



A5 Western Transport Corridor (A5 WTC)

Appendix TNI – Theme Report: Strategic Context and Policy

15 July 2016

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1. In September 2001, the Department for Regional Development formulated 'Shaping Our Future: the Regional Development Strategy for Northern Ireland 2025' (RDS 2025). This strategy was intended to guide the future development of the region up to 2025. It also provided guidance on a range of social, economic and environmental matters which are implemented through the plans and strategies of Government Departments.
2. An integral feature of the RDS 2025 was the requirement to develop a Regional Transportation Strategy having a vision of *"a modern, integrated and sustainable transportation system which benefits society, the economy and the environment and which actively contributes to social inclusion and everyone's quality of life"*. The RDS 2025 identified a Regional Strategic Transport Network (RSTN) which *'has a fundamental role to play in contributing to the achievement of sustainable progress on social, economic and development goals in Northern Ireland.'* As well as identifying the need to extend travel choice and change travel culture, the RDS 2025 identified the need (SPG-TRAN 1) *'To develop a Regional Strategic Transport Network based on key transport corridors, to enhance accessibility to regional facilities and services.'*
3. In July 2002, the Assembly approved the strategic direction and underlying principles of the "Regional Transportation Strategy for Northern Ireland 2002-2012" (RTS). The RTS identified strategic transportation investment priorities and considered potential funding sources over a 10 year period as well as setting down guidance as to how funding would be split between areas and transport modes.
4. The Regional Strategic Transport Network - Transport Plan 2015 (RSTN-TP), published in March 2005, is one of 3 multi-modal transport plans which facilitated the delivery of the RTS. The plan has 8 primary objectives, one of which is the need *"to examine access to regional gateways and cross border links with an emphasis on improving connections from the 5 key transport and 4 link corridors"*. In addition to the 5 key transport corridors and 4 link corridors, the rail network, Belfast Metropolitan Transport Corridors and the remainder of the trunk road network complete the Regional Strategic Transport Network (RSTN).

5. The RSTN-TP identified a number of priority transport schemes to enhance the RSTN. Each scheme within the plan was assessed using standard UK transport appraisal methodology. The appraisal criteria were broadly grouped in economic, social and environmental considerations aligning closely with the vision of the RDS 2025.
6. In 2008, the Northern Ireland Executive agreed its first budget and endorsed a 10 year Investment Strategy, covering the period 2008-2018. This strategy included a contribution of £400 million from the Irish Government for investment in the A5 and A8 dualling projects.
7. The Investment Delivery Plan (IDP) for Roads, published in April 2008, was a delivery document for the Investment Strategy which was ratified by the Executive in January 2008. It set out firm capital allocations for the 3 years to 2010-11 and indicative capital allocations for the 7 years thereafter. It also identified the programme of Strategic Road Improvements proposed for the 10 years of the Investment Strategy period to 2017/2018. In relation to the A5 dualling scheme the IDP anticipated delivery within the 2013/14 to 2017/18 timeframe.
8. Also in 2008 the “Northern Ireland Programme for Government 2008-2011” was published by the Northern Ireland Executive. This contained a commitment to progress plans to extend the dual carriageway network to the A5.
9. A further budget covering the period 2011-2015 was subsequently agreed by the Executive. It included in the region of £1.2 billion of capital road improvements which embraced the continuing commitment from the Irish Government to invest £400 million towards the A5 and A8 dualling projects.
10. As a consequence of the downturn in the world economy, the Irish Government deferred its £400 million contribution in November 2011 but committed £25 million per annum towards the project in 2015 and 2016. Following a review of spending priorities the Executive announced a revised budget on 14 February 2012. This revised budget outlined plans to invest £500 million in road infrastructure over the subsequent four year period. A £330 million investment in

the A5 would allow two sections to progress: the section from New Buildings to the north of Strabane (now known as Phase 1a) and the section from south of Omagh to Ballygawley (now known as Phase 1b). This was reflected in the updated Investment Strategy for Northern Ireland 2011 – 2021.

11. In recognition of the changing challenges facing the region, the Executive agreed that the RDS 2025 needed to be reviewed. The Regional Development Strategy 2035 (RDS 2035) was launched by the then Minister for Regional Development on 15 March 2012. Many of the objectives of the new strategy remain consistent with the previous one and it provides an overarching strategic planning framework to facilitate and guide the public and private sectors. The vision of the RDS 2035 is supported by 8 aims, one of which is to *“improve connectivity to enhance the movement of people, goods, energy and information between places”*.
12. “Ensuring a Sustainable Transport Future: A New Approach to Regional Transportation” (later referred to as the “New Approach”) was published on 28 March 2012 and follows on from the RTS. This document sets out three high level aims for transportation along with twelve supporting strategic objectives, covering the economy, society and the environment. The New Approach complements the RDS 2035 and aims to achieve the transportation vision. The document recognises the need to complete the work identified in the current Regional Strategic Transport Network Transport Plan and Strategic Roads Improvement Programme, while new programmes of work are developed for the main roads and railways.
13. In November 2015, the Irish Government, through ‘*A Fresh Start: The Stormont Agreement and Implementation Plan*’ reaffirmed its commitment to providing funding of £50 million and committed to a further £25 million to ensure that Phase 1 of the A5 scheme could commence as soon as practical. The Northern Ireland Executive and the Irish Government agreed that, subject to the necessary statutory procedures, construction of the first section of the route, i.e. New Buildings to north of Strabane (Phase 1a), would commence in 2017 with a view to completion by 2019.

14. In its budget 2016-2017, the Northern Ireland Executive identifies a number of flagship projects, including the A5 WTC, where it recognises the importance of providing funding certainty beyond the immediate budget period. It therefore agreed an indicative funding package of £229 million for the scheme up to financial year 2020/21.
15. In May 2016 the Northern Ireland Executive launched its 'Draft Programme for Government Framework 2016-21' for consultation. In the foreword to this framework document is a commitment to continue to deliver the flagship projects announced in the Budget 2016-2017. The framework has 14 *strategic outcomes*, supported by 42 *indicators*. Indicator 23 states "*Improve transport connections for people, goods and services*". It lists the A5 Londonderry to Aughnacloy as a key economic corridor and states that "*maintaining and improving the performance of these corridors is the means by which the greatest positive impact can be delivered to the people and businesses of the region.*" Indicator 23 is listed as a contributor to the achievement of 8 of the *strategic outcomes*.