

Natural England Board



Meeting: 11
Date: 25 June 2008

Paper No: **NEB PU11 06**

Title: **Natural England's Draft Policy on Transport and the Natural Environment**

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1. Purpose

- 1.1. This paper presents Natural England's draft policy on transport and the natural environment for the Board's approval. It builds on discussions with Board Outcome Group 3, and a workshop with key stakeholders in February 2008.
- 1.2. The draft policy provides the strategic framework for all our work on transport including ports (our draft ports policy is currently under development) and our work on sustainable leisure travel, which will support the requirement for National Nature Reserves to have Visitor Travel Plans in place. Natural England is committed to leading by example in adopting good environmental management and sustainable practices, and visitor travel plans for our own sites are a major contribution to this.
- 1.3. The policy also complements Natural England's climate change and bio-energy policies, and the draft green travel policy options paper, which is currently out for internal consultation.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1. It is recommended that the Board agree the draft 'Transport and the Natural Environment' policy (attached at Annex 1 in full), prior to external stakeholder consultation. A final draft of this policy will be circulated to all Board members for comment, prior to sign off by the Chair.

3. Summary of Context for our Transport Policy

- 3.1. Transport is a key influence on many policy areas, from climate change and energy to health and recreation. Mobility is an integral part of people's lives, and many people enjoy travel for its own sake. A low carbon, environmentally sustainable transport network is capable of contributing, in no particular order, to outcomes as diverse as:
 - a healthier, happier population;
 - a lower carbon economy;
 - a healthier more resilient natural environment;

- wildlife corridors and green infrastructure;
 - tranquil landscapes;
 - sustainable access to the natural environment;
 - safer, more attractive settlements;
 - cleaner air.
- 3.2. Transport trends show an increasing demand for road and air transport, whilst levels of cycling, walking and bus use are declining. These trends are detrimental to our quality of life as they contribute to rising greenhouse gas emissions, poorer physical health, and a more fragmented and polluted natural environment.
- 3.3. Government policy is that the UK's transport system is largely sufficient in terms of connectivity but supports further expansion of the transport network to aid economic productivity and reduce congestion. The Government also acknowledges the need to encourage modal shift from the private car to more sustainable modes and from road and air freight to water and rail. But there is a tension between these two positions, and delivering modal shift whilst sustaining economic growth on current models is proving difficult.
- 3.4. Transport affects the natural environment, and people's experience of the natural environment, in three key areas:
- a) Biodiversity, landscape, geodiversity:
 - through direct and indirect impacts from infrastructure and traffic.
 - b) Climate change and energy:
 - through greenhouse gas emissions and the use of biofuels.
 - c) Quality of life:
 - through access to and experience of the natural environment, and through the links between walking, cycling and health and well-being.
- 3.5. Our policies for transport, therefore, seek more positive outcomes for these three areas, with the aim of securing the future of England's natural environment in a society that aspires to greater mobility whilst reducing its emissions.
- 4. Summary of Natural England's draft policy on Transport and the Natural Environment**
- 4.1. We believe that transport policies, delivery mechanisms and funding should deliver net benefits for the natural environment, as well as for the economy and for people.

- 4.2. We believe that transport policy must be an integral part of spatial planning and other policies affecting the environment in order to encourage sustainable transport patterns and reduce the need to travel.
- 4.3. We believe that mobility is a valuable aspect of life, but that we must make a cultural shift towards low carbon travel patterns that can be sustained in the long term.
- 4.4 We believe a significant shift away from car-borne access to the natural environment is needed, with people being able to access high quality green space near to where they live by walking and cycling, and enjoying rail and public transport modes for longer journeys.
- 4.5 We believe that better use should be made of existing transport networks, with new infrastructure the exception rather than the norm. Where there are no alternatives to new infrastructure, it should be designed and managed to enhance landscape character and biodiversity and reduce habitat fragmentation.

Annex 1

Transport and the Natural Environment Draft Policy

This paper presents Natural England's draft policy for transport and the natural environment. It builds on discussions with Board Outcome Group 3, and a workshop with a range of stakeholders and Natural England Teams in February 2008.

Context

'Transport' in this paper is considered to include roads and road transport, public transport (buses, trams, railways, and light rapid transit), airports, canals, inland waterways and water transport, shipping and ports, and cycling and walking.

Government transport policy includes a presumption against new or expanded transport infrastructure in environmentally sensitive areas, and provides guidance to practitioners in identifying and reducing some of the main impacts of transport schemes on the environment. There are a number of Government policies in place to ensure that our desire to travel and transport goods minimises impacts on the natural environment:

- Current transport policy acknowledges that we cannot build our way out of congestion and the Government has indicated support for local road pricing to make better use of urban networks.
- Planning guidance acknowledges the interplay between spatial planning and transport and encourages planners to locate development in areas that are accessible by public transport.
- The Renewable Transport Fuel Obligation (RTFO) is part of a number of measures being developed to address growing CO2 emissions from the transport sector.

