

The Highland Council

Local Transport Strategy

Strategic Environmental Assessment

February 2010

Halcrow Group Limited

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Non Technical Summary

1.1 Introduction

The purpose of the Strategic Environmental Assessment is to provide a method of predicting, assessing mitigating and monitoring the significant environmental effects of the LTS

Section 14(3) of the Act requires the Environmental Report to include the information specified in Schedule 3 of the Act and to take account of the following:

- (a) Current knowledge and methods of assessment of environmental matters;
- (b) The contents of, and level of detail in, the Strategy
- (c) The stage of the Strategy in the decision-making process; and
- (d) the extent to which any matters to which the report relates would be more appropriately assessed at different levels in that process in order to avoid duplication of the assessment.

1.2 Background to the Local Transport Strategy

The Highland Council Local Transport Strategy has been drafted to set the framework for transport policy and decisions for the next three year period. The objectives and principles also aim to guide decision making beyond this period. It will replace the 2000-2006 Local Transport Strategy. The LTS will set out the Council's aims, objectives, policies and strategies addressing transport issues during defined time period.

The LTS is not a stand alone document – it relates to (and is informed by) policies across the local authority, the region and nationally.

Moreover, the LTS relates to the issues and policy priorities for non-transport sectors, in particular, health, social inclusion, economic development and environmental sustainability.

The objective of the LTS is

‘...to consider what the National objectives mean in the context of the Highland locations, considering at ore detailed level the problems encountered in towns and villages , in Inverness and along key transport corridors between them.’

1.3 Approach to SEA

In accordance with SEA protocol a Scoping Report was submitted to the Consultation Authorities, Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH), Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA) and Historic Scotland via the SEA Gateway on the 12th August 2009. The Scoping Report informed the Consultation Authorities of the scope and level of detail in the Environmental Report. In accordance with Schedule 3 of the Act the following approach was taken

- Review of relevant plans, programmes and strategies
- Comprehensive review of the baseline environment data
- Identify environmental problems and issues

A SEA Scoping Workshop was hosted by The Highland Council on the 30 July 2009. The Scoping Workshop was convened to identify the most appropriate issues for consideration. SNH and Historic Scotland were in attendance. SEPA provided comments through the Scoping Report statutory consultation period.

From this information and taking account of the National Transport Strategy and Regional Transport Strategy SEA objectives, a series of environmental objectives and criteria were determined for each of the relevant SEA topics. The objectives and criteria are presented in the table below.

Table 1: SEA Objectives and Assessment Criteria

Local Transport Strategy SEA Objectives	Assessment Criteria
To protect and, where possible enhance the natural environment including designated sites and protected species (on a local, national and international level), and to conserve and enhance the existing environment where possible.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Will the LTS result in any likely significant effects upon Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) (including candidate), Special Protection Areas (SPA) (including proposed) and Ramsar sites? • Will the LTS result in any adverse effects on Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), National Nature Reserves (NNR), Local Nature Reserves (LNR), Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC) and RSPB/SWT Reserves? • Are there likely to be impacts to any UK or European Protected Species? • Are there likely to be impacts to any priority habitats and species as identified in the UK and Local Biodiversity Action Plans?
To promote accessibility, health and quality of life through the integration of the LTS.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does the LTS plan to increase social inclusion through increasing accessibility to services such as healthcare? • Does the LTS promote 'healthier lifestyles'

