Scottish Natural Heritage is a non-departmental public body, funded by Scottish Government. Our remit is to promote the care and improvement, responsible enjoyment, greater understanding and appreciation, and sustainable use of the natural heritage.

Our interest in the relationship between transport and land-use planning arises from three main aims:

- Reducing greenhouse gas emissions from transport
- Engaging more people in active travel, as a way of enjoying the outdoors
- Minimising adverse impacts of transport infrastructure on the natural heritage, and making the most of beneficial opportunities

**Emissions from transport**

SNH views climate change as the most serious threat over coming decades to Scotland’s natural heritage. In addition to its environmental consequences, climate change is likely to have major social and economic implications for people in Scotland and elsewhere. Transport gives rise to some 22% of all Scotland’s greenhouse gas emissions. Reducing these emissions will therefore play an important part in delivering the Scottish Government’s commitment to reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 80% by 2050. We strongly support transport proposals which contribute significantly towards delivery of such reductions.

Planning policies have a major role to play in reducing transport emissions. The planning, design, siting and layout of the built environment strongly influences transport choices. Effective design of developments so that travel within them can be low-impact is a key aspect of creating ‘sustainable places’. In terms of transport between locations, the emphasis should be firstly on locating developments as close as possible to existing sustainable public transport links and then on extending public transport provision to service new developments. ‘Planning for sustainability’ should be a key principle in siting new developments to secure modal shift. However, planning is just one tool: planning policies need to work hand-in-hand with other approaches, such as fiscal incentives and the provision of effective information on public transport.

**Promoting active travel**

We want to see people better able to participate in active travel both as a means of enjoying the outdoors and as a way to appreciate their environment while engaging in other day-to-day activities, such as their journey to and from work or short-distance travelling as part of their working day. Greater participation in active travel will both help reduce transport-related emissions and provide health benefits through people taking more exercise. These twin benefits should be taken into account when appraising the socio-economic benefit of active travel projects.

The planning system has a key role in making active travel a more attractive option for people. It requires planners and transport professionals to view active travel as a valid transport option, not just as a recreational activity. It requires the location, design and layout of built development to make it easy for people to choose active travel or public transport (or a combination of the two) in preference to using a car.

**Minimising impacts and maximising opportunities for the natural heritage**

Transport infrastructure can have a major impact on the natural environment of an area, particularly in rural areas. Effects include the visual and landscape effect of a new or expanded linear feature, the noise associated with its use, and any intrusion of vehicle or road lighting. They include loss of habitat within the footprint of transport development, fragmentation of habitats where major roads cut across a habitat, wildlife killed while crossing the route, and changes to drainage and hydrology. At the same time, transport corridors can provide for new habitat corridors in their margins, and so help deliver ‘green networks’, if due care is taken against their acting as a reservoir for invasive non-native species.

The planning system has a key role in ensuring that transport infrastructure is located and designed in a way which minimises these adverse impacts, and maximises the beneficial opportunities. Environmental assessment, both at strategic level in respect of transport plans and strategies, and at project level, provides a foundation for such consideration. SNH is a statutory consultee. In general the key to an effective environmental assessment process is early consideration of environmental factors, and iteration and project refinement in the light of findings.
Question 1  Is enough thought given to providing modern integrated transport connectivity and sustainable public transport provision when preparing strategic and local development plans?

No. More consideration should be given to connectivity and sustainable transport provision in strategic and local development plans. There needs to be greater awareness (among those developing these plans) of the implications for transport of Scottish Government’s emission reduction targets, as well as the scale of the challenges that lie ahead if Scotland is to meet these targets. Consideration of transport provision should make use of the context of Scotland’s National Transport Strategy, which sets three priorities – reducing journey and connection times, reducing emissions, and improving the quality, accessibility and affordability of transport.

Local plans should provide a framework to ensure investment at a local level helps to deliver this integrated connectivity and sustainable transport infrastructure. To deliver a reduced demand for motorised transport, it is likely that plans will have to aim for a mixed-use, high-density living approach, including greenspace and green networks. Planners should have access to good examples of what has been done elsewhere so that they are confident of building such ideas into strategic frameworks.

