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Merseyside Supplementary Planning Document for Transport 'Ensuring Choice of Travel'

Sustainability Appraisal/Strategic Environmental Assessment

Non-Technical Summary

May 2007

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Issue and Revision Record

Rev	Date	Originator	Checker	Approver	Description
A	03.05.07	N Levy	K Leather	E Thomas	Summary for Issue

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1 Introduction and Background

Mott MacDonald was commissioned by the Merseyside Local Transport Plan (LTP) Support Unit in November 2006 to undertake an integrated Sustainability Appraisal (SA) and Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) incorporating Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) (or Appropriate Assessment) for the Merseyside Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) for Transport 'Ensuring Choice of Travel'.

The Merseyside SPD for Transport is being produced as a framework at the Merseyside (county) level but will then be taken forward and adopted separately by each of the Merseyside Local Authorities: Knowsley; Liverpool; Sefton; St Helens; and Wirral.

Currently the application of planning guidance, standards, conditions and requirements is applied inconsistently across Merseyside leading to the potential for missed opportunities to improve transport access. The Merseyside SPD for Transport is being produced as a framework at the Merseyside-wide level to secure a consistent approach across Merseyside by, for example, ensuring new housing developments adequately cater for and support new bus routes, incorporate new cycle routes and parking facilities, and caters for pedestrians. It is recognised that although the aim is a consistent framework for assessing accessibility across Merseyside, the SPD cannot be adopted simultaneously, and it is intended that each Local Authority will take forward and adopt the Merseyside SPD separately to coincide with their Local Development Framework (LDF) timetables.

The Merseyside SPD aims to set out clear and consistent standards for Local Planning Authorities (LPAs) and developers to ensure that a transparent, fair and clearly understood system is in place to improve the integration of land use planning and transport. It also aims to ensure that new developments promote good access by all modes of transport and so encourage choice of travel such that people have the opportunity to make more sustainable choices.

2 Appraisal Methodology

Under the SEA Directive and Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 the proposed SPD requires a Sustainability Appraisal (SA) and Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) to be undertaken. Mott MacDonald has been commissioned to undertake Stages A to C of the SA/SEA process on the Merseyside-wide SPD framework. Each Local Authority will then take the SPD through its own public consultation in Stage D of the SA/SEA process which might lead to slight variations in the content of each of the adopted SPDs. If consultation results in significant changes being made to the SPD then the Local Authority will have to carry out further SA/SEA work.

A Scoping Report was produced in March 2007 which covered Stage A of the SA/SEA for the Merseyside SPD for Transport framework, in accordance with the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) (now DCLG) Guidance '*Sustainability Appraisal of Regional Spatial Strategies and Local Development Documents*' (November 2005). The Scoping Report also included a Habitats Regulations Assessment (Appropriate Assessment) which is being undertaken under the EU Habitats Directive. The Scoping Report was sent out for formal consultation from 6th March 2007 to 10th April 2007. Following closure of the consultation period all responses were taken into consideration and justification for incorporating or omitting comments was recorded.

This SA Report covers Stages A-C of the SA/SEA process for the Merseyside SPD for Transport as described in the Government Guidance 'Sustainability Appraisal of Regional Spatial Strategies and Local Development Documents' (November 2005).

3 Relationship to other plans, programmes and objectives

The range of international, European, national, regional and local plans, programmes and objectives relevant to the Merseyside SPD for Transport was established, along with how the plan is affected by these outside factors, and how objectives and requirements might be taken on board.

4 Baseline conditions

Baseline information for the Merseyside region was used from existing baseline data studies and information available, including previous studies such as the SEA Baseline Report for the Second Merseyside LTP (June 2005) and the Merseyside LTP SEA and Health Impact Assessment (HIA) Report (November 2005). The existing baseline was reviewed and relevant data used to inform the SA/SEA process. A table showing baseline data for each SA/SEA objective and indicator, regional and national comparators, key trends and sustainability issues can be found in Appendix C.

5 The sustainability appraisal framework

The next task involved the development of a range of SA/SEA objectives and indicators (see Section 6.4) against which the various options for the SPD could be tested to determine whether their contribution towards sustainability can be improved. A SA objective is a statement of what is intended to happen in the future. Examples of this may include a reduction in air pollution or an improvement in human health. A SA indicator is a measure of how things change over time, often used to measure the achievement of objectives. Examples of this could include air pollution levels or traffic accidents at a certain location.

