

Session 4/7 - Highways Agency (447)

BOURNEMOUTH AND POOLE HMA SUB REGIONAL STRATEGY

The Highways Agency is an Executive Agency of the Department for Transport (DfT) and is responsible for operating, maintaining and improving the Strategic Road Network (SRN) in England on behalf of the Secretary of State for Transport. The Agency's involvement in the planning system is guided by the current Government Circular 02/2007 Planning and the Strategic Road Network, which was published on the 7th March 2007. This new Circular sets out how the Highway's Agency, on behalf of the Secretary of State, will engage in the planning process to ensure that national and regional aims and objectives for integrated planning and transport can be aligned and met.

The aim of the Agency's involvement in the EiP is to inform the development of the RSS based on our understanding of the capability of the SRN to support broader policy objectives. Circular 02/2007 paragraph 12 sets out the Agency's role in the RSS process and states that the Agency should contribute to the revision of the RSS, including the integrated Regional Transport Study, by advising on the ability of the strategic road network to support proposed land-use policies and proposals. This includes evaluating the impact of strategies on road performance and should also take into account safety and environmental considerations.

The Agency broadly supports the policies and proposals set out in the draft RSS and looks forward to working with the Regional Assembly in delivering sustainable development within the region. The Agency does have some concerns in respect of specific aspects of the RSS which have been explicitly outlined within the Agency's initial response to the draft RSS dated 30th August 2006. Generally these concerns relate to locational, phasing and delivery matters.

The following comments therefore take account of, and should be read in conjunction with, the Agency's initial response (August 2006), which has been updated since that time to take account of the findings of additional evidence at both sub regional, regional and national level. For ease of reference, suggested revisions to policy wording and associated text are summarised in tabular form at the end of the statement.

- a) ***Is the draft RSS sufficiently clear about the spatial outcomes it is seeking in Bournemouth and Poole in terms of their present and future regional and sub-regional roles and their relationship with the other parts of the HMA?***

The Agency is concerned at the scale of development proposed in Areas of Search N, O and P. These development sites are located in a band stretching from Ferndown to Corfe Mullen near the Junction of the A31 and the A350. It is considered that they would result in significant impact on the A31 Trunk Road particularly given the relatively remote location of the key settlements.

Recent discussions between the Highways Agency and the local highway authorities have led to the view that the development of these areas must wait to be informed by the South East Dorset Transport study, following development of a multi-modal traffic model for the JSA area. The impact on local and strategic networks, particularly the A31, and the need for transport interventions and solutions in the A31 to Poole Corridor needs to be fully assessed. It is the intention of the highway authorities, to have completed the South East Dorset Transport Study in time to inform Local Transport Plan 3. We now consider that the sites are unlikely to be developed before 2016.

Area of search Q relates to 20 ha employment provision west of Ferndown. The Agency is concerned about the possible cumulative effect of this potential development with sites N/O/P and transport impacts associated with area Q should also be assessed under the South East Dorset Transport Study referred to above. The Agency is aware of a live planning application for employment development in the Ferndown area and has drawn the attention of the prospective developer to the need to manage demand at source through the implementation of a travel plan, and to improve conditions at junctions including on the A31 Trunk Road.

The Agency is also concerned about plans for expansion at Bournemouth Airport, and related plans to construct a link road to the A338 in order to secure access to the site. Expansion at the airport is likely to have a noticeable and far-reaching impact on the trunk road network.

Independent proposals for employment growth near Bournemouth Airport are likely to add to the impacts of the airport's expansion on the A31 corridor. The Agency would therefore reserve the opportunity to comment until further evidence has been provided concerning the impacts of these proposals.

The enhancement of the Port of Poole is promoted in the RSS. Although the Agency supports the aspiration for existing rail connections to contribute to the transport of goods to and from the port, any resulting road freight will affect the SRN. With regard to the constrained situation on the A31 corridor the Agency reserves comment until clarity is gained on the likely level of road-borne freight and resulting impacts on the SRN.

