

ANNEX E - SEA ASSESSMENT ENVIRONMENTAL STATEMENT

Scoping Study, Environmental baseline, Objectives and Alternatives assessment

The SEA commenced with the scoping study to determine the level of detail that needed to be assessed to define the SEA criteria and begin to collect the SEA baseline data. The report assessed the different options available for developing the core objectives upon which the LTP2 is based. This included an assessment of each of the SEA criteria against the objectives and the alternatives, outlining preferred options and recommendations for each. A consultation of the SEA Scoping Report was then undertaken outlining the environmental issues and options identified at the scoping stage. Relevant local context including related plans were outlined in the document.

The findings from the alternatives assessment were presented to HCC's Transport Panel on 22 March 2005. At this panel all of the recommendations put forward by the SEA of the Strategic Alternatives were accepted. It was at this time that the policies were to be assessed but the SEA timeline was difficult to reconcile with the LTP timeline at this point, as the LTP long term policies needed to be reviewed and rewritten, and it was therefore not possible to meet the panel paper deadline with the full Environment Report.

Vision and Key Programmes

The SEA noted that the vision for transport in Hertfordshire assumes that the car will remain the dominant form of transport in terms of the number of journeys made, but its physical dominance will be reduced so as to allow everyone a free choice of travel mode.

The vision for transport for Hertfordshire and the objectives translate into five key programme areas:

- Tackling congestion
- Delivering accessibility
- Safer roads
- Better air quality
- Quality of life issues

Policy assessment and Significant Environmental Impacts

These programme areas are developed in light of the long term policy framework. Therefore the long term policies were assessed against the SEA assessment criteria. The main areas where significant negative environmental impacts were identified were as follows:

- Impacts on biodiversity
- Encouraging the use of recycled, local and sustainable materials
- Air, noise and water pollution
 - General impacts on the socially excluded and rural areas
- Light pollution

Officers preparing the LTP responded to these areas by developing both monitoring indicators and action plans to include environmental considerations such as optimising the long-term costs of assets realised in the Transport Asset Management Plan (TAMP).

Major Scheme assessment

The SEA process next assessed the six Major Scheme options available. The schemes showed the same significant negative impact areas as the policies. There was difficulty with understanding the issues surrounding the

schemes as in many cases understanding their development was complicated with a long history in which the programme of work that funding was sought for had, in some cases, evolved significantly over time, it was therefore difficult to establish whether the original intention for the schemes had been a more or less sustainable option than the current one. However, overall the assessment resulted in the same issues, as had been identified for the policies, emerging during the process. This was to be expected as they were local issues and mainly dealing with hard engineering solutions.

Consultation and preparation for draft submissions to Transport Panel

The SEA was then developed to culminate in an overall assessment of the objectives, alternatives, policies and major schemes as part of the decision-making process around the priorities of the plan-making process. The Interim Environment Report went to consultation from the 6th May to the 3rd of June 2005. The consultation comments were taken into consideration in June 2005, there were no changes suggested for the SEA, so it remained unchanged. Agreement on the final draft of the SEA was accepted by the Cabinet on the 11th July 2005 and for Full Council 19th July 2005.

The Provisional LTP2 was submitted in July 2005. The Environmental Report was interim as the analysis of the policies and major schemes was incomplete in some areas, where recommendations were yet to be made and HCC responses yet to be considered in the analysis. After this time the Interim Environmental Report was sent out to final consultation in September/October 2005. The final planning guidelines from DfT were announced at this time to finalise the LTP.

During the course of the SEA there were many occasions where national government changes to the guidelines at short notice left the SEA with an unmanageable timeline to complete analysis in time to meet HCC LTP2 deadlines for the submission of panel papers for members etc. As the SEA process is new, this was not unexpected, but meant that on many occasions it was difficult to influence the decision-making process, where transport planners were working under pressure with limited time to consider SEA issues in a wider context than that covered by their usual plan making activities.

Daughter documents

It was during the December period that the SEA process sought legal advice on the remaining daughter documents to check whether these documents required SEA. It was found that the Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP) and Bus Strategy may require SEA, the notice of determination for the ROWIP determined that the plan-making process had started before SEA applied. The Bus Strategy requires a consultation (which is currently underway and concludes on the 17th March) and soon after a report to the Executive Member Transportation and Environment - Stuart Pile to advise of the consultation comments, how these have been taken under consideration and then register the notice of the Determination, which runs for a period of four weeks is due to conclude in mid April 2006.

Final Conclusions and Monitoring

Since this time the SEA process has worked toward improving the baseline to include secondary, synergistic and cumulative impact indicators and encourage the development of a monitoring framework in line with the APR timetable.

As the final settlement has now been made, it is possible to make comment on where the actions and priorities for funding are focused in comparison to where the SEA has identified the significant negative environmental impacts.

The ability of the SEA to influence the plan-making process has been problematic in that there has been some difficulty in identifying the strategic level of plan development, and therefore down to what level the plan needs to be assessed. As before, the plan and the aspects that have been assessed by the SEA show a promising blend of soft and hard measures contained within the main LTP2 and long term policy documents. What is unclear at this stage is whether and how these strategic aspirations will translate at the scheme implementation level and with an equal measure of status as they appear in the strategic plan. With respect to SEA conclusions the original comments made in the draft Environmental Report still stand. This is that a critical aspect of the success of the plan making process, and the ability of the SEA process to influence it, will only become fully apparent when the plan is implemented, where determining the extent of the environmental effects that the plan has, will depend as much on how things are done rather than what is to be done. Monitoring to ensure that negative significant environmental impacts are avoided or mitigated against in as a proactive manner as possible, therefore it is also critical to address the current gaps in the environmental baseline at as early a stage as possible. This is also a result of the infancy of the SEA process where we are still determining what the undesirable and unacceptable levels of impact are, in certain environmental baseline/indicator areas. It is particularly critical that the environmental baseline identifies the secondary, synergistic and cumulative impacts

and employs consistent localised figures. We are currently taking our lead from partners both from within the county council and external local, regional and national indicators to ensure we are consistent with the most critical environmental data areas as they pertain to SEA legislation.

Currently, it is difficult to reconcile the process whereby scheme development is influenced by external factors such as funding tied to mandatory indicators which are determined at central government level, and see the degree to which the HCC policy process influences these schemes when implemented. These links between the guiding of mandatory indicators and policies toward developing the work programme will determine to what extent the significant negative environmental impacts are avoided or mitigated against during implementation. Therefore an understanding of the success or failure of the SEA process to influence the plan will only be fully realised with a robust monitoring process, and a coherent and reliable environmental baseline. Therefore resource toward this end is critical to the success of SEA, and the realisation of a plan which takes adequate account of the full scope of the range of environmental issues contained within the directive.

Main Stages of completing a Strategic Environmental Assessment

