

The Institution of Environmental Sciences

A NEW APPROACH TO TRUNK ROAD PLANNING

Comments on draft supplement to PPG13

1. Introduction:

The proposals involving wider consultation and closer integration of transport policy with land use planning are to be welcomed. A factor of considerable reassurance to the Institution is the emphasis placed on sustainable growth in the Guidance. This should be a major consideration in all policy and individual project reviews.

Whilst the RPG and the regional level of consultation may not cover all the issues involved it is seen to be a progressive development.

2. Role of RPG in Transport Planning:

RPGs provide guidance on the transport strategy and priorities for each region but are very much focused on strategic roads and, sometimes, rail corridors of national importance.

The *management* of trunk roads presumably has strategic land use implications through policies of more intensive use and thereby the reduction in demand for additional land area for new roads. This effect is not entirely clear and more elaboration in the Guidance would be useful.

3. Role of Regional Conference & Consultation:

Preparation and submission of Local Authority advice by Regional Conferences will be able to provide strategic advice as requested but to do so in any depth could represent a massive task. It is likely that the resources, procedures, working timescales and political representation for Regional Conferences may need to be reviewed.

Regional Conferences will certainly press the case for public transport improvements, particularly rail and bus. Given the privatised nature of the transport industry how will such improvements actually be promoted? At Regional Conference level, private transport operators may acknowledge the desirability of a particular rail scheme but may simply say that funding is beyond their means and up to Central Government. This starts to stray beyond what is normally considered to be a land use planning matter. It may be politically expedient for some local authorities to argue for demand management rather than road building and thus reaching a consensus may be very difficult.

There is guidance on how the priority for road schemes will be determined and how existing planned schemes should be considered but alternatives could usefully be expanded.

Consultation beyond the parameters of the Regional Conferences is not mentioned. Where local issues are involved, for example with public transport or traffic management arrangements, wider consultation may be necessary, further complicating administrative arrangements. The converse may be true of rail alternatives where considerations may be on a broader scale than Regional context. There may well be cases where national organizations, perhaps with their own regional divisions, may have a valid contribution to make particularly on environmental issues. Clarification of the whole process of consultation requires amplification.

4. Transport Policy Aims:

The published transport policy aims support the argument for greater consideration of alternatives to trunk road development. Some of these alternatives, such as the promotion of public transport, might be better addressed at local levels rather than Regional Conference. However this particular alternative is not easy to address, especially in rural areas where the particular problem is one of continuing difficulty.

5. Policy on Trunk Roads:

Increases in road capacity should only be proposed after options such as traffic management have been explored (says the draft). Regional planning guidance and regional conferences are not the appropriate means to discuss traffic management which cannot really be considered in strategic terms. In many cases there may be public transport solutions to traffic problems but the financing and means of implementing these are the key.

Regional Conferences are not expected to carry out detailed assessments (says the draft). This raises the question of what actually should be undertaken by a Regional Conference in order to discount traffic management/public transport solutions (for example) in favour of new road construction. Further and more detailed guidance may be required.

6. Summary:

In principle, any initiatives which will lead to closer integration between land use and transport are welcomed. However, there is concern that, like the existing PPG13, much needs to be done in other fields than planning to achieve real benefits e.g. public transport provision, fiscal measures and so forth. While being a useful step in the right direction, it is considered that on its own the PPG13 supplement may not achieve all its objectives.