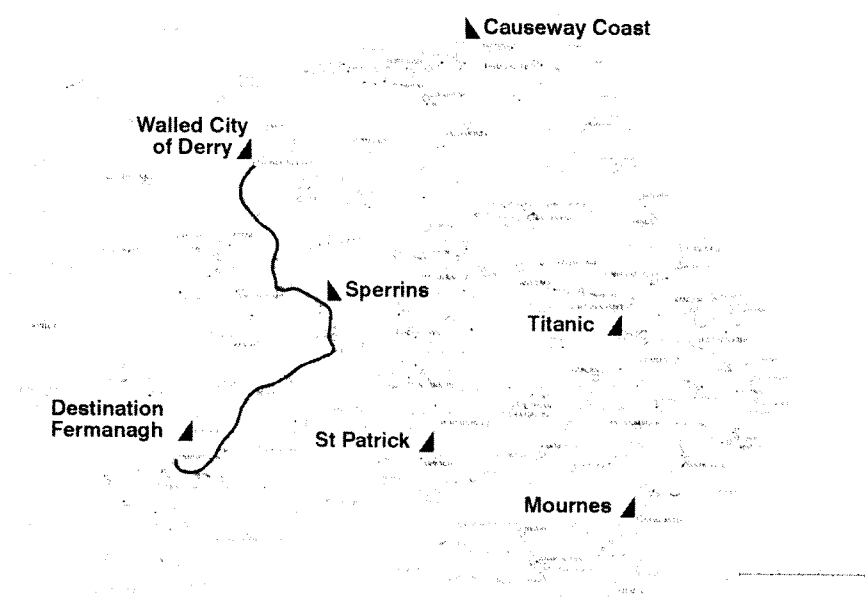
### Phase III – Mourne Coastal Route (implementation 2010)

As stated above, the Mourne Coastal Route ties in the Mourne National Park into the Coastal Trail. It is strategically important in the sense that it provides a chance to link directly from Dublin via Newry. Once in Newry, visitors would have a choice of whether to follow the Coastal Route or the main A1 to Belfast or potentially highlighting the St. Patrick’s Trail.



**Phase IV – Fermanagh / Sperrins Trail (implementation 2012)**

The ongoing development of Destination Fermanagh and the opportunity to provide linkages with the Derry Signature Project through a scenic Sperrins Route should also be considered in the long term. In terms of linkages with Armagh, that has yet to be considered but could possibly be done so in a cross border context potentially opening funding opportunities.



NITB is aware that there are several car touring trails and scenic routes in existence ie. the Carleton Trial, Bronte Homeland and several scenic driving routes through the Sperrins. It is anticipated that NITB and Roads Service will review the strategic benefits and performance of these existing routes in the context of the development of these new routes and trails to assess their suitability and viability.

In a strategic context this ensures that all 5 Signature Projects, and Fermanagh, are interlinked creating a natural “flow” from one to the next North to South, East to West. The use of tourist signage ensures that all projects are easily located and that other main attractions and facilities are signed from the routes in a series of loops or trails. In effect, NITB has created a strategic car touring route and “web” of associated loops and trails around Northern Ireland linking all Signature Projects and major areas of tourism interest.

Whilst this paper sets out the strategic context of car touring routes, it is important to note that each route will be subject to a feasibility report, market testing and a detailed technical study. The implementation of the route will be subject to financial resources made available to NITB and match funding being forthcoming from the local councils.

