

DELIVERING BETTER LOCAL AND REGIONAL TRANSPORT – LESSONS FROM THE FIRST ROUND OF ENGLISH LOCAL TRANSPORT PLANS

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1. INTRODUCTION

There are some useful lessons to be drawn from comparing the experience of local and regional transport planning and delivery in England and Scotland.

Both England and Scotland embraced the “new realism” transport policy debates of the late 1990s and, through the respective 1998 English and Scottish Transport White Papers¹, have adopted a more integrated, multi-modal and objective-led approach to transport infrastructure and services at the local and regional level. This shift has been accompanied by the development of new frameworks, namely Local Transport Plans (LTPs) in England and Local Transport Strategies (LTS) and Regional Transport Strategies (RTS) in Scotland. These frameworks were intended to bring about a step change in the quality of local transport provision and its contribution to the social, economic and environmental needs of local communities and businesses. Both have also gradually developed a stronger national and regional context as they have evolved.

With both the LTP and LTS frameworks now established and moving into their second round, and the publication of statutory RTS in Scotland now imminent, it is timely to consider whether the original objectives of the Department for Transport and Scottish Executive have been met and how experience to date can offer recommendations for English and Scottish policy makers in future. In particular, there is a growing body of research evidence on LTP development, delivery and outcomes in England, as well as a growing interest in regional and sub-national decision-making and governance in both countries. Some key findings of this research are presented in this paper together with comments on the equivalent development of LTS and RTS in Scotland.

2. COMPARISON OF LOCAL TRANSPORT PLANNING PROCESSES

The first round LTPs and LTSs were submitted by English and Scottish local authorities in 2000. The key similarities and differences between the two frameworks are set out in Table 1 below. In particular, there was a recognition by policy makers north and south of the border that local authorities themselves were best placed to develop appropriate solutions to local problems, with a consequent reduction in central management of resources for specific schemes best planned and delivered locally.

Key Areas of Comparison

Within this approach, both LTPs and LTSs share the following attributes:

- planning and delivery of an integrated package of measures contributing to an overall strategy rather than a series of unconnected schemes;
- a greater focus on consultation and partnership on a shared vision and aspirations;
- a focus on objectives which are related to local problems and issues together with appropriate performance indicators and targets;
- a broad coverage of all modes, including road safety, traffic managements, measures

¹ A New Deal for Transport – Better for Everyone. Department for the Environment, Transport and the Regions 1998. Scotland’s Transport Future. Scottish Executive 1998.

- to improve bus services, walking and cycling, travel awareness, Freight Quality Partnerships and proposals for road user charging/workplace parking levies²; and
- o a costed and realistic implementation programme of specific projects and policy measures, linked to the stated objectives and targets.

Both LTP and LTS have become increasingly linked to the delivery of national transport objectives. For example, the second round of English LTPs is centred around the Shared Priorities³ of. Similarly, in Scotland, local and regional authorities are seen as vital to meet a number of the objectives contained within the new National Transport Strategy⁴.

Key Areas of Difference

There are also important differences reflective of (inevitable) contrasting political priorities, local and regional government structures and institutional arrangements between Scotland and England. Most apparent, the introduction of LTS in the first round by Scottish local authorities has been voluntary,⁵ compared to the statutory status imparted in England by the 2000 Transport Act, although all Scottish authorities chose to develop a first round LTS.

Scotland has also been stronger in developing Regional Transport Partnerships (RTPs) as a key focus of delivery, now given statutory status under the Transport (Scotland) Act 2005. Guidance⁶ sets out advice to RTPs on the preparation of RTS, in collaboration with constituent local authorities. These must be prepared and submitted to Scottish Ministers by 31st March 2007. As set out below, unlike England RTPs may also acquire powers from the local level for the implementation of shared objectives and strategies.

LTPs, and associated Annual Progress Reports (APRs), have been key instruments for DfT to direct long-term capital allocations of to English authorities. During LTP1, the Department has used the APR framework as a means of monitoring, “scoring” and financially rewarding or penalising authorities for their performance.

By contrast, the processes of local transport strategy development and allocation of funding for delivery in Scotland remains separate and will increasingly be split in future between LTS and RTS tiers. The basic funding of Scottish local authorities is provided by ‘omnibus’ allocations which the authorities allocate between their various services. However there are additional specific transport funds defined by Ministers which local authorities and RTPs effectively bid for, or are allocated, on an annual or periodic basis⁷.

Whilst expenditure against these streams must generally be consistent with the LTS/RTS, approval of the Strategy itself does not therefore automatically secure the additional resources for its implementation, leading to a document and framework which is arguably more aspirational in nature. The Scottish Executive has also yet to develop an approach to systematic LTS/RTS performance monitoring at the national level, following England through assigning published scores to local or regional authorities on the basis of their delivery, or linking funding allocations explicitly to demonstration of progress to date, although there is a requirement within the Guidance that both levels of strategy should include a monitoring plan.

² In the more remote parts of Scotland and the Scottish Islands, local transport provision also has to place a high priority on “lifeline” air and ferry services, reflecting the peripherality of isolated communities from the Mainland and Central Belt.

³ Congestion, accessibility, safety and air quality

⁴ Improve journey times and connections, reduce emissions, improve quality and accessibility and affordability

⁵ In Scotland, it is the preparation of a Road Traffic Reduction Report which is a statutory requirement, not the LTS. In practice, all Scottish authorities have chosen to produce an LTS of some description alongside the RTRR. There is an assumption that major transport proposals require an LTS justification.

