

Nestrans Regional Transport Strategy Refresh

Strategic Environmental Assessment

Post-Adoption Statement

June 2014

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The first Regional Transport Strategy (RTS) for the North East of Scotland was published in 2008. The development of this strategy was subject to a process of Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA), as required under the Environmental Assessment (Scotland) Act 2005. Since the publication of the RTS in 2008 however there have been a number of changes to the policy and economic context within which the RTS sits and a number of actions and policies that the RTS needs to take account of.
- 1.2 A refresh of the strategy was undertaken in 2013 and the proposed changes also subject to the SEA process. The proposed methodology for the SEA of the RTS refresh was set out in a scoping report and was in proportion to the scale of the refresh of the strategy that was undertaken.
- 1.3 The RTS refresh considered the actions and policies contained within the 2008 RTS and whether they required to be updated or new actions added. As a full SEA was undertaken at the time of the 2008 RTS the SEA undertaken as part of the refresh only assessed the anticipated environmental impacts of any actions that it was proposed were significantly amended and any proposed new actions of the RTS resulting from the review.
- 1.4 Actions contained within the 2008 RTS for which there was no change proposed, were not re-assessed, as the assessment carried out in the SEA of the RTS in 2008 remained valid. The results of the 2008 assessment were however presented in the 2013 SEA in order to provide an understanding of the overall cumulative impact of the RTS.
- 1.5 The SEA of the RTS refresh included the following activities:
 - a. Taking into account the views of the Consultation Authorities regarding the scope and level of detail that was appropriate for the environmental report;
 - b. Preparing an environmental report on the likely significant effects on the environment of the draft refreshed plan which included consideration of:-
 - the baseline data relating to the current state of the environment;
 - links between the plan and other relevant policies, plans, programmes and environmental objectives;
 - existing environmental problems affecting the plan;
 - the likely significant effects on the environment (positive and negative) of new or significantly amended actions;
 - the mitigation measures envisaged;
 - monitoring measures to ensure that any unforeseen environmental effects will be identified allowing for appropriate remedial action to be taken.

- c. Consulting on the environmental report alongside the draft strategy;
 - d. Taking into account the environmental report and the results of consultation in making final decisions regarding the plan/ programme;
 - e. Committing to monitoring the significant environmental effects of the implementation of the plan to identify any unforeseen adverse significant environmental effects and to taking appropriate remedial action.
- 1.2 All documents relating the refresh of the Regional Transport Strategy, including the SEA scoping report and environmental report are available on the Nestrans website at www.nestrans.org.uk. Paper copies are also available from the Nestrans office on request by contacting 01224 625524 or by email on nestransinfo@nestrans.org.uk.

2. Key findings of the SEA process

- 2.1 The environmental impacts of the RTS 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 refresh 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 refresh, 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 refresh, 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.
- 2.2 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, the Environmental Report concluded that the RTS will have no major, identifiable detrimental impacts on the environment. Some negative or uncertain

impacts were however identified and mitigation measures explored in the Environmental Report.

3. Consultation responses

- 3.1 As a result of consultation on the Draft RTS Refresh and the environmental report, a number of changes were made to the strategy. A summary of the comments received during consultation and amendments made to the strategy as a result, is provided in the consultation report available on the Nestrans website at:

<http://www.nestrans.org.uk/regional-transport-strategy-refresh-1.html>.

4. Reasons for adopting this plan and assessment of alternatives

- 4.1 A range of alternatives were developed and assessed as part of the development of the RTS in 2008 and the accompanying SEA. As the purpose of the review was not to change the direction of the RTS but rather to incorporate developments in the wider policy framework within which the RTS sits and better align it with the Strategic Development Plan, the objectives or the general direction of the RTS did not change as a result.
- 4.2 It was proposed, and submitted to the consultation authorities in the scoping report, that the assessment of the alternative options contained within the original SEA of the RTS remained valid and that the environmental report would only assess those policies or actions in the RTS that were new or significantly changed since the assessment carried out in 2008.
- 4.3 A number of changes have been made to the RTS as a result of issues identified during the SEA process, in particular, the identification in the RTS itself that Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) and Habitat Regulations Assessment will be required for any intervention around the River Dee, which is designated as a Special Area of Conservation and protected at European level. Reference has also been made to reducing emissions from buses and the link with improving health as a result of comments received on the environmental report. Expansion of 'strategic objective 3: environment' to include reference to noise impacts has also been as a result of consultation and the SEA process.

5. Requirement for further assessment

- 5.1 The SEA identified that many interventions will require further assessment through the STAG process to identify a preferred option and following that a full Environmental Impact Assessment. This is most appropriately done at the project stage as there is insufficient detail in the RTS to fully assess the likely environmental impacts of a number of RTS actions.
- 5.2 The SEA also identified the need for a Habitat Regulations Appraisal (incorporating an Appropriate Assessment) of the interventions that are likely to have a significant impact on Special Areas of Conservation or Special Protection Areas within the region.
- 5.3 A potential impact on the River Dee SAC from the RTS policy "IC2 Road Improvements – addressing the cumulative impacts of development through a Strategic Transport Fund", specifically an action for a River Dee link, was identified.
- 5.4 The purpose of an Appropriate Assessment is to assess the impacts of the proposed interventions against the conservation objectives and qualifying features of the relevant

European sites. The assessment must determine whether the interventions would adversely affect the integrity of any site in terms of its nature conservation objectives. If any negative effects remain after mitigation has been identified then other options should be examined to determine whether these would have an adverse effect on the integrity of a European site.

5.5 The qualifying features of the River Dee SAC are Atlantic Salmon, Otter and Freshwater Pearl Mussel. The Conservation objectives of the site are:

- To avoid deterioration of the habitats of the qualifying species or significant disturbance to the qualifying species, thus ensuring that the integrity of the site is maintained and the site makes an appropriate contribution to achieving favourable conservation status for each of the qualifying features; and
- To ensure for the qualifying species that the following are maintained in the long term:
 - Population of the species, including range of genetic types for salmon as a viable component of the site;
 - Distribution of the species within the site;
 - Distribution of the extent of habitats supporting the species;
 - Structure, function and supporting processes of habitats supporting the species;
 - No significant disturbance of the species;
 - Distribution and viability of freshwater pearl mussel host species;
 - Structure, function and supporting processes of habitats supporting freshwater pearl mussel host species.

5.6 An HRA and Appropriate Assessment against these qualifying species and criteria will be done at the project level once a preferred option has been identified through the STAG appraisal process.

6. Monitoring Measures

6.1 Section 18(3)(f) of the Act proposes the provision of information on the measures that are to be taken to monitor for any unforeseen environmental effects so that appropriate remedial action may be taken. The following are proposed actions listed in the monitoring framework.

- Plan review – the Strategy will continue to be reviewed at regular intervals, most likely within five years;
- A number of more detailed Action Plans and a Delivery Plan have been developed with the opportunity to consider impacts in more detail and these will be reviewed in light of the RTS refresh;
- A Monitoring Report is prepared, including environmental indicators and targets and performance is reported on an annual basis.

7. Conclusion

7.1 It is our view that the SEA has had a positive effect on the plan. It will enable Nestrans and its partners to realise their goal of sustainable development, promote an

evidenced-based culture and transparency as well as supporting the community well-being in the north east of Scotland.