Local Transport Strategy SEA Objectives	Assessment Criteria
	<p>through increased promotion and provision of walking and cycling facilities? Are there links between the LTS and the Highland Council Core Path Network Plans?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Will the LTS cause the deterioration of either the air or water quality of the region?
<p>To promote the use of brownfield sites and the sustainable use of local sites and resources. The local ground environment and any high quality agricultural land will be protected and enhanced where possible.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If LTS proposals require land-take will there be an adverse impact upon the local geodiversity of the area? • Will any prime quality agricultural land be impacted? • Will any geologically designated sites (SPA, SSSI, or Regional Important Geological Sites (RIGS)) be impacted? • Will any peatland be impacted?
<p>To prevent the deterioration of the water environment (including ground and surface waters) and any associated protected sites and flood plain areas.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Will the LTS policies result in a deterioration of current ground or surface waters? • Will any LTS policy result in direct impacts to flood plain areas?
<p>To protect and enhance the current air quality of the highland area.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Will the LTS maintain or enhance current air quality throughout the region? • Will sustainable transport be promoted which will help to reduce greenhouse gas emissions? • Will the LTS policies result in Government targets for emissions being exceeded leading to the declaration of Air Quality Management Areas (AQMA)?
<p>To reduce energy consumption and contribute towards a more sustainable transport infrastructure through a reduction in greenhouse gas emissions.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Will the proposals reduce the reliance on private vehicle transport? Are there likely to be any conflicts with policy given the highly rural nature of the study area? • Does the LTS promote either air or ferry travel, and if so what are the climatic implications? • Will modal shift to more sustainable forms of transport be promoted? • Do LTS proposals avoid or take account of areas at risk of landslip or coastal erosion?
<p>To protect and enhance existing infrastructure and promote more sustainable transport.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Will the LTS avoid severance or other detriment to existing walking and cycling routes?

Local Transport Strategy SEA Objectives	Assessment Criteria
To protect and, where appropriate, enhance the historic environment of the highlands.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Will the LTS result in any adverse impacts upon the cultural heritage features of the Highlands?
To protect and, where possible enhance the landscape and visual amenity of the highlands.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Will the LTS policies protect and where possible enhance landscape character, or visual amenity of sensitive receptors within the Highlands? • Will the LTS policies protect and where possible enhance designated areas (National Scenic Areas [NSAs] and Areas of Great Landscape Value [AGLV])?
To minimise noise and vibration related to the transport network, and to protect sensitive receptors from excessive noise and vibration levels.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Will the LTS proposals result in any adverse impacts to sensitive receptors and/or residential areas in the Highlands? • Will there be any significant noise increase in the Highlands above those currently experienced as a result of the policies?

The Environmental Report has assessed the vision, objectives and core policies as proposed in the Scoping report. The assessment has also taken into consideration cumulative, secondary/indirect and synergistic impacts.

1.4 Alternatives

The SEA Act requires the environmental effects of reasonable alternatives to the strategy be identified, described and evaluated. It specifies that only reasonable SEA regulations do require that the environmental effects of such alternatives be considered

Following the Scoping Workshop and subsequent additional consultation with the Statutory Authorities alternative approaches that have been considered have focused on specific priority themes as follows

Alternative Strategy one – do nothing / do minimum. This is a scenario of moving forward with limited intervention by the local authority in terms of policy direction or investment as presented in the LTS

Alternative Strategy two – A strategy focused on public transport and active travel i.e. sustainable modes. This strategy has a strong focus on sustainable modes (i.e.) that is modes which have a lesser environmental impact than the private car or road based freight.

Alternative Strategy three – This strategy has a strong focus on developing and maintaining the road network infrastructure to serve individual users and businesses, through cars, road-based public transport and business related vehicles such as lorries.

In summary, the Council felt that an integrated Strategy approach as represented by the proposed LTS Core Policies better met the needs of all transport users, as well as meeting the objectives set for local transport and SEA objectives.

1.5 Supporting Assessment

Appropriate Assessment

An Appropriate Assessment (AA) on the Local Transport Strategy has been carried out in tandem with this SEA. An AA is required where any plan is likely to have a significant effect on a 'Natura 2000'¹ site, which has been designated under the EU Habitats and Birds Directives, which are transposed into Scottish law by the 'Conservation (natural Habitats &c) Amendment (Scotland) Regulations 2007.

The AA found that there were possible significant impacts on 41 Natura 2000 sites in total, yet impacts were unlikely to occur on 14 of these sites. For all sites where there was an uncertain impact, further details of the transport schemes will be needed to assess their likely impacts. A large number of schemes, including those listed as having uncertain effects, will require further, site-level AA.

The AA is provided as an appendix to this SEA report.

1.6 Findings of Environmental Assessment

A Vision, Key Objectives and Core Policies were developed for the LTS. The extent and significance of predicted environmental impacts of each were assessed where possible.

The LTS Vision and Key Objectives were all deemed to be compatible with SEA objectives, with some minor text changes recommended to enhance clarity.

