



Greener Transport Council

March 25, 2024

Department for Transport National Networks National Policy Statement

Dear ,

I am writing on behalf of the Greener Transport Council, to raise serious concern over the content of the National Networks National Policy Statement (NNNPS) tabled by the Department for Transport (DfT) on 6th March. In particular, it is clear that the DfT is seeking to remove meaningful consideration of the carbon impacts of the Road Investment Strategy from the decision-making and appeals process. This is despite the recommendations of both the Committee on Climate Change (CCC) and the Transport Select Committee, both issued in October 2023. I set out our key concerns below.

There are other aspects of the NNNPS and the responses to the Transport Select Committee Inquiry and Consultation which trouble the Council. However, these three are the most important. Unless there is a resolution against it, then the NNNPS will be automatically designated on 23rd April. There is a Parliamentary Debate on the **afternoon of 26th March** and we conclude by posing three questions which we believe the Secretary of State should answer..

1. Strategic Need

The NNNPS makes the case that investment in strategic road (and rail) investment is necessary to reduce congestion and improve safety, although it should be recognized that this is relative to doing nothing, not an absolute improvement in congestion. It goes on to state that “Effective operation and optimisation of both the SRN [Strategic Road Network] and the local road network are essential to achieve the outcomes set by the Transport Decarbonisation Plan.” (p21, emphasis added).

Neither the Transport Decarbonisation Plan nor the more recent Carbon Budget Delivery Plan provide an assessment of the extent to which such investment programmes will reduce carbon. Many other policies are listed and assessed, including those with emissions savings as low as 0.1MtC per annum. There is no evidence that such an assessment has been done on which to base this claim. Indeed, the DfT declined the CCC’s request to review the roads programme for its carbon implications. The carbon implications of the roads programme have been one of the key areas of challenge for roads schemes in RIS2. If the purpose of NNNPS is to provide greater clarity over future strategic programmes, such that Development Consent Orders can be delivered more rapidly, then this is a significant area of weakness which we find to be indefensible.

2. Whole Economy Test

Clause 5.41 states that schemes which, after mitigation efforts have been considered, may still produce an increase in emissions can be considered for approval. This provision is controversial. However, it is the test against which the significance of any such emissions increase is assessed to be important which is problematic. Clause 5.42 states that “where the increase in carbon emissions resulting from the proposed scheme are so significant that it



would have a material impact on the ability of government to achieve its statutory carbon budgets, the Secretary of State should refuse consent.” This means that the assessment of each scheme will be against the overall national carbon budget. Of course, if one scheme were to be looked at in isolation then, relative to the whole economy, it could be considered very small. However, road and rail schemes are part of a national programmes of investment. As a parallel, in accounting for the carbon benefits of active travel investments, the programme *is* aggregated when presented in the Carbon Budget Delivery Plan. If each cycle scheme was assessed individually then, of course, the outcome would be negligible in the national carbon budget. It is difficult to see where the individual scheme logic ends.

Equally importantly in Clause 5.42 is the question as to who assesses whether or not there is headroom for additional carbon. The Government sets out its position on achieving carbon reduction across the economy through the Net Zero Strategy and the associated Carbon Budget Delivery Plan. This task enables the Government to mark its own homework in deciding whether there is headroom for a scheme. The Climate Change Committee’s 2023 Progress Report to Parliament suggested that 37% of the Government’s policies have some risks, significant risks or insufficient policies. Fundamentally, the NNNPS is being written to permit an increase in emissions when we are already not on-track to meet our future carbon budgets. The scale of this gap is not trivial and a programme of investment the size of RIS3 is not evidently compatible with our current carbon budget position. However, the CCC’s assessment is not relevant in the current document.

3. National, Regional and Local Responsibilities

Our final point relates to the relationship between national, regional and local responsibilities. In deciding that the assessment of transport schemes should only be against the whole economy carbon assessment the NNNPS sets out in Clauses 2.22 and 2.23 “The statutory carbon budgets are the only legally binding carbon targets, so we have removed references to regional or sectoral targets.” And “there may be practical difficulties in applying a local, sector-specific carbon reduction target to one. We consider the current approach, where Examining Authorities and decision-makers decide what (if any) weight to give to local targets, having regard to any Government guidance on local transport plans, to be preferable.”

The legal position on national targets being the focus of the Climate Change Act is unarguable. However, the provisions as set out here suggest that there is no need to pay any attention to the provisions of Regional Transport Strategies or Local Transport Plans. Local areas may simply have to accept the additional traffic and carbon burdens of changes to the SRN. The Transport Decarbonisation Plan states that “LTPs will also need to set out how local areas will deliver ambitious quantifiable carbon reductions in transport, taking into account the differing transport requirements of different areas. This will need to be in line with carbon budgets and net zero.” (p151). The guidance on LTPs has not been produced and neither has the guidance on quantifiable carbon budgets but what is set out here is quite clearly a divergence from the Transport Decarbonisation Plan. There is a much broader significance of the provisions in the NNNPS on the role and significance of regional, local or sectoral targets. We note, for example, that the CCC takes a sectoral approach to scrutiny.

In conclusion

On the basis of our assessment we would ask that you take the opportunity of the debate on 26th March to ask the Secretary of State:

- 1) Whether an assessment of the carbon implications of future road building has indeed been done?
- 2) Given that more than a third of the carbon reduction aims set out by government are assessed as having no policy or risks in delivery - how will a Secretary of State for



Transport determine if the whole of Government is on track or not in making a determination on a scheme?

- 3) Whether the plan to require local authorities to submit local transport plans in line with net zero goals, as set out in the TDP, has now been abandoned? If not, then how is this consistent with the provisions of the NNNPS?

I would be happy to answer any further queries regarding our analysis.

Yours sincerely

Professor Greg Marsden
Chair, Greener Transport Council
Professor of Transport Governance



ANNEX

About Greener Transport Council

An independent group of experts focused on accelerating the decarbonisation of transport and the transition to net zero in a fair and just way. The primary purpose is to help ensure that emissions reductions are delivered at the scale and pace required to achieve net zero, including crucial interim targets. The Council's focus is on how the 2030 net zero transport targets can be achieved. The GTC is an entirely voluntary organization. <https://greener-vision.com/council/>

Greener Transport Council Members

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