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Transport Committee
Scottish Parliament

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INQUIRY INTO THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN TRANSPORT AND LAND USE PLANNING

Thank you for the opportunity to share my views with the Committee on 20 April. I thought that it might be helpful to follow up the discussion by referencing and expanding a few of the main points discussed.

Planning policy guidance has for many years put forward many laudable principles but in general these have not been followed in practice. Most countries in the world face similar problems so it is important to recognise that these are difficult issues which will only be resolved if all parties focus on overcoming the barriers. Four main themes emerged in the discussion:

- Tackling the gap between theory and practice
- Fostering leadership
- Building partnerships
- Using economic levers and investing in success

From theory to practice

The first, and perhaps most important point, is that the requirements of national planning policy should be accompanied by a supporting toolkit to help planners actually achieve the aims in practice. In particular:

- National planning policy needs to be enforced to be meaningful - Neighbouring authorities will often be competing for key developments. Competition for development often leads to national goals being sacrificed. If the authorities that break the most rules get the best developments, then national government should recognise that this is what the national planning framework actually delivers in practice. Enforcing national policies by supporting development consistent with policy with partnership approaches could lead to quite different outcomes.
- The settlement hierarchy and transport nodes should be consistent – There is a risk of confusion if connectivity in transport networks is not clearly linked with the land uses at the ends of trips. Connecting people to places is what transport is all about. It is important to ensure that transport and economic linkages reinforce a settlement hierarchy that works for both the land use and transport future of any area improving accessibility for people and businesses.
- Support for professional skills - Major changes have taken place in transport and planning policy, but many practitioners have shown an understandable desire to stick with the policies and practices they know best from the past. There has been some training, but this falls short of practical support to deliver the required culture change amongst practitioners. An example of a

successful programme has been a recent action learning programme for English rural authorities delivered by the local government improvement agency¹. Even the current planning guidance is based on fairly old research².

- Goals need to be defined more clearly - Planning policies require accessibility to be assessed to ensure development takes place in locations that will be competitive for economic development and social inclusion. Access can be improved without inducing more travel if planned across sectors. However, across Scotland few planning authorities have set measureable goals for accessibility against which to measure progress³ or developed joint plans with other sectors to invest in local facilities to make shorter trips more attractive. The policy line of the Scottish Government for at least decade has been that 'accessibility planning' is entirely a matter for local authorities. A more pragmatic approach is now needed recognising that professional practice needs support to move on to tackle this challenging agenda.
- A joint toolkit for transport appraisal and land use planning - Land use development and/or investment in transport affects the competitiveness of locations. If relatively more investment is made in speeding up long distance travel than in helping to make local trips more attractive⁴ then local facilities such as shops could close, leading to a decline in accessibility overall, despite the transport investment. It was intended that the accessibility appraisals required by STAG⁵ would require planners to check whether or not transport investment distorted markets in this way, but common STAG appraisal practice remains weak in this area. For example, it is notable that no detailed analysis of these factors was undertaken for the national strategic transport projects review STAG appraisal. The expectation of national government appears to be that local authorities will redress any unknown accessibility imbalances created by the national investment. A much more balanced approach is needed to ensure that national changes include the complementary local funding to ensure integrated approaches can be afforded by local authorities.

Leadership to Join up Land Use and Transport

There are many failed examples around the world of attempts to put a single joint agency in charge of integrated land use and transport planning. The areas delivering the best practice have been the ones that recognise leadership coming from many sectors and levels. The design of successful planning systems reflects diversity, and supports and invests in leadership wherever it emerges. Three main principles define success:

¹ DHC and TAS 2010 – Guidance on Improving rural Transport and Accessibility
<http://www.idea.gov.uk/>

² DHC drafted the guidance on accessibility analysis (currently published as Annex B of PAN75) in 1999 in a different age of computers and data. Although the guidance is still relevant, current practice has moved on a long way (see www.dhc1.co.uk/accessibilityplanning).

³ i.e. as recommended in Annex B of PAN75 Transport and Planning based on research for Scottish Executive a decade ago, DHC 2000 – Guidance on Accessibility Analysis Techniques and their Application". A typical target of an English local authority where at least two accessibility targets are mandatory might be that "more than 90% of the population live within 15 minutes walk of a supermarket". Monitoring is through a statistical series by national government so that planners can make useful local assessments and set targets.

