

Nestrans Regional Transport Strategy 2040

Strategic Environmental Assessment

Post-Adoption Statement

2022

1.0 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 original RTS in 2008 a refresh of the strategy was undertaken in 2013 and the proposed changes were also subject to the SEA process. There have been a number of significant changes to the policy and economic context since this time, as well as completion of the regionally significant projects. The new Regional Transport Strategy 2040 (RTS 2040) needed to take account the greater emphasis on challenges and issues such as climate change, equality, health and technology, as well as responding to the opportunities afforded by completion of the Aberdeen Western Peripheral Route project, and other major schemes such as rail line capacity improvements.

- 1.2 Due to many of the projects and actions being completed in the original RTS and RTS refresh it was agreed by Nestrans, the Regional Transport Partnership for Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire and as the responsible authority that a new RTS 2040 should be developed to take into account the changing priorities, policies and legislation around transport and travel. During 2019 and 2020 the draft RTS 2040 was researched, developed and consulted on through an iterative transport planning process undertaken including the Strategic Transport Appraisal (STA) undertaken as part of the Aberdeen City Regional Deal. This also included stakeholder engagement, undertaking a Health Inequalities Impact Assessment, Equalities Impact Assessment and Fairer Scotland Duty in parallel with the SEA.

- 1.3 The RTS 2040 sets out a vision for transport in north east Scotland with four pillars aligned with those in Scotland's National Transport Strategy (NTS2). Six key priorities aligned with these pillars set a clear statement of intent for the Strategy around safety, accessibility, efficiency and connectivity of journeys, emissions and modal shift. These are underpinned by a series of transport packages comprising policies and actions organised under 18 policy headings.

- 1.4 The SEA of the RTS 2040 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 setting out the likely significant effects on the environment of the draft RTS 2040 which included consideration of:-
 - the baseline data relating to the current state of the environment in the area of the Strategy;

 - links between the strategy and other relevant policies, plans, programmes and environmental objectives;

- existing environmental problems affecting the area of the strategy;
 - the likely significant effects on the environment (positive, negative and neutral) of actions and proposed projects;
 - the mitigation measures envisaged; and
 - 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 RTS 2040 strategy and other assessment documents;
- d. Taking into account the environmental report and the results of consultation in making final decisions regarding the strategy;
- e. Committing to monitoring the significant environmental effects of the implementation of the strategy to identify any unforeseen adverse significant environmental effects and to taking appropriate remedial action.
- 1.5 All documents relating the Regional Transport Strategy 2040, including the SEA scoping report and environmental report and other assessments are available on the Nestrans website at www.nestrans.org.uk www.nestrans2040.org.uk.
- 1.6 The SEA was integrated with the transport planning process and with the principles of Scottish Transport Appraisal Guidance (STAG). Environmental assessments were undertaken for the shortlisted set of options developed in the STA work and for the packages of proposed transport interventions forming the basis of the RTS.

2.1 Key findings of the SEA process

2.1 The predicted environmental impacts of the RTS 2040 identified through the SEA are summarised below:

- a) **Positive impacts:** The RTS 2040 includes a large number of actions and measures to increase the proportion of trips undertaken by sustainable modes (reducing the need to travel, and promoting journeys by bus, rail, walking and cycling), particularly in areas currently affected by congestion and poor air quality. Actions included in the RTS 2040 include investigating the potential for Aberdeen Rapid Transit, potential further railway stations, bus and rail improvements, enhanced measures to increase the number of trips by active travel such as walking and cycling, encouraging the uptake of alternative fuels and support for demand management measures to lock in the benefits of other schemes. Collectively these actions will help to decrease greenhouse gas emissions and improve air quality. Climate Change is one of the four pillars of the RTS 2040 and reducing greenhouse gas emissions underpins the development of the RTS 2040 and its priorities and actions. More active travel will also likely to improve the population's health and wellbeing, as well as improve air quality and reduce greenhouse gas emissions.
- b) **Unknown impacts:** As many of the proposed measures in the RTS 2040 are outline at this stage, and specific details such as service routings or locations of infrastructure are unspecified, there is some uncertainty in the prediction of the magnitude of physical impacts from some proposed schemes in the RTS, particularly those which will require new or extended infrastructure. 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

options appraisal (which includes appraisal of environmental impacts) in order to identify a preferred option before they can be taken forward and designs developed in more detail.

- c) Negative impacts:** Negative environmental impacts could arise from new road, rail, active travel, Aberdeen Rapid Transit and park and ride infrastructure which may involve land take. These impacts may arise from crossings such as bridges over water or routes through sensitive sites; special consideration will be required and additional environmental assessments carried out in these areas on a case by case basis. Negative impacts may also arise from air travel and maritime travel such as freight and passenger ferries. However, it is important to note that none of the RTS 2040 actions have been assessed as being likely to have significant adverse effects on the environment (at this stage). Furthermore, potential negative project-level impacts need to be balanced against predicted benefits from implementing the projects and implementing the RTS 2040 as a whole, which has been developed to improve road safety, reduce congestion, improve air quality, improve health and wellbeing, reduce greenhouse gas emissions and promote sustainable modes of travel. Additionally, RTS 2040 actions involving proposals for road/rail improvements have been balanced with proposals to lock in the benefits of road safety, reducing congestion for public transport, cyclists and pedestrians.