However, despite the Government's presumption against development in environmentally sensitive areas, many transport schemes are threatening or having negative impacts on Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, National Parks and Sites of Special Scientific Interest and European and international designations, such as Special Areas of Conservation. Resources from central and local Government for sustainable transport initiatives that deliver environmental and health benefits are comparatively scarce as are resources for ensuring that people can access the countryside in more sustainable ways.

Government policy acknowledges that the UK's transport system is largely sufficient in terms of connectivity but supports further expansion of the transport network to aid economic productivity and reduce congestion. The Government also acknowledges the need to encourage modal shift from the private car to more sustainable modes, and from road and air freight to water and rail. But there is a tension between these two positions, and delivering modal shift whilst sustaining economic growth on current models is proving difficult.

Issues

Transport is a key influence on many policy areas, from climate change and energy to health and recreation. Mobility is an integral part of people's lives, and many people enjoy travel for its own sake.

A low carbon, environmentally sustainable transport network is capable of contributing to, in no particular order, outcomes as diverse as:

- a healthier, happier population;
- a lower carbon economy;
- a healthier more resilient natural environment;
- wildlife corridors and green infrastructure;
- tranquil landscapes;
- sustainable access to the natural environment;
- safer, more attractive settlements;
- cleaner air.

Transport trends show an increasing demand for road and air transport, whilst levels of cycling¹, walking² and bus use³ are declining. These trends are detrimental to our quality of life as they contribute to rising greenhouse gas emissions, poorer physical health, and a more fragmented, polluted natural environment. There is also uncertainty – about fuel prices and fuel availability – that means trends may change abruptly and decisions made about the need for transport today may be wrong tomorrow.

Transport affects the natural environment, and people's experience of the natural environment, in three key areas:

1. Biodiversity, landscape, geodiversity – through direct and indirect impacts from infrastructure and traffic.
2. Climate change and energy – through greenhouse gas emissions and the use of biofuels.
3. Quality of life – through access to and experience of the natural environment, and through the links between walking, cycling and health.

Our policies for transport, therefore, seek more positive outcomes for these three areas, with the aim of securing the future of England's natural environment in a society that aspires to greater mobility whilst reducing its emissions. Natural England wants to see a truly sustainable transport system – a stable, low carbon one that will

¹ Cycling Personal Travel Factsheet, January 2007, DfT/National Statistics

² Between 1995/7 and 2006 the number of trips made on foot declined by 15 per cent (Transport Trends 2007, Department for Transport)

³ The number of bus journeys has declined from the mid 1980s to the mid 1990s, but has shown some increase over the past 7 years, mainly because of increased bus use in London, and the introduction of free concessionary travel for elderly and disabled passengers. (Transport Trends 2007, Department for Transport)

help to conserve and enhance the natural environment, as well as delivering economic and social benefits.

Policies

1. We believe that transport policies, delivery mechanisms and funding should deliver net benefits for the natural environment as well as for the economy and for people.

Policies that support further large-scale infrastructure expansion could have significant negative impacts on the natural environment and on the UK's greenhouse gas emissions; the implications and cumulative effects of further expansion must be thoroughly assessed. Alternatively, there are proven packages of policies and measures that deliver more sustainable transport patterns and reduce impacts on the natural environment. These include:

- maximising the effective use of existing transport networks;
- modal shift from the car to public transport, walking and cycling;
- modal shift of freight to rail and water;
- internalising the external costs of transport – the 'polluter pays' principle – through subsidies and taxation;
- 'Smart or soft measures' such as travel plans, teleconferencing, car sharing and individualised travel planning.

Many of these measures will require support through taxation and regulation in order to ensure they are successful. Fiscal measures such as the fuel duty escalator and congestion pricing have been shown to influence travel choices. Current and future transport policies and infrastructure projects need to contribute to the conservation and enhancement of the natural environment - an essential part of delivering sustainable development.

Evidence

The 2004 Transport White Paper estimates that an additional 4032km of trunk roads will be built between 2010 and 2025, in addition to hundreds of kilometres of local roads. It also predicts that traffic will grow by 40% between 2000 and 2025. 'The Future of Air Transport in the UK (2003)' White Paper supports an increase in the UK's airport capacity from 200 million air passenger movements in 2003 to 470 million passenger movements by 2030.

Despite these trends and predictions for growth, the smart measures applied in DfT's 'Sustainable Travel Towns initiative' have reduced car trips by more than 10% and increased public transport, walking and cycling trips by more than 10%.

2. We believe that transport policy must be an integral part of spatial planning and other policies affecting the environment in order to encourage sustainable transport patterns and reduce the need to travel.

Transport policy needs to be part of wider spatial planning if it is to help deliver sustainable development. Government guidance recognises that by shaping the pattern of development and influencing the location, scale, density, design and mix of

land uses, planning can help to reduce the need to travel and enable people to make sustainable transport choices. The integration of spatial planning and transport will be essential in ensuring that decisions about eco towns and other new settlements deliver development that enables low car dependency.

