

Developing the Regional Transport Strategy - Investment Priorities for the South West: Summary Document

“If regions do not identify priorities then central government ends up deciding priorities by default” Transport Minister Tony McNulty (March 2004)

The South West Regional Assembly is publishing this summary document as part of the task of developing and updating the current Regional Transport Strategy which was approved in 2001. It seeks to identify the key issues that are relevant to the South West and what transport investment is essential to deliver our priorities. It also identifies the necessary foundations for achieving our longer term objectives. The opportunity has been taken to co-ordinate existing approaches to freight through the preparation of a Regional Freight Map.

This document has been prepared ahead of the full review of the Regional Transport Strategy which is due to be carried out as part of the process of preparing a Regional Spatial Strategy due to be published in 2005. It does not replace or amend the policies set out in Chapter 8 of Regional Planning Guidance 10 (RPG 10), which has set the framework for transport development since 2001. It takes into account a variety of information, which has emerged since RPG 10 was approved, including the new transport studies and issues emerging from work on the Assembly's Integrated Regional Strategy.

In the light of this new information, it is essential to agree key transport issues and priorities for the South West for the short, medium and long-term.

This document sets out

- Why it is necessary to update and develop the current Regional Transport Strategy
- Key issues and priorities for investment and management
- A Regional Freight Map
- The consultation process and the next steps

All responses to the consultation are welcome, but those seeking detailed technical information should refer to the more detailed consultation document, which is available at www.southwest-ra.gov.uk.

WHAT ARE THE AIMS OF THE REGIONAL TRANSPORT STRATEGY

“Developing the region, in a sustainable way, as a national and European region of quality and diversity, where the quality of life for residents, the business community and visitors will be maintained and enhanced.” Vision - RPG10

The purpose of all planning activity is to meet, sustainably, the needs and aspirations of the businesses, communities and individuals who live, work in, or visit the region. A regional perspective provides coherence, continuity and consistency between planning bodies.

The transport element should complement, reinforce or complete work going on elsewhere to meet those needs. So the impacts of transport decisions need to be considered in the widest possible context.

WHY PUBLISH THE INVESTMENT PRIORITIES NOW?

The Secretary of State has made clear that the Assembly needs to update the Regional Transport Strategy in RPG 10 to take into account the outcome from the multi-modal studies – SWARMMS – and the national Airports Policy Review. This document aims to do that by reflecting the findings of studies like SWARMMS and the Bristol/Bath to South Coast Study. It also takes into account underlying issues affecting businesses and communities across the region as identified in work on the Integrated Regional Strategy. It therefore seeks to move forward and update without changing the policy framework.

There is a need to co-ordinate the work of transport authorities on freight to ensure consistency of approach and definition of freight routes.

Local Authorities need to prepare and submit their Local Transport Plans by July 2005. Enhanced and expanded guidance provided by the revised document, including the Investment Priorities, will help ensure these plans meet the region's wider needs as effectively as possible.

The key issues being published now for consultation should help us identify our priorities for the medium and long term. The Government has made it clear there is limited funding for transport, and that investment must support a wide range of objectives. To secure and manage all such investment effectively, we need to be clear what the South West's investment priorities are, what issues they will address and how they meet wider policy objectives.

WHAT IS THE POLICY CONTEXT?

The document, and in due course, the revised regional strategy must operate within the context of European and National policy. There are five key documents to take into account:

- The European Commissions 'European Transport Policy for 2010: Time to Decide'
- The Transport White Paper 'A New Deal for Transport: Better for Everyone'
- The Ten Year Transport Plan
- Regions White Paper 'Your Region, Your Choice'
- The Integrated Regional Strategy

The first three policies have been in place for some time. More recently, 'Your Region, Your Choice' confirmed the role of the Assembly as Regional Planning Body responsible for regional Spatial and Transport policy. It also gave a wider role to ensure a co-ordination of regional policy making in the South West. As a result, the Assembly has been preparing an Integrated Regional Strategy (IRS) that aims to achieve better co-ordination in the region by identifying the main objectives and priorities for the region as a whole. These objectives and priorities are:

- Managing population growth effectively as an agent for change for change in the region
- Protecting and enhancing the South West region's environmental assets, both urban and rural
- Enhancing the economic productivity of the region and ensuring quality and choice of employment opportunity in the South West
- Reducing significant intra-regional variations in the performance of the region against a range of social, economic and environmental indicators
- Targeting deprivation and disadvantage and meeting the needs of a region with a changing demographic profile

Bearing in mind the principles and objectives of the other policy documents, any transport strategy must be based on a realistic and deliverable programme for transport investment that facilitates economic prosperity, reduces regional inequalities and meets social needs while protecting our environmental assets and managing the constant pressure of growth in a positive way.

