

# Landscape Institute Northern Ireland

## **Regional Transportation Strategy 2011 – A Sustainable Transport Future.**

Public Consultation by Department of Regional Development (DRD).

Response of the **Landscape Institute Northern Ireland branch (LINI).**

28 June 2011

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The Landscape Institute is the chartered institute in the United Kingdom for landscape architects, incorporating designers, managers, and scientists, concerned with conserving and enhancing the environment. The Landscape Institute promotes the highest standards in the practice of landscape planning, design, management and research, and represents members in private practice, at all levels of government and government agencies, in academic institutions and in commercial organisations.

The Landscape Institute is an educational charity and chartered body whose purpose is to protect, conserve and enhance the natural and built environment for the benefit of the public. It champions well-designed and well-managed urban and rural landscape. The Landscape Institute's accreditation and professional procedures ensure that the designers, managers and scientists who make up the landscape architecture profession work to the highest standards. Its advocacy and education programmes promote the landscape architecture profession as one which focuses on design, environment and community in order to inspire great places where people want to live, work and visit. The Landscape Institute is committed to the principles of sustainable development by improving the quality of design of urban and rural environments and to the protection and enhancement of our physical and natural environments.

The Landscape Institute Northern Ireland branch (LINI) represents the professional membership within Northern Ireland and is particularly concerned with design, management and planning for the protection, conservation and enhancement of the natural and built environment of Northern Ireland.

LINI welcomes the opportunity to consider the Regional Transportation Strategy Consultation Document, and submits the following response.

### **2: Challenges for Transport to 2025.**

#### *Questions for Chapter 2*

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

*Q. What are the challenges for society?*

*Q. Are there challenges for you as an individual?*

LINI considers that one of the main challenges to transport in Northern Ireland is the continued acceptance and policy promotion of rural dwelling, despite the lack of rural employment. NI has traditionally had a significant rural population, however this was composed predominately of those peoples whose livelihood/ employment was associated with the rural environment.

Nowadays the majority of our rural population avails of the private car and ever increasing road network to travel to other locations for employment, school, services etc. There is little benefit to the countryside or rural communities and economy, and the impact of roads on the environmental and social quality of local life in the countryside is largely negative.

Further, all our urban centres, from small rural villages to the main cities, continue to suffer and deteriorate as a result of continued dispersal of our population into rural settings; it is simply not possible to have thriving urban centres with a commuting population.

LINI notes that the granting of permission for building new homes and businesses in the countryside should be integral with bearing responsibility for the impact of the travel habits

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embedded within such development. For instance, rural housing should not be permitted to increase without parallel increase to public transport services. If the government is unwilling to provide one additional bus service for every 10 houses permitted in the countryside, the proposed houses should not be granted permission. Each planning application (even for individual homes in the countryside) should be required to submit a shortened environmental impact assessment which includes transport assessment, indicating how that development will function. If it is demonstrated by the applicant that the development cannot function without full reliance on the private vehicle and a particular number of travel miles, that development should not be permitted.

It is often stated that construction favours the economy, but LINI recognises that construction which does not recognise the transport impact of its embodied lifestyle is unsustainable and an economic burden.

LINI recognises that the public transport services that exist in Northern Ireland are generally good, clean and reliable. However, these services need to be extended throughout Northern Ireland, more frequently, and for a longer day.

LINI recognises that it is essential that people in Northern Ireland are less reliant on the private car, either through adopting alternative means of transport (bus, train, walk, cycle, horse etc) or through adapting their lifestyle and working operations so as not to make so many travel journeys. It needs to be recognised that generally the more travelling that is required, the poorer the quality of life for the traveller, and also for the locality through which the traveller passes. It is recognised that the negative impacts on the locality are increased when the travelling is done by private car (less local stopping, less economic benefit, greater negative public realm issues) than by public transport (economic benefit at interchanges, less noise, more environmental care etc). It is important that the government demonstrate commitment to this and assists all private individuals and businesses to promote, support and facilitate 'another way' of transport. Transport is not just interregional, it also includes crossing the road to the shop, walking to school, visiting family and friends, and visiting special locations. Generally everyone can walk or travel locally, whereas not everyone has access to a car or travels great distances. It is therefore important that these local quality of life and environment issues are served to a greater degree than interregional transport, and not the other way round.

*Q. How should DRD respond to these challenges?*

LINI suggests that DRD should respond to these challenges by seeing its remit as integral with the design of the built environment – an environment that is created by and for the people of Northern Ireland. DRD must be designers of the public realm. Roads are not primarily for vehicular transport. Roads create the form and liveability of our places. Roads are public realm, where people play, meet, live, sit, watch etc. Roads are more generally about access where access is for people, and that access might not necessarily be in the main vehicular direction of travel of the road. Along with all other NI government departments, the DRD is obliged to adhere to the Architecture and Built Environment Policy (DCAL), and LINI requests that DRD submit its major projects to the MAG (Ministerial Advisory Group for Architecture and the Built Environment, NI) for Design Review. Similarly, the government of Northern Ireland is obliged to adhere to the European Landscape Convention, and LINI requests that DRD consider the landscape character of all localities within which its transport proposals are made.

*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?*

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For the above reason, all 'particular interests' need to be considered together. Streets and roads are for all, and all means for the transport of and for people. If streets and roads are not first accessible to the most fundamental means of transport (walking) then they do not serve their purpose. All roads must be connected to the place which they pass through. LINI challenges DRD to give pedestrians priority on all roads, and to develop a hierarchy where some roads would also be accessible to cycles, some also to horses, some also to vehicles etc. The local would benefit, a sense of place and value in environmental and social wellbeing would result. The economy would benefit.