⁶ *Scottish Executive (2006): Scotland's Transport Future: Guidance on Regional Transport Strategies*

⁷ For example, the Public Transport Fund, Integrated Transport Fund, Rural Transport Fund and Bus Route Development Fund. Scottish Ministers have also recently made separate announcements over funding for Safer Routes to School and investment to support cycling.

Table 1 – Comparisons Between the English LTP and Scottish LTS Processes

English Local Transport Plans	Scottish Local Transport Strategies
<p>Policy and Guidance set by Department for Transport within context of 1997 Integrated Transport White Paper "A New Deal for Transport" and 2004 White Paper "The Future of Transport"</p>	<p>Policy and Guidance set by the Scottish Executive within context of <i>National Transport Strategy for Scotland</i> and by the Regional Transport Partnerships within their RTSs.</p>
<p>Statutory status under 2000 Transport Act. First round Guidance required production of a Road Traffic Reduction Report alongside the LTP.</p> <p>Regional Spatial Strategies now have statutory status and must include a Regional Transport Strategy, both of which are subject to Examination in Public. LTPs are required to be consistent with the relevant RTS, but are assessed by DfT separately.</p>	<p>Defined within the Transport (Scotland) Act 2001. Administrative and voluntary, although encouraged by Scottish Executive for supporting statutory Road Traffic Reduction Reports and relevant funding bids.</p> <p>Transport (Scotland) Act 2005 introduces new statutory Regional Transport Partnerships with a duty to prepare a Regional Transport Strategy for approval by Scottish Ministers.</p>
<p>82 LTPs covering a range of unitary, joint and metropolitan Highway Authorities. Small number of Joint LTPs.</p>	<p>32 LTSs covering all Scottish unitary authorities, SPT and FETA. Authorities also members of 7 statutory, Regional Transport Partnerships.</p>
<p>5 year plans with first round covering 2001-2006. Second round for 2006-2011 commenced in March 2006.</p>	<p>3 year plans with first round covering 2001-2004. No firm timetable for preparation of second round LTS's, but most authorities expected to complete their Plans in 2007.</p>
<p>A strategy and delivery plan linked explicitly to allocation of "mainstream" capital funding. UK Government may initiate some targeted funding streams from time to time e.g. Rural Bus Challenge, School Travel Plans, Community Infrastructure Fund</p>	<p>A strategy and delivery plan with bids and allocations for funding handled separately (e.g. bids to Public Transport Fund, Rural Transport Fund). However, expenditure must generally be consistent with LTS and RTS frameworks.</p>
<p>Focus on minor works but with scope to include and bid for major strategic transport infrastructure and schemes such as light rail, road user charging and public transport interchange (Some schemes progressed by PTEs).</p>	<p>Tend to focus on minor works with major strategic transport infrastructure largely covered through other mechanisms (e.g. Transport Scotland).</p>
<p>Greater local discretion over allocation of resources. Greater flexibility in shifting funding between schemes provided these contribute to the overall strategy and delivery of targets. Prudential Borrowing provides greater flexibilities.</p>	<p>Funding is handled separately from LTS and where provided is usually ringfenced for specific schemes and programmes (Public Transport Fund, Bus Route Development Fund). Prudential Borrowing at local and regional level provides greater flexibilities.</p> <p>Funding likely to be increasingly directed through Regional Transport Partnerships from 2007 onwards.</p>
<p>Policy shift in favour of measures to encourage public transport, walking and cycling, with authorities free to decide budget allocations to particular areas.</p> <p>Greater emphasis on "soft" measures and demand management, including Road User Charging</p>	<p>Policy shift in favour of measures to encourage public transport, walking and cycling, although less flexibility to switch budgets between different spending areas once allocated by the Scottish Executive.</p> <p>Greater emphasis on "soft" measures and demand management, including Road User Charging.</p>
<p>Inclusive approach, with an emphasis on partnership working to deliver key outcomes and public consultation to ensure widest possible ownership of the LTP strategy.</p>	<p>Inclusive approach, with an emphasis on partnership working to deliver key outcomes and public consultation to ensure widest possible ownership of the LTP strategy.</p>
<p>Recognition of regional planning but relatively weak link in first round between LTPs and non-statutory Regional Transport Strategies. Growing regional role in second round in LTP-RTS consistency, Regional Funding Allocations and regional prioritisation of Major Schemes.</p>	<p>Some elements of local programmes delivered through voluntary Regional Transport Partnerships in first LTS round.</p> <p>Statutory Regional Transport Partnerships set out in Transport (Scotland) Act 2005 with potential for transfer of co-ordination, delivery and funding powers from authorities.</p>
<p>Specific LTP Guidance issued every five years for LTPs and annually for Annual Progress Reports. LTP2 Guidance issued in December 2004.</p>	<p>LTS Guidance issued in 2000, but no guidance or requirement for Annual Progress Reports. Second round LTS Guidance issued in February 2005 and RTS Guidance in March 2006. An underlying assumption is the utilisation of a process based on the Scottish Transport Appraisal Guidance (STAG) approach.</p>
<p>Greater emphasis on targets, performance indicators and monitoring with Progress Reports, required setting out programme delivery and contribution towards quantified targets.</p> <p>Formal and published scoring of LTPs and APRs against single set of criteria with authorities categorised according to DfT bands.</p> <p>LTP2 process relaxes APR reporting, but progress against targets likely to remain important. Decision on whether authorities' will be categorised in their progress in LTP2 still to be taken.</p>	<p>Inclusion of advice on targets and performance indicators in the latest LTS Guidance, but no formal process of annual progress monitoring or "scoring" of authorities based on performance.</p> <p>Regional Transport Strategies must be approved by Scottish Ministers and RTS Guidance provides some advice on key considerations for approval. Each RTP will also be required to prepare an annual Progress Report to be submitted to the Executive. However, no formal scoring mechanism currently envisaged.</p>

3. EVALUATING LOCAL TRANSPORT PLANS IN ENGLAND

Atkins is leading a consortium, which includes PricewaterhouseCoopers LLP and Warwick Business School, undertaking a Long-Term Process and Impact Evaluation of the Local Transport Plan (LTP) Policy as it applies in England. This Evaluation was commissioned by the Department for Transport in September 2003 and, together with earlier research in 2002, is considering whether the LTP policy is meeting its overall objectives, how, and with what success, authorities are applying the policy principles and what outputs and outcomes are being delivered.

