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Regional Transportation Strategy Contribution to the Transportation Vision

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3.1. Introduction

3.1.1 This Chapter presents the transportation vision (Section 3.2), the characteristics of a transportation system that would support the vision (Section 3.3), an overview of the extent to which the Regional Transportation Strategy (RTS) could improve the transportation system over the next 10 years and the role for future strategies (Section 3.4).

3.2. Transportation Vision

3.2.1. As outlined in Chapter 2, the Regional Development Strategy (RDS) agreed by the Assembly in September 2001 sets out a dynamic strategic planning framework for the spatial development of Northern Ireland over the subsequent 25 years.

3.2.2. The RDS was developed following a period of over 3 years of extensive community consultation and it engaged the imagination and vision of people in considering how the region should develop. A strong consensus was evident from even the earliest RDS consultation that a modern, integrated and sustainable transportation system, with an emphasis on the combined delivery of economic, social and environmental benefits for everyone in Northern Ireland, had to be a central feature of the region's strategic planning processes.

3.2.3. Further detailed consultation on the nature of the future transportation system was undertaken in spring 2000 with the Regional Development Committee of the Assembly, local authorities and representatives of key stakeholder groups. As a result of this detailed public consultation, the RDS transportation vision was drafted and presented to consultees who confirmed that it captured their aspirations for the future:

“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.”

3.3. Characteristics of the Vision

3.3.1. By definition, visions describe aspirations at the highest level and do not necessarily provide an indication of the tangible interventions that would be made in order to secure their realisation. The RTS team was aware that the transportation vision does not give a detailed breakdown of the future transportation system. Characteristics were therefore developed to describe a system that could represent this vision and support the 25-year regional objectives outlined in the RDS. The characteristics were





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then presented to stakeholders in January 2001 in 'Developing a Regional Transportation Strategy - A Consultation Paper'³⁹. Consultees were asked to give their opinion on these characteristics and to suggest amendments and/or additions to them as they believed to be appropriate.

3.3.2. Although there was a very high level of agreement with the proposed characteristics, improvements were identified by consultees and were incorporated into the list. The revised list of characteristics was included in the RTS Conference documentation in September 2001⁴⁰. Informed by the consultation feedback, it is envisaged that a future modern, efficient and effective transportation system could have the following principal characteristics:

- (i) exploiting the latest technology, innovative practices and communication techniques to ensure that best use is made of the transportation network and services;
- (ii) roads (including footways and cycle paths) being the predominant feature of the transportation infrastructure;
- (iii) a high quality strategic transport network constructed, operated and maintained to ensure rapid and predictable journey times for public transport (including taxis and community transport as well as conventional bus and rail), goods vehicles and cars;
- (iv) integrated with land use planning and contributing to a healthy and environmentally aware society choosing to walk, cycle and use public transport for many journeys;
- (v) best practice maintenance strategies applied to all infrastructure (road and rail), with no maintenance backlog;
- (vi) modern and innovative public transport services planned, managed, operated and regulated to meet the needs of travellers' regular journeys, thereby providing a realistic alternative to the use of the car and making a major contribution to the mass movement of people, especially commuters;
- (vii) an extensive, customer-orientated public transport system fully integrated with all modes of travel through high quality interchanges;
- (viii) efficient and affordable forms of public transport operated to regulated service standards providing all passengers, including people with disabilities, with access to services and facilities;
- (ix) rural areas served by different types of accessible public

³⁹ Developing a Regional Transportation Strategy – A Consultation Paper, DRD, January 2001

⁴⁰ Developing a Regional Transportation Strategy – Report of Consultation Conference held on 28 September, Community Technical Aid, October 2001

- transport drawn from a varied range, including flexible and community based services, responsive to local needs;
- (x) all infrastructure and services used responsibly and managed, operated and maintained to the highest contemporary European standards of safety;
- (xi) a safe environment for pedestrians in general and older people and children in particular, with vehicle access and speeds limited in residential areas;
- (xii) contributing to the creation of attractive central areas in cities and towns for living, working and leisure, with management of traffic levels, congestion and vehicle pollution and priority for pedestrians, cyclists and public transport; and
- (xiii) safe and extensive walking and cycling networks, used regularly for travel to work, shops, education centres and leisure.

This transportation system would be underpinned by adequate funding for transport as a whole, through a combination of an appropriate level of public expenditure supplemented by the private sector, public transport revenues and new charges (see Section 6.3).

