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Dear Sir

Written response by the Chartered Institution of Highways & Transportation – Northern Ireland Branch to the Consultation on the revised ‘Regional Transportation Strategy 2011’

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The Chartered Institution of Highways and Transportation (CIHT) is a learned society concerned specifically with the planning, design, construction, maintenance and operation of land-based transport systems and infrastructure. It serves the transport profession for the benefit of society and its members.

With over 12,000 members, working across a wide range of disciplines, CIHT aims to promote the exchange of knowledge, improve policy formulation, stimulate debate on transportation issues, recognise individual competence and encourage best practice in the industry.

2.0 REVISED ‘REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION STRATEGY 2011’ CONSULTATION DOCUMENT

CIHT believes that a modern, efficient transport infrastructure is a vital component for economic prosperity.

The Regional Transportation Strategy (2002), endorsed by the Assembly, provided a much needed framework for transportation development in Northern Ireland. While much successful work has been done to implement the RTS, there is still much to be done and it is timely that there should be a review to reflect changes in priorities since the RTS was published.

CIHT believes any review of the RTS must deal with a number of key issues:

- a. Sustainable transport and climate change.**
- b. Maintaining and Safely Operating our Transportation Network.**
- c. Making better use of our Networks.**
- d. Making Targeted Infrastructure Improvements.**

It is important that transportation plans are realistic and realisable and do not promise what cannot be afforded. It seems likely that funding constraints will dominate transport investment over the next 5 to 10 years.

In addition, the process will need strong commitment and leadership from Government and recognition that behavioural change will need to be accepted by the travelling public if we are to move away from a private car dominated transport system to one in which public transport plays a far greater role.

The approach adopted in the Public Consultation Document seems to offer an entirely new approach setting aside the good work done in 2002. CIHT would have preferred a review of the existing RTS as set out in the previous consultation exercise to which CIHT responded in December 2009. Nevertheless, answers to the questions set out in your Public Consultation Document are set out below:-

Chapter 2

Question 1 *What do you believe are the major challenges to delivering an improved and more sustainable transportation infrastructure here?*

Answer The major challenges are to influence people's behaviour and really affect 'hearts and minds' while working within much tighter budget constraints. Significant progress has been made on the region's transportation system through implementation of the RTS. It will be necessary to ensure in the future that the benefits achieved are not lost, for example, the average age of bus fleet has significantly improved, however current budget may impact on this. Maintenance backlog has continued to rise - and could continue at increased rate with major impacts on safety, journey times, operation costs of vehicle fleets and ultimately the economy.

Question 2 *What are the challenges for society?*

Answer People need to be willing to consider where they live, work and play to reduce the need to travel. They need to use more public transport, especially at peak traffic times, and adapt to using more fuel efficient means of transport.

Question 3 Are they challenges for you as an individual?

Answer Yes, the challenges for society are actually a challenge for every individual.

Question 4 How should DRD respond to these challenges?

Answer DRD should maximise public transport opportunities to build on the growth of rail travel and reverse the slow decline in bus travel. Investment in road infrastructure should be targeted to achieve maximum benefit, such as at bottlenecks, or to facilitate economic growth. The Department should also seek to ensure within the new RTS that the region benefits from an integrated transport system that meets the needs of society. With a focus on people and communities rather than vehicles, DRD must develop arrangements to ensure that Government Departments co-operate on delivery of their transport programmes (eg health and education) to share resources, reduce duplication, improve access to key services and activities and reduce the need for unnecessary travel.

Question 5 Do you agree that particular interests such as freight, active travel and the needs of older and disabled people should be mainstreamed in the Strategy rather than being considered separately?

Answer It is difficult to answer this question as how do you 'mainstream an interest'. This very much depends on the potential 'ring-fencing' of funding and targets for these interests/activities. There is however a good case for mainstreaming all interests into the main strategy to ensure that in the interests of equality all elements/users are included in policy and decision making. There will be a need to provide more detailed sectoral direction at a lower level.

Chapter 3

Question 6 Do you agree/disagree that growing the economy in a sustainable way should be at the core of our strategy and if so why/why not?

Answer There is an unbreakable link between growth in travel and economic growth and therefore growing the economy in a sustainable way must be at the core of the strategy.