Overview of the LTP Process

Many of the principles underlying the LTP policy remain valid since its introduction in the Transport Act 2000. However, the framework has not remained unchanged since its inception. In particular, the Government's approach has shifted from the development of "aspirational" local strategies, and a rationale for capital funding allocations, towards delivery of effective schemes and programmes. The Department has also increasingly emphasised the need for authorities to demonstrate contribution towards national objectives and targets, a feature emphasised in recent Scottish LTS/RTS Guidance.

The wider policy context of local government and public services has also changed significantly since 2000 and continues to do so with far-reaching and complex implications for local transport planning and delivery. There are essentially four major areas of change:

- an increasing focus on the national and regional policy agenda, including statutory Regional Transport Strategies and agreement between Central and Local Government of the Shared Priorities;
- a recognition of transport as a means to wider corporate and community objectives, such as social inclusion, health, sustainable communities and environment
- the Local Government Modernisation Agenda, including greater neighbourhood and community engagement, strengthened performance management, and earned "freedoms and flexibilities"; and
- an emphasis on evidence-based delivery and value for money and the need to demonstrate efficiency gains in planning and delivery.

These factors have increasingly influenced authorities' delivery of their first LTPs and development of their second LTPs. The second round also introduces a number of new requirements for local authorities, including Accessibility Planning, the Network Management Duty under the 2004 Traffic Management Act, Transport Asset Management Plans, Strategic Environmental Assessment and the incorporation of Air Quality Action Plans and Rights of Way Improvement Plans into the LTP framework.

The evidence has suggested consistently that the LTP framework represents a popular Government policy. Overall, the approach is strongly supported by local transport practitioners, local and national stakeholders and the transport profession more widely. Authorities have made genuine efforts to adopt the key elements set out in the LTP guidance and are planning and delivering programmes which are larger, broader, more inclusive and command a higher profile amongst senior officers and members. DfT Guidance is seen as generally useful and fit for purpose. There is evidence of closer engagement between local authorities, the wider stakeholder community, and DfT.

In particular:

- there has been a step-change in the level of consultation and partnership working amongst most authorities;

- o authorities are using long-term funding for more effective planning and delivery; and
- o LTPs largely reflect the national transport agenda, with a policy shift and increased expenditure in favour of non-car modes. There is evidence that wider policy goals are being considered.

However, application of the key LTP principles remains variable across local authorities. For example:

- o many authorities continue to give transport a low priority at corporate level and fail to link their transport planning and delivery to corporate, community and service plans;
- o working across policy areas and administrative boundaries is often constrained by managerial and political barriers;
- o the linkage between local land use and transport planning and the developing frameworks at the sub-regional and regional level is only slowly developing;
- o poor project management has led to cost increases and reduced programme effectiveness in some instances, with LTP Major Scheme delivery being a particular area of concern;
- o the technical evidence base and analysis underlying many of the first LTPs was limited and, whilst improvements are evident, target setting and monitoring of outcomes remains an area of weakness;
- o sharing of good practice and benchmarking is often ad hoc rather than systematic; and
- o the structure of funding, staffing and skills and political decision making at local and national level continue to be seen as significant barriers to achieving a fully effective LTP policy.

Authorities, and stakeholder groups, have also expressed concerns on some aspects of DfT's stewardship of the LTP process. These include:

- o the lack of equivalent revenue funding for local transport, alongside the considerable increase in capital allocations;
- o an early lack of transparency in, and frequent changes to, the framework by which the Department assesses authorities' performance and makes adjustments in capital funding allocations;
- o a shift of transport priorities towards national objectives under the banner of the Shared Priorities, in place of the more "localist" agenda set out in the original LTP Guidance;
- o lack of dedicated powers to secure improvements from key stakeholders in support of LTP objectives, especially in relation to bus operators and the rail sector, as well as fragmented between Passenger Transport Authorities and Metropolitan Districts in conurbations;
- o perceptions of limited integration between DfT and Other Government Departments in supporting wider priorities; and
- o the resource intensity of some aspects of LTP preparation, especially in relation to the second round of LTPs published at the end of March 2006, and timing of the issue of Guidance.

Inputs and Outputs

Our analysis shows that the first round LTPs generally reflected the national transport objectives defined in the 1998 Integrated Transport White Paper – environment, safety, economy, accessibility and integration – as well as a wide range of local agendas. The second round LTPs more closely reflect the national priorities defined under the Shared Priorities – accessibility, congestion, safety and air quality.

To achieve these objectives, authorities have seen an increase in funding of two to three times from mid-1990s levels, with almost £6 billion allocated to authorities between 2001-2006 to deliver over 320,000 integrated transport and maintenance schemes, as well as £1.2 billion on completing or making progress on over 100 Major Schemes. Including revenue funding and non-LTP sources, we estimate that authorities spent around £26 billion in the first round in total. Following a hesitant start, most councils have now ramped up their programmes to deliver larger spending programmes in line with their increased allocations. There is little evidence that authorities have used the flexibilities of Single Capital Pot to transfer capital funding out of transport to other service areas and indeed many have used supplementary bids, performance-related funding, additional Government grants and external sources to increase spending over and above LTP allocation levels.

