

Revised Regional Transportation Strategy 2011 Questionnaire

You can e-mail your response to shapingourfuture@drdni.gov.uk .

Questions for Chapter Two

Q. What do you believe are the major challenges to delivering an improved and more sustainable transportation infrastructure here?

DRAFT RESPONSE BY BELFAST HEALTHY CITIES

There is a continued overreliance on the private car, which is built around the car as a social status symbol as well as a form of transport. Belfast Healthy Cities believes that the social attitude to car ownership is one of the key factors that makes the car culture particularly difficult to shift - essentially it makes public transport and active travel second rate forms of transport for many people.

The suburbanisation which has accelerated in recent years is also a major barrier for more sustainable transport, as it has entrenched car dependence. Not only are suburban dwellers reliant on the car for work journeys, due to a lack of local services they also need the car for local basic service trips. This has negative impacts on people and communities across Northern Ireland: it reduces opportunities for people to meet and socialise in an informal and incidental way, which hinders social bonds and communities from forming; the impacts on older people and children are particularly severe, as these groups are least travel independent. Car reliance also reduces opportunities for physical activity and is a risk factor for obesity, while finally commuting

creates congestion and an economic burden; for employers in terms of lost productivity and for society in terms of increased road maintenance requirements.

Q. What are the challenges for society?

It is alarming that the draft RDS, as reflected in the draft RTS, appears to accept continued rapid suburbanisation and long distance work commuting as inevitable trends. To achieve a more sustainable transport system - socially, environmentally and economically - it is essential that the transport implications of land use planning and regional planning are given greater consideration. In our response to the draft RDS, Belfast Healthy Cities suggested that greater focus should be put on relocalisation around the proposed clusters of towns, and on developing the unique selling points of each area. In other words, this would mean directing jobs as well as services into local hubs, with the aim of encouraging and enabling people to work more locally and reducing long distance commuting.

This could not only ease transport pressures, but also strengthen the economic potential of different areas, by enabling a stronger focus on their specific strengths, eg. on agriculture related business in the west and creative economy in the northwest.

We also noted that for many service oriented businesses - not least financial services - access to a logistics network is less vital than for others, and that this could be taken into account when planning suitable locations. In particular, Belfast Healthy Cities emphasised the need for

the Executive and Assembly to take stewardship of local development and establish its own priorities, rather than being led by investors, existing and potential.

More generally, the car culture and car focused attitudes continue to pervade much of public policy. Belfast Healthy Cities is very pleased that the draft RTS proposes shifting resources away from provision for cars and reallocating road space, which are essential measures to develop a sustainable transport system. However, this requires sustained priority, and to achieve maximum impact, support from a majority of decision makers for a considerable shift in transport priorities.

Q. Are they challenges for you as an individual?

Individuals have a responsibility to consider their own transport choices and motivations for those. However, the onus is on decision makers and service providers to create the conditions that enable and incentivise people to take sustainable choices. This involves setting public transport fares at accessible prices, as the cost of public transport remains a barrier for many people, particularly in rural areas where travel distances are greater.

Q. How should DRD respond to these challenges?

See answers above. Belfast Healthy Cities believes that the role of DRD is to take leadership in developing sustainable transport options and promoting those across government, engaging with all Departments, MLAs and Ministers to identify how they can contribute to this and how transport influences their core activities. DRD also has a

key role in engaging with local government and civil society, to gain local knowledge and information on local needs related to transport, and to promote uptake of more sustainable options.

Q. Do you agree that particular interests such as freight, active travel and the needs of older and disabled people should be mainstreamed in the Strategy rather than being considered separately?

Belfast Healthy Cities believes a comprehensive, joined up approach is essential. It creates strength in particular for less influential issues and stakeholders, as it helps ensure that all issues are considered, and that the cross implications are taken into account (eg. how the needs of freight for reliable and speedy transport links can be reconciled with the needs of older people for safety and good local connections). It also enables a coherent monitoring framework, which is vital to ensure that progress is achieved across all priority areas in an equitable way. There may, however, be a number of ways to achieve a joined up strategy; specific issues may require their own chapter or sub strategy. What is vital, however, is that key priorities for particular interest are reconciled and incorporated into the overarching key priority and target framework.

