

3b Regional Transport Strategy Re-fresh: Strategic Environmental Assessment and Equalities Impact Assessment

- Purpose of Report

The purpose of this report is to present to the Board the results of the Strategic Environmental Assessment and Equalities Impact Assessment that have been carried out as part of the refresh of the Regional Transport Strategy.

- Background

At its meeting on 20th February, the Board approved a draft RTS Refresh document for further consultation.

- Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA)

Work has been on-going in parallel to the RTS re-fresh on the Strategic Environmental Assessment, which is a statutory requirement. A scoping report was submitted to the Scottish Government's SEA Gateway for consultation with the three statutory consultation authorities (SEPA, SNH and Historic Scotland) in October 2012 and was reported to the Board in December 2012. The purpose of the SEA Scoping Report was to set out sufficient information on the RTS Re-fresh to enable the consultation authorities to form a view on the consultation period and scope/level of detail appropriate for the Environmental Report. A copy of the Scoping Report is available on the Nestrans website at <http://www.nestrans.org.uk/strategic-environmental-assessment-1.html>.

A full SEA was carried out on the RTS when it was first developed in 2008. This SEA therefore used this as the basis of the assessment and updated it where RTS policies and actions have been significantly amended or added. The SEA is a strategic assessment, and therefore need only concentrate on the significant environmental impacts of the RTS, not all the possible environmental issues.

The environmental impacts identified through the SEA process are summarised below:

- Positive impacts: The RTS includes a large number of actions and measures to increase the proportion of trips undertaken by sustainable modes (bus, rail, walking and cycling), particularly in areas currently affected by congestion and poor air quality. New actions, added to the RTS in this re-fresh include investigating the potential for further stations and new rail lines, strategic bus priority and bus frequency improvements, enhanced measures to increase the number of trips by bike, measures to enforce the operation of bus lanes, support for encouraging the uptake of alternative fuels and support for demand management measures to lock in the benefits of other schemes.
- Unknown impacts: As many of the proposed measures in the RTS are outline at this stage, and specific details such as routings are unspecified, there are unknown physical impacts from some proposed schemes, particularly those which will result in new or extended infrastructure. In relation to new actions added as a result of the re-fresh, this includes strategic road improvements to mitigate the cumulative impact of development. All these areas will have to be fully considered in line with the principles of STAG (Scottish Transport Appraisal Guidance) which includes

appraisal of environmental impacts, in order to identify a preferred option before they can be taken forward.

- Negative impacts: Potential negative impacts could arise from new road infrastructure and expanded air services in particular. However, the impacts of these projects need to be seen in terms of the overall impacts of the preferred package as a whole, which will reduce congestion and promote sustainable modes. Where proposals for road improvements are made, these are balanced with proposals to lock in the benefits of reducing congestion for public transport, cyclists and pedestrians. An action has been added, as part of the re-fresh, to ensure that all new developments and transport infrastructure improvements take consideration of and makes provision for pedestrians and cyclists as an integral part of the design process. Furthermore, efforts to mitigate negative impacts are discussed as part of the Environmental Report.

Given the assessment of RTS actions against the objectives and topic areas set within the SEA, and the outline nature of many of the proposals which negates more detailed impact assessment, it is concluded at this stage that the RTS will have no major, identifiable detrimental impacts on the environment. Some negative or uncertain impacts have been identified and mitigation measures explored.

The full Environmental Report can be found on the Nestrans website at <http://www.nestrans.org.uk/strategic-environmental-assessment-1.html>. Should members require a printed copy, we are happy to provide this on request.

• Equalities Impact Assessment

An Equalities Impact Assessment has also been carried out in parallel to the finalisation of the RTS and environmental appraisal. This process has used Aberdeenshire Council's Integrated Impact Assessment Screening template which covers equalities, health and socio-economic impacts. It concludes that overall the RTS will have a positive impact on multi-equalities and provides a number of opportunities to reduce exclusion, particularly for the elderly, disabled and those who do not have access to a car. It will also have a positive impact on health and wellbeing with many policies centred on improving accessibility and increasing active travel. In relation to sustainability, the RTS will have a positive impact with actions to reduce emissions from transport, reduce congestion and encourage mode shift.

The completed assessment is also available on the Nestrans website at <http://www.nestrans.org.uk/equalities-impact-assessment.html>.

• Next steps and timescales

Subject to approval by the Board the RTS Re-fresh, SEA and Equalities Impact Assessment will be made available to stakeholders and the public for a further period of consultation on the proposed final document.

The next steps are:

- To issue the draft re-fresh of the strategy alongside the environmental report and equalities assessment for a further period of consultation. This will include:
 - Providing the two Councils with a formal opportunity to comment on the draft re-fresh of the strategy, Environmental Report and Equalities Assessment;
 - Providing a further opportunity to NETCF members to comment on the draft re-freshed document;
 - Publication of the documents on the Nestrans website.
- To submit the Environmental Report and proposed RTS to the SEA consultation authorities for comments as well as making this available to stakeholders and the public;

- Take on board the comments of the SEA consultation authorities, partner Councils and stakeholders;
- Produce a final document, including graphics and a key diagram / map of proposals;
- Report the proposed final re-fresh back to the Board for approval; and
- Submit the RTS to Scottish Ministers for approval.

- Recommendation

It is recommended that Members:

- Consider the Environmental Report and Equalities Report and approve them, incorporating any amendments agreed by Members, for consultation.

KC/3rd April 2013