With the exception of CP8: Air Services, all Core Policies were concluded to have a minor positive impact on the environment following mitigation. Changes and mitigation measures have been recommended to minimise predicted environmental impacts wherever possible; however, some impacts still remain.

¹ Special Areas of Conservation, Special Protection Areas. Ramsar sites also included, in accordance with Scottish Government guidance on AA.

- **Biodiversity:** Land-take associated with the construction of new development and intensification of water-based vessel traffic will deliver the most significant impacts to biodiversity across the region (see Core Policies 2, 3, 7, 8, 9, 10, 12 and 13).
- **Population and Human Health:** Adverse impacts to population and human health are currently unknown; these will depend on the specific requirements or outcomes to scheme proposals.
- **Soil:** Land-take associated with the construction of new development will deliver the most significant impacts to soil across the region (see Core Policies 2, 3, 7, 8, 10, 12 and 13).
- **Water Quality:** Development within or adjacent to designated marine sites and intensification of water-based vessel traffic will deliver the most significant impacts to water quality (see Core Policies 9 and 12).
- **Air Quality:** Any intensification of road traffic levels, particularly where it contributes to existing congestion problems, and any intensification of air traffic levels will adversely impact on air quality (see Core Policy 8).
- **Climatic Factors:** Any increase in greenhouse gas emissions, particularly as a result of intensified road or air traffic levels will adversely impact on climate factors (see Core Policy 8).
- **Material Assets:** Adverse impacts to population and human health are currently unknown; these will depend on the specific requirements or outcomes to scheme proposals.
- **Cultural Heritage:** Land-take associated with the construction of new development presents the most significant potential for impacts to cultural heritage sites across the region (see Core Policies 2, 3, 7, 8, 10 and 13).
- **Noise:** Any intensification of air traffic and construction works related to new development and/or maintenance to existing networks present the most significant potential for noise pollution (see Core Policies 3 and 8).
- **Landscape and Visual Amenity:** Land-take associated with the construction of new development presents the most significant potential for impacts to cultural heritage sites across the region (see Core Policies 2, 3, 7, 8, 10 and 13).

Given the strategic nature of the LTS, further environmental impacts are expected to arise from specific proposals for improvements to existing services and through the provision of new transport services and facilities. These will need to be subsequently assessed on a scheme-by-scheme basis.

1.7 Mitigation Measures

Throughout the assessment of the strategy vision, objectives and core policies mitigation measures have been proposed in the matrices to offset likely significant adverse impacts. These can be found in the detailed assessment summaries in sections 5.5 and 5.6. Section 6 provides guidance on strategic level mitigation and further studies/assessment that may be required at the project level.

1.8 Monitoring

Section 7 of the Environmental Report sets out a list of proposed indicators that could be used to monitor the environmental effects of the LTS. Following the adoption of the final LTS, a Post Adoption Statement will be produced which will be set out the final monitoring framework.

1.9 Next Steps

Table 2: The Next Steps

Expected date	Milestone
Winter 2009/2010	Publication of the Draft Local Transport Strategy and Environmental Report. This will be subject to a public consultation period of eight weeks
Spring 2010	Preparation of the Final Local Transport Strategy and Environmental Report. Develop a comprehensive monitoring framework
Spring 2010	Highland Local Transport Strategy and Environmental Report to be presented to The Highland Council Committee for approval
Summer 2010	Approval of the Local Transport Strategy along with Environmental Report, publication of Post Adoption Statement

Comments on the Environmental Report may be addressed to

The Highland Council
Glenurquhart Road
Inverness, IV3 5NX
Email:

2 Introduction

2.1 Background

The requirement to undertake Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) is established by European Directive 2001/42/EC, 'the Assessment of the Effects of Certain Plans and Programmes on the Environment' (the SEA Directive). SEA provides plan-making authorities with the ability to incorporate environmental considerations into decision-making at an early stage and in an integrated, transparent and documented manner.

The overall objective of SEA is to:

Provide for a high level of protection of the environment and to contribute to the integration of environmental considerations into the preparation and adoption of plans and programmes with a view to promoting sustainable development'
(Article 1 of the SEA Directive).

