

CHAPTER 3 TRANSPORTATION AND COMMUNICATIONS

3.1 BACKGROUND

The National Spatial Strategy provides a number of strategic principles that underpin the national approach to identifying and prioritising economic infrastructure. The Regional Planning Guidelines for the Border Region implement the principles of the National Spatial Strategy. The County Development Plan underpins the National Spatial Strategy, the National Development Plan and the Regional Planning Guidelines through the establishment of a number of Transportation and Communication Policies and identification of regionally significant physical networks of infrastructure such as roads, public transport, energy and communications.

Donegal's location on the periphery of the island of Ireland, geographically distant from Dublin and mainland Europe has long determined the high priority given to good access into and within the County. Road transport receives highest priority, as in the absence of any rail system as it is the most commonly used form of transport. Modern telecommunication and information technology can overcome many of the problems of peripherality and are of great importance in the development of the County.

National priorities for transport development are set out in the National Development Plan 2000-2006. The development strategy for National Primary Roads focuses on routes from Dublin to Galway, Cork, Limerick, Waterford and Belfast, as far as the Border, which will be developed in their entirety.

Further major improvements to and in the north west include the:

N2 (Dublin - Omagh - Derry/Letterkenny)

N3 (Dublin - Belturbet - Enniskillen - Ballyshannon)

N4 (Dublin - Sligo),

N13 (Derry - Letterkenny - Stranorlar)

N14 (Lifford - Letterkenny)

N15 (Sligo - Donegal - Stranorlar - Lifford)

N16 (Sligo - Blacklion - Enniskillen - Belfast)

The N56 (Letterkenny - Dungloe - Donegal) is listed for improvement under National Secondary Roads.

Non-national roads facilitate the distribution of traffic within the County and continuation of improvement works to the network is required to assist with the development of the County.

GOAL

To ensure provision of safe and effective transportation and communication systems into and within the County.

OBJECTIVES

- To provide safe, convenient transportation and communications systems for all users, including pedestrians.
- To provide good access to the locations of major economic activity.
- To facilitate local urban and rural development.
- To support access facilities to inhabited offshore islands.
- To promote and support the safe use of the road network.
- To safeguard carrying capacity of National Roads and other strategic routes.
- To support communications improvements into the County.
- To remove traffic bottlenecks and to reduce journey times and journey variances.
- To improve access to ferry ports and airports.
- To support the Rural Transport Initiative.
- To identify future potential relief roads around the Gateway town of Letterkenny.
- To improve the extent and form of signage throughout the County.

3.2 POLICIES AND PROPOSALS

Transportation and Communication aims and objectives are met through a three-stranded policy approach.

- At National and Regional level, focussing on the development of an integrated strategic network.
- At County level which focuses on the major distribution links and strategic routes within the County.
- At Local development level which targets more local sectors and activities within the County.

Priority under each approach is given to the development of the roads system, with judicious development of air and sea access within the County and optimum utilisation of nearby facilities that can serve the County, including in particular, the railheads at Derry and Sligo. The following Transportation and Communication policies have been established to meet the Council's aims and objectives:

POLICY NO. TC 1: STRATEGIC ROAD NETWORK DEVELOPMENT

The strategic road network development will be progressed by the Council by:

- (1) Encouraging and promoting development of all major access routes into the County in association with authorities and bodies north and south of the Border. The advocacy of the development of a motorway link from Dublin and Belfast to the North West in general and Donegal in particular as well as upgrading the Galway-Sligo-Derry link and also the Enniskillen-Ballyshannon link. The Council will take a lead in promoting these projects.
- (2) Improving and safeguarding the national roads network in the County by:
 - Reserving the routes and acquiring the lands necessary to implement the National Roads Programme as outlined in Appendix A Development Guidelines and Technical Standards.
 - Guiding development on roads in accordance with Chapter 3.3 GUIDING DEVELOPMENT ON ROADS and Section 2.2 Transport and Communications in Appendix A, Development Guidelines and Technical Standards.
- (3) The development of strategic Non-National routes within the County including links from border crossing points and air and sea ports, identified Countywide distributor routes, and strategic link roads. The Council will reserve the routes and acquire the lands necessary to implement the Countywide Regional Road

Programme and the Non-National Strategic Roads as outlined in Appendix A, Development Guidelines and Technical Standards.

POLICY NO. TC 2: LOCAL DEVELOPMENT ACCESS

The Council will assist local development access through

- (1) Development of integrated traffic management systems, bypass roads, internal relief roads, off street car parking and traffic calming measures in principal towns in each Electoral Area, as needs are identified. This will be done in conjunction with Environmental Improvement Works under the Urban and Village Renewal Programme 2007-2012, to be prepared and agreed by the Council within a year of adoption of the Plan. A Countywide car parking programme will also be prepared and agreed by the Council which will identify and prioritise parking needs throughout the County.
- (2) Implementation of a three-year programme for non-national roads incorporating surface restoration, road reconstruction and community involvement schemes. A new programme is due to be prepared by the Council in 2005 to cover the period 2006 to 2008 inclusive and it is expected that there will be more emphasis on road reconstruction which in the past has shown most overall benefit in the long term. A further multi-annual programme will subsequently be prepared to cover the period after 2008.
- (3) Access improvements which support local sectoral development
 - (1) Designated coach touring routes.
 - (2) Access to Centres of Employment Generation throughout the County.
 - (3) Local access to the three major fishing ports of Killybegs, Burtonport and Greencastle.