The Agency has briefly reviewed the additional studies, which were recently published by the SWRA, in particular the suggestion of a potential increase in housing figures for the region. The Agency holds some concern at the potential increase in the scale of housing growth proposed for the region and Bournemouth and Poole HMA and would reserve the opportunity to provide further comment on this matter as and when further evidence is provided.

b) *Has the scale of additional greenfield development been adequately justified against the likely level of housing requirements and in particular the urban renewal opportunities in the main urban areas?*

The Agency has no further comments to make in relation to this matter. The aim should be to support sustainable growth which reduces the need to travel.

c) *Has sufficient consideration been given to the impact of lead-in times for all or any of the development areas on the required annual output for the HMA?*

The Agency's principal objection is the lack of certainty regarding how the required infrastructure improvement will be funded, phased and delivered. All infrastructure improvement, traffic management or other mitigation measures on the SRN, required to support development shall be funded by the developer, and/or the Regional Funding allocation process, or other appropriate public sector funding sources.

The Agency is concerned that there is insufficient guidance in the Draft RSS on the dependency of proposed growth on the delivery of supporting transport infrastructure, and the details of funding and delivery.

The Agency considers that the supporting text should recognise the need for co-ordinated development and infrastructure implementation programmes. The identification of thresholds that development cannot exceed before infrastructure improvements need to be in place and inclusion of further details on funding arrangements is desirable.

d) *Have environmental limits arising from matters such as flood risk and the protection of environmental assets been adequately taken into account and in particular do the proposals reflect the need to avoid any impact on the integrity of the important nature conservation areas around the conurbation?*

The Agency is aware of the need to ensure that new development does not exacerbate the potential flood risk of the sub region.

e) *Have infrastructure considerations been adequately taken into account?*

Despite efforts to embed mitigation measures in the RSS, the Agency is concerned about the combined impact of the proposed developments on the A31. The proposed construction of 2,400 houses in areas N, O and P is likely to release short-distance, peak-hour trips onto the A31, thereby exacerbating existing congestion on the A31.

A new terminal is proposed at Bournemouth Airport. Plans are being put forward to secure access through the construction of a new link road from the A338. As a result of these improvements the number of air passengers using the airport is projected to rise from 0.49m in 2004 to 3.5m in 2029 as detailed in the South-East Dorset Local Transport Plan 2006-2011. The number of airport employees is expected to triple in the years between 2001 and 2026. The Agency feels that insufficient consideration has been given to the further-reaching impacts of expansion at the airport on the trunk road network. Support for the plans will be withheld until the results of a more thorough investigation of these impacts are known.

The A31 north of Bournemouth is among the worst 15% of the SRN in terms of delay. The Agency's modelling has confirmed that this section is already at capacity under existing conditions and that the congested area is expected to

extend further west by 2026. There is also a relatively high incidence of serious accidents north-east of Bournemouth.

The A31/A35 corridor is expected to experience further pressure during the 2012 Olympics when it is likely to serve as a key access route to the sailing venues at Weymouth and Portland Harbour.

The Bournemouth-Poole area is connected to London via the A31/ M27 and M3. Trips generated by the level of development outlined above could imperil the strategic function of the A31.

The planned improvements to the A31 and the timescale for their implementation are of crucial importance to the transport arrangements of enhanced freight facilities at the Port of Poole. It is clear that approach routes via the A31 from the East or West cannot accommodate a large increase in the volume of freight under present conditions. The Agency will continue to work with Regional partners to identify acceptable solutions which alleviate the transport problems whilst ensuring the SRN remains available for its strategic role. Any assessment of the impact of road freight attracted by the port on the A31 will need to be informed by more detailed knowledge of the proposed improvements.

At present it is unclear how the RSS proposals relate to the Regional Funding Allocation (RFA) for significant infrastructure projects, and this relationship should be clarified. Relevant proposals in the case of Bournemouth and Poole include the Poole Bridge Regeneration Initiative, South East Dorset ITS, and A31 Poole Corridor Improvements. These are currently identified as RFA Tables 1, 2A/B and 3E respectively. The Agency supports the explicit inclusion of the Poole Bridge and A31 Corridor improvements in the RSS proposals and suggests that the ITS project should also be included.

The Agency would however reiterate that considerable uncertainty surrounds the plans to improve the A31, which are in any case unlikely to commence before 2016 at the earliest, limiting growth proposed prior to this date.

