

Rt Hon Douglas Alexander MP
Secretary of State for Transport and Scotland

9 June 2006

Dear Secretary of State

Draft Regional Spatial Strategy for the South West

The South West Regional Assembly has recently published the draft Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) which has been submitted to the Department for Communities and Local Government and is now open for public consultation. Attached is a summary, your department will receive a full set which highlights its cross cutting nature and close relationship with the Integrated Regional Strategy should you wish to see it.

The Assembly is a partnership of Councillors from all local authorities in the region and representatives of various sectors with a role in the region's economic, social and environmental well-being. The Assembly is the Regional Planning Body, and as such has worked with a wide range of partners and stakeholders including all local authorities in the region over the last 2 years to prepare the Draft RSS. We would be delighted to host a visit to the South West by you or one of your Ministers at some point in the future.

You will know that the South West Region's population and economy have been growing at a significant rate throughout the 1990s and into this century. Our forecasts, embedded in both the Draft RSS and the Regional Economic Strategy (RES), suggest this will continue into the foreseeable future. Our attitude to growth is clear in the region's Sustainable Communities Plan submission, the Way Ahead, and in the number of places applying for Growth Centre status. The region through its Integrated Regional Strategy 'Just Connect', and particularly through the Draft RSS and RES, recognises the real benefits which can arise from growth, if it is managed properly. Accordingly, our draft RSS is heavily based on principles of sustainable development.

The Regional Spatial Strategy will play a crucial role in the South West's economic, social and environmental wellbeing over the next twenty years and well into the future. There are a number of areas where the RSS, if delivered successfully, will contribute to the delivery of the DfT's objectives – including the shared priorities on transport agreed by the Central Local Partnerships Committee. We have set these out in the appended document, which shows how we believe the RSS can help deliver

DfT's objectives, as defined in Public Service Agreements, and where we think national policy could change to help deliver the RSS.

We hope that you and your colleagues recognise the great progress which has been made in the South West in the last two years in developing challenging strategies which are well integrated and are positive about the future and about growth, and in addressing regional priorities through the Way Ahead and the Regional Funding Allocation (RFA) process. We have set out a number of items where the region needs help from Government if we are to deliver sustainable communities and meet Government's targets for emissions. We would welcome an opportunity to discuss with you and your colleagues the areas outlined below. We would be particularly delighted if that were able to happen in the Region.

There are two immediate issues which the region would be particularly pleased to share with you. These relate to the compatibility of national rail planning estimates of passenger growth in relation to the RSS estimates and delivery of growth and the integration between Highways Agency national performance criteria with those of rail and regional policy objectives. We have previously written to you requesting a meeting to discuss the rail franchise proposals as they affect the south west.

Yours sincerely

Jackie Longworth
Chair, SWRA

Jill Shortland
Deputy Chair, SWRA

Chanel Stevens
Vice Chair, SWRA

Sir Simon Day
Vice Chair, SWRA

Pat Ferguson
Vice Chair, SWRA

Department for Transport Public Service Agreements and the Draft Regional Spatial Strategy for the South West of England

Objective I: Support the economy through the provision of efficient and reliable interregional transport systems by making better use of the existing road network; reforming rail services and industry structures to deliver significant performance improvements for users; and investing in additional capacity to meet growing demand.

- 1. By 2007-08, make journeys more reliable on the strategic road network.*
- 2. Improve punctuality and reliability of rail services to at least 85% by 2006, with further improvements by 2008.*

Section 5 of the draft RSS sets out a wide range of policies on transport which will help make the targets above more achievable. In particular:

Policy TR2 The M4 and M5

The M4 and M5 will be managed and where appropriate improved so as to ensure that they perform their function as the main strategic inter-regional links to London and the Midlands. Measures should seek to maintain the reliability of journey times into and out of the region. Regional stakeholders will work with the Highways Agency to seek a complementary package of measures to manage the demand for travel in relation to the M4/M5, and ensure the most effective use of the trunk road network and reduce congestion, including the implementation of:

- Incident Management;
- Intelligent Technology Measures;
- Information Management; and
- Access Control Measures.