WHAT ARE THE KEY TRANSPORT ISSUES IN THE SOUTH WEST?

There are five key problems and issues which any investment priorities report must address:

1. Peripherality

Peripherality is a function of distance and ease of travel. The far south west of the region relies on only one major rail and road route; there is no motorway west of Exeter and the rail links beyond the city are slow. Opportunities for domestic air travel are limited.

Within the region itself, accessibility tends to decline westward. The difficulties of serving the far South West have been identified in the SWARMMS final report. This impacts on competitiveness and economic performance. SWARMMS concluded that without investment, accessibility will decline due to congestion and this will widen regional disparities. Those parts of the South West that perform best are generally those closest to the South East. However there are also parts of the north and east of the region which have accessibility problems resulting in regeneration requirements.

2. Congestion and the development of Principal Urban Areas

RPG 10 identifies PUA's as major engines for economic growth. They play an important economic and social role and they tend to be the best performing areas for economic productivity. Congestion and capacity constraints will impinge on their future growth: unreliable journey times, scheduling and delivery of public transport and the health, safety and environmental problems will all impact on future performance. However in many parts of the region's urban areas investment in the transport networks has not kept up with economic and housing growth giving rise to a 'deficit' in investment. The Developing the Regional Transport Strategy document has identified specific problems evident in each PUA which need to be addressed.

3. Accessibility and Social Exclusion

Problems with transport and the location of services can prevent people from accessing employment, healthcare, learning and other social or leisure opportunities. An evaluation of New Deal for Young People gave 'no local jobs' and 'lack of personal transport' as the two most common problems in securing employment.

In rural areas transport infrastructure can create particular problems for communities as it is further to shops, schools, healthcare and other facilities. Geographical isolation can be compounded by other indicators of disadvantage like low incomes and poor access to training, resulting in pockets of deprivation and social exclusion.

In urban areas, transport services are generally better, but services tend to focus on routes in and out of towns, with limited links to residential areas. This tends to impact most on the elderly, young families and the disabled. However in some urban areas employment sites are located where they are poorly served by public transport.

Remoteness combined with poor transport and communication links have increased disparities across the region and created severe economic and social problems in the far South West. This has been recognised by the EU funding programmes like Objective One and Objective Two but more needs to be done if accessibility and social exclusion issues are to be addressed.

4. Reducing the impact of transport on the environment

Reducing the need to travel in the interests of the global environment is an objective of the Government's transport and planning policies. Protection and enhancement of the environment is an objective of RPG10. Priority is given to proposals that can contribute positively to housing, jobs and environmental objectives. Close integration of environmental and transport objectives has the potential to deliver benefit to the region. Close integration will improve economic prosperity by reducing congestion and enabling more efficient movement of goods, and will reduce pollution, noise and accidents.

5. Inter-Urban congestion

Congestion is apparent on most routes into the South West during seasonal peak times. The region relies on one major East-West route, the M4/M5. This is becoming increasingly congested around Bristol, Exeter and Swindon when

peak time traffic mixes with more long distance flows. SWARMMS predicted that unless investment is made, congestion will increase and journey time reliability decline affecting the economic competitiveness of the region.

The rail network is also largely reliant on the Great Western Main Line where the growth of passenger numbers is significant. Overcrowding of trains and infrastructure bottlenecks are apparent, affecting service quality and reliability. Some lines are vulnerable to delay and disruption due to single line sections eg Exeter to Waterloo and Swindon to Gloucester. There are also capacity problems on the cross country and the north-south routes.

WHAT ARE WE TRYING TO ACHIEVE?

