Submission to the Assembly Regional Development Committee Inquiry into Sustainable Transport

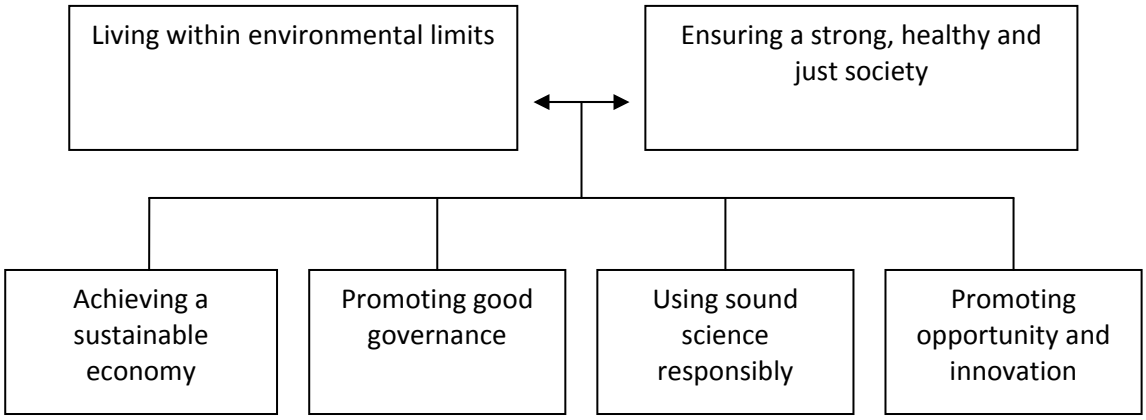
September 2009

1. The Sustainable Development Commission (SDC)

1.1. The SDC is the Government's independent advisor on sustainable development, reporting to the Prime Minister, the First Ministers of Scotland and Wales and, in Northern Ireland, the First and Deputy First Minister. Through advocacy, advice, appraisal and capacity-building, we help to place sustainable development at the heart of Government policy.

1.2. The SDC thanks the Committee for its invitation to submit a written response to this inquiry and welcomes the opportunity to contribute to this important initiative. The SDC recognises the need for a modal shift in transport patterns and attitudes in Northern Ireland, as a contributory factor in the move towards a low-carbon society. This will involve fundamental changes in the operation of government and business and in all of our lives as citizens and consumers. The SDC believes that the only consistent, effective and equitable way to meet this challenge is through the framework of sustainable development – applying the six principles of sustainable development agreed in our strategy, *First Steps to Sustainability.*

The principles of sustainable development



2. The current situation

2.1 Currently transport accounts for 25% of Northern Ireland's greenhouse gas emissions – and this percentage of the total has been increasing rapidly.

2.2 Northern Ireland's per capita greenhouse gas emissions of 12.83 tonnes pre annum lies above the UK average of 10.48 tonnes.

2.3 There is a striking imperative to bring forward targeted policies to counter this growth.

2.4 In Northern Ireland 82% of the total distance travelled is by car, about 7% on public transport, with the rest made up of taxis, walking, motor cycles and so on (Roads Service)

2.5 From 2006-07 to 2007-08 the number of passenger journeys on Ulsterbus rose 1% from 43.4 million to 43.9 million. On Metro services, passenger journeys have increased 8% from 24.1 million to 26.0 million[1]

2.6 During 2007-08 there were 9.5 million rail passenger journeys made, an increase of 12% from 2006-07.[2]

2.7 There were 97,463 air transport movements (landings and takeoffs) during 2007, an increase of 9% on the 2006 figure of 89,822.[3]

2.8 In 2007 the most frequently used method of travel to work in Northern Ireland was car, van or minibus, with 84% of the workforce interviewed in October to December using these methods. This compares to 70% in the United Kingdom as a whole.[4]

2.9 During 2007-08, 806,483 tonnes of petroleum and diesel were delivered for use in Northern Ireland. This is 6% more than the 759,076 tonnes in 2006-07.[5]

2.10 According to the Roads Service 2005-2007 Travel Survey for Northern Ireland:

2.11 Car journeys were, on average, just over seven miles long

2.12 Nearly one fifth (17%) of all journeys were less than one mile long, and just over two thirds of these were on foot (68%).