In Scotland, the 'Environmental Assessment (Scotland) Act 2005' (the SEA Act) provides the legislative mechanism for transposing the Directive into Scottish legislation. Scottish Government Ministers envisage Scotland as a world leader in SEA provision and, as such, Section 1 of the Act sets out the primary requirement, which is to secure the completion of an environmental assessment during the preparation of a qualifying plan or programme. The explanatory notes to the Act state,

*"Through the Act the aim is to improve protection of the environment, to improve public decision making and ...to legislate to introduce Strategic Environmental Assessment across the range of **all** new strategies, plans and programmes developed by the public sector in Scotland".*

The implementation of the Local Transport Strategy is likely to have significant environmental effects on the Highland Region and therefore an SEA has been carried out in accordance with Scottish Government guidance.

A scoping report was prepared and submitted to the statutory consultation authorities on the 12 August 2009. This informed the Consultation Authorities on the scope and level of detail to be contained in the Environmental Report.

The Statutory Consultation authorities are

- The Scottish Government who have delegated their responsibilities to Historic Scotland
- Scottish Natural Heritage; and

- The Scottish Environment Protection Agency

The Consultation Authorities responded with their views on the 9th September 2009. These responses have been summarised along with the Highland Council's response and are provided for reference in Appendix C. The responses to the Scoping report have been incorporated where appropriate.

2.2 Purpose of this Environmental Report and key facts about the Strategy

As part of the preparation of the Local Transport Strategy, the Highland Council is carrying out a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA). SEA is a systematic method for considering the likely environmental effects of plans, programmes and strategies. SEA aims to

- Integrate environmental factors into the plan preparation and decision-making;
- Improve the plan and further environmental protection;
- Increase public participation in decision making; and
- Facilitate openness and transparency on decision-making.

The table below summarises the key SEA stage and identifies SEA activities carried out to date, and identifies where further information can be obtained relating to each stage

Table 3: SEA Stages and Timescales

Stage	Summary	Timescale
Screening	Determining whether the Local Transport Strategy is likely to have significant environmental effects and whether an SEA is required	The part was missed due to the understanding that an SEA would be carried out due to potential significant impacts
Scoping	Deciding on the scope and level of detail of the Environmental Report, and the consultation period for the report – this is done in consultation with Scottish Natural Heritage, Historic Scotland and the Scottish Environment Protection Agency	This was carried out between June and August with the Scoping Workshop on the 30 July 2009. Scoping Report issued to the SEA Gateway on 12 th August 2009.
Environmental Report	Publishing an Environmental Report which outlines the environmental analysis undertaken for the Local	In February 2010 the Submission of the Environmental Report to the Statutory Authorities and made available for public consultation in

	Transport Strategy and its environmental effects, and consulting on that report	association with the draft LTS. Consultation will run for a period of eight weeks.
Adoption and SEA Statement	Providing information on: the Local Transport Strategy; how consultation comments have been taken into account; and methods for monitoring the significant environmental effects of the implementation of the strategy	Will follow consultation and adoption stage
Monitoring	Monitoring significant environmental effects in such a manner so as to also enable the Responsible Authority to identify any unforeseen adverse effects at an early stage and undertake appropriate remedial action	To be undertaken by The Highland Council

The purpose of this Environmental Report is to:

- provide information on the Highland Local Transport Strategy
- identify, describe and evaluate the likely significant effects of the Local Transport Strategy and its reasonable alternatives;
- provide an early and effective opportunity for the Consultation Authorities and the public to offer views on any aspect of this Environmental Report.

The key facts relating to the Highland Local Transport Strategy are set out in Table 4 below. This is based on the draft Local Transport Strategy which has been publicly available by THC via its website. (www.highland.gov.uk)

Table 4: Key Facts

Responsible Authority	The Highland Council (THC)
Plan Title	Local Transport Strategy for the Highlands
Plan Subject	The Local Transport Strategy sets out the framework for transport policy and development decisions in the Highland Region.
Period covered by PPS	3 years
Frequency of updates	3 years