Belfast Healthy Cities has participated in the Active Travel Forum that has supported the development of the forthcoming Active Travel Strategy. We believe it is crucial that the core aims and objectives of this strategy are linked into the RTS, as achieving increased active travel requires collaboration and engagement across the transport sector as well as other sectors.

In relation to monitoring, a partnership chaired by Belfast Healthy Cities has developed an indicator set intended to enable monitoring of how regeneration affects health and wellbeing. This set includes economic, social and environmental considerations, but also separates access issues into a specific domain. As a novel element, the set has also identified a small set of eight 'headline' indicators, which have relevance to all regeneration initiatives, and enable a focus on overall impacts as well as specific impacts on disadvantage and deprivation. A short checklist has also been developed, which can be used at an early stage of planning to explore what the potential impact of an initiative is, eg. on access to jobs and on employment, on air quality and traffic congestion. Belfast Healthy Cities would be happy to provide more information on the indicator set, should it be of potential interest for monitoring the RTS.

Questions for Chapter Three

Q. Do you agree/disagree that growing the economy in a sustainable way should be at the core of our strategy and if so why/why not?

Belfast Healthy Cities believes that focus should be on creating a prosperous society. This incorporates the concept of social prosperity, which emphasises conditions in which people of all backgrounds have a chance to fulfil their potential and flourish, and in which communities can develop resilience through a sense of shared wellbeing and social cohesion. A stable economy plays a part in this, and is a precondition for basic wellbeing for all, but a growing economy in itself is no guarantee for prosperity. In particular, direction is needed to ensure that prosperity is divided equitably and that growing returns contribute to reducing inequality and poverty; evidence from England during the growth years of the late 1990s and early 2000s show that a natural 'trickle down' effect is unlikely to occur. It would be important to establish why a growing economy is important, and what the growth can achieve.

Transport plays a vital role for prosperity, as it is necessary for maintaining and improving daily life. It plays a significant economic role in this indirect way, and Belfast Healthy Cities believes greater emphasis should be put on the economic benefits and savings created for example through improved access to jobs, education and services for the most disadvantaged groups by good public transport; or through improved opportunities to meet people and be active by walking and cycling. This would also highlight the

cross cutting impact that transport has on people's lives, and could support a more cross Departmental approach to developing transport.

Q. What do you see as advantages or disadvantages in this approach?

See above. Belfast Healthy Cities believes that an emphasis on the benefits of good transport systems (focused on public transport and active travel) for people and communities has synergies across many of the current priorities for the Executive, and does not conflict with any. In short, we advocate a focus in transport policy on accessibility, which emphasises giving people opportunities to get where they need to go, rather than mobility, which emphasises moving people and goods and can miss major economic and social opportunities.

Q. Do you agree with the strategic objectives proposed?

Belfast Healthy Cities welcomes the broad approach taken in developing the strategic objectives, and is particularly pleased to see that health and wellbeing are mentioned among the overarching aims. We also welcome the opportunity to consider the relative priority of the objectives.

We believe that the strategic objectives are in the right direction, in that they increase the focus on transport as a public service for people, as well as an economic lever. As noted above, we believe that this public service role in itself has economic benefits, as well as vital social benefits that are important to underpinning society

as a whole. However, in our view prioritising is difficult for a number of reasons. Firstly, the wording can be interpreted in a number of ways; for example, connectivity may mean both investment in roads infrastructure and public transport. Secondly, the objectives are aimed at slightly different levels. For example, 'developing transport programmes focused on the user' is from our perspective more operational and action oriented, while linked to other objectives are strategic, eg. improve social inclusion. Some objectives are also linked to each other, eg. in our view improving social inclusion is closely linked to improving access in towns as well as rural areas. If these were joined up into a composite objective, it would be possible to give for example improving safety a greater priority, which it does warrant.

Belfast Healthy Cities would suggest that following this prioritisation exercise, a second analysis is undertaken to explore how objectives relate to each other, and how they might be placed in a helpful framework that indicates how one contributes to others (eg. as outlined above). This might also help identify potentially effective actions, that can contribute to a number of objectives simultaneously.

Q. Please rank the strategic objectives as you see them? (Please use the table on the next page)

As discussed above, Belfast Healthy Cities believes prioritising objectives is difficult and has therefore chosen not to, to avoid misinterpretations. Instead, we refer to the comments made above, which give a broad indication of what we think the priorities should

be.