2.13 The number of people travelling to work by car in Belfast fell from 67% in 2004 - 2006 to 59% by 2007. At the same time, those using the bus rose from 10 to 12% and those walking rose from 16 to 21%.

[1] DRD Annual Transport Statistics 2007-08
[2] DRD Annual Transport Statistics 2007-08
[3] DRD Annual Transport Statistics 2007-08
[4] DRD Annual Transport Statistics 2007-08
[5] DRD Annual Transport Statistics 2007-08

3. Travel Choices

3.1 A raft of influences determines our travel decisions. These range from emotional attachment to and pride in car ownership, to the practical requirement for safe, comfortable and reliable modes of transport.

3.2 Cost and underlying infrastructure are also important.

4. Travel and Sustainable Development principles

Applying sustainable development principles to transport requires:

- Reduction in the need to travel and encouraging a better work-life balance.
- Reduction in greenhouse emissions associated with travel through choosing more efficient transport means.
- Promotion of health and well being and thereby reducing work absenteeism.
- Reducing the strain placed on existing infrastructure.
- Reducing overheads for government departments.

Fundamentally the SDC advocates a four strand approach to transport:

4.1 Government should aim to reduce demand for motorised transport. Increased demand for 'active travel' (cycling and walking) should be viewed positively. Demand reduction should be achieved through the widest possible application of spatial planning, fiscal interventions, behavioural change and technological measures (e.g. teleconferencing/ICT, working from home, home shopping, travel planning.

4.2 There needs to be a modal shift to more sustainable and space efficient modes – this should focus on two areas in priority order:

i. Shifting away from motorised modes to cycling and walking due to the multitude of benefits this creates (congestion reduction, health and air quality improvements, noise reduction, greater social cohesion). A range of measures including reducing speed limits, restricting motorised transport access and creating high quality, safe and attractive routes for cyclists and pedestrians can be employed.

ii. Shifting from private motor vehicles to public transport. Increasing passenger numbers on existing public transport improves efficiency. Regular public transport users also tend to have higher levels of walking and cycling. This category should include measures to improve inter-modality between different forms of public transport and active travel, i.e. bus/train/cycle.

4.3 Efficiency improvements to existing transport modes are required – this is a broad category covering a range of possible options including: legislation to mandate vehicle efficiency improvements; encouraging higher vehicle occupancy rates; promotion of car clubs; eco-driving; measures to spread demand peaks on public transport; measures to promote more efficient use of existing transport networks.

4.4 Capacity increases for motorised transport – only once the full potential impacts of 1-3 have been appraised, an explicit delivery programme determined, and the full effects of that programme included in assessing the residual role for 4. Any capacity increases that are required should be prioritised to the most efficient modes.

5. Private Transport

There will always be a demand and a need for access to some form of private transport, but the committee should address the particular overdependence on the car as a mode of transport in Northern Ireland.

5.1 Cars will always be an important part of our transport system

5.2 The problem at the moment is that <u>people feel they don't have a choice</u> other than to own and use cars. Across the UK cars account for:
78% of 2-3 mile trips[6]
80% of all trips of 5 miles or more[7]
58% of our domestic transport emissions[8]

5.3 People want a choice:
45% of people would like to reduce their car use[9]
62% of people would use their car less if public transport were better[10]
87% of people agree that cycling should be encouraged but 74% agree that 'cycling on busy roads frightens me'.[11] Just 2% of all trips are by bike
80% believe the current level of car use has a serious effect on the climate

5.4 DfT's own research further backs this up[12]:
"nearly half of drivers say they would like to drive less than they do"
"Over 90% of people are in favour of action to enable or encourage more walking to improve personal fitness, and a majority (though not so large) also supports encouragement of cycling for this reason."

[6] The Car in British Society – RAC Foundation, April 2009
[7] The Car in British Society – RAC Foundation, April 2009
[8] Low Carbon Transport – A Greener Future, Department for Transport, July 2009
[9] 2007 Survey of "Public Attitudes and Behaviours Towards the Environment" for Defra
[10] RAC Report on Motoring 2008
[11] CTC Safety in Numbers Campaign May 2009
[12] Glen Lyons et al, June 2008, *Public attitudes to transport: Knowledge review of existing evidence* http://www.dft.gov.uk/pgr/scienceresearch/social/evidence.pdf

6. Recommendations

6.1 SDC wants people to have a choice and it wants people to be able to choose the most sustainable and lowest carbon ways of meeting their transport needs.