The objectives set out in the Strategy sit under five main headings

Economic:	Providing efficient transport; facilitating movement; reducing inequalities; increasing competitiveness; reducing peripherality; contributing to national targets;
Environmental	Protect and improve character, diversity and distinctiveness of the South West; protect and maintain environmental designations; reduce pollution and use of non renewable fuels; reduce impact of congestion
Social	Improve safety; enhance wealth and regeneration; improve rural accessibility; reduce travel demands; increase sustainable travel; achieve more sustainable communities
Spatial	Relieve congestion; make PUA's work; support urban renaissance; support and facilitate new development requirements from RPG10. Address current infrastructure investment deficit in PUA's.
Delivery	Projects that are affordable; and offer value for money.

SO WHAT ARE THE PRIORITIES FOR INTERVENTION?

The choice of priorities reflects a process based on values and judgement but must be selected to address the key problems and issues identified in this document.

There is no current 'regional pot' of money available to deliver the Regional Transport Strategy. Delivery is in the hands of the transport providers, like the Highways Agency, the Strategic Rail Authority and Local Authorities. It should also be remembered that a mix of capital and revenue solutions are required.

In determining priorities it is necessary to reflect national guidance which indicates we should have regard to the likely level of resources and to avoid a long 'wish list'.

The draft priorities for the South West on which the Assembly is consulting are:

1. Trunk Roads

- Delivery of second strategic route to the South West
- Management of the M4/M5 to make the most effective use of the network including use of Information Technology, incident management and selected investment to tackle bottlenecks eg crawler lanes

2. Inter City Rail network

- Renewal of the Great Western Main Line infrastructure.
- Addressing bottlenecks – some of which are outside the region, eg Reading.
- Establishing minimum travel times from the main urban centres in the South West to London and Birmingham.
- Utilising the network most effectively
- Direct rail access to Heathrow from the Great Western Mainline.

3. Making Principal Urban Area's work

The eleven PUA's identified in RPG10 are the main centres for development and growth in the South West. Plans for each PUA are set out in more detail in the full report. Making them work and prosper is key to the delivery of the regional Spatial Strategy and the prosperity of the South West. The main document 'Developing the Regional Transport Strategy-Investment Priorities for the South West' identifies what is required in regional terms to deliver the spatial strategy in the PUA's. The main priorities are:

- The need to address the use of the motorway network for local commuter journeys.
- Development of major public transport systems including bus 'showcase' routes on congested corridors.
- Park and Ride Strategies (linked to other solutions)
- Network management measures to manage the demand for road space including investigation of road charging
- Parking strategy to provide access for retail and other functions but discouraging long stay commuters who are encouraged to switch to other modes of travel and/or park and ride.
- Development of the heavy rail network in Exeter, Greater Bristol and Plymouth to serve the 'City Region'
- Improved access to, and investment in, Bristol, Exeter and Bournemouth airports to meet more of the regions air travel needs from within the South West
- Limited Selective road investment to address specific regeneration problems
- Emphasis on investment in interchange hubs for public transport integration.

4. Rural Accessibility

The Assembly is working with stakeholders to determine the most appropriate action at regional level to address this issue, taking into account the initiatives currently being developed at national and local level relating to accessibility planning.

5. Freight

As part of the ongoing work to update and develop the Regional Transport Strategy the Assembly has been working with local authorities and transport stakeholders to co-ordinate the presentation of information on freight routes at regional level.

Current local authority maps do not use the same definitions or show consistency of approach which is confusing to the freight industry and other groups.

A Regional Freight Map has been prepared to focus on those routes which are of national or regional importance.

Some “local” routes are also shown where they provide a regional function in providing links between urban areas.

WHAT ARE THE NEXT STEPS?

Following comments from the public and key partners the key issues and Investment Priorities will be agreed in September 2004. In the longer term the transport strategy will form part of a wider statutory Regional Spatial Strategy issued by central Government. To develop a realistic and deliverable programme of transport investment which meets a range of wider objectives, we need to balance regional priorities against likely available resources. It is important to have views and comments from as many people and organisations across the South West as possible.