Even if these infrastructure improvements are delivered additional growth within the sub region will have to be carefully managed so as not to inhibit the safe and efficient functioning of the A31. Large-scale development should not proceed before significant infrastructure investment secures the SRN's benefits for strategic travellers.

f) *Do the proposals adequately reflect the need to reduce the need to travel, support the use of public transport and minimise congestion?*

The Agency would like to stress that with a view to the congested situation on the A31 north of Bournemouth, it is of paramount importance to find alternatives to adding to the volume of traffic. If further growth in the volume of traffic is incurred, the A31 will no longer effectively fulfill its strategic function with respect to inter regional connectivity. The Agency emphasizes the need to locate all new housing development in areas where the development density is high enough to reduce the need to travel, and where frequent and accessible public transport services are provided. Sites N, O and P appear to be inconsistent with this policy.

The Agency welcomes the aspirations within the RSS to encourage development in a balanced manner and in a way that seeks to rectify the identified imbalances that currently exist within the sub region. The Agency considers that any new development within the emerging RSS should be led by sustainable transport objectives in terms of ensuring that development is located within the urban and central areas, supported by a range of means of transport other than the private car and presents the opportunity to reduce the need to travel.

In this context the Agency welcomes plans set out in paragraph 4.3.14 to improve rail service provision at a local and regional level. However, although a general statement is made in support of improvements in provisions for public transport, walking and cycling, insufficient details are given.

The Agency considers that the key component in achieving reduction in congestion is the delivery of improved public transport links, which need to be agreed, funded and implemented in an appropriate time frame to ensure that such services are in place and fully functioning before significant new development is implemented. In particular we consider that provision of high quality bus links to serve the towns will be an essential requirement for providing sustainable links to the town centre and other local areas of trip attraction.

There needs to be a concerted effort to achieve a step change in public transport provision and usage across existing communities. Measures must be implemented to support public transport services including a high level of priority along routes and high quality facilities for passengers as well as to deter car use through measures such as car parking controls.

The Agency is pleased that key infrastructure projects have been identified in paragraph 4.3.14, and we would like to provide our full support for the inclusion of '*demand management*' measures. These will be a key component in achieving the RSS aspirations for the HMA, whilst ensuring that the development does not have an adverse impact on the strategic road network.

Travel plans represent a further form of demand management that benefits from a partnership approach. Travel plans minimise transport impacts, by reducing the demand to travel at source. In its role as highways authority for developments affecting the Trunk Road Network, the Agency requires that travel plans are prepared by applicants to a high standard, and give full consideration to targets, monitoring and enforcement.

The Agency therefore supports the inclusion of demand management measures within paragraph 4.3.14, and recommends the addition of specific references to travel plans and access controls for the reasons described above.

g) *Are the proposed modifications to the Green Belt adequately justified?*

The Agency has no additional comments to make in relation to this matter.

h) Does the draft RSS set out adequate guidance on the provision of Green Infrastructure?

The Agency has no additional comments to make in relation to this matter.

Suggested Policy Amendments

The Agency would welcome the following revisions to Policy SR29 and supporting paragraphs. Our suggested revisions are outlined in bold.

1.	Policy SR27	Add a commitment to careful management of any Greenfield sites that are released for development in order to minimize transport impacts.
2.	Policy SR29	<p>Investment will be agreed and secured for the provision of key infrastructure within the sub region to support the scale of growth outlined within Policy SR29. Proposed infrastructure works and funding sources should be outlined within the implementation plan and accompanied by the provision of a number of relevant development triggers, to guide the implementation of development proposals, which should be agreed by the relevant planning and highways authority and the Highways Agency.</p> <p>Key infrastructure improvements (paragraph 4.3.14) should have works agreed, funding in place and an appropriate timetable for implementation in place.</p>
3.	Paragraph 4.314 (Key Infrastructure)	<p>Key infrastructure required will be identified through the Implementation Plan and will include:</p> <p>Increased demand management, by transferring more road space to priority vehicles, by managing the supply and use of car parking and by the implementation of travel plans</p> <p>Prime transport corridor improvements including ... [detail to be added by SWRA to explain what is meant by this]</p> <p>Port of Poole deeper access channel and berth improvements (subject to further study) and associated infrastructure investment focusing on rail links.</p> <p>Improvements to rail links to other major centres</p>

		<p>in the South West and to other regions including London</p> <p>Provision of the South East Dorset ITS proposals funded as part of the RFA process.</p>
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