Question 7 What do you see as advantages or disadvantages in this approach?

Answer Economic growth is essential to pay for social, health and education services and without which the people of NI will suffer a decline in living standards.

Question 8 Do you agree with the strategic objectives proposed?

Answer In general we agree with the Strategic Objectives proposed but there should be a reference to the link between transport and development planning. The ongoing trend for permitting housing in the countryside while the population of the Belfast Metropolitan Area declines, inevitably makes all of the desirable travel targets harder to achieve, particularly when Belfast is viewed as the economic hub of the region.

It is inappropriate to include Improving Safety as a ranked objective, as Improving safety should be a key feature of all objectives (*see below).

It seems inappropriate to include a specific objective – Improve connections to key tourism sites - over and above other key destinations as, in transport assessment terms, this doubles the weighting of any project assessed against the objectives. We suggest deleting the tourism objective and amending the first objective to read – Improve connectivity within the region including connections to key tourism sites (**see below).

Question 9 Please rank the strategic objectives as you see them (see table on page 34)?

Answer

1	Improve connectivity within the region
3	More efficiently use road space and railways
2	Better maintain transport infrastructure
6	Improve access in our towns and cities
5	Improve access in rural areas
**	Improve connections to key tourism sites
*	Improve safety
7	Improve social inclusion
4	Develop transport programmes focussed on the user
8	Reduce greenhouse gas emissions from transport
9	Protect our biodiversity
10	Reduce noise and air pollution

Question 10 Are there other strategic objectives that you believe should be included?

Answer The coordination of the RTS and the RDS should be ranked as the top priority.

Making targeted infrastructure improvements.

Chapter 4

Question 11 Do you agree with the interventions listed?

Answer The Transportation Interventions listed are all commendable but somewhat general.

Question 12 Have you any other interventions to suggest or any alternative wording that you would prefer?

Answer The interventions don't mention any major highway schemes (only improvements at bottlenecks) so where would the A5 & A8 schemes sit? Also there is no mention of investment in rolling stock or railway infrastructure or investment in buses or bus stations.

Chapter 5

Question 13 Do you agree with our proposals for a prioritisation framework?

Answer The prioritisation framework appears very thorough but care should be taken when allocating scores to differing factors and then adding up all the scores to give a decision. Will prospective public transport schemes be weighted/scored differently from capital road building schemes?

CIHT will wait until we see the results before giving an answer to this question. Comparing such diverse issues is fraught with difficulty and can become very subjective. It is important within appraisals not to 'double-count' the benefits and this could occur with some of the proposed objectives. As previously noted in answer to question 8, safety should be an overarching requirement, whatever project/intervention is being considered.

Question 14 Have you any other priority mechanism to suggest?

Answer The economic return on projects should still be an important consideration, and this is required for Business Case from DFP.

Some of the above answers contain questions in return, to which we look forward to hearing a response. We also seek clarification on the following points:-

Question 15 What is the definition of a 'transportation intervention', as most of our members found the terminology to be ambiguous.

Question 16 On page 54 of the document, there is a flowchart showing the process for producing a 'Draft Delivery Plan 2015'. Does this mean that the revised RTS will be renamed?

Question 17 There is no timeline associated with the flowchart, though can you confirm that the target for publishing the revised RTS will be October 2011?

Question 18 Can you confirm the timescale for the revised RTS? The document appears to be dated 2011, but yet the programming appears to be post-2015?

Question 19 If this is the case, how is the Strategy managed for the period between 2011 and 2015?

Question 20 Will the interventions differentiate between what is desirable, what is affordable and what must be done to meet air quality targets?

On page 53 (para 5) of the Consultation Document, it is stated that once strategic objectives have been determined, DRD will work with 'key stakeholders' to develop an agreed Policy Prioritisation Framework and scoring guidance. **CIHT would like to be part of this stakeholder group.**

CIHT trusts the Department will take these answers into account when finalising the revised RTS document, and, in the interim, look forward to a response to the questions raised by our membership and being invited to be part of the stakeholder group.

Yours faithfully

ROISIN BOYLE
Honorary Secretary
CIHT – Northern Ireland Branch