A number of authorities have used the unsupported borrowing powers available under Prudential Borrowing to increase their transport spend, for example on highway maintenance. However, the extent of this has been limited outside of London. Other powers for funding local transport, such as Business Improvement Districts and hypothecation of road user charging revenues, have yet to be taken up outside of London on a major scale.

Encouragingly, authorities are now more likely to be spending their allocations in line with their intended programme. For those schemes which have linked programme delivery to target delivery, this is an efficient use of resources. However, many authorities have been slow to focus scheme delivery in this way, suggesting that the increased resources may not always have been targeted effectively.

The LTP process has widened the scope of initiatives which authorities are required to plan and provide, particularly re-balancing of investment between car and non-car modes. Whilst some authorities were already moving in this direction under the former Package Approach, the LTP policy has given greater impetus to authorities to widen coverage of all modes and behavioural and demand management measures, as well as broader policies such as regeneration, air quality, health and climate change. There are numerous examples of good practice which can be highlighted as a result of LTP investment, many of which are set out in Atkins' report *Delivering Better Local Transport: Key Achievements and Best Practice from the First Round of Local Transport Plans*, published by DfT in December 2006.

There has been some good progress with the introduction of school and employer travel plans and other “smart” measures, reinforced by Government funding for dedicated co-ordinator posts within authorities. Recent research and guidance from the Department is providing further incentives for authorities to promote these measures in the second round LTPs. There is relatively little empirical evidence on the overall effect of travel plans in reducing traffic growth and congestion, however, and limitations on revenue budgets and powers on external stakeholder organisations also currently constrain councils' ability to achieve intensive application of “smart” measures.

The increase in revenue funding and expenditure on local transport has also lagged behind that of capital expenditure. A strong viewpoint from councils, Government Offices

and stakeholders is that local transport funding is capital rich, but revenue poor. Lack of revenue funding, resulting from a range of national and local factors, has emerged as a consistent barrier to delivery throughout our research and it seems likely this is limiting authorities' ability to fully achieve their LTP objectives.

Outcomes

The accuracy, consistency and robustness of authorities' monitoring programmes is an area of weakness and limits the extent to which it is currently possible to assess, with total confidence, what outcomes LTPs are delivering at a national level and the extent to which observed improvements are due to the increase in local transport funding, the process principles themselves and wider external influences.

With this important caveat, performance against national and local targets appears to have improved as authorities have become more adept at delivering planned programmes. Authorities now appear on track to deliver more of their core and local targets than at the beginning of the LTP1 period, and performance against local targets is better than performance on core targets.

To date two national targets are on track to be met – the number of individuals and the number of children killed or seriously injured. Bus satisfaction has improved in over three quarters of authorities. However, bus patronage levels continue to decline overall, despite significant improvements in some county and unitary authorities. Despite increasing levels of capital expenditure in cycling schemes, performance across authorities is patchy and weaknesses in the monitoring approaches used mean that many authorities do not have a clear picture of change in cycling levels within their areas.

Changes in the collection and reporting of Best Value road maintenance indicators prevents an overall assessment of road condition at this stage, although more than half of authorities report that they are currently 'on track' to meet their targets, reflecting the increase in funding since the 1990s. The National Road Condition Survey confirms significant improvement in the surface condition of local authority roads, whilst footway condition appears to have remained stable in recent years.

In terms of local targets, most progress is likely to have been made on targets relating to widening travel choice, casualty reduction and physical improvements to bus interchanges. Less progress is evident on targets relating to the environment and the economy, including reductions in traffic growth, reduced congestion, and more sustainable freight movement.

Barriers and Enablers to Delivery

The volume of local transport schemes which authorities are able to deliver on the ground is currently being limited by a number of factors. These include lack of revenue funding relative to capital allocations; the rising cost of construction materials, highway maintenance work, contractors and consultants; and increasing tender costs.

As set out above, lack of revenue funding has been consistently identified as the main barrier to delivery. Rising costs appear to have become a significant barrier over the last year or so, and is likely to become increasingly relevant as most authorities are now spending their full allocation. There is evidence that increases in the tender costs of local bus contracts is impacting on authorities ability to maintain effective public transport services outside of the commercial network.

Staff and skills shortages continue to be an important barrier, but there is evidence of a general improvement across many authorities and more widespread use of private sector service providers. The commercial priorities of external stakeholders (especially bus and rail operators) continue to limit integration with LTP objectives and progress in many

authorities, although there are a number of notable exceptions. Within metropolitan areas, these problems are compounded by the additional split of delivery powers between Passenger Transport Authorities/Executives and Districts.

Time-consuming and ineffective consultation, and lack of member support delayed the delivery of many schemes in the initial years of the LTP. However, these barriers have become less relevant as authorities have become more adept at managing and delivering the LTP process and DfT's assessment of authority performance has become more focused on delivery of the planned programme and targets.

A sizeable proportion of LTP Major Schemes have not been delivered as planned. There is consistent evidence of frequent delays and cost increases. This is due to a range of factors, including poor initial scheme specification, changes due to stakeholder consultation and requirements of statutory agencies, land ownership, tender price inflation and changes in political control. As a result, some high-profile light rail schemes had seen DfT support withdrawn, whilst others have been remitted to the Regions for prioritisation against newly defined Regional Funding Allocations. The Department has also issued revised Major Scheme Guidance aimed at addressing a number of the planning and delivery problems experienced in the first round.

