



Scottish National Transport Strategy Consultation

Posted by [Chris Vernon](#) on July 24, 2006 - 3:51pm in [The Oil Drum: Europe](#)

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[editor's note, by Chris Vernon] This is a guest post by Malcolm Wardlaw.

In the introduction, Mr Tavish Scott, MSP, Minister for Transport and Telecommunications, lays out the need for and purpose of the consultation document:

The need for a National Transport Strategy - NTS - has been clear for some time. Over the past few years, as the profile of Scottish transport and the level of our investment in it have grown under devolution, stakeholders have told us time and again that what is needed is a single, comprehensive national statement of our objectives, priorities and plans for the long term.

After the current period of consultation and analysis, the NTS will be developed and published later in 2006 and will guide transport policy formulation and investment over the next 20 years by all those involved in Scottish transport.

The strategy is expected to have relevance extending out almost to 2030. It thus spans the period in which Britain will become largely dependent on imports of oil and gas. As regards the all-time peak in global oil production, the notorious "Peak Oil", nobody knows when that will happen, but many, perhaps most, well-informed experts judge that the peak will occur before 2030. Some judge it will happen during 2010-2015, well within the time span of the strategy.

This commentary very briefly appraises the intentions of the strategy within the context of likely transport fuel shortages.

A full copy of the document, titled **Scotland's National Transport Strategy: A Consultation** may be found at:

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2006/04/20084756/0>

The formal consultation period ended 13/07/06. However, the above link is still working for the time being.

Measures to anticipate severe oil shortages would include reducing the vehicle kilometres travelled per year, reducing road freight in favour of rail and water-borne, increasing fuel economy and supporting large modal shifts to public transport, walking and cycling. The strategy's aims do reflect all of these measures. However, nowhere does the strategy admit that serious fuel shortages could occur, possibly at short notice. Even the discussion on biofuels is in terms of lower emissions rather than independence from fossil fuel imports. Thus the aspirations appear quite ambitious in terms of existing trends.

The overall target for road traffic is to stabilise the vehicle kilometres travelled in 2021 at 2001 levels. This is relative to predicted growth, in the absence of intervention, of 27%. However, the

strategy notes that since the target was set, traffic had already increased by 6.5% over 2001 levels by 2004. In effect, it is not anticipated that any serious control of car dependency will have been achieved by 2021. The best case would be a situation no worse than the current one.

The strategy is quite openly pessimistic that even the best case scenario might be achieved. To quote:

Overall, the evidence from our projections is that this target is not going to be achieved, and indeed will be missed by a very significant margin; and that the Scottish Executive does not have the devolved power to achieve it, although investment in modal shift and cleaner fuels are areas where we will continue to develop our policies.

This appears to sum up the Peak Oil dilemma quite nicely!

While the strategy is prepared to give up the "aspirational" target to control motor vehicle use, it also questions the target to increase cycle use. The National Cycling Strategy laid down the target to quadruple cycle use between 1996 and 2012. The consultation document rightly notes that cycle use in Scotland has not increased since 1996, and questions whether the existing target is realistic. The consultation fails to reflect on whether official incompetence in the promotion of cycling has been a factor in the failure to get more people cycling for daily transport. In fairness, the consultation does correct the long-held myth that cycling is a "dangerous" mode of travel. It notes that "This transport goal... improves safety, because... cycling is a safer mode of transport both for the user and for third parties than the car". However, the document questions whether "consultees are content that the target of quadrupling cycle use should now be reviewed".

The contribution of cycling and walking tends to be belittled because transport patterns are given as distances travelled. By this measure only about 3% of travel is walked or cycled. This is irrelevant. It is vital to understand that the demand for personal travel is constant in time terms at one hour per person per day. In time terms, travel per person has not changed in Britain or in any other country in the last 30 years. Indeed, one hour's travel per day turns out to be fairly ubiquitous human behaviour, independent of economic development. It would be more pertinent to state that 2% of travel time is by bike at present and about 20% is on foot. The potential to reduce time spent at the wheel by a major factor is there - but will it be effected by policy, or willy-nilly via the cruel action of spiralling fuel prices; "demand destruction"?

Fossil fuel dependency occurs because people spend too much time in cars, not because they spend "too much" time travelling. Strategies to increase walking and cycling could be highly effective in reducing the distance travelled per person per year. The consultation document notes that the average Scot has increased distance travelled by 43% between 1985/6 and 2002/3. As noted previously, it is expected that this trend will continue.

As regards road freight, 70% of tonne-kilometres are currently carried on the roads of Scotland, reflecting the great exposure to oil shortages of Scottish industry. While some modest increase in non-road freight is noted from freight grant schemes, this is against a steady trend of increasing road freight. This issue will be addressed in a future freight strategy.

In conclusion, the consultation document highlights the problems created by excessive car dependency and road freight and sympathises with the need to alleviate these problems. Whereas, the overall tone is somewhat resigned. It is as close as one can imagine to the state admitting that it lacks the power to control the consequences of the excesses allowed by cheap fossil fuels. It does not admit the high risk that severe shortages of transport fuel are likely within the time span of the strategy. In this we ought to find concern.



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