6.2 We recommend the following policies:
Firstly we do support the government's initiatives to promote ultra-low carbon vehicles. It is necessary to develop much more efficient vehicles to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and our reliance on oil. However simply substituting much more efficient vehicles into current transport trends is clearly not sustainable.

As outlined previously we advocate a hierarchical approach to transport:

i) Demand reduction
ii) Modal shift to more sustainable modes
iii) Efficiency improvements
iv) Capacity increases only when all the above have been fully applied.

6.3 So Government should:

a) Promote ways to reduce the number of motorised journeys people have to make:
- Better spatial planning - designing communities in which people can meet their transport needs by walking and cycling
- Promoting home-working, video and audio conferencing to reduce the number of journeys people have to make
- Encouraging home shopping
- Promoting travel planning - ensuring all employers and schools have an active and effective travel plan in place which is monitored annually

b) Create an environment in which people can choose more sustainable modes when they do travel:
- Substantially increase funding to create a safe and attractive environment for walking and cycling
- Improve public transport information and service quality such that door to door journeys are made as easy and convenient as possible

c) Improve the efficiency of existing modes
- Promote the development and growth of car sharing schemes such as car clubs and concepts such as walk up and drive car clubs. 46% of drivers do less than 5000 miles a year. For these people being a member of a car club would be a more sustainable and probably cheaper option than owning their own car, or at least, owning a second car.
- Promote liftsharing and focus on reducing inefficient single occupancy car use
- Introduce congestion charging and road pricing while providing improved alternatives to car use.

7. Best Use of Cars

7.1 The major advantage of cars over public transport is that they enable door to door journeys. The only other form of transport which offers this is the bicycle.

7.2 Cars are best used for transporting several people together, particularly over longer journeys which are too far to cycle or if carrying heavy or bulky loads. An economical car carrying two or more people is a relatively efficient means of transport in terms of energy consumption and CO_2 emissions per passenger kilometre.

7.3 Of course there are many other impacts associated with car use - deaths and serious injuries on the roads, noise, air and water pollution[13], and the effects of traffic on communities and children.

7.4 The most inefficient use of cars is for individuals making shorter journeys, yet these account for the vast majority of car journeys. Fuel consumption is up to twice as high on short journeys and single occupancy cars are very space inefficient, creating urban congestion.

7.5 Whilst technological advances such as electric cars will help decrease fuel consumption and reduce overall emissions, we must point out that they will not combat other difficulties such as congestion in built up areas, health problems associated with obesity, and increased risk of traffic accidents. However the SDC believes that the Committee should look at the wider role of electric transport as part of an integrated solution – the benefits that it could provide are clear.

7.6 Park & Ride systems offering free parking and aimed primarily at car users are likely to encourage short, single occupancy journeys. They fail to take advantage of the car's ability to make door to door journeys. In addition, if they attract large numbers of people, they need large car parking areas.
When Park & Ride systems are introduced, it is essential that they do not simply lead to an increase in overall parking provision otherwise they are likely to increase overall car use. There should be a simultaneous reduction in city centre car parking in line with the overall ambition to reduce car use.

7.7 SDC believes transport policy should aim to:

1) integrate public transport primarily with walking and cycling rather than cars

2) focus on reducing single occupancy car use

7.8 Various other options designed to lower car ownership and usage should be explored. Examples would include:

i. Car leasing and car clubs which would be attractive to city dwellers who want to avoid the hassle and worry of car ownership.