POLICY NO. TC 3: AIR, SEA AND RAIL ACCESS

The Council will pursue the development of selective sea and air access into the County by:-

(1) AIR

- (1) Improving and maintaining the road network to and from Donegal (Carrickfinn) Airport through the roads work programme including the ongoing upgrade of the R259 from Crolla towards Donegal (Carrickfinn) Airport and realignment of R259 airport junction.
- (2) Supporting the airports at Strandhill and Derry through a programme of road improvement in the hinterlands of the airports.
- (3) Facilitate and actively pursue the development of an airstrip at Tory Island.

(2) SEA

- (1) The Council recognises the importance of Killybegs, Burtonport, Greencastle, Lisahally and Sligo as sea/fishing ports to serve Donegal. Given this fact, the Council will strive to facilitate the transport network to and from these ports.
- (2) The Council will pursue improvements to the transport network to and from ferry ports within the County, (Greencastle, Buncrana, Rathmullan, Magheraroarty, Burtonport, Bunbeg, Tory and Arranmore).
- (3) The Council will pursue a long-term strategy to develop a ferry link to Scotland/NW England.
- (4) The Council is committed to an ongoing programme of maintenance and improvement of such infrastructure. The Council will prepare an Island Strategy setting out in detail specific policies and programmes for the development of the Islands.

(3) RAIL

- (1) The Council will pursue the following strategy to maintain and develop rail links into and throughout the County.
- (2) Undertake a preliminary study (within 2 years of the adoption of this Development Plan) into the potential of rail links into and throughout the County in order to identify likely costs, preferred routes, feasible services etc. This study would be completed in co-operation between all relevant departments, agencies, and authorities on a cross border basis.
- (3) Safeguard the intact routes of the old railway network and associated structures within the County in order to facilitate their re-integration into the transport network (or to facilitate their use as cycling or walking routes) in the medium to long term.
- (4) Actively support efforts by Northern Ireland Railways and Iarnrod Eireann to maintain and develop the rail services to Derry and Sligo respectively.
- (5) Positively support the re-establishment of rail services along the entire length of the Sligo to Galway line.
- (6) Facilitate the re-establishment of a rail link between Sligo and Derry (through Donegal via Letterkenny) in order to make possible direct rail services along the Western Transport Corridor between Derry and Limerick.
- (7) Facilitate the re-establishment of a direct rail link between Donegal and Dublin through co-operation between all relevant departments, agencies, and authorities on a cross border basis.

In addition the Council will carry out a preliminary feasibility study into the provision of a commuter rail linking Sligo, Letterkenny and Derry.

POLICY NO. TC 4: ALTERNATIVE MODES OF TRANSPORT

- (1) The Council shall seek to support and enhance existing Rural Transport Initiatives and to develop RTI's in other areas, in conjunction with other interested parties.
- (2) The Council will pursue a strategy to promote public transport and other sustainable modes of travel, such as walking and cycling to encourage a switch from private cars, by facilitating the introduction of taxi and bus drop off and pick up points, which may advance more sustainable forms of transport.
- (3) The Council, in order to promote walking or cycling, will facilitate appropriate improvements to the transport network to
 - (1) reduce accidents
 - (2) enhance safety
 - (3) to increase access for those with mobility difficulties.
- (4) Individual Transportation Assessments must include a review of public transport and other more sustainable form of transport requirements. This applies to both residential and industrial sites. Developments should provide the necessary infrastructure such as lay-by's, linkage between sites, junctions and routes that can accommodate buses, cyclists and pedestrians.

POLICY NO. TC 5: DEVELOPMENT ON TO PUBLIC ROADS

- (1) The Council will introduce the NRA's TTA Procedure on all National Roads. A Traffic and Transport Assessment (TTA) may be required for any road in the County, where the development exceeds the thresholds identified in the NRA Traffic and Transport Assessment Guidelines, and same shall be carried out in accordance with the NRA's Traffic and Transport Assessment Procedures.

- (2) The Council shall require all technical standards in relation to roadside development to be in accordance with the standards as set out in Appendix A Development Guidelines and Technical Standards.

3.3 GUIDING DEVELOPMENT ON ROADS

(1) National Roads

The Council will safeguard the carrying capacity of National roads network in the County through:

- Restricting the number of new access points and intensification of existing access points outside of the 60kph limit (as outlined in **Appendix A Development Guidelines and Technical Standards**).
- Implementation of the NRA's Traffic and Transport Assessment Procedures for all Planning Applications.

