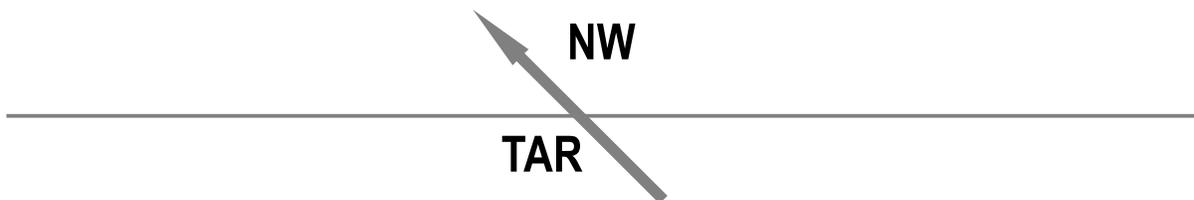


**Submission on the
Regional Strategy**

PRINCIPLES & ISSUES PAPER

from the

Transport Activists' Roundtable
North West



April 2009

Since the **North West Transport Activists Roundtable (NW TAR)** was formed over 10 years ago, it has taken an active role in the regional planning process and has held seats on a number of regional groups. This response to the Regional Strategy's Principles & Issues consultation reflects our terms of reference. These require us to promote sustainable transport and land use and a low carbon future for the region.

Introduction

Question A: *Do you believe that things will have fundamentally changed as a result of this recession and that issues of climate change, low carbon economy, competing land use pressures and the nature of future growth are important to consider?*

Whether things will have fundamentally changed or not is impossible to judge at this stage of the recession. What might be more appropriate to consider is whether things *should* change. There has been some excellent work carried out in this region by a dedicated sustainability team which produced a sound sustainability toolkit. Efforts by planning policy teams at the Regional Assembly (predecessor to 4NW), along with inputs by various Assembly groupings and wider stakeholders and measured judgements by panels of planning inspectors have resulted in generally well-balanced Regional Spatial Strategies. That balance between social, environmental and economic facets must not be lost as the region struggles to pull itself out of recession. The recession will impact on all levels of public and private finances, so now is an appropriate time to think seriously about the desired nature of future growth and to ensure it aligns with Lord Stern's advice to government. The Stern report set out clearly how environmentally unsound policies will also prove to be unsound for the economy.

Assumptions

Question B: *Do you agree with the assumptions above? If not, what alternative assumptions would you make? Are there assumptions missing?*

Taking the points in order:

1. This is far from clear. Britain is outside of the Eurozone and current global economic panic is pushing some countries towards protectionist policies. Increased integration cannot be assumed.
2. We agree in so far as it is important that outputs are of a good standard – but not everything should be judged on a commercial basis and nor should everything be seen as competitive.
3. This is key. Climate change will fundamentally affect our future behaviour, including the way in which we travel.
4. We agree with this statement.

5. We agree with this statement.
6. We agree with this statement but long-distance commuting and unsustainable lifestyles should not be encouraged. Sustained investment in public transport and measures to support cycling and walking are vital in order to give people viable alternatives to the car. Local authorities need to adopt a greater commitment to and investment in smart choices/ soft measures.
7. Although we concur with this statement, our reaction is that pressures on the Green Belt should be resisted for some time to come. This region still has more brownfield sites and more empty homes than any other and it is important to retain the sequential approach to land use. Allowing development to sprawl over the Green Belt would be totally unsustainable and would lead to a loss of distinct identities which many communities have.

Additionally, it should be assumed that if the population in our towns and cities continues to grow with little investment in public transport and other infrastructure, congestion on the roads will grow and people's 'travel to work' areas will shrink as a result. This will have a knock on effect on employers' ability to attract talent.

8. We agree with this statement.

We would suggest the three following additional assumptions:

9. The nature of the economy itself is changing, from a sustained decline in manufacturing over many years and now a rapid contraction of the financial sector. However, as part of a low carbon economy, there will be the need for skills training in green technology and green manufacturing industries, which will contribute to sustainable economic growth. In future there is also likely to be a greater emphasis on the service industry, cultural/media and the social care sector (in line with our ageing population). Occupations in the service and social care sector are traditionally lower paid and attracting and retaining talent to these sectors may prove difficult.
10. Health inequalities have continued to widen for many years and this trend shows no signs of reversing. New strategies are needed to tackle this situation. Also, the obesity problem is likely to continue, across all sections of society, but more prevalent in the poorly educated sections. There will be a need for areas of open space near to people's homes, to enable them to take regular healthy exercise within walking distance.
11. It is likely that the Regional Strategy will have to be implemented in an austere economic climate which will see severely reduce levels of public spending, and potentially deep cuts to public services. What spending there is must be much better targeted to deliver sustainable and healthy lifestyles and to cut CO2 emissions in line with the Climate Change Act and the DFT's command document, '*Delivering a Sustainable Transport Strategy*'.

