

Key Transport Consultants Information Sheet

No: 2

Topic: The Regional Spatial Strategy—what's it all about?

Some readers will already be familiar with a new breed of TLAs (Three Lettered Acronyms!) appearing in the planning system, but for those who are interested, I attempt below to summarise lengthy reports without you nodding off

The Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) was published in draft form in June 2006 for a twelve week consultation period by the South West Regional Assembly (SWRA), the organisation responsible to the Government for Regional Planning in the South West of England. SWRA is a partnership of councillors from all local authorities in the region and representatives of various sectors with a role in the region's economic, social and environmental well-being. The full RSS is available at www.southwest-ra.gov.uk and I suggest reading it alongside the Glossary of Terms to understand all the acronyms and



terminology – I needed it just to understand the Contents page! For those so minded, consultation responses needed to be made by 5pm on 30th August 2006 to the Panel Secretariat who can be found at www.southwesteip.co.uk.

But what is the RSS and why is it important? The RSS is the strategic plan for the South West for the twenty year period to 2026 setting out how population growth leading to a demand for potentially over 23,000 new homes per year can be achieved in the most sustainable way. Of course, population growth not only needs new homes, it also needs new jobs, education, health, retail and leisure development. Fundamental to all these is transport – how are those of us already in the South West going to be able to continue to go about our business on increasingly congested networks whilst accommodating an influx of incomers and also trying to meet Government climate change targets?

In a region as geographically large and diverse as the South West with all the peripherality issues of some of the more rural areas, this is quite a challenge. The Draft RSS aims to

concentrate development in the SSCTs (Strategically Significant Cities and Towns!) and aims to reduce congestion by way of demand management tools – the sticks – and improved public transport, cycling and walking provision – the carrots.



This is not new policy but the Draft RSS makes it clear that a 'step change' is required. For the development industry, this will mean that all new development will need to be designed to optimise high quality public transport accessibility both within, and from/to developments. Challenging usage targets will be set, and monitoring undertaken potentially leading to enforcement actions. Demand management techniques proposed include those already being promoted such as travel plans and bus priority, but also

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include congestion charging and workplace parking levies. The separate SSA (Strategic Sustainability Appraisal) that accompanies the Draft RSS questions how much regional policies can affect traffic growth and congestion without national intervention on such issues as road user charging. Whilst the implementation of an independent road user charging system in Bristol should be achievable in the short term, such as that achieved in London (and as indicated by Roger Key in his Radio Bristol interview on 14 June), it would not be feasible to introduce such systems in small towns and cities elsewhere in the South West and would do little for interurban travel.

In terms of the interurban network, the SSA expresses concern about upgrading these routes on the basis that it might encourage longer distance travel. Fortunately, in my view, the Draft RSS recognises the need to upgrade the A303 and A358 to dual carriageway standard to provide a Second Strategic Route between London and the South West. In terms of the rest of the Motorway and Trunk Road Network in the South West, the policy is to seek to maintain safe and efficient operation and reliability of journey time – this

could involve access controls to the motorways and limiting their use by local traffic. Other policies within the Draft RSS seek to enhance and improve reliability of the rail network and long distance bus and coach services. The importance of ports in the South West is recognised in the Draft RSS and a potential doubling of throughput at Bristol Port is foreseen over the plan period. The Draft RSS seeks to reduce 'leakage' to airports outside the region, and supports growth of the airports within the South West to meet demand for the tourist and business markets.

The Draft RSS recognises that the South West Region is too diverse to set parking standards, and these will therefore need to be identified by the individual local authorities in their Local Development Documents and Local Transport Plans.

If you have read this far, congratulations! But seriously, the RSS will guide planning policy throughout the South West over the next twenty years and if you are considering making representations on the draft transport policies during the consultation period, we would be only too pleased to assist - why not drop me an email?

Peter Mansell