Transport infrastructure is a long-term investment, lasting for decades and in some cases centuries. Those instigating developments and making planning decisions now need to be aware, in so far as it is now clear, of what a low-carbon society might look like and what that is likely to mean for transport provision. Decisions taken now should contribute towards, and not conflict with, that overall vision. Otherwise strategic planning decisions could leave some transport-demand legacies that are very difficult to undo in years to come.

Question 2  Does the consideration of individual planning applications for significant developments take into account the need to provide appropriate transport solutions?

Not consistently, in SNH’s experience. The need for transport to service developments should always be considered well before a planning application is lodged. Local authority planning staff should promote this message among developers, and also among colleagues in other departments who are responsible for instigating developments such as schools and leisure centres.

Transport Scotland encourages key partners, especially local authorities, to consider transport needs as early as possible. Its development of LATIS (Land-Use and Transport Integration in Scotland) to encompass both the Transport Model for Scotland (TMfS) and a land-use model TELMoS is part of its strategy to help with the investigation and assessment of different policies and strategies on land-use and transport provision.

The planning system should consider the effect of different planning decisions on transport-related emissions. This should include all transport which is a consequence of the development, including any road, rail, ferry or air transport expected to be used by clients or customers of the development. Care should be taken not to miss opportunities for strategic decisions which can lead to a step change in emissions reduction.

Question 3:  What practical steps could be taken through the integration of transport and land use policies which could help reduce greenhouse gas emissions?

We have already highlighted in our response to Question 1 the need for sharing examples of good/best practice where planning and transport policies have been used together to help deliver more sustainable forms of travel. This would help planners and developers understand what has been done elsewhere and what is possible in this area.

Planning policy and guidance should promote active travel, both as a viable travel option to access new built development and in ensuring that built development is designed so as to accommodate attractive active travel routes. New development should avoid disrupting existing active travel routes. Guidance used to appraise and design transport projects should take active travel opportunities into account – recognising its importance in addressing congestion and emission problems. The Scottish Transport Appraisal Guidance (STAG) makes very little mention of active travel, either as a transport option or as an interest to be taken account of. The Design Manual for Roads and Bridges (DMRB), last updated in 1993, includes guidance on constructing paths, pavements and cycle ways, and explains how road design should take into account existing levels of use of routes by walkers and cyclists. However it does not promote active travel routes, nor the objective of increasing the level of active travel. This section of the DMRB should better reflect current policy ambitions for active travel.
At a very practical level, we need an urban form without barriers which deter people from walking and cycling – making it easier for people to use active travel as the prime means of travel to and from places such as shops, schools, work, transport hubs and leisure facilities. It also needs to be easy, and pleasant, to take the train and/or bus to work. Practical things here include easy transfer between bus and rail, effective signposting and information, and facilities such as secure bike parking at train and bus stations. Conversely, it may be appropriate to allocate space away from cars (both road space and parking space), in favour of active travel and public transport. These all require detailed decisions of urban planning and design.

Outside of urban areas, much transport in Scotland is linked to how land is used. The Land Use Strategy currently being developed by the Scottish Government may have significant consequences for transport demand and provision, particularly in relation to the creation and management of new woodland and changes in Scottish agricultural production. The Land Use Strategy is to be refreshed every five years, which should provide a periodic opportunity to review the linkages between planning and transport as land uses and transport technologies evolve. There should be a clear link too between strategies such as the Strategic Transport Projects Review and Regional Transport Strategies, and the preparation of development plans.

SNH has an interest in the retention of strong and sustainable communities across Scotland’s rural areas, so that there are people in these areas to manage the land and provide the services sought by visitors. The way these communities develop depends significantly on planning decisions, and on transport links to and within rural areas. While better transport links can be of great benefit to a rural community, there are also risks that better transport links can make it easier for people to drive to large nearby towns. Out-of-town supermarkets in particular make it easier for many in rural areas to buy supplies there, rather than from local shops where they live. Thus, in rural and semi-rural areas, planning decisions need to be informed by the likely impact over a wide area, taking into account the probable induced transport use, given current and planned transport facilities. Planners should have an understanding of the tools (such as LATIS) that they can use to predict the transport and socio-economic impact of different developments.