Ultimate Aims/ Goals

Question C: *Do you agree that the focus of this strategy should be on sustainable economic growth and contribute to sustainable development?*

We believe that the focus on this strategy should reflect the UK's Guiding Principles of Sustainable Development:

- Living within environmental limits
- Ensuring a strong, healthy and just society
- Achieving a sustainable economy
- Using sound science responsibly and
- Promoting good governance

Economic growth is clearly desirable but we must use this opportunity to move away from some of the mistakes of the past and grow our economy in a way that seeks to reduce inequalities and to value our natural environment.

Question D: *In the delivery of this, do you agree with the elements outlined above? Are there elements missing? How would you prioritise them?*

The list is fairly comprehensive and we broadly agree with all of the elements. It is perhaps disappointing to see transport confined to the phrase 'connectivity within and/to from the region' as this does not fully recognise the cross-cutting impact of sustainable transport on the environment, health, employment and communities. High quality, safe, frequent, accessible and sustainable connectivity within local areas underpins every other element listed and is a key economic driver.

We are not sure that it would be possible or even desirable to prioritise the elements as they all interlink so closely. It might be more useful to look more closely at how different elements overlap and prioritise groupings of elements that work in synergy.

We would also suggest the additional aims:

- (i) To achieve policies which demonstrate an appreciation that land and natural resources are finite resources
- (ii) To facilitate the introduction of a more imaginative and more sustainable tourism offer

Question E: *How do you believe these aims/ goals should best be measured?*

Clearly, each aim/goal will need a different form of measurement but, in many instances, there are already proven 'tools' for the job, eg. World Health Organisation's indicators, the Index of Sustainable Economic Wellbeing, the Environmental Quality Index Tool, the 'Assets at Risk' register (for heritage) and the North West Integrated Appraisal Toolkit. In addition, there are various 'standards' which could be adopted and we suggest that the following principles should be adhered to:

- The impacts (ie. 'outcomes') of interventions should be measured rather than simple outputs. These need to be disaggregated as appropriate (eg. by gender, age, ethnicity and income) so that impact on different sectors of the population are clear.
- It would seem logical to develop a suite of measurements to focus on areas where there is a clear issue to be addressed eg. health inequalities, greenhouse gas emissions, affordable housing, congestion and so on.
- There should be a focus on qualitative measures, such as quality of life/satisfaction, as well as traditional quantitative measures.

The Role of the North West – what makes the region unique?

Question F: *Do you agree that these elements adequately summarise the North West's unique offer in a world economy? Are there any current or future potential elements missing?*

Under point 8 there could be a mention of the more unique elements of transport infrastructure, such as the Metrolink system and the Manchester Ship Canal, but also of the sheer quantity of canals. Not enough is made of natural assets such as the number of estuaries and navigable rivers. There is no mention of the industrial heritage of the region - the home of the Industrial Revolution - or of the diverse architecture of our towns and cities or of 'Media City' which is coming to Salford. An important missing item is the fact that Manchester is home to the largest university in Europe.

Question G: *Do you disagree with any of these statements?*

We do not disagree but this does not mean that we support the further expansion of air travel and airports in view of the fact that aviation is the fastest growing source of carbon emissions. Expansion of this sector would conflict with government goals for a low carbon economy.

Question H: *Do you believe these elements will still be unique about the North West in 20 years' time?*

Things are unlikely to change as much as we might think, particularly if we make concerted efforts to protect that which is worth protecting. However whether that makes us continue to be unique (if we even are) is another matter entirely.

Challenges

Question I: *Do you agree with the challenges outlined above for the North West over the coming 20 years? Are there any missing?*

We broadly agree with the challenges outlined.

To address two of the challenges individually:

1. This should explicitly emphasise that health *inequalities* is one of the largest challenges to overcome.
9. Whilst we agree that there are increasingly 'stressed' parts of the transport network, we do not subscribe to the idea that the problem should be dealt with through the provision of more road space. This would only be a short term solution and ultimately result in more demand for yet more road space. The answer has to lie in providing solutions which will bring about modal shift.

We would urge, therefore, the inclusion of a key rail policy that commits to (i) tackling rail capacity issues, particularly through Manchester (the 'Manchester Hub') - which would bring benefits throughout the whole of the North of England, (ii) improving stations and access to them and (iii) protecting the routes of former railway lines.