Authorities that are able to deliver major and integrated transport schemes offering good value for money appear to be those where effective partnership working has been developed, there is adequate staffing and skills capacity, there is strong corporate and political support aligned with LTP objectives, and effective programme and performance management processes are in place. The Department and Government Offices have also initiated a range of advice, engagement activities and interventions to improve authorities' performance.

External Factors and Unintended Consequences

There are a range of factors in the external environment which influence authorities' ability to meet their LTP objectives and targets. These include wider transport trends, socio-economic factors and random and unforeseen events. The development of new technology is seen as a positive influence on delivering LTP objectives. These factors also impact on travel demand, attitudes and behaviour independently of LTP policies and investment, and can also have indirect political and corporate impacts in terms of increasing or undermining local political will to pursue particular policies.

Unintended impacts of the LTP process include staff shortages and rising staff and consultancy costs, driven by the significant increase in local transport funding and shortage. A further frequently expressed view is that the comprehensive and complex assessment criteria and processes adopted by DfT for evaluating LTPs and associated reports has led to authorities' preparing plans which are less varied and innovative, directed at achieving the maximum score under the Guidance rather than reflecting genuinely local priorities and conditions. It is now likely that the approach to reporting progress on strategy and target delivery will be relaxed somewhat in the second round⁸.

Patterns of Performance

Nevertheless, DfT's annual assessment of LTPs and APRs provides a measure of how successfully authorities are applying the principles of the policy. The assessment process itself has evolved over the last five years. While the 2001 LTP assessment was largely a reflection of the application of the process and the quality of the document produced, there has been an increasing emphasis placed on delivery and targets.

⁸ For example by moving to a system of bi-ennial reporting of progress in place of APRs.

Analysis of LTP/APR assessment scores shows that whilst metropolitan, county and unitary authorities showed a wide range of LTP 'quality' in 2000, performance has narrowed as authorities have had to demonstrate a wider range of competencies focusing on expenditure, delivery and monitoring and management of targets. Metropolitan LTPs have struggled to maintain strong performance against DfT criteria as the first round has progressed. Difficulties in delivering large complex programmes across a number of Metropolitan Districts, sometimes with differing political control, and the need to co-ordinate activities with Passenger Transport Executives which lack direct levers on many aspects of delivery appear to be key factors behind their performance.

The Second Round and Beyond

The second round Local Transport Plans were submitted to DfT at the end of March 2006. Our research shows that most authorities have set objectives focused on the Shared Priorities and have set outcome targets which are based on stronger evidence and analysis compared to the first round. There also appears to be more of focus in the plans on "smart" measures and demand management, reflecting strengthened DfT Guidance in these areas.

Looking ahead, there are a range of major policy initiatives which could potentially have major implications for the future of local transport planning in England, and the development of the third round of LTPs for 2011-2016. A new Local Government White Paper has now been published and proposes a range of initiatives for the continued modernisation in the way that councils are constituted, deliver their services, engage with their communities and manage their performance.

At the time of writing the Lyons Review is due to report shortly with recommendations for the funding of local public services. It is also likely that the development of local transport planning in England in the medium-term will more fully reflect the challenges now recognised by Government of managing and responding to future climate change.

The current debate on "city regions" and other forms of sub-national decision making across England, raised in the 2006 Eddington Transport Study, is of particular relevance. Policy makers in England are examining the arrangements for RTPs in Scotland and raising questions over whether such partnerships, made up of consortia of local authorities spanning functional rather than administrative areas, could represent an improved vehicle for governance and delivery in England⁹.

4. OBSERVATIONS ON LOCAL TRANSPORT STRATEGIES IN SCOTLAND

In Scotland, an equivalent policy and impact evaluation of the LTS framework in its first round has not yet been being formally undertaken and published. However, we feel many of the emerging findings of the English experience will strike a resonant chord north of the border and the lessons learnt will be applicable to a Scottish local authority audience.

For example, an early review of the first round of LTS documents¹⁰ for the Scottish Executive, published in 2001, made a number of observations:

- all Scottish local authorities, including SPT and FETA, have developed an LTS, although the comprehensiveness, quality and format of the Plans varies considerably;
- the Plans contain a wide of policy measures, resulting in comprehensive strategies for most areas, although with varying levels of detail;

⁹ See, for example, Prosperous Communities II – Vive la devolution! Local Government Association (February 2007).

¹⁰ Review of Local Transport Strategies and Road Traffic Reduction Reports. Steer Davies Gleave (2001):

- the extent to which targets and desired outcomes have been set and quantified varies considerably, with some authorities having few quantified targets and indicators at all; and
- there is a variation in the extent to which strategies are deliverable within the available resources.

Review work on Scottish local road traffic reduction targets also establishes problems of target definition, monitoring and support for effective decision making and impacts¹¹. Other factors, such as misalignment between road traffic reduction objectives and local priorities, and the lack of direct local authority control of all the levers required to achieve policy objectives will be familiar to English LTP practitioners.

Experience since 2001 allows us to elaborate further on some key observations. In particular, the separation of LTS development from the funding allocation process has meant that the Scottish approach is largely unable to provide the long-term certainty of funding or the flexibility of programming which English practitioners regard as core strengths of the LTP system. There is potential that this uncertainty and the introduction of “stop-start” funding streams for specific initiatives adversely affects long-term planning and delivery at the local level and therefore for Scottish authorities to meet their LTS objectives.

As with the English experience, preparation of LTS has been found to be a time-consuming task given the staff resources available and many of the practical difficulties of delivering programmes on the ground are highly relevant. In particular, staffing and skills shortages, constraints on revenue funding and mixed levels of political support and corporate priority given to transport appear to be common themes. It is arguable whether these problems are especially prevalent within the LTS system due to relatively small size of Scottish unitary authorities and the lack of a systematic national performance management framework such as that found in England.