<http://www.dft.gov.uk/pgr/statistics/datatablespublications/ltp/coreaccessindicators2008>

⁴ e.g. walking to local shops by improving local streets, paths, pedestrian priority areas.

⁵ Scottish Transport Appraisal Guidance <http://www.transportscotland.gov.uk/stag/home>

- That key decisions are made at the lowest possible level - In general cross sectoral working gets harder higher up the tree. There is much better interaction between activities at community level than within top down policy.
- National policy should seek to be consistent – Although there has been progress to harmonise national policy across different policy areas, there remain many conflicts. Some tensions will always be inevitable, so national guidance should be viewed as “framework for national action and support” rather than “national job done”. It is important for national government to work through solutions with partners to give the policies the best chance of success. For example outline ideas for “National Developments” are shown in planning policy with no real clarity on how to interface these with local changes.
- Evidence is the bridge that can join up sectors – For many parts of the country it is taking progressively longer and costing more for everyone to get to services. Negative engagement and blame cultures benefit nobody. What matters is that evidence is used to create practical cross sectoral plans and deliverables to improve access in the future⁶.

Partnership

Public, private and voluntary sectors all do best when they work together. Many more partnerships are needed with developers, bus companies and others in order to improve the quality of land use and transport planning. Currently legally binding partnership agreements to secure public policy aims within development are the exception rather than the rule. This needs to change.

Partnerships fail if they attempt to demand change through regulation and control. It is through evidence of shared benefits that real progressive change takes place. Shared goals can be managed through contracts that the partners enter into on a voluntary basis. From voluntary partnerships between groups of local authorities, to partnerships with property developers covering development zones, fixed rules about roles and duties in planning can undermine the flexibility required to ensure successful outcomes.

Fostering competition for the best locations

Business needs good access for staff, customers and goods, and new development is costly so needs to be sustainable. Sustainable development in accessible locations is therefore essential for the viability of most private developers, and this aim is shared with that of government. However shared delivery of these aims is far too rare due to perverse economic incentives in the way government administers land use and transport:

- Government should carry the costs of risks it can manage - Unmanageable uncertainty is un-investable. Developers will sacrifice good access (such as in town centres) for resilient access (such as near motorway junctions) if they cannot get certainty that the town centre locations will not become congested or be subject to restrictions (e.g. rail strikes). If public authorities were prepared to carry the risk of impacts they are able to manage, then many more new developments could be in sustainable locations.
- Developer contributions should be lower in sustainable locations - Local authorities tend to have more transport investment priorities in town centres

⁶ See for example DfT 2006 - Guidance on Accessibility Planning.
<http://www.dft.gov.uk/pgr/regional/ltp/accessibility/developing/research/accessibilityplanningdevelop3615>

so place greater financial burdens on developers. Development in less accessible places can therefore be more profitable since the developer contributions required by planning authorities are lower. To change this there needs to be a shift from viewing congestion as the main transport problem towards clearer goals for accessibility.

- Scottish Government should revisit the debate on the interaction between business travel plans and parking taxes - The cost of parking is often a hidden subsidy in development. Land with parking on it is not taxed at the value of the land to society. It is in nobody's interests to add costs to business from excessive parking costs. Additional taxes would not be necessary for businesses which are demonstrating they have effective travel plans, and are avoiding where possible the high costs of building and maintaining large car parks for staff. Costs are minimized and businesses competitiveness increased by maintaining effective travel plans for staff and customers in accordance with the national standard for business travel plans⁷.

Competitive bus services

Finally public investment should where possible drive wider investment programmes to create more financially sustainable approaches. In particular current bus provision to support new development (e.g. requirements on developers to provide a bus service) is fragmented, piecemeal, often unsustainable, and costly. Each new development requires incremental changes in the bus network so that public transport supply and demand are in balance. For too much of Scotland land uses have moved on, yet historic bus network patterns remain. Public authorities could potentially get much more from bus companies than they currently achieve by developing partnerships around shared aims. It is critical that public authorities become more invested in the success of the local bus industry, setting clear achievable aims for services and developing contracts and service level agreements to support the public, voluntary and private companies to deliver. Local authorities should be as proud of their local bus services as they are of other successful businesses in their areas.

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⁷ In accordance with PAS2008: national specification for travel plans