



# Transport Activists' Roundtable North West

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Dear Sir,

**"Hoon breaks RFA rules as £1 bn transport package accelerated"** was LTT's front page lead headline in your last edition (LTT 508, 28 Nov. 08). In the article you justify the headline by pointing up that the government were prepared to break their own rules with regard to how Highways Agency regional schemes were funded for one exceptional case - the A46. This is so but the government's latest transport funding announcement breaks the Regional Funding Allocation rules in another way as well. **It dictates to regions what their priorities should be.**

The government gave the task of recommending transport priorities for non-national schemes to the regions. In so doing, it allowed them to develop their own methodologies for prioritisation. What emerged was deeply disappointing to sustainable transport and environmental bodies because it was very much 'business as usual' - a predominance of road schemes. The North West was not alone in placing too much emphasis on perceived economic benefits (without a proper evidence base) and too little on carbon emissions and modal shift. In any event the process was so rushed as to make robust consideration impossible. The environmental and voluntary sectors were excluded from RFA 1 decision-making in most regions. But that is not the point at issue here.

By whatever process it was arrived at, the North West RFA advice, which the government accepted, was not to fund the SEMMMS (South East Manchester Multi Modal Study) Relief Roads, merely to provide some money towards scheme preparation. Later lobbying of the government by local authorities promoting the network of new road schemes that make up the SEMMMS 'Relief' Roads led to a ministerial pronouncement only a few months ago - that SEMMMS was too big as one entity and the government were not prepared to fund it. A possible way forward suggested was for the promoting authorities to split up the schemes into separate entities. This was particularly ironic as it was the government which packaged several schemes together in the first place and created a multi-modal study out of them for the Integrated Transport White Paper of 1997.

4NW, the Leaders Forum which is the successor to the North West Regional Assembly, has declared during the round two deliberations (several times) that it will not be altering its advice from round one (it is spectacularly over budget) but will instead merely be reassessing the figures and delivery. However, as your article explains, Geoff Hoon, the Secretary of State for Transport, announced that he was providing £165 m. for the SEMMMS Relief Roads (which, incidentally, have yet to go through planning process) - subject to a contribution from the RFA pot! This therefore is an attempt to override the decisions of the regional leaders who have already declared that they have no intention of throwing out any schemes currently in the programme. So, the message appears to be to put the RFA advice out with the paper refuse for recycling. It is clearly irrelevant.

Yours sincerely,

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