- 2.2 As noted within the detailed SEA assessment matrices set out in the Environmental Report **Appendix 4**, the RTS 2040 is a high-level strategy document and most individual actions (e.g. schemes, initiatives or projects) will have to undergo further development and appraisal work before they can be implemented. In particular, RTS 2040 Actions involving infrastructure works will require to be subject to consenting processes and environmental assessments as appropriate in order to identify and address (i.e. through siting, design and mitigation) any likely significant adverse effects. In some cases this is likely to include carrying out a statutory Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) in accordance with relevant regulations. Infrastructure proposals will also need to take account of and make provision for pedestrians and cyclists as an integral part of the design process. Whilst primary mitigation will involve avoidance of effects where possible, further mitigation measures have also been developed through this SEA process.

3 How the SEA has informed the RTS

3.1 A key role of the SEA process is to devise appropriate mitigation and enhancement recommendations in order to address identified uncertainties, resolve deficiencies and strengthen the sustainability performance of the plan, programme or strategy being assessed.

3.2 Reflecting the high-level nature and regional focus of the emerging RTS, the SEA critical review focused on examining the effectiveness of linkages included within the strategy to SEA findings and recommendations. Three recommendations for clarifications within the Draft RTS were made at this point:

- a. Clarify the role of SEA and other relevant statutory impact assessments, as plan-making tools, in shaping the development of the emerging RTS to date;
- b. Explain how environmental considerations and the findings of the SEA process will be taken account of in strategy delivery. This included a need for further consideration of a range of physical environmental constraints and sensitivities which influence where and how RTS policies and individual actions will be implemented; and,

- c. Clarify RTS Action RD2 - A90 North (Ellon to Fraserburgh and Peterhead) to confirm that proposals to dual the Ellon bypass to Toll of Birness will be further developed taking account of previous appraisal work and identified environmental constraints including ecological sensitivities associated with the crossing of the River Ythan.

3.3 All three recommendations were subsequently addressed within the final version of the strategy. Coupled with the integration of environmental considerations into strategy development from the outset this demonstrates how the SEA process has directly informed and improved the preparation of the strategy.

3.4 A summary of further mitigation and enhancement recommended by the SEA for the strategy is available on p53 of the Strategic Environmental Assessment. A link to this document is below.

<https://www.nestrans.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/FINAL-SEA-RTS-2040-July-2020.pdf>

4. RTS and SEA Consultation

4.1 As a result of consultation on the Draft RTS 2040 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 and feedback document available on the Nestrans website at: [Documents – Regional Transport Strategy 2040 | NESTRANS](#)

5. Reasons for adopting this plan and assessment of alternatives

5.1 A range of alternatives were developed and assessed as part of the development of the RTS 2040 and the accompanying SEA.

5.2 The RTS 2040 was developed through an iterative and collaborative process undertaken in tandem with the Aberdeen City Deal Strategic Transport Assessment (STA). This multi-stage options development and refinement process led to:

- a) The development of a holistic vision and six Key Priorities to underpin the Draft RTS 2040, approved by the Nestrans Board in 2019. STA has helped inform and develop the Draft RTS by generating and sifting out options for priorities, policies and actions resulting in the contents of the Draft RTS which is now being assessed in this ER. The relationship between RTS development and the Aberdeen City Region Deal Strategic Transport Appraisal means that all components of the Draft RTS are themselves reasonable and there are now no other reasonable alternatives which also require consideration in the SEA process. As high-level objectives, it was not possible to identify any reasonable alternative priorities without changing the fundamental basis of the emerging RTS 2040, which would not appropriately respond to identified key transport and environmental problems; and,
- b) The identification of a long list of options, all of which have been refined, sifted and included as a package of actions within the RTS 2040. Importantly, as all feasible and relevant options identified through the Aberdeen City Region Deal STA Part 1 Appraisal have been included (i.e. no options were discounted outright), these have all been subject to the SEA process. This approach was validated through further work undertaken by Nestrans officers to consider whether the inclusion of only some of the identified options to focus the RTS 2040 in a particular direction could still effectively deliver all six RTS 2040 Key Priorities. The work evidenced the need to include all identified options within the

RTS 2040 and thus confirmed that proceeding with only a limited number of the options would not itself represent a reasonable alternative.

6. Requirement for further assessment

6.1 The SEA identified that many interventions will require further assessment at the appropriate stages through the STAG process to identify a preferred option and following that potentially a full Environmental Impact Assessment. This is most appropriately done at the project stage as there is insufficient detail in the RTS 2040 to fully assess the likely environmental impacts of a number of RTS 2040 actions. For example, the exact location of some of the proposed projects are currently at an outline concept stage.

6.2 The SEA also identified the need for a Habitat Regulations Appraisal (HRA) (incorporating an Appropriate Assessment) of the interventions that are likely to have a significant impact on Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) or Special Protection Areas (SPAs) within the region. The requirement for, and scope of, HRA will be discussed with NatureScot as projects are developed.

7.0 Monitoring Measures

7.1 Section 18(3)(3) of the Act proposes the measures that are to be taken to monitor the significant environmental effects of the implementation of the plan or programme. The following are proposed actions listed in the monitoring framework of the Regional Transport Strategy. Monitoring information for the strategy is published on the nestrans website <https://www.nestrans.org.uk/projects/monitoring-and-modelling/>

- a. Plan review – the Strategy will continue to be reviewed by Nestrans at regular intervals, most likely within five years;
- b. A number of more detailed Action Plans and a Delivery Plan will be developed with the opportunity to consider impacts in more detail
- c. An RTS Monitoring Report which is specifically prepared by Nestrans to show progress against the objectives of the RTS, and which includes environmental indicators and targets. Performance will be reported on an annual basis and published on the nestrans website.

8.0 Conclusion

8.1 It is Nestrans' view as the responsible authority that the SEA has had a positive effect on the RTS 2040. It will enable Nestrans and its partners to reduce emissions from transport in the region, improve air quality and promote an evidenced-based culture and transparency for transport investment, as well as supporting the community well-being in the north east of Scotland.