Based on the summary consultation document we would welcome your comments by 30 June 2004 on 5 key questions:




- **Given the issues and objectives outlined above, what do you consider to be the most important priorities and interventions to meet the region’s needs? Why?**
- **Do you have additional evidence relating to the key issues and priorities to support the South West case for investment?**
- **What are the essential investments required to deliver against our objectives?**
- **How best can we integrate what we already have to meet wider economic, social and environmental needs?**
- **Do you agree that the Regional Freight Map sets out an appropriate framework for co-ordinating local maps in the South West?**

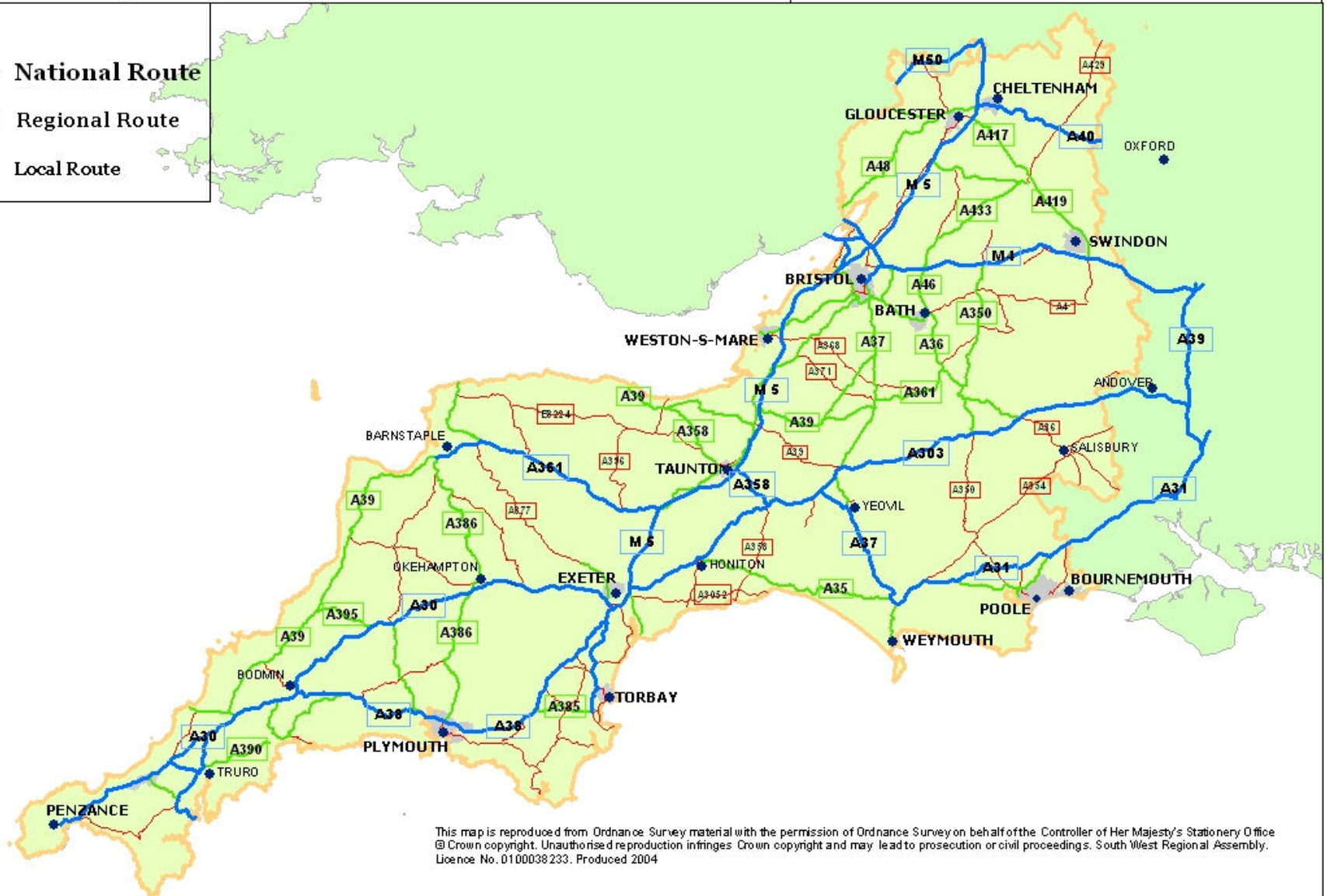
Working Regional Freight Map

Version - May 2004



Key:

-  National Route
-  Regional Route
-  Local Route



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If you want to read the more detailed version of the Investment Priorities document, a copy can be obtained from www.southwest-ra.gov.uk or via us at:

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