[13] Environment Agency - *Underground, Under Threat*

ii. City Centre residential developments could have a small on site car pool included in the purchase price – residents could then book a pool car as and when required. This would not only reduce car ownership but also reduce congestion in the city centre.
iii. Employers could promote 'Green Commuting' policies and provide incentives for staff to explore transport options other than the car. For example, In Kent, pharmaceutical company Pfizer is paying its employees £2 a day not to drive to work, while here Bombardier is facilitating tax friendly schemes for employees to purchase bicycles. Similar pilot schemes are being developed within the Northern Ireland Civil Service. Insurance company Unum Provident offers incentives (such as time off) to employees who walk or cycle to work.
iv. These are not only positive developments from an environmental or health perspective – green travel policies are also often cheaper than providing car parks, and far cheaper than building new roads.
v. There is also an opportunity for the public sector in Northern Ireland to take a lead role in reducing private transport. Government departments and local council buildings, particularly in our larger towns and cities, should address the reality that providing large staff car parks in built up urban areas only encourages staff to use them. By cutting down on this available space and providing incentives to staff not to drive to work, as outlined above, positive behaviour change can be achieved.
vi. On a wider scale the committee should also note that there is a large amount of relatively cheap and available car parking spaces in our towns and cities. This does not promote a shift to more sustainable modes of transport. Of course, ensuring that a fully integrated public transport system is able to step in and replace the car is another challenge.
vii. Nottingham City Council are the latest authority to consider the introduction of a Workplace Parking Levy for large businesses in the city centre – all the money raised by the levy would go into improving public transport and managing congestion problems.

8. Public Transport

8.1 A fully integrated public transport system is key to a sustainable transport system. It must cater for dispersed rural communities as much as it does for urban dwellers.

8.2 Enhanced public transport provision and other non-car measures must be targeted at disadvantaged areas first.

8.3 A reliable and easy to access system must be the goal – making best use of new technology to help public transport users. For example, Intermodal journey planners allow travellers to plan their journey across more than one mode of transport. Advanced systems incorporate real-time information into their computations, capturing incidents as they happen.

8.4 The SDC would recommend that the committee look in to examples of best practice in city transportation systems, such as Freiburg in Germany and Curitiba in Brazil. Indeed the most successful urban transport initiatives remodel the infrastructure to make travel fast and convenient, effectively creating demand for public transport use in the same way that the infrastructure of traditional cities create demand for private motor vehicles. For example, continuous priority lanes should be created on all strategic corridors into major urban areas.

9. Healthy Transport

9.1 The SDC believes that carbon and health impacts should be considered in all transport decisions. Ultimately it must be recognised that a truly sustainable transport system is by definition one which only uses the earth's resources at a speed at which they can be replenished. In comparison to today, this will inevitably require that we all travel less far and less fast. Walking and cycling will need to become the normal modes of transport for short journeys.

9.2 Simply put, we also need to pedestrianise more of our urban areas and reduce car parking to make people, not cars, the prime consideration in urban areas. The introduction of dedicated cycle lanes, physically separated from motor traffic should be promoted when and where possible. Many people are wary of using cycle lanes at the side of busy urban roads as they simply do not feel safe, particularly during rush hour.

9.3 Of course government should promote the associated short and long term health benefits of this transport shift, considering active and public transport as a public health enabler. Government should also consider introducing 20mph speed limits in residential areas and around schools, thus helping to lower the number of fatal collisions and helping communities to engage with local transport solutions.

9.4 We also believe that the committee should look into the prospect of developing a number of 'sustainable travel towns' in Northern Ireland, were best practice models can be put in place and were behaviour change in travel patterns can be studied and the benefits promoted. Pilot projects in other regions have proven to be very successful, for example, Darlington, Peterborough, and Worcester.

10. Aviation

10.1 While air transport will continue to be part of our future transport networks we must use other technological advances to cut out the need for unnecessary air travel. We must also ensure that air and sea travel are included in future emissions budgets as part of a dedicated overall Northern Ireland budget. Cutting down on emissions does not need to mean cutting down on economic outputs but it will help the Government and business to think carefully about the best ways of pursuing

economic growth in Northern Ireland. The Committee should also consider if the public transport options available to people travelling to and from our major airports are sufficient.

10.2 Government should also use aviation taxation revenues to improve active and public transport system.

11. Further Information

This submission can only introduce some limited aspects of the wide number of issues embraced by the extensive terms of reference for this important Inquiry. SDC will be pleased to expand on these comments with an oral presentation, if the Committee would find that helpful.

Sustainable Development Commission
Northern Ireland
September 2009