A total of eleven proposed SA/SEA objectives have been developed for this SA/SEA, with the aim of keeping the number of objectives to a manageable number. The objectives and indicators were established by the SA/SEA consultancy team through consultation with Officers from the five Merseyside Local Authorities, Merseytravel and the Merseyside LTP Support Unit. Development of the objectives and indicators was based on the SEA Directive topics, the generic Merseyside SEA/SA objectives, North West RSS, North West Sustainable Development Integrated Appraisal Toolkit, and the LTP2 objectives (see Appendix B).

6 Appraisal of strategic options

A key requirement of the SA/SEA is to consider reasonable alternatives. Three options were assessed:

- Option One - Business as Usual/Without SPD Option;
- Option Two – With SPD and Without Air Quality Option;
- Option Three – With SPD and With Added Air Quality Chapter Option.

Each option was examined against each SA/SEA objective in a half day workshop with consultants from Mott MacDonald, and Officers from each of the five Merseyside Local Authorities, Merseytravel and the Merseyside LTP Support Unit. The effects on each option over time and the transboundary and cumulative effects were also assessed.

The results of the appraisal indicated that implementation of either SPD option would have benefits over the Business as Usual/Without SPD option. The SPD increases positive effects associated with implementing policies in the RSS, PPG13 and LTP2, through travel plans and the accessibility checklist. Positive effects of implementing the SPD would include improving health and well-being, accessibility, social inclusion, increased travel choice, and air quality and climate change benefits.

The With SPD and With Added Air Quality Chapter option has slightly more benefits than the With SPD and Without Air Quality option. The With SPD and With Added Air Quality Chapter option would have a more positive effect on air quality through helping to reduce NO₂ and CO₂ emissions associated with surface based transport which might lead to health and biodiversity benefits.

7 Consulting on the draft SPD and SA Report

Stage D of the SA/SEA process requires that the draft SPD and draft SA Report is subject to a five week formal public consultation. Each of the five Merseyside Local Authorities are taking the SPD for Transport forward separately therefore each authority will carry out its own consultation to fit in with its LDF timetables. Results of the consultation process might lead to slight variations in the content of each of the adopted SPDs. If consultation results in significant changes being made to the SPD then the Local Authority will have to carry out further SA/SEA work.

8 Habitats Regulations Assessment

In accordance with Article 6 paragraphs (3) of the Council Directive 92/43/EEC on the Conservation of Natural Habitats and of Wild Fauna and Flora (Habitats Directive) and Regulation 48 of the Habitats Regulations 1994, a Stage 1 Habitats Regulations Assessment has been undertaken to ascertain any likely significance effects of the SPD on all European Natura 2000 sites and all international Ramsar sites within the Merseyside area. The full Habitats Regulations Assessment and results are contained within the Mott MacDonald Report 'Stage 1 Appropriate Assessment – Test of Likely Significance for the Merseyside Supplementary Planning Document: Ensuring Choice of Travel' (April 2007).

In accordance with Regulation 48 of the Habitats Regulations 1994 the Stage 1 Test of Likely Significance has indicated that the Merseyside SPD is unlikely to have direct effects on Merseyside Natura 2000 and Ramsar sites. It has therefore been concluded that a Stage 2 Habitats Regulations Assessment will not be required at this high level for the Merseyside area. In addition, in taking the SPD forward at the local level it is considered unlikely that Habitats Regulations Assessment would be required or appropriate, unless there are significant changes to the proposed SPD or significant changes in views of the statutory consultees. Within the context of Habitats Regulations Assessment, some screening of these issues in relation to potential changes is recommended at the local level at this later stage.

However, there could be potential cumulative and in-combination impacts as a result of other development plans and programmes. It is recommended that when each of the five Merseyside Local Authorities develops and adopts its own SPD, further investigation of the identified potential indirect cumulative effects associated with other plans and programmes should be carried out at the local level as part of the Stage 2 Appropriate Assessments being undertaken for other Development Plan Documents for example housing.

