

**Aberdeenshire Local Transport Strategy**  
Strategic Environmental Assessment  
*Non-Technical Summary - Environmental Report*  
May 2006

Aberdeenshire Council

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# Non-Technical Summary

## 1.1 Introduction

This document summarises the Environmental Report, compiled as part of a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) of the draft Aberdeenshire Local Transport Strategy (LTS). It explains what SEA is and highlights the effects that the Local Transport Strategy is likely to have on the environment. More detailed information regarding the SEA process and its findings are available in the full Environmental Report.

### 1.1.1 *Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA)*

The primary purpose of this SEA is to highlight the potential environmental impacts of the Aberdeenshire LTS. The findings of the SEA enable potential environmental consequences to be addressed early in the development of the LTS, allowing these impacts to be avoided or reduced.

### 1.1.2 *Aberdeenshire Local Transport Strategy (LTS)*

The draft Local Transport Strategy sets out Aberdeenshire Council's vision for transport, proposing actions to implement Scotland's national transport objectives whilst addressing local needs. The Aberdeenshire LTS has a strong focus on sustainability and changing travel behaviour and as such its environmental impacts are broadly positive. The majority of negative environmental impacts tend to result from development proposals such as road infrastructure and to a lesser extent development associated with public transport (e.g. new rail infrastructure), walking and cycling facilities.

## 1.2 The SEA Process

This SEA was required by the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes (Scotland) Regulations 2004. These regulations require the environmental effects of the LTS to be considered throughout its development. SEA should lead to a LTS which has fewer environmental effects. The environmental effects that were considered include effects on human health and safety, pollution, climate change, landscape, historic features, plants and animals.

The SEA process involves several stages, which allow existing environmental problems to be taken into account and to allow the input of various experts. The first stage of the SEA involved a workshop with members of Aberdeenshire Council and environmental organisations to highlight environmental issues and to comment on the proposed method for the SEA.

After the relevant environmental issues and objectives of the SEA were identified, a 'Scoping Report' containing details of these was submitted to Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH), the Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA) and Historic Scotland. These environmental organisations provided comments, which were then taken into account in the SEA.

The next stage of the SEA was to predict the environmental effects of the LTS. Ways to reduce these environmental effects were then proposed. In addition, a plan was developed to monitor the environmental effects, throughout the life of the LTS.

The Environmental Report and draft LTS are now available for public consultation. Comments made by the public will be taken into account in the development of the final Aberdeenshire LTS.

### **1.3 The Environmental Effects of the Local Transport Strategy**

The LTS does not contain detailed information regarding the location and design of developments that have the potential to cause negative environmental impacts. It is therefore very difficult to predict how specific places will be affected. The remainder of this document summarises the types of impacts that are likely due to the types of Actions that each chapter of the draft LTS proposes. Possible ways to remove or reduce some of these impacts are discussed in Section 11 of the full Environmental Report.

#### **1.3.1 *Travel Awareness***

The proposed Actions relating to Travel Awareness focus on changing behaviour to more sustainable transport activities such as walking, cycling, public transport and car sharing. The combined effect of these proposed Actions could have positive effects on local air quality through a reduction in vehicle-related emissions. The extent of improvements are however very much dependent on the degree to which travel behaviour changes due to the LTS. Aspects of this chapter of the LTS also have the potential to improve road safety through a 'Safer Routes to Schools' campaign.

#### **1.3.2 *Walking***

This chapter focuses on improving walking facilities in existing and new developments, including footpaths and pedestrian crossings. The provision of dedicated walking areas and crossings is predicted to have positive effects on road safety and benefits on human health are also predicted through increased physical activity. Footpath design improvements, for example tactile surfaces and dropped kerbs, could also improve accessibility for those with impaired mobility.

Walking facilities can also have negative environmental impacts; footpaths can increase the amount of land required adjacent to roads. In addition, the provision of facilities such as crossings, can contribute to the erosion of the character of the historic built environment.