For planning purposes in terms of Development Management, (access arrangements) National Roads Standards will be applied to the following roads:

- R238 Bridgend-Buncrana Road (outside control points).
- Link Road in Letterkenny from the Ramelton Road Roundabout to the Knocknamona Roundabout on the N56.

Details of the TTA procedure are set out in Appendix A Development Guidelines and Technical Standards (Section 2 Transportation and Communications).

A Road Safety Audit must be carried out as part of any development which involves a change to the existing road layout, in accordance with the NRA DMRB¹ HD 19/01 Road Safety Audits
HA 42/01 Road Safety Audit Guidelines

Where necessary noise and vibration reduction measures are to be provided to ensure that road traffic noise levels do not exceed the thresholds set out in the guidelines

(2) Other Strategic Roads

The Council shall encourage the safeguarding of the carrying capacity and safety of all existing and future Non-National Strategic Roads as outlined in Appendix A Development Guidelines and Technical Standards through the encouragement of effective development of lands adjacent to Strategic Routes by identifying and safeguarding Council agreed common access points.

¹ Design Manual for Roads and Bridges. National Roads Authority.

3.4 COMMUNICATIONS

A key factor in the progress of social and economic progress in the County is the development of a high quality, efficient Information and Communications network. The provision of power supplies and a modern telecommunications network are of strategic importance in the development of the County and as a method of overcoming the relative disadvantage of peripherality.

GOAL

The Council recognises the importance of developing the Information Systems within the County and will co-operate with provider agencies to facilitate the modernisation of the communications network. The Council will support and facilitate the most modern telecommunication and broadband infrastructure, as a means of promoting economic and social development.

BROADBAND

The Council recognises that the creation of an information society is vital acting as a catalyst for economic, social and cultural development. The provision of affordable and accessible broadband for both commercial and residential consumers is a vital element in the infrastructural make-up of the County. Broadband development has been placed as a key strategic priority on the County Councils economic agenda. See Chapter 4 Employment Generation and Enterprise Development Strategies.

Until recently Donegal was relatively disadvantaged in relation to backbone networks reaching into the County. ESB Telecom have now constructed, and opened for business, an alternative backbone to Eircom (the incumbent) in the East of the County. This will substantially improve competition and resilience and will enable towns located in the East to derive greater benefit from the MAN programme.

The West and North of the County, however, are unlikely to obtain an alternative broadband backbone fibre supplier within the next ten years due to their lower population base and the cost involved in the construction of such infrastructure.

However Wireless broadband solutions are extremely suitable in this type of environment and the Council is attempting, as part of the IFI/INTERREG funded Community Network Services project, to stimulate the building of a wireless backbone network to service the West and North of the County. This is known as the North West Atlantic Broadband Arc and is planned for completion in 2006.

In 2004 the Letterkenny Metropolitan Area Network (MAN's) was completed and similar networks are to be introduced across the County allowing towns such as Ardara, Buncrana, Ballybofey/Stranorlar, Ballyshannon, Bundoran, Carndonagh, Donegal Town, Dunfanaghy, Dungloe, Gweedore, Killybegs and Lifford to be connected.

TELECOMMUNICATIONS

The Council recognises the importance of developing the mobile telecommunications industry and will co-operate with provider agencies to facilitate the modernisation of the communications network. The Council aim to provide for the orderly and sustainable development of telecommunications infrastructure throughout the County in accordance with the most recent Government guidelines². Standards relating to an application for telecommunication structures and ancillary

² 'Telecommunications Antennae and Support Structures- Guidelines for Planning Authorities'. Department of the Environment, July 1996.

developments are contained in Appendix A Development Guidelines and Technical Standards.

POLICY NO. TC 6: COMMUNICATIONS - BROADBAND

It is a policy of the Council to facilitate the provision of broadband infrastructure to all sectors in the County by:

- Improving the competition for fibre and broadband services within the County.
- Supporting the rollout of broadband across the County.
- By working in partnership to examine opportunities for cross border linkages.

TELECOMMUNICATIONS SYSTEMS AND STRUCTURES

POLICY NO. TC 7:

When considering applications for telecommunications antennae and support structures the Council will have due consideration to published Government Guidelines on Telecommunications Antennae and Support Structures.

POLICY NO. TC8:

The Council will not favourably consider applications for telecommunications antennae and support structures in areas of Especially High Scenic Amenity save for the development of the North West Broadband Arc Project or similar projects.

POLICY NO. TC9:

The Council will not favourably consider applications, which provide for an increase in the height or width of telecommunications antennae and support structures in areas of Especially High Scenic Amenity save for the development of the North West Broadband Arc Project or similar projects.

POLICY NO. TC10:

The County Council will encourage applicants for telecommunications antennae and support structures to engage in pre-application discussions with local stakeholders with a view to addressing local concerns regarding the siting of the same.

POLICY NO. TC11:

The Council will favourably consider applications, which will facilitate the development of the North West Broadband Arc Project or similar projects.