Q. Are there other strategic objectives that you believe should be included? If so please add them to the table and rank them.

We would suggest that top priority is given to a new objective, worded as follows:

Improve connectivity throughout Northern Ireland and access in towns and rural areas through public transport and to the extent possible, active travel networks.

More generally, we believe greater emphasis should be placed on developing public transport and in particular bus transport, since bus is the only realistic alternative for many people and areas of Northern Ireland.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE	RANK
Improve connectivity within the region	1
More efficiently use road space and railways	1
Better maintain transport infrastructure	1
Improve access in our towns and cities	1
Improve access in rural areas	1
Improve connections to key tourism sites	1
Improve safety	1
Improve social inclusion	1
Develop transport programmes focussed on the user	1
Reduce greenhouse gas emissions from transport	1
Protect our biodiversity	1
Reduce noise and air pollution	1
Improve connectivity throughout Northern Ireland and access in towns and rural areas through public transport and to the extent possible, active travel networks	

Questions for Chapter Four

Q. Do you agree with the interventions listed?

Belfast Healthy Cities finds the majority of listed interventions helpful as part of an overall package. The diagram outlining the relationship between proposed actions and objectives is also very helpful, and we believe it should provide a basis for identifying actions with the greatest potential effectiveness (as separate from efficiency, which however also is important).

However, we believe that the prioritisation framework, considered below, plays a vital role in shaping the final action plan and ensuring that it contributes to society in the widest sense. To support this, Belfast Healthy Cities believes it is important to establish at an early stage how it can be ensured that each of the strategic domains has equal weight. For example, it is vital that issues and actions in domain B. Enhance the quality of life for all are not seen as 'softer' than actions in domain A. which emphasises the economy. For this, a broad evidence base and framework that emphasises the indirect economic, environmental and social implications of transport decisions is important; we would stress again that a transport network that enhances people's access to jobs and services can make a greater contribution to the economy in indirect ways, than a system built primarily to support commercial movements and interests.

Q. Have you any other interventions to suggest or any alternative wording that you would prefer?

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Questions for Chapter Five
Q. Do you agree with our proposals for a prioritisation framework?
Belfast Healthy Cities is pleased that a proposed prioritisation framework is included; it is helpful and offers welcome transparency into how decisions are made. It would, however, be helpful if it was publicly outlined how the prioritisation criteria are arrived at, eg. what formal evidence and assessments support this, and what proposed assessments or other interventions proposals will undergo before decisions are taken.
Q. Have you any other prioritisation mechanism to suggest?
Further to the comments made above, Belfast Healthy Cities would stress that it is essential that the prioritisation framework and in particular the key criteria are based on strong and transparent evidence of the likely impacts and effects (positive and negative). In particular, it is important to take into account impacts on people and communities. Not only are these important in themselves as significant shapers of people's everyday lives and long term wellbeing outcomes; the cumulative impact of this can have substantial cost implications for the public purse. Belfast Healthy Cities is aware that there are a number of statutory impact assessments. It may be possible and helpful to consider

health and equity within these, to ensure that a focus on people is retained. Belfast Healthy Cities has also developed capacity on Health Impact Assessment, which offers a formal, systematic methodology that can inform decision making by assessing potential impacts of a proposal and suggesting ways of enhancing positive impacts and measures to tackle inequalities. Belfast Healthy Cities is currently developing tools and capacity on a Health Equity in All Policies approach, which aims to work with organisations from all sectors to support them to achieve their aims, but in a way that also supports health. This approach builds on HIA, but is flexible and designed to support non health sectors. It is currently being piloted on a number of policy areas, and has informed work by Belfast Healthy Cities to develop a travel plan framework, primarily for health care organisations but with potential application to many other organisations as well. This work has included the development of a set of indicators that monitor the performance of the framework against set priorities, eg. modal switch, safety etc. The project also involves assessing the potential impact of travel plans on a range of factors that affect people, from lifestyle to personal safety. This can help develop interventions that as effectively as possible support people to take sustainable transport choices, which in turn reduce transport and associated pressures in key locations, such as hospitals .

We would be happy to provide further information on this, should that be helpful.