9 Mitigation and monitoring

The appraisal of the SPD options suggests that implementing either SPD option will have mainly positive impacts, because of this mitigation measures will be aimed at maximising these positive effects. The following issues were highlighted as a result of the SA/SEA process:

- Incorporation of references to Design Guides in the SPD - The SPD needs to clearly refer to any appropriate design guides that have been produced, either by the Merseyside Local Authorities or Statutory Bodies such as the new Manual for Streets. Adherence to design guides would help improve and would ensure quality design that minimised potential adverse effects on the local character and visual amenity that may occur through in sensitive design and urbanisation.
- SPD to require quality design of all new developments and schemes - Where works may affect a sensitive area, e.g. Conservation, historic core or area of high value in terms of its streetscape/landscape character and visual amenity, sensitive design work should be implemented including the use of appropriate materials and street furniture that would compliment the local historic character.
- Incorporation of references to Guidance, Plans and Strategies in the SPD - Developers would be required to adhere to these documents:
 - The SPD should ensure developers refer to CABI documents, Institute of Lighting Engineers (ILE) guidance and the Merseyside Walking Strategy to ensure that proposals are consistent with requirements and ensure benefits
 - Wildflower Verge guidance is being produced. The SPD should refer to this document, and any other guidance documents that would promote and enhance biodiversity through planting/habitat creation and restoration in schemes.
 - The SPD should include reference to flood risk management documents produced by the EA, GONW and Merseyside Local Authorities.
- Incorporation of reference to the use of Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems in the SPD - This can help to prevent localised flooding associated with the urban drainage system and can also have additional benefits with regard to biodiversity, landscape/townscape character and visual amenity and recreation depending on the system installed. New car parks can create an impermeable surface which may cause flash flooding, implementing SUDS could help reduce impacts. Careful design, green landscaping and planting can reduce climate change impacts, flooding, reflection, and urban heat issues. Adherence to the design guides mentioned above should ensure effective design and landscaping for new developments.

- Include reference to Community Transport in the SPD – This could be done through inclusion within the travel plans or the accessibility checklist. Including community transport in the SPD will help strength commitment to and implementation of community transport schemes outlined in the LTP2.
- Build in links in the SPD to Merseyside project ‘WorkWise’ which aims to remove transport as a barrier to residents taking up employment/education or training opportunities; Liverpool Neighbourhood Travel Team; and Sefton/Liverpool Enterprise Growth Initiative (SLEGI).

Each of the five Merseyside Local Authorities will undertake its own monitoring on its SPD for Transport. Each Local Authority may have different monitoring arrangements but in all cases monitoring of the SPD should be linked to the LTP2 SEA monitoring. Success of the SPD will depend on the implementation and enforcement of the SPD. Monitoring will be an important requirement to monitoring performance and ensure the SPD is being successfully implemented. The Local Authorities could consider developing targets to help focus the achievement of the SA/SEA objectives and aid future monitoring such as national and regional targets on priority biodiversity species and habitat, national air quality objectives and targets.

Appendix C in this SA Report provides the basis for monitoring the SPD contribution to sustainability. The table in Appendix C shows the SA/SEA objectives and indicators to be monitored and the baseline data against each indicator. This will allow future monitoring data to be compared against the baseline to see whether the SPD has improved conditions in Merseyside.

10 Difference the process has made

The SA/SEA process has shown that implementing the SPD for Transport will have many benefits. Positive effects of implementing the SPD may include:

- The SPD is likely to build on the positive effects of the LTP strategies on air quality and climate change in terms of NO₂ and CO₂ reduction associated with surface based transport through increased transport options and travel plans;
- Improvements in air quality and encouragement of walking and cycling through the use of travel plans and the accessibility checklist may lead to health benefits;
- Ensuring new development is accessible by a range of transport options will help community accessibility to services, goods, amenities and jobs, and will help improve social inclusion;
- There may be indirect benefits on biodiversity through improved air quality and sensitive landscaping/habitat creation.

As a result of the SA/SEA process the following mitigation/recommendations have been developed for incorporation into the SPD:

- Incorporation in SPD of reference to design guides, plans and strategies (Manual for Streets, CABE);
- Section added to SPD requiring the quality design of all new developments and schemes through adherence to referenced documents;

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- Incorporation in SPD of section on Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems (SUDS) relating to new car parks;
 - Incorporation in SPD of reference to Community Transport through inclusion within the travel plans or the accessibility checklist; and
 - Build in links in the SPD to Merseyside project 'WorkWise'; Liverpool Neighbourhood Travel Team; and Sefton/Liverpool Enterprise Growth Initiative (SLEGI).

The recommendations have been agreed with the Merseyside LTP Support Unit, Merseytravel and the five Merseyside Local Authorities and will be incorporated into the Merseyside SPD for Transport.