Scottish authorities, like their English counterparts, have found that co-ordination of local transport with external stakeholders such as bus operators and the rail industry can be an often difficult experience in the absence of proactive personalities, effective joint working structures, adequate levels of funding and a shared understanding of mutual benefits of partnership working.

However, as cited above and covered in more detail below, one area where the Scottish system has made contrasting progress compared to England is in the area of regional and cross-boundary working. The relatively small scale of Scottish unitary authorities, and the evident benefits of working jointly with neighbouring authorities on priorities of more than local significance, seem to be important factor behind this, such that Scottish Ministers have now made the preparation of an RTS, rather than an LTS, a statutory duty and therefore a focus for achieving delivery.

The lack of a systematic LTS annual reporting process or national research programme makes it more difficult to assess how Scottish authorities have used their LTS (or will use their RTS) to deliver improvements on the ground, contribute to their objectives or offer value for money for the resources provided. Guidance on reporting progress under the new tranche of RTS due to be completed on 31 March 2007 appears to be slightly stronger in this respect, however, and there will be a requirement for annual progress reporting.

¹¹ Term Commission for the Evaluation and Review of Local Authority Road Traffic Reduction Targets. Scottish Executive Social Research (2006).

One important basis for the LTS (and RTS) preparation process is the utilisation of the same standard Scottish Transport Appraisal Guidance (STAG) approach which is used for the development/appraisal of all individual transport schemes in Scotland. This should ensure a consistent, and well understood, approach by the staff involved as well the successful co-ordination of strategy preparation with the development of their constituent elements.

There are some dear examples of good practice in terms of schemes delivered¹² and some positive movements in key national indicators, but far less evidence on how progress varies across Scotland and the factors underlying good, moderate or weak performance for individual authorities or RTPs. This may be an area of potential future research.

5. THE SCOTTISH REGIONAL DIMENSION

The Transport (Scotland) Act 2005 provides for the establishment of statutory Regional Transport Partnerships to whom unitary authorities may cede transport powers. The model is interesting as it builds on voluntary RTPs successfully established since 1998 to improve co-ordination and delivery, with Scottish transport regions being broadly similar in size (by population) to the English sub-regions and proposed city regions.

The primary responsibility of the RTPs is to prepare a statutory Regional Transport Strategy (RTS), taking account of guidance from Scottish Ministers. These strategies will be used to steer the funding priorities of the partnerships, their constituent councils, and the new national transport agency, Transport Scotland. The latter, and the Scottish Executive, will hold some discretionary funding, and the RTS will form the basis of any funding bids to the centre. Individual authority LTS documents will need to align with the RTS which will also input into the current Strategic Transport Projects Review (STPR) being undertaken between 2006 and 2008 and which will inform the delivery of key transport infrastructure projects between 2012 and 2022.

Seven statutory RTPs have been set up since December 2005. These are shown in Figure 1 at the end of this paper and bring together local authorities and other key regional stakeholders with the core task of drawing up the RTS, although some partnerships will also be responsible for the delivery of transport services and initiatives. Essentially three different models for RTP role and function are envisaged with varying degrees of transfer of powers from constituent councils to the RTP. To date, the Strathclyde Partnership for Transport (SPT) has the most significant (Level 3) powers reflecting its role as the former PTA/PTE for the Glasgow city region. For example, it owns and operates the Glasgow Subway.

Membership of the RTP is through a combination of council members and non-council members with around a third of the membership being drawn from outside the councils. The RTPs will recommend a list of candidates to Scottish Ministers who will take the final decision on appointments. RTPs will also be able to appoint advisers and the guidance also suggests that RTPs may establish consultative forums to ensure stakeholder engagement.

The 2005 Act provides an illustrative list of the functions which could be conferred on an RTP for the purposes of delivering its strategy, including:

- o quality bus partnerships and contracts;

¹² For example, Edinburgh's LTS2 (Chapter 4) contains a useful analysis of LTS achievements between 2000 and 2004, including performance against specific targets.

- establishing voluntary ticketing arrangements or binding ticketing schemes;
- providing subsidized bus services;
- installing bus lanes;
- designing and implementing road user charging schemes; and
- operating or managing tolled bridges, ferry services, airports and air services.

In order to achieve these, or other, additional functions, RTPs must make a request to Scottish Ministers for the relevant order, against certain set criteria, such as full consultation with the constituent unitary authorities and other concerned stakeholders. To date concerns from the constituent local authorities over ceding powers have limited the extent to which RTPs have sought to apply for additional functions. The full justification of such a transfer of powers may well relate to the requirements for the effective delivery of the RTS.

In the current debate, there are some concerns centred on the future role and powers of local government with respect to transport, and how local authorities and the RTPs will work together. There is also a concern about introducing another layer of bureaucracy without adding value, so the respective roles of central, regional and local government has to be more clearly defined. At present the Scottish Executive appears to be looking towards each individual RTP to agree with the constituent authorities what their respective roles will be, and the framework is still therefore in transition. However there is evidence that the Scottish Executive is increasingly routeing specific transport funding streams to/through the RTPs.

The development of statutory RTPs in Scotland with potential for transfer of powers and funding from the constituent local authorities represents a more powerful regional model than is currently the case in England. However, it may address many of the current issues of governance and limits of partnership working found in metropolitan areas and some other two-tier areas. As such it is likely to be relevant to the ongoing debate on transport governance, powers and funding in many parts of England. A further lesson is the enabling nature of the legislation for RTPs, presenting different models and a “toolkit” of options for negotiation between the Partnerships and Scottish Ministers rather than a single prescriptive structure for all regions.