Policy TR3 Second Strategic Route

Regional stakeholders will work with the Highways Agency to achieve a second strategic route into the region from London to dual carriageway standard utilising the A303/A358 in order to improve the resilience of the inter-regional network and maintain the competitiveness of the South West.

Policy TR4 Remainder of the Trunk Road Network

The remainder of the trunk road network will be managed and investment targeted so as to ensure that it performs its strategic function. Measures should seek to maintain safe, efficient operation and reliability of journey times within, into and out of the region. Regional stakeholders will work with the Highways Agency to manage demand so as to avoid congestion compromising the strategic function.

Policy TR5 Inter-regional Rail Network

Rail infrastructure, signalling systems and stations on the strategic inter-regional rail routes will be enhanced so as to ensure the provision of reliable train services with enhanced capacity to meet the growth in demand embodied in the Spatial Strategy. This will include the following:

- improved platform capacity at Reading Station, and junction improvements at Reading;
- additional passing loops between Salisbury and Exeter;
- appropriate engineering measures to secure the long term future of the Great Western route through Dawlish;
- additional track capacity and power supply between Poole and Weymouth;
- new/improved Parkway stations at Gloucester, Worle, Bristol Parkway and Tiverton;
- improved quality and capacity trains, particularly replacement High Speed Trains;
- improved infrastructure at major stations including bus interchange, car and cycle parking, passenger information and waiting facilities;
- direct rail links to Heathrow from the Great Western Main Line;
- investment in the Worle (Weston-super-Mare) loop to facilitate the reliability of inter-regional services;
- development of opportunities to facilitate modal shifts, address overcrowding and improve the network on routes between Wales, Bristol and the south coast by enhancing speeds, frequencies and the capacity of passenger services; and
- re-signalling and route modernisation of the Great Western Main Line.

In submitting our draft RSS, the region has demonstrated its willingness to embrace the growth agenda but has limited resources available 'to make things happen' and to deal with accumulated 'infrastructure deficits'. The region is looking carefully at a Regional Infrastructure Fund to enable forward funding of development and has identified the need for 'capacity building' in its Regional Funding Allocation (RFA) transport bid. In both cases, the Assembly seeks a positive response from government, the necessary resources, and the freedom and flexibility to enable RFA funds to be used for capacity building.

Objective II: Deliver improvements to the accessibility, punctuality and reliability of local and regional transport systems through the approaches set out in Objective I and through increased use of public transport and other appropriate local solutions.

3. By 2010, increase the use of public transport (bus and light rail) by more than 12% in England compared with 2000 levels, with growth in every region.

4. By 2010-11, the ten largest urban areas will meet the congestion targets set in their Local Transport Plan relating to movement on main roads into city centres.

RSS Policies relevant to the achievement of this objective include:

Policy TR1 Demand Management and Public Transport in the Strategically Significant Cities and Towns (SSCTs)

Demand management measures will be introduced progressively in 21 identified SSCTs, accompanied by a 'step change' in the prioritisation of public transport provision serving these places, including bus priority, and better integration of development proposals and public transport provision.

Policy TR6 Inter-regional Bus and Coach Network

LDDs and LTPs should provide for the enhancement of long distance bus and coach services, and should make provision for interchange infrastructure at SSCTs and other nodal centres on the Strategic Road Network.

Policy TR10 Regional Connectivity

A Corridor Management approach making best use of the network will improve the reliability and resilience of journey times for the routes listed in paragraph 5.5.2. As part of a Corridor Management approach, Local Authorities working with the rail and bus industries will develop opportunities to facilitate modal shift, address public transport overcrowding, improve strategic interchanges and improve use of the network. Within the scope of the Corridor Management approach, highway authorities should also develop proposals to reduce the impact of long distance traffic on the built and natural environment and improve the quality of life of communities seeking to improve air quality, and to reduce accidents, severance and the impact of noise.