There should be a commitment to better integration between bus and rail and to providing more demand-responsive and flexible bus, taxi-bus and shared taxi services (particularly in socially-deprived urban areas and in rural areas) and to improving the whole public transport experience.

There also needs to be cycling targets (eg. seeking to match the levels reached in most of the rest of Northern Europe) achieved by identified measures which will tackle the very low level of cycle usage across the region on and off-road. This should be accompanied by better provision for walkers. However, none of this should lose sight of the key national and regional aspirations to reduce the need to travel through better planning policies and more local service provision.

Issues

Question J: Do you agree that the list of major issues for the region to address via the Regional Strategy are correct and will lead to sustainable and equitable economic, social and environmental wellbeing? Are there any issues you would remove? Are there any issues missing from your perspective? How would you prioritise these issues?

We do not agree that a review of the Green Belt is necessary. This region still has more previously developed land and more empty homes than any other. We also find ourselves unable to answer the second part of the first question without understanding how the issues listed would be tackled.

It must be emphasised that any solutions involving infrastructure provision should adopt the sequential approach to land use. Promotion of this approach should carry across from the extant RSS to the new Regional Strategy. Greenfield and particularly Green Belt land should not be considered as an early or easy option for development.

We are pleased to see 'Connectivity' highlighted as an issue in itself, although this perhaps presents a rather narrow view of how we see transport. The word connectivity would be better replaced by 'Accessibility' as this recognises the need to connect people to services/jobs etc... rather than simply the connection of different cities on a map. Greater levels of long distance travelling are neither viable nor sustainable with the current infrastructure in our region. More local interventions are necessary to reduce inequalities that are compounded by poor transport links but this can be difficult within the current deregulated structure.

We welcome the specific reference to improving rail infrastructure but it should be recognised that the most disadvantaged members of society are currently priced out of the rail network. Though the document mentions the poor quality of rail services, it makes no reference to the poor quality of much of the local road network in terms of safety for pedestrians and cyclists – and the consequent impact on levels of cycle use and walking. Few people are excluded from these activities by cost, and the infrastructure requires relatively low levels of investment to improve significantly. Above all, better spatial planning is needed and where services have to be centralised (such as the centralisation of health services) transport links should be considered from the beginning, rather than as an afterthought.

Issue number 10 deals with the public sector but it is notable that the voluntary and community sector (or 'third sector') receives very little mention, other than in reference to sustainable procurement. Within our newly indebted economy, cuts to public sector services are likely to be unavoidable, and voluntary and community action may be relied upon to 'fill the gaps'. The voluntary and community sector has a long history of innovation and has a clear role to play in addressing health inequalities, deprivation and building strong, cohesive communities.

Although there is a reference to the changing demographics of the population in section 3, (point no. 8), this major issue has – oddly – not been carried across into this section. This is extremely remiss as it is arguably going to be one of the biggest issues that we will have to face - with major impacts on communities, employment, transport, health, social care and so on. With more people living longer it is likely that there will be ever more cars on the road than we might have once predicted and also more people requiring other means of travel – investment in public transport and social needs transport is therefore vital. A new wave of ‘travel training’ for older people who have never travelled on public transport before may also be required.

Question K: *Do you agree with the assertions made in these issues? Have you got any specific comments on the issues raised or the inter-relationships between them?*

Whilst we are well aware of the statistics which show that health inequalities and worklessness are closely related, it seems odd that health should only be listed in relation to worklessness. It is clearly a cross-cutting theme, as is transport. Also, health and transport overlap in several respects, eg. on the matter of poor air quality due to harmful emissions from motorised road transport and aviation and in respect of the need to encourage more cycling and walking to reduce obesity and improve health generally. This brings us on to another matter – the lack of emphasis on the need to change travel behaviour, which is a matter that needs to be corrected.

We would also question whether ‘*Places and Communities*’ should be together as they are in this consultation document, or whether they should be separated. They do not necessarily have to be split up, but there does need to be more emphasis on people and social issues – the third plank of sustainability.

Transport and accessibility inter-relate between all of the issues. However, the key to evolving a sustainable regional transport strategy has to be the same as it is for the over arching Regional Strategy. It is to strike the right balance whilst not proposing solutions that test environmental capacity to its limits. In any event, the government has clearly signalled the way forward with its latest command document ‘*Delivering a Sustainable Transport Strategy*’ (DaSTS). The new Regional Strategy must comply with this – and with the Climate Change Bill - and consequently considerations of harmful emissions, particularly CO₂, must be apparent in all emerging strategies.

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