

ITEM No. 1 2

Report No 436/98

ANGUS COUNCIL

PLANNING AND TRANSPORT POLICY COMMITTEE
ROADS COMMITTEE

30 APRIL 1998
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SUBJECT: ROAD TRAFFIC REDUCTION ACT 1997
DRAFT GUIDANCE TO LOCAL AUTHORITIES

REPORT BY DIRECTOR OF PLANNING AND TRANSPORT AND DIRECTOR OF ROADS

Abstract: This Report comments on draft guidance, issued by the Scottish Office Development Department, which when finalised will provide advice and guidance to Councils in implementing the provisions of the Road Traffic Reduction Act 1997.

1 RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the Committees:

1. Note the potentially far reaching implications of the Draft Guidance on Road Traffic Reduction, including work required and costs incurred to assess and forecast traffic levels locally and requirements for preparation and consultation on possible measures.
2. Forward a copy of this Report to the Scottish Office Development Department as Angus Council's comments on the Draft Guidance, drawing particular attention to the need to more fully recognise the different requirements and issues arising in rural areas such as Angus in finalising the Guidance, as discussed in sections 4 and 7 of this Report including further specifying exemptions for specific instances/circumstances to which rural Councils like Angus would be eligible to apply.
3. Forward a copy of this Report to COSLA drawing attention to the rural dimension, funding requirements and timescales for undertaking relevant studies for consideration in an overview response.

2 INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 The Road Traffic Reduction Act 1997 provides for the Government to issue guidance to local authorities on its implementation. At this stage a Circular has been produced in draft and the Scottish Office Development Department is consulting Councils and other interested parties on its content with a closing date for responses of 15 May 1998. COSLA has also requested any comments of a corporate nature from Councils to be included in the COSLA overview response.

- 2.2 The Government intends considering, in due course, the need to develop this guidance in light of its review of transport policy and the publication of the Scottish Transport Policy White Paper. In the interim the draft Circular addresses the main points of:
- assessing the levels of traffic;
 - forecasting future levels of traffic;
 - setting out targets for reduction in the level or growth of traffic;
 - establishing indicators and monitoring mechanisms.
- 2.3 This Report summarises key points arising from the draft guidance and provides a proposed response taking account of circumstances arising in Angus including:
- the rural dimension and applicability of "urban type" measures;
 - funding required to establish a base position for relevant data;
 - timescales for undertaking relevant studies.
- 2.4 A copy of the Draft Guidance Circular is available for reference in the Member's Lounge, The Cross, Forfar.

3 MAIN POINTS ARISING FROM GUIDANCE

Background

- 3.1 A broad background to issues addressed in the Draft Guidance is provided by several Government publications which have been the subject of previous Reports to members, namely:
- Road Traffic Reduction Bill - Report 682/96 to Planning and Transport Policy Committee, 29 August 1996.
 - Draft National Planning Policy Guideline: Transport and Planning - Report 614/96 to Planning and Transport Policy Committee, 29 August 1996.
 - Keeping Scotland Moving: Scottish Transport Green Paper - Report 450/97 to Planning and Transport Policy Committee and Roads Committee, 24 April 1997.
 - Developing an Integrated Transport Policy - Report 1134/97 to Policy and Resources Committee, 28 October 1997.
- 3.2 These publications have commented on various aspects relevant to the future direction of transport policies and priorities aimed at influencing the rate of traffic growth including:
- the relationship between road traffic and air quality where transport is the major single contributor to a range of air pollutants.
 - the aim not to meet traffic growth demands but to promote a multi-faceted approach including demand management and provision of alternatives.

- confirmation of the important role road transport will continue to have in the future and recognition that the scope for influencing the number and length of road journeys through the location of new development is inevitably more limited in rural areas than in more urbanised parts of Scotland.
- need to co-ordinate policies for land use and transport provision with the aim of reducing the need to travel, especially by car.
- promoting environmental objectives, economic development and greater efficiency in the use of scarce resources, including road and rail capacity.
- meeting the needs of rural areas, reducing social exclusion and taking account of the basic accessibility needs of all sectors of society, including disabled people.

3.3 In commenting on and responding to these publications the Council has consistently stressed the different set of accessibility problems facing rural areas such as Angus, including the dependency on road transport and in particular the car.

Purpose and Requirements of Draft Guidance

3.4 The stated purpose of the draft guidance is to assist Councils in reviewing road traffic levels and setting targets for the reduction of such traffic in their areas. Given the differences which exist throughout Scotland, the Circular has been drafted to allow Councils sufficient flexibility in meeting their obligations under the Act and to ensure that measures what are designed to reduce traffic levels are properly focused and have maximum effect.

3.5 Among the effects of the Road Traffic Reduction Act will be a duty for Councils to:

- Prepare a Report containing an assessment of the existing levels of local road traffic in their area and a forecast of expected growth in these levels.
- Specify targets for a reduction in the levels of local road traffic in the area, or for a reduction in the rate of growth in the levels of such traffic (this may include different targets for different parts of their area or for different classes of local road traffic).