Evidence

The new settlement of Vauban in Freiburg, Germany, has been designed to provide residents with good access to services without needing to drive, and 40% of the households do not own a car. The Peabody Trust's well-known Bedzed development in Sutton has been designed to encourage alternatives to car use, with a green travel plan, car club and good public transport links.

3. We believe that mobility is a valuable aspect of life, but that we must make a cultural shift towards low carbon travel patterns that can be sustained in the long term.

The transport sector needs to reduce its emissions and move onto a lower carbon pathway; evidence indicates that a package approach combining technology, policy and fiscal measures and behaviour change, is required to achieve this move. Where technology is concerned, biofuels may be part of the solution, but one that has significant implications for the natural environment. There is therefore a need for the adoption of a robust industry-wide certification for sourcing and processing biofuels to ensure that they are produced sustainably. Other technologies, including hybrid and more fuel efficient engines, will also contribute to emissions reduction. Policies to encourage the use of the most fuel efficient modes and routes for freight also offer the potential to reduce emissions from the sector.

Individuals and organisations can also play their part in changing their travel behaviour to reduce emissions. Natural England has a target to reduce our emissions by 50% by 2010, and we will ensure that our travel patterns contribute to this reduction.

Evidence

In 2006, transport emitted 23.5% of the UK's carbon emissions, with road transport contributing 93% of this (this figure excludes international aviation and shipping). Road transport emissions are growing and aviation emissions are set to quadruple between 1990 and 2050. The UK only has enough land to produce around 2.5% of our road transport fuel needs, whilst still leaving some land available for other bioenergy crop uses.

A 2006 report for the Department for Transport⁴ concluded that there is a need to engage the public in issues of transport and climate change using alternatives to the traditional 'top down' methods of information provision.

When asked which types of activities respondents were likely to undertake in the next 12 months due to concerns about climate change, 77 per cent mentioned at least one activity related to reducing car journeys, most often walking some short journeys (51 per cent) or reducing the number of non-essential journeys (40 per cent)⁵.

⁴ A review of public attitudes to climate change and transport: summary report, July 2006 Anable, J et al

⁵ Transport Trends 2007, Department for Transport

4. We believe a significant shift away from car-borne access to the natural environment is needed, with people being able to access high quality green space near to where they live by walking and cycling, and enjoying rail and public transport for longer journeys.

Transport plays an essential role in linking people with places and with the natural environment in all its forms but comes with an inescapable environmental impact. Transport to and for leisure is increasing as people become more mobile, and rising traffic levels are presenting 'honeypot' sites with challenges such as overflow parking and seasonal congestion. It is important that people can continue to access the natural environment without damaging the very qualities they go to experience. People enjoy travel for its own sake, and we need to make sustainable travel – by public transport, walking and cycling – easier and more enjoyable.

Evidence

- The 2005 England Leisure Visits Survey highlights that the majority of visitors to National Parks, AONBs and 'open' countryside arrive by car;
- The number of walking trips per person fell by 15% in 2006 and the number of trips by bus outside London fell by 8%;
- 30% of trips in 2006 were for leisure purposes (this is all leisure trips, not just access to the natural environment) and 40% of the distance travelled;
- The Public Accounts Committee is aware that more needs to be done to increase public transport to open access land under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act (CROW);
- The 'Widen the Choice' Rural Transport Partnership in the East of England is demonstrating how more sustainable access to the natural environment can be provided;
- The South Shropshire Hills AONB shuttle bus is one example showing how public transport access to the natural environment can be improved.

5. We believe that better use should be made of existing transport networks, with new infrastructure the exception rather than the norm. Where there are no alternatives to new infrastructure, it should be designed and managed to enhance landscape character and biodiversity and reduce habitat fragmentation.

Major transport schemes are always likely to cause environmental impacts, but they also offer scope for creating biodiversity or landscape benefits, such as the A30 Goss Moor in Cornwall and the tunnel under construction on the A3 at Hindhead in Surrey. Scheme developers should avoid damaging the natural environment and look for alternative solutions to major schemes that would otherwise damage environmentally sensitive areas. New infrastructure at or near sensitive areas should be exceptional and the damage should be mitigated or compensated. There should be 'retro-fitting' to the existing transport network to improve its performance for biodiversity and landscape, for example land bridges to reduce habitat fragmentation and assessing the potential for removing or reducing lighting.

More transport case studies and evaluations are required, across all modes, to demonstrate good practice in environmental design and management. There are evidence gaps relating to transport infrastructure and the natural environment, including:

- The effectiveness of environmental mitigation techniques used in transport schemes;
- The contribution of transport infrastructure to habitat connectivity and adaptation to climate change;
- Cumulative impacts on the natural environment from transport infrastructure and operation.

Natural England will work with key stakeholders to see if these evidence gaps can be filled. Where they cannot be filled, we need to use 'ecological common sense' and the precautionary principle to safeguard our natural environment.

Evidence

Between 1995 and 2004 around 11,300 hectares of land in England changed from other uses to highways and other forms of road transport. About 2,300 hectares was from a previous developed use, the rest from Greenfield land⁶.

⁶ Transport Trends 2007, Department for Transport