3.4. Towards the Vision

- 3.4.1. It must be stressed that the 10-year RTS presented in Chapter 5 will not achieve the RDS transportation vision, nor will it secure the full extent of the characteristics of the vision that are set out above. Primarily this is because to do so within the timeframe of the RTS would require an **additional** investment in the 10-year period of more than £200 million (at 2002 prices) per year over and above the Reference Case or 'existing funding level continued' scenario. While it would be tempting to construct a RTS based on this optimal level of funding, a strategy pitched at this investment level would not be "earthed in reality" given the pressures on public expenditure. (More detailed consideration of the 10-year funding assumptions is given in Chapter 6).
- 3.4.2. It has already been noted that in relation to the level of public expenditure funding for the Strategy, the outcome will be determined through the normal Budgetary process, which will take account of the financial needs of other Departments and decisions on priorities. If that process determines that the full level of resource identified in the Strategy is not available, then not all initiatives will be delivered within the 10-year period. It is likely that the priorities for investment within a constrained Strategy would be, for example,

- highway structural maintenance;
- highway strategic improvements addressing existing bottlenecks;
- safety-related initiatives;
- replacement of bus fleet;
- rail as per RTF consolidation;
- local traffic calming and walk/cycle improvements; and
- improvements in public transport in rural areas, including innovative services.

3.4.3. The funding requirements of the range of transportation initiatives will be revisited in successive reviews of the Strategy and any resultant changes could also lead to an alteration in the overall content and/or amendment to the timeframe for delivery of the RTS.

3.4.4. Consultation confirmed the Department's view that it is essential for policies and resources to be largely directed towards improving the poor state of the existing highway network and public transport asset base. The RTS therefore aims to reduce significantly the infrastructure deficit that has arisen as a result of years of underinvestment and to halt the decline that has afflicted the transportation system. To achieve this will inevitably consume a considerable proportion of available resources and limit the amount of funding available for enhancements to the system. However, the assumed level of additional investment will, nonetheless, allow much-needed improvements to be introduced, including some innovative measures such as a rapid transit network in Belfast and flexible, demand responsive transport services in rural areas.

3.4.5. It should be remembered that the Regional Development Strategy is set in a 25-year timeframe and the scale of additional resources assumed in the Regional Transportation Strategy would, if continued, enable the transportation vision to be achieved within the 25-year period. An estimate of what the RTS could achieve is presented in Chapter 7 of this document, based on implementation of the schemes and initiatives described in Chapter 5. These include the contribution of strategic longer-term developments across other Departments to the achievement of transportation objectives. As a consequence of the RTS initiatives, subsequent transportation strategies, given funding of a similar magnitude, would be able to focus on making greater improvements, given that the backlogs in asset maintenance would have been largely eliminated.

- 3.4.6. Subsequent transportation strategies in years 11-25 of the RDS timeframe could see a continuation and wider application of many of the initiatives introduced in the RTS. The extent of their future implementation would be informed both by monitoring the performance and impacts of initiatives and by people's responses to the schemes within the RTS 10-year period.
- 3.4.7. Examples of some of the more visionary measures might include the upgrading of initial rapid transit schemes to light rail, the expansion of rapid transit in the Belfast Metropolitan Area and the evolution of local demand responsive services in discrete rural areas into a regional scheme, with a central call centre and computerised scheduling.
- 3.4.8. There could be greater priority for buses on Quality Bus Corridors in the Belfast Metropolitan Area and enhancements and additions to the rail network and services. This would encourage people travelling by car to switch to bus and rail in response to both these improved services and reduced commuter parking in Belfast. Greater use of information technology systems could warn drivers approaching Belfast central area of car park capacities and direct them to designated Park & Ride sites which would have quality public transport links offering a superior way to complete the journey.
- 3.4.9. In towns across the region, urban bus service frequencies could be improved and some bus priority measures introduced in tandem with reduced commuter parking provision and environmental improvement schemes in town centres.
- 3.4.10. The strategic road network would be constructed and maintained to high standards, providing a better and more uniform level of service across the region. It would be operated with real-time driver information, and would provide for rapid, predictable and efficient movement of freight, public transport, taxis and private vehicles. Additionally there could be extensive walking and cycling networks that would be well-used, safe and enjoyable, and which would contribute to a healthy lifestyle and give access to services and transport interchanges.
- 3.4.11. These and other measures in years 11-25 could play their part in ensuring that the transportation vision for 2025 really does become a reality. The radical improvement in transportation investment inherent in this 10-year RTS should therefore be viewed as a significant move towards achieving the longer-term vision.