3.6 The draft Circular contains the guidance the Secretary of State intends to publish to fulfil the above provisions of the Act. At this stage the draft Circular contains suggested guidance on:

- undertaking the Review;
- setting targets;
- preparing and producing an appropriate Report.

3.7 Among the subjects covered in the draft guidance are:

- Data collection, including data from the National Traffic Census.
- Traffic forecasting, including, the production of forecasts and relationship to National Forecasts.
- Forecasting the impact of policies and measures to reduce road traffic growth.
- Choosing the appropriate target.
- Consultation with interested parties in drawing up Reports.

3.8 Various possible targets which are identified in the Draft Guidance include:-

- a single traffic reduction target for whole area;
- a target relating to a particular class of traffic, e.g. cars or HGVs;
- a target relating to time of day;
- a target relating to existing traffic levels or their growth;
- a target relating to particular types of traffic e.g. commuter;
- any combination of the above.

3.9 A principal Council are not obliged to specify targets in relation to their area, or in relation to any part of their area, if they consider it inappropriate to do so, but in that case the Report must state:-

- (a) that they consider it inappropriate to do so;
- (b) their reasons for so considering.

3.10 The Road Traffic Reduction Act requires Ministers to lay copies of each Council's report before Parliament. The draft guidance indicates that each Council should submit copies of their report to the Scottish Office by 31 July 1999.

4 DISCUSSION ON DRAFT GUIDANCE

General

4.1 The Environmental and sustainability aims of reducing road traffic, or at least reducing the scale of road traffic growth, have been widely promoted both in the Draft Guidance and in various other Government Publications. These aims are also recognised locally but policies which are designed to address largely urban-based congestion and pollution do not adequately take into account the different problems of accessibility in many rural areas. Patterns of private car use are generally very different in rural areas where there is a much higher degree of car dependence. In many rural situations, owning and using a car is the only practical and economical way to get around. This is reflected in higher car ownership in areas such as Angus and particularly in areas outwith the main towns.

4.2 Rural car use generally does not cause congestion and the level of emissions reached in most areas does not give cause for medical concern. It is essential to recognise that in rural areas there is often no alternative to the car and measures to restrict its use must appropriately reflect this. It is also important to recognise that not everyone has unlimited access to a car and therefore public transport is a vital service requiring continuing and increasing support.

- 4.3 In any event the different needs of rural areas in the context of car dependence and public transport provision should be more fully recognised in the final version of the Guidance so that blanket measures designed with national and global concerns in mind do not cause disproportionate hardship in rural areas. Indeed many of the issues addressed in the Act and Draft Guidance appear largely, but not entirely, concentrated in large urban areas and along heavily used inter-urban corridors.
- 4.4 This is not to suggest that measures to reduce dependency on the car and to encourage greater use of public transport - rail and bus - and cycling and walking should be ignored in Angus. It does, however, suggest that a carefully targeted approach may be required recognising the circumstances arising in each of the main settlements in Angus and particularly in the Coastal Corridor where there may be greater opportunities to proactively address various strategic priorities contained in the Tayside Structure Plan 1993, namely:-
- to reduce the need to travel particularly by car for longer distance journeys between home and workplace;
 - to restrain further growth in the use of private transport where public transport can meet a greater part of future travel demand;
 - to further develop provision for cycling and walking as important transport modes particularly for local trips, the safety and attractiveness of which need to be enhanced.

Current Position in Angus

- 4.5 Existing data relative to traffic volumes on routes within Angus is very limited, indeed non-existent except with respect to the A92 and A90 Trunk Road. The reasons for this are as follows.
- 4.6 In the main, in light of the free-flowing nature of the network on all routes and the lack of congestion in any of the towns, it is not surprising that the Roads Department and the Council does not afford a high priority to monitoring traffic levels. Indeed in times of restricted finance it would seem illogical to devote scarce resources to such activities. The Council would inevitably be criticised if it did.
- 4.7 However, it is agreed that if specific 'ring fenced' additional resources were to become available, as a result of the proposed Road Traffic Reduction Act, then it would be necessary to formulate a strategy to measure 'baseline' traffic flows throughout the area and in the towns, against which future traffic levels could be monitored.
- 4.8 Only in specific development control issues such as planning applications requiring a traffic impact assessment are issues assessed in a true transport planning sense; that is, identifying the current flows and trends and modelling the network (along with other known changes which might impact on traffic generation on the network) and forecasting long term traffic flows. Some limited information where such TIAs have been carried out is therefore available.

- 4.9 There are no operational automatic traffic counters in Angus. No staff resource is currently available to interrogate any traffic information, except on a very limited basis. To meet the requirements of the proposed RTRA significant additional finance would therefore be required.