6. FACTORS IN DETERMINING EFFECTIVE DELIVERY AND PERFORMANCE

An important practical dimension of the Atkins research for the DfT to date has focused on determining and evaluating varying patterns of performance in transport delivery across policy areas and between authorities. This research¹³ identifies a number of specific corporate and technical factors which English authorities’ performance down in recent assessments and which are likely to be equally relevant to Scottish local and regional organisations.

Corporate and Managerial Factors

- insufficient priority given by senior management and political leadership to the importance of the LTP process overall and requirement for progress reporting;
- insufficient linkage between the authority’s transport plans and delivery programmes and the wider corporate and community goals, leading to transport being progressed

¹³ Working with Weaker Local Authorities. Atkins (2004 and 2005).

largely in its own “silo” independently of, and sometimes in conflict with, other service areas;

- weak strategic and operational integration between neighbouring authorities, especially in two tier areas;
- absence of, or poor, project, programme and performance management;
- lack of cost management and prioritisation of budgets to ensure effective programme delivery and monitoring;
- insufficient recognition of the importance of good communication, within the authority, with external stakeholders and partners, and with the media;
- a failure of human resource management, particularly in recruiting and retaining the right skills, ensuring staff are developed and motivated to their maximum potential, and have awareness and understanding of range of resident and user perspectives and experience.

Technical Factors

- an over-reliance on “bottom-up” processes for programme assembly with historical precedent or political considerations more important than focused delivery of LTP targets in the most cost effective way;
- difficulties in setting realistic, but challenging, targets and relating these to outcomes rather than output;
- difficulties in obtaining and managing performance data suitable for demonstrating level of progress against specific objectives;
- limited understanding and ability to explain, and respond to divergences between the planned programme and actual reported progress; and
- an inability to capture the benefits of joint working and learn best practice from others.

Factors in Driving Improvement

Conversely, our ongoing research with other authorities in England shows that factors determining effective delivery and performance include:

- a strong priority given to transport as a means of delivering the authority’s wider corporate and community goals, with resultant active commitment to the LTP by senior executive and political leadership;
- effective departmental structures where there are clear lines of responsibility and the elements of LTP planning and delivery are explicitly owned by named officers or teams who are clearly accountable to senior management for delivery and demonstration of progress;
- a commitment to staff recruitment, training and career development at all levels;
- strong project, programme and performance management with LTP programmes clearly managed and prioritised on the basis of their capacity to deliver the objectives and targets in the most cost effective and timely way;
- consultation and engagement methods which take a user focus, clearly promote the authority’s objectives and which assist, rather than delay, scheme implementation;
- recognition of, and effective partnerships with, other delivery agents at local, regional and national level, with a clear definition of roles and responsibilities;

- o excellent communication at all levels (including with the media) and a commitment to effective partnership working and learning and dissemination of best practice; and
- o a clear understanding of the Guidance and the specific responses required by national policy makers in process, not just presentational, terms.

7. MODERNISING LOCAL TRANSPORT PLANNING AND DELIVERY IN ENGLAND AND SCOTLAND

Both the UK and Scottish Governments have now published updated national frameworks for transport strategy and delivery¹⁴. In Scotland Guidance has been issued by the Scottish Executive¹⁵ on the preparation of the second round of LTSs and the initial RTSs. Some authorities have already prepared second round LTSs either before or in parallel with their 'umbrella' RTS; however all RTPs are on line to deliver their RTS by the end of March 2007. It will be interesting to see whether account has been taken of relevant elements of the English LTP system, particularly in relation to performance management and assessment, or whether a uniquely Scottish model of a tiered hierarchy of regional and local transport planning and delivery is now on the cards.

The introduction of statutory RTPs, in particular, will have a significant impact on the subsequent preparation and delivery of LTS, especially if there is some transfer of powers and funding from local authorities to deliver their regional objectives and targets and address travel patterns which increasingly cross local authority boundaries. Such an arrangement may allow authorities to have more influence in discussions with the Scottish Executive and potentially address many of the issues of staff and skills shortages, technical and analytical tools and capabilities and political support which were evident for many of the smaller unitary authorities in the LTS first round. In future, there is also a question as to whether certain local authorities will see a need to actually retain an LTS given the potentially comprehensive nature of the RTS¹⁶.

In England, the second round of LTPs has now commenced. It is notable that whilst the basic principles and geographical focus of the LTP process remains unchanged, there are some important differences in the detailed requirements, reflecting recent developments in Local Government Modernisation, regional planning, European legislation and lessons learnt from the first round. In particular:

- o there is a greater focus on the development of targets, performance indicators and delivery programmes for a smaller number of priority outcomes, largely linked to DfT's national objectives for congestion, safety, accessibility and air quality, and emphasising the emerging role of the LTP framework as a delivery and performance management system;
- o there is more emphasis given to making best use of existing assets, demand management and ensuring value for money from a pre-defined level of LTP expenditure; and
- o there is stronger emphasis given to regional and sub-regional planning, including a requirement for LTPs to be consistent with (now statutory) Regional Transport Strategies, for authorities to provide clear evidence of working across boundaries and

¹⁴ The Future of Transport – Department for Transport (2004). Scotland's National Transport Strategy – Scottish Executive (2006).

¹⁵ See Scotland's Transport Future: Guidance for Statutory Regional Transport Partnerships on preparing Regional Transport Strategies. Scottish Executive (2006). & Scotland's Transport Future: Guidance on Local Transport Strategies. Scottish Executive (2005)

¹⁶ Particularly in Dumfries & Galloway and the Shetlands where the boundaries are conterminous.

at sub-regional level and for LTP Major Schemes to be assessed and prioritised by regional stakeholders with subsequent advice to Ministers..