### 3. Transport Objectives:

#### *Questions for Chapter 3*

*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?*

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

LINI advises that transport aims must be about providing Good Transport Connections to all. Not everyone has a car, nor does everyone choose to have a car, which means that the achievement of pedestrian access must be a priority in all cases. It must be understood that the transport connection concerned is more likely to be local as interregional.

LINI requires however that facilitating good transport for all must be read in accordance with two overarching objectives: for Quality of Life, and for Quality of the Environment.

LINI attests that Serving the Economy is not a valid transport objective. Economy is usually the reason transport proposals are made, but this is not an objective. If a thriving economy is the ambition, and transport is the means, then quality of life and quality of environment are the components from which it must be achieved. LINI requests that the listed 'strategic objectives' should be reworded to reflect this.

It may be that a transport scheme has been brought about for reasons of the economy, but only if it meets these 3 equal objectives (transport connections, quality of life, quality of environment) should it be permitted. Planning conditions must be imposed in all cases to ensure this. For instance, business operations in the countryside should not be granted permission unless their transport operations accommodate these 3 objectives – eg. by providing integral free or subsidised transport along their routes, or by facilitating safe walking on all their routes, and by enhancing the countryside.

*Q. Do you agree with the strategic objectives proposed?*

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

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

SO1 – DRD must be concerned with locality at all points on regional infrastructure.

SO3 – LINI requests a DRD commitment to building no more new road schemes, accompanied by a statement that DRD will achieve all its solutions through management of those which already exist.

SO2 / SO4 / SO5 – DRD states that not everyone in urban areas has a car, and yet states that in rural areas the car is the main mode of transport. If DRD is serious that car use reduction is desired (SO2), it is necessary to substantially limit rural development unless it embodies reduced rather than increased use of the car.

SO6 – LINI suggests that tourist destinations, where people seek to 'get away from it all', should specifically not be accessible by car, but require increased walking / cycling / train / bus use, to facilitate health and well being of the visitors, and also the environmental and

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economical wellbeing of the locality. It should be highlighted that too much focus is often given to destination tourism, at the expense of the entire tourist experience. Little account seems to be made of the experience and tourism value of travelling through the Northern Ireland countryside.

- SO7 – LINI recognises that the best way to increase road safety is to give the road back to the walking public and stop the facilitation of speed.
- SO8 – A pertinent example is the current proposal of the York Street Interchange in Belfast, where the facilitation of through traffic will seriously curtail the ability of the local population to access services and the very local centre of Belfast. All transport schemes must improve quality of life for all (both users and locals) and the quality of environment. It is essential that DRD recognises design principles of ‘green infrastructure’ in all its designs.
- SO9 – LINI advises that DRD transport objectives must not be primarily for the economy. An economy serves the people. Design must always be for the people. The wellbeing of the people will be curtailed if environmental quality is degraded. Thus there is no real relevance in serving an economy if the quality of the environment, and quality of life for the people are not served first.
- SO10 / SO11 / SO12 - Transport includes walking to local services (school / shops / family and friends etc). It is essential that this transport is achieved in the sustainable manner which it can be, rather than reliant unnecessarily on the use of a private vehicle. All transport which embodies use of the private vehicle must be reduced.
- LINI is concerned that DRD suggests that environmental concerns relate only to gas / air / noise pollution, and to the protection of biodiversity. The environment is all-encompassing. Road construction widening and straightening can have profound impacts on the character of our landscapes. Further ecological thinking must underpin all transport proposals. LINI requests that DRD uses the Landscape Character Assessment, principles of Ecosystem Services and Green Infrastructure approaches in all of its design work. These methods recognise the environment and landscape as a resource which can be harnessed and enhanced whilst at the same time providing a human resource and enhancing human wellbeing.

#### **4. Transport Interventions:**

##### *Questions for Chapter 4*

*Q. Do you agree with the interventions listed?*

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

LINI requests that new bus services, new rail services, new walkways and cycleways are explicit in the list of transport interventions.

DRD should work with people and localities to not just understand needs, but also to encourage and facilitate alternative behaviour.

The restriction of car parking in towns must be targeted to restrict the provision of free off-street commuter parking, not occasional on-street parking which provides life and interaction to the street.

Urban settlements should be made more compact and walkable. Facilitation of speed and reduced journey times for driving private vehicles to and through the centre of urban settlements should be ceased. Mechanisms for this should include reduction of any 4 lane arterial routes into or through the city and town centres to be reduced to 2 lanes with lanes given permanently to dedicated public transport.

Road freight use must be reduced and rail freight use increased.

All bus, rail, ferry connections must interconnect, in space and time. High quality rail access to

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airports must be provided. High quality public transport must be provided to all destinations. LINI requests that DRD commits resources to improvement of technology (eg. electric or hydrogen), although cautions that whilst this would mean cleaner air and perhaps less noise, it does not remove concerns relating to degradation of social interaction and spatial dominance caused by the private vehicle.

## **5. Policy Prioritisation:**

*Questions for Chapter 5*

*Q. Do you agree with our proposals for a prioritisation framework?*

*Q. Have you any other prioritisation mechanism to suggest?*

No comment.

The Landscape Institute Northern Ireland branch would like to thank the Department of the Environment for the opportunity to contribute to the Regional Transportation Strategy. For any queries and further discussion relating to this response, and for future consultations, please contact:

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