#### **1.3.3 *Cycling and Motorcycling***

Proposed Actions of the LTS relating to cycling have a focus on providing facilities including dedicated cycle routes, which are likely to improve road safety. Cycle stands and lockers are also predicted to reduce crime. The proposed development of longer-distance cycle routes is likely to improve access to the natural and built environments and to encourage healthy lifestyles. However as with walking facilities, the provision of cycling facilities can have negative effects on landscape/townscape, including affecting the character of historic areas.

But like footpaths, the building of cycleways can have potentially damaging physical impacts e.g. affecting landscape / townscape, biodiversity and the historic environment. In addition, the provision of cycle stands and lockers can have negative visual impacts, depending on design and location. These impacts can be mitigated by careful route selection and design.

The draft LTS proposed Actions relating to motorcyclists have a particular focus on improving rider safety and vehicle security. Awareness campaigns and training aim to improve safety whilst proposed secure parking within town centres would help to reduce theft.

### 1.3.4 *Public Transport*

The LTS Action Plan aims to make public transport 'more attractive to existing and potential users alike' via a number of methods. These include improving services, physical accessibility, affordability and tackling security issues. In addition, improved public transport interchanges and rail infrastructure developments and improvements are planned.

If large numbers of people began to use public transport rather than private vehicles, there would be improvements to overall emissions to air, which could be further improved if less polluting fuels are used by public transport operators. Improvements to public transport services in more remote areas will improve social inclusion through improved accessibility.

Development associated with improvements to public transport infrastructure can however have negative effects on landscape and townscape character, biodiversity and the historic environment.

### 1.3.5 *Freight*

Proposals for promoting transport of more freight by rail and sea rather than road has the potential for environmental benefits, including improvements in air quality, climate change contributions and safety by reducing numbers of HGVs on Aberdeenshire's roads.

Negative impacts relate to the potential for new freight-related developments, including lorry parks and a proposed new major container port. These could have adverse effects on landscape, biodiversity, the historic environment and on water quality.

### 1.3.6 *Local Network Management and Maintenance*

Positive impacts of proposals associated with maintenance and management include improvements to safety through traffic calming schemes, road safety plans, winter maintenance and requirements for developers to provide appropriate lighting. In addition to safety, flooding problems can be improved with the aid of proposals to assess the risk of regularly flooded areas. Proposed improvements to disabled parking are an important contributor to social inclusion.

There are several physical environmental impacts associated with maintenance and management of the transport network. The cumulative impacts of many traffic-calming measures can sometimes be significant, depending on their scale, location and design. The strengthening of weak bridges can also have impacts on the built and historic environment.

Environmental improvements due to maintenance include the conservation of bridges of value in terms of cultural heritage. Appropriate verge maintenance can also have benefits for biodiversity.

### 1.3.7 *External Links*

This aspect of the LTS has a focus on connecting Aberdeenshire with other major centres in Scotland, UK and Europe. This includes support for the proposed Aberdeen Western Peripheral route, improving rail services to Inverness, Glasgow, Edinburgh and other UK destinations and increasing flights to and from Aberdeen.

An Action of the LTS which supports the proposed Aberdeen Western Peripheral Route and other major road infrastructure proposals, has the potential for significant negative environmental impacts, including on landscape, biodiversity and the historic environment in the areas where developments occur. Major public transport infrastructure projects also have the potential to create similar negative environmental impacts. However, improved rail services to major centres in Scotland and the UK could reduce the need to travel by air and private car.

## 1.4 Conclusions

The LTS is likely to result in some negative impacts. Impacts of development associated with activities such as footpaths and cycle ways can potentially be mitigated through design, careful selection of routes and avoidance of sensitive areas. Such measures should ensure that policies are positive overall. Similar issues surround the mitigation of major road and rail infrastructure but often they are harder to achieve.

A key strength of the draft LTS, in terms of SEA, is its focus on changing behaviour to use of more sustainable transport methods. This is presented as specific Actions, which are directly relevant to Aberdeenshire and should contribute to reducing negative impacts caused by motorised road users on for example, local air quality, CO<sub>2</sub> emissions and noise. Major issues relating to transport and the local area are highlighted and the LTS recognises that difficult decisions have to be made in the short-term in order to address current and future transport and environmental issues. Taking a long-term approach is fundamental to sustainable development.