Policy TR11 Intra-regional Public Transport

Improved rail, bus and coach services will be sought to facilitate sustainable travel between settlements within the region. This will be achieved through the removal of infrastructure constraints; better quality trains and buses/coaches; enhanced station and interchange facilities, station parking and passenger information.

We believe we have a strategy which is in the best long term interests of the region and independent consultants who carried out the Strategic Sustainability Assessment tell us that it is a sustainable approach if it can be delivered; but, we are facing stiff challenges in terms of the effect of climate change on the region – rising sea levels could leave some key transport infrastructure highly vulnerable. There are of course severe limitations on what can be achieved within the powers of the planning system and the resources available to a region.

Objective III: Balance the need to travel with the need to improve quality of life by improving safety and respecting the environment.

5. Reduce the number of people killed or seriously injured in Great Britain in road accidents by 40% and the number of children killed or seriously injured by 50%, by 2010 compared with the average for 1994-98, tackling the significantly higher incidence in disadvantaged communities.

6. Improve air quality by meeting the Air Quality Strategy targets for carbon monoxide, lead, nitrogen dioxide, particles, sulphur dioxide, benzene and 1,3 butadiene. (Joint with the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs).

7. To reduce greenhouse gas emissions to 12.5% below 1990 levels in line with our Kyoto commitment and move towards a 20% reduction in carbon dioxide emissions below 1990 levels by 2010, through measures including energy efficiency and renewables. (Joint with the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and the Department of Trade and Industry).

The core of the draft RSS is based on the notion of using positive planning and development allocations to reduce the need to travel. Future housing development will be geared to 21 main urban centres in the region where 80% of new jobs are forecast to arise. Making these urban centres 'work' in transport terms is key to success of this strategy.

The draft RSS aims to ensure that the impacts of development proposals on air quality are taken into account so that new development will not exacerbate air quality problems in existing and potential Air Quality Management Areas.

The achievement of a more sustainable region is highly conditional upon changes in individual behaviour and upon government policy. The Draft RSS can make only limited progress based on its effect on the scale and distribution of growth. Re-configuring the region so that a higher proportion of people live at the 21 identified Strategically Significant Cities and Towns in 2026 will have a major effect in sustainability terms especially if all local public services are of a consistently high quality. This could be overshadowed, however, by increased emissions from car, and particularly, air travel. Reducing the need to travel by car is at the core of the RSS and as already indicated, encouraging people out of their cars will need the 'carrot' of increased public transport attractiveness and availability (bus and rail) as well as the 'stick' of demand management and possible national traffic reduction targets. When assessing this Draft RSS, Government will need to consider carefully whether its strategy of providing for increased air travel is sustainable in the long term and whether the resourcing of public transport in the South West is adequate

<p>Objective IV: Improve cost-effectiveness through sound financial management, robust cost control, and clear appraisal of transport investment choices across different modes and locations.</p>

While the region has been contemplating the long term future through the RSS and Regional Economic Strategy it has also been addressing shorter term priorities to secure immediate growth through the Way Ahead and the recent Regional Funding Allocation process. In all of this work there are clear messages about the need for adequate resources to build the infrastructure and services which will underpin our future, as well as addressing the unwanted legacy of 'infrastructure deficits.'

The Assembly remains gravely concerned that the resources required to deliver the very substantial investments in social, health, educational and transport infrastructure will not be in place to facilitate the high levels of development envisaged in the Draft RSS. 'Making the cities and large towns work' is a recurring theme in the Draft RSS and in the Regional Funding Allocation. Crucial to this, as well as investment in the programme proposed, is sufficient revenue resources available to enable necessary transport modelling and other master planning work to be carried out and to support growth in public transport services.

**South West Regional Assembly
June 2006**