

COMMITTEE FOR REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

INQUIRY INTO SUSTAINABLE TRANSPORT

To explore and clarify the social, environmental and economic aspects of sustainable transport.

The need for Sustainable Transport has been established for many years, and is part of the vision of the Regional Transportation Strategy for Northern Ireland, but in practice has been largely ignored.

In 1994, the Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution published a report on Transport and the Environment. Sir John Houghton the then Chair said "Ways must be found to make the longer term development of transport environmentally sustainable."

In 2007, the same Commission published a report on the Urban Environment which highlighted the web of externalities and connections between increased car use and environmental and social outcomes and deficits.

The Energy Saving Trust in its 2007 Green Barometer showed Northern Ireland, after the inclusion of transport, to have the highest index of CO₂ emissions in the UK despite having the highest levels of economic inactivity in the UK.

The Institute of Public Health in Ireland, in March 2005, published a Review of the Health Impacts of Transport. The review concluded "Transport policy makers are in a powerful position to promote the positive and mitigate the negative effects which their decisions may have on the public's health."

The International Energy Authority in its 2008 World Energy Outlook stated that "The era of cheap oil is over".

The Committee for Regional Development responding to the Northern Ireland Assembly Committee for the Environment Inquiry into Climate Change clearly catalogued:

1. The lack of linkage between Northern Ireland Transport Policy and Emission Reduction.
2. The understanding that tackling Climate Change is a Pro-Growth Strategy as the effects of Climate Change will ultimately damage and constrain economic growth. (Stern)
3. The complexities of Transport Emission Reduction (Eddington).
4. The imbalance between Road and Public Transport Spending in Northern Ireland.

To identify the policies, attitudes and technologies likely to underpin a move to more Sustainable Transport in Northern Ireland

Elevate the Northern Ireland political debate from the populist to the informed level. For example Bairbre de Brun who has knowledge of best European practice and is a Member of the European Parliament's Climate Change Committee speaking in Lurgan in Feb 2009 said:

"In transport there are a number of necessary shifts in policy which we need to get to grips with. Decades of underinvestment in our transport services mean a culture of car dependency has evolved in our country. This dependency must be broken by providing efficient and sustainable public transport networks in cities, towns and rural areas. By arguing for decent and sufficient public investment in our public, and I stress public, transport services we remove the excuse for excessive car usage in every day life

"There needs to be detail in the Programme for Government with regard to how we are going to meet carbon emission targets and how this will affect policy in different departments such as DRD".

Yet the local DRD Minister was quoted recently by Local Transport Today,

"Murphy, 46, took the regional development portfolio in 2007 (after a renewed period of direct rule between 2002 and 2007). He is currently leading a review of the RDS and RTS but seems satisfied that the overall pattern of expenditure between roads and public transport is appropriate. The ten-year investment strategy (2008/09-2017/18) actually envisages £725m being spent on public transport – including new vehicles and the Belfast rapid transit scheme – though this is dwarfed by the £3.1bn earmarked for roads."

The above exemplifies the need to educate and inform local politicians and the public at large about the externalised costs of a transport system which is car dependent and clearly identifying the features and benefits of a transport system built on sustainability.

Introduce policies which properly link health, environment, wellbeing, inclusion and economic activity.

Undertake an immediate review of cost-benefit methodology of road building appraisal. The current methodology gives more weighting to an obese man, driving a single occupancy 4x4 to a hot food bar for a gravy chip than a young mum cycling with her children to school and work.

63% of all journeys within Northern Ireland are 5 miles or less. (Travel Survey 2005-2007).

Promote walking for the one mile or less journey and cycling for the journeys up to and around 5 miles. 97% of all rural dwellers live within 5 miles of amenities see http://www.foe.co.uk/resource/reports/ni_pps14_report_qub.pdf

Introduce policies which make cycling and walking safer and a more attractive option than taking a car, including, to discourage car use, segmenting urban areas, restraining parking and introduce parking charges which reflect the full external costs. This should include suburban and out of town retail centres which currently offer free parking.

Prioritise cycling and walking over the car and acknowledge sustainable transport hierarchy at all times.

Introduce soft measures, based on psychological and sociological research, which have been shown to achieve behaviour change and modal shift

Introduce a National Standard on Road Cycle Training for all primary 6 pupils and all learner drivers. The recent cycle training scheme in the Merseyside LTA can be used as an exemplar.

Research and apply the economic benefits of sustainable transport. "Towards a Healthier Economy" published by Transform Scotland has a model.

Economic research published by Cycling England shows that moving 109 people from sedentary travelling to cycling saves £1million. The CTC's "A new vision for cycling" and "Safety in Numbers" gives another model that can be easily modified to the requirements of Northern Ireland.

The Good News of moving from a car based system of transport to one based on active travel and public transport are:

1. A reduction in Health Costs,
 - a. Obesity and road traffic collisions in NI cost £one billion per annum
2. Enhanced levels of well being of children,
 - a. See UN report which ranked the UK 24th out of 25 countries.
3. Social Inclusion
4. Cycling and walking policies are the cheapest public health and transport buys.
5. Cycling schemes show cost-benefits of up to 1:30 when most road construction schemes rarely achieve 1:2.

6. Reduce dependence on fossil fuels which are imported from politically unstable regions of the world and are subject to increasing levels of economic nationalism and price increase.
7. Northern Ireland does not have any major car manufacturing plants. Spending money on imported cars and imported fuel displaces spending that would otherwise be put directly into the Northern Ireland Economy.

Electric cars

Electric cars are seen by some as the answer to emission reduction. Moving to battery technology will require a huge increase in generating capacity and grid enhancement and will not solve the problem of congestion and inefficient use of urban space

To make recommendations arising out of the above investigations and report to the Assembly.

This final term of reference applies to the Committee itself.