The latter currently falls short of the actual transfer of powers and funding from local authorities to regional or sub-regional level which is now possible in Scotland. However, a stronger regional and sub-regional approach is increasingly under discussion in relation to the metropolitan conurbations, non-PTE large urban areas and other spatial functional areas in England where a partnership approach might produce benefits. Further proposals in this area can be expected from the Government later in 2007, with implications for the LTP process from 2011 onwards.

8. CONCLUSIONS

We believe that the experience of Local Transport Plans in England since 2000 presents some parallels and lessons for the preparation and monitoring the effectiveness of future LTS and RTS in Scotland. It is clear that many of the practical problems of planning and delivering transport schemes and programmes on the ground are common to both countries

In particular, the English experience of developing LTPs as a delivery and performance management framework for national and local objectives provides a key element which Scottish Ministers, as well as local and regional authorities, may wish to examine more closely. Conversely, there is also scope for England to learn from Scotland in a number of areas. Significantly, the proposals for transfer of some powers, funding and responsibilities for transport delivery from local authorities to statutory RTPs will be of interest in England, for example in the context of the city regions debate and proposals for reform of PTAs and PTEs in metropolitan areas which the Department for Transport is likely to set out in the forthcoming Road Transport Bill.

Finally, the evolution of the English LTP system and the factors governing authorities' performance within it offer some lessons for Scottish practitioners, at local and regional level, in seeking to improve the overall quality of their transport planning processes, targeting of resources on effective delivery and consequent ability to demonstrate the case for funding at the regional and national levels. These lessons may stand them in a better position in seeking to exploit the potential of the RTS and LTS frameworks, and make the case for transport investment in their areas.

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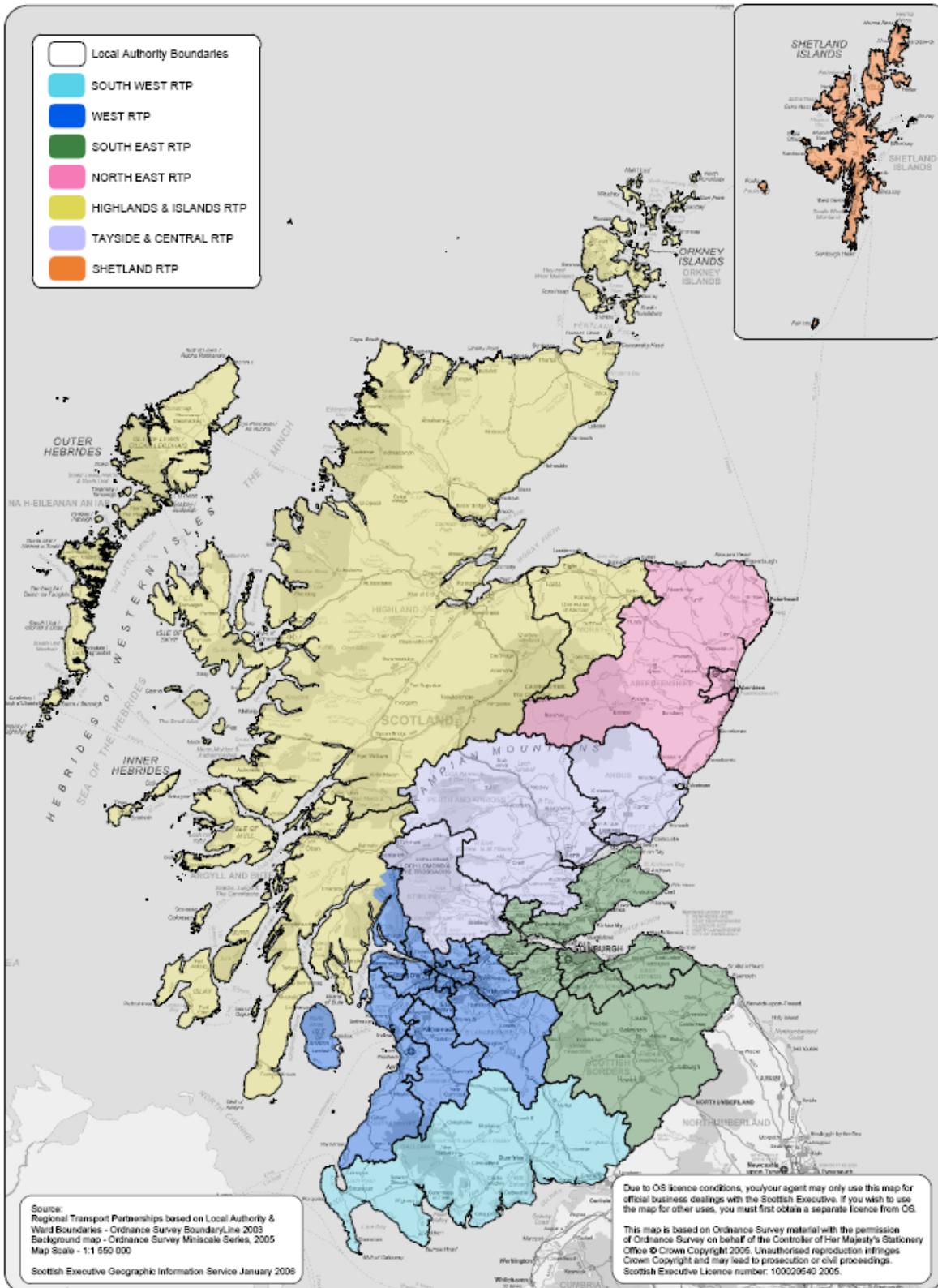
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Figure 1 – Statutory Regional Transport Partnerships in Scotland



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