Air Quality Strategy Issues

- 4.10 The dominant source of the eight major pollutants: benzene, 1,3-butadiene, carbon monoxide, lead, nitrogen dioxide, ozone, fine particles and sulphur dioxide is road traffic.
- 4.11 The Environment Act 1995 required the Government to develop a UK National Air Quality Strategy the primary purpose of which is to reduce the levels of these pollutants by 2005. At the core of the strategy is a new duty and responsibility for Local Authorities to carry out regular reviews and assessments of air quality within their areas, and where air quality objectives are unlikely to be met by 2005, to declare an Air Quality Management Area (AQMA). In such cases, Local Authorities will have a duty to prepare an action plan for improving air quality in the designated areas.
- 4.12 The government has issued guidance to Local Authorities on local air quality strategies and action plans, air quality and traffic management, air quality and land-use planning, and reviewing and assessing air quality.
- 4.13 A key element of AQMA action plans is likely to be traffic management.
- 4.14 Councils are advised to ensure that their monitoring programmes are sufficiently sensitive to distinguish between a real reduction in traffic levels and merely a displacement of traffic to other routes.
- 4.15 Air quality does not currently pose any particular problems in Angus and is not expected to require the designation of any Air Quality Management Areas to achieve air quality standards or objectives. Nevertheless Angus Council is conducting an appropriate assessment and review of air quality in accordance with Government guidance and advice.

Implications to Angus Council if RTRA brought into force as a Statutory Instrument

- 4.16 A number of automatic traffic counters would require to be established across the roads network in Angus.
- 4.17 Initial indications would appear to reveal that 20-25 automatic traffic counters would be required outwith centres of population to realistically assess, albeit at a relatively basic level, the existing flows (and allow future monitoring thereafter). Furthermore, it is likely that the collection, interrogation and interpretation/presentation of data would require the need for a full-time Technician. Any traffic modelling would require to be carried out via external resources as the technology and staff resources are not in place. If the RTRA were to be implemented as indicated in the guidance then the likely initial and year-on-year financial impact to the Council is estimated as follows:-

Initial Costs - Year 1

25 No. Fully Automatic Traffic Counters and Computer Hardware/Software for Data Retrieval	£70,000
Appointment of Traffic Technician - 1 No.	£20,000
Total	<u>£90,000</u>

Year-on-Year

Traffic Technician	£20,000
Administration Costs	£ 5,000
Traffic Management - Traffic Modelling to Assess Options	£15,000
Total	<u>£40,000</u>

- 4.18 It is questionable in an area such as Angus as to the benefits of implementing such a traffic monitoring regime - unless specific additional resources are made available for this purpose. The philosophy of integrated transport and the damage that traffic emissions can cause to the environment is accepted. However, unless measures are addressed in the forthcoming white paper on integrated transport to significantly improve public transport in rural areas (which in turn means much additional monies from Central Government) then it is unlikely that traffic levels will reduce or be curtailed to any extent. Even if road pricing and taxation on non-residential parking is introduced this will not provide any benefit to rural authorities unless major populated areas (who might benefit from such measures) are prepared to share their additional income across a wider geographical base.
- 4.19 In any event traffic levels in Angus, based on projected demographic trends will not be a problem for the foreseeable future.

5 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 The Draft Guidance indicates that the Government does not consider that the assessment of traffic levels and production of reports, as required by the Road Traffic Reduction Act, should require significant additional expenditure. However it accepts that some additional expenditure may be incurred and intends discussing the arrangements for meeting such costs with COSLA.
- 5.2 As indicated in paragraph 4.17 of this Report initial costs of £90,000 followed by annual costs of £40,000 per annum could be incurred in Angus if the RTRA were to be implemented based on the draft Guidance.

6 CONSULTATION

- 6.1 The Chief Executive, Director of Finance, Director of Law and Administration, and Director of Environmental and Consumer Protection have been consulted in the preparation of this Report.

7 CONCLUSION

- 7.1 The major challenge set by the Road Traffic Reduction Act 1997 and detailed through the Draft Guidance Circular is to determine traffic growth and then to influence it through different mechanisms. In addressing this challenge it is vital that the geography and settlement distribution in Scotland which have a strong influence on our travel patterns are taken fully into account. In particular the circumstances and issues arising in rural areas such as Angus are very different to densely populated urban areas and require special recognition.
- 7.2 The application of blanket road traffic reduction measures across Scotland is clearly inappropriate. Similarly the congestion problems which underpin much of the emphasis on road traffic reduction measures in England and in the major Scottish cities are a far less relevant factor elsewhere in rural parts of Scotland.
- 7.3 Indeed in rural areas such as Angus the current Draft Guidance may be "using a sledgehammer to crack a nut". This is not to suggest that measures to reduce the unnecessary use of the car and to promote and support alternative means for travel and communication in rural areas should be ignored. It does however indicate that an approach which does not unnecessarily constrain the "appropriate" use of cars for medium or longer-distance rural journeys, while discouraging "inappropriate" use for short-distance or urban journeys would be more suitable for rural areas including much of Angus.
- 7.4 It is therefore recommended that if the RTRA is enacted then Angus Council seek exemption from its requirements (unless additional monies are forthcoming) and it would be useful at this stage if the Scottish Office could give some indication of what they might consider being legitimate reasons for exemption or perhaps write into the documentation exemptions for specific instances/circumstances to which rural Councils like Angus would apply.

NOTE

The following background papers, as defined by Section 50D of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973, (other than any containing confidential or exempt information) were relied on to a material extent in preparing the above Report:

- Road Traffic Reduction Act 1997 Draft Circular - Scottish Office Development Department, February 1998.

AA/CGR/SP

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