Area covered by the Plan	The Highland Region
Summary of content/ Nature of the Plan	<p>The Local Transport Strategy sits within the framework of both the National and Regional Transport Strategies.</p> <p>It is intended to provide policy and guidance to address the problems identified in the Highland region not only from a transport perspective but also any decisions necessary to allow the community to function well across the region</p> <p>The Strategy provides high level objectives and core policies.</p>
Contact points	<p>Cameron Kemp Integrated Transport Manager, The Highland Council Tel: 01463702612 Email: cameron.kemp@highland.gov.uk</p> <p>Mike Roberts SEA Project Manager, Halcrow Group Ltd Tel: 01312723300 Email: robertsmi@halcrow.com</p>

2.3 Public and Stakeholder Consultation

Consultation events have been held over the month of September. The Council presented both the Development Plan Scheme and the Local Transport Strategy to the public during a series of events in September

Pre consultation has been carried out through Ward Forums across the Highland Council area, to inform the development of the Draft Highland Council Local Transport Strategy

In addition, individual consultation meetings were held with officer across the Highland Council

The draft LTS will have a second round of consultation when issued along with the Environmental report for consultation

2.4 Structure of the Environmental Report

Section 14(3) of the Act requires the Environmental Report to include the information specified in Schedule 3 of the Act and to take account of the following:

- (a) Current knowledge and methods of assessment of environmental matters;
- (b) The contents of, and level of detail in, the Strategy;

- (c) The stage of the Strategy in the decision-making process; and
- (d) the extent to which any matters to which the report relates would be more appropriately assessed at different levels in that process in order to avoid duplication of the assessment.

This SEA was undertaken in line with Scottish Government SEA toolkit. The Environmental Report is structured as follows:

<i>Section 3</i>	<i>Context of the Local Transport Strategy</i>
<i>Section 4</i>	<i>Scoping: Provides a summary of the Scoping Report</i>
<i>Section 5</i>	<i>Assessment of Environmental Effects: Presents the results of the Environmental Assessment, reviews alternatives to the Local Transport Strategy</i>
<i>Section 6</i>	<i>Mitigation: Presents proposal for mitigation of any significant environmental effects reported</i>
<i>Section 7</i>	<i>Monitoring: Presents approach to monitoring the environmental effects of the Local Transport Strategy</i>
<i>Section 8</i>	<i>Next Steps: Proposes the next steps following the issue of the Environmental Report</i>

The detailed appraisals are contained within the following appendices:

<i>Appendix A</i>	<i>Lists of Strategies, Plans and Programmes Reviewed</i>
<i>Appendix B</i>	<i>Environmental Baseline</i>
<i>Appendix C</i>	<i>Detailed Assessment Matrices for Vision and Objectives</i>
<i>Appendix D</i>	<i>Detailed Assessment Matrices for Core Policies</i>
<i>Appendix E</i>	<i>Council Response to Consultee Comments</i>
<i>Appendix F</i>	<i>Appropriate Assessment Screening</i>

3 Context of the Highland Local Transport Strategy

3.1 Introduction

Schedule 3 of the Environmental Assessment (Scotland) Act 2005 requires that the Environmental Report includes “*an outline of the contents and main objectives of the plan or programme*”.

3.2 Background to the Local Transport Strategy

Scottish Integrated Transport White Paper (1998) stipulated that the Local Authorities were now required to produce Local Transport Strategies. The intention for the strategies is to set out the councils approach to an integrated transport framework. The first Highland Local Transport Strategy was published in 2000

The Highland Council Local Transport Strategy has been drafted to set the framework for transport policy and decisions for the next three year period. The objectives and principles also aim to guide decision making beyond this period. It will replace the 2000-2006 Local Transport Strategy. The LTS will set out the Council’s aims, objectives, policies and strategies addressing transport issues during defined time period. . The new LTS provides an opportunity to refocus on priorities for the Highland area, and address areas where further progress is still required.

In particular:

- More ambitious targets are required for road safety
- Greater levels of investment continue to be required to maintain and improve transport services and infrastructure, although the economic climate makes this a considerable challenge
- Greater effort is required to limit the rate of traffic growth, particularly on key corridors

The LTS is not a stand alone document – it relates to (and is informed by) policies across the local authority, the region and nationally. Moreover, the LTS relates to the issues and policy priorities for non-transport sectors, in particular, health, social inclusion, economic development and environmental sustainability.

The objective of the LTS is

‘...to consider what the National objectives mean in the context of the Highland locations, considering at ore detailed level the problems encountered in towns and villages , in Inverness and along key transport corridors between them.’

3.3 Outline and objectives of Strategy

The LTS supports the aims set out in the Highland Programme, and ultimately works towards achieving the outcomes set out in the Single Outcome Agreement. An outline vision, objectives and a list of the core policies included in the draft strategy are listed below.

3.3.1 Single Outcome Agreement

Following on from the Government's Single Purpose, all local authorities in Scotland have produced Single Outcome Agreements. The second Highland Single Outcome Agreement was signed in July 2009. This identifies the local outcomes which contribute to the 15 national outcomes set by the Scottish Government. It sets the strategic framework for policy delivery for the Council across all areas of responsibility – moreover, it is key to prioritising Council spending. Whilst the outcomes cut across areas of social and economic wellbeing, there are significant transport factors in delivering the agreement.

In particular there are actions in local outcomes 10.A and 10.1 which will be taken forward through the LTS:

- Increase the number of community transport schemes supported (10.A)
- Increase the availability of buses. (10.1)
- Increase the number of people using the bus network. (10.1)
- Increase use of public transport in and around Inverness. (10.1)
- Increase investment in lifeline roads and bridges in the Highlands. (10.1)

3.3.2 The Highland Council LTS Draft Vision

Through its Local Transport Strategy, the Highland Council seeks to enable and facilitate development and economic growth; support, include and empower communities, and create safe and sustainable environments in which people can live, work and travel.

3.3.3 LTS Objectives

The LTS objectives are as follows:

- ▶ Economy: Provide a transport network to enable sustainable economic growth, noting the very different conditions between urban and rural locations;
- ▶ Social Inclusion: Facilitate travel to enable economic/social involvement and improve access/travel choices to essential services for those without access to a private car;
- ▶ Environment: Manage/reduce the impacts of transport on the natural and built environment;
- ▶ Health: Increase levels of cycling walking to promote health improvement and modal shift;
- ▶ Road Safety: Improve road safety addressing locations where road accidents are above average levels;

- ▶ Personal Safety: Address issues of perceived safety and personal security particularly where they are a barrier to walking, cycling and public transport;
- ▶ Policy Integration: Identify policy overlap across Council services, and with other public bodies (e.g. NHS), maximise benefits and minimise contradiction;
- ▶ Investment integration: Identify benefits and opportunities of combined transport procurement for all Council services; and
- ▶ Traffic reduction: Where appropriate consider targets for reducing traffic, although noting the variation in conditions and requirements between rural and urban areas.

3.3.4 Core Policies

Each of the core policies contributes to meeting certain objectives of the LTS,

- ▶ CP1: Development Management Contribution to Transport;
- ▶ CP2: Road Network – Part 1 Road Improvement Schemes;
- ▶ CP3: Road Network – Part 2 Road Maintenance;
- ▶ CP4: Pedestrian and Cycle Network;
- ▶ CP5: Road based Public Transport – Part 1 Key Route network;
- ▶ CP6: Road based Public Transport – Part 2 Service frequency/journey times;
- ▶ CP7: Rail based Public Transport;
- ▶ CP8: Air Services;
- ▶ CP9: Ferry Services;
- ▶ CP10: Parking Policy;
- ▶ CP11: Travel Plans (including Council Travel Plan);
- ▶ CP12: Freight;
- ▶ CP13: Design guidelines for new developments; and
- ▶ CP14: Road Safety Plan (separate document).

The Strategy also includes the following

- Context for the Highland Local Transport Strategy – Issues and trends
- Policy framework and responsibilities
- Progress on Highland Local Transport Strategy 2000-2006

3.4 Relationship with other Plans, Programmes and Strategies and environmental objectives

Schedule 3 of the Environmental Assessment (Scotland) Act 2005 requires that the Environmental Report (ER) includes consideration of the Strategy relationships with other relevant PPS, and how environmental protection objectives have been taken into account in the Strategy's preparation. This section covers these issues and describes the policy context within which the Strategy operates.

3.4.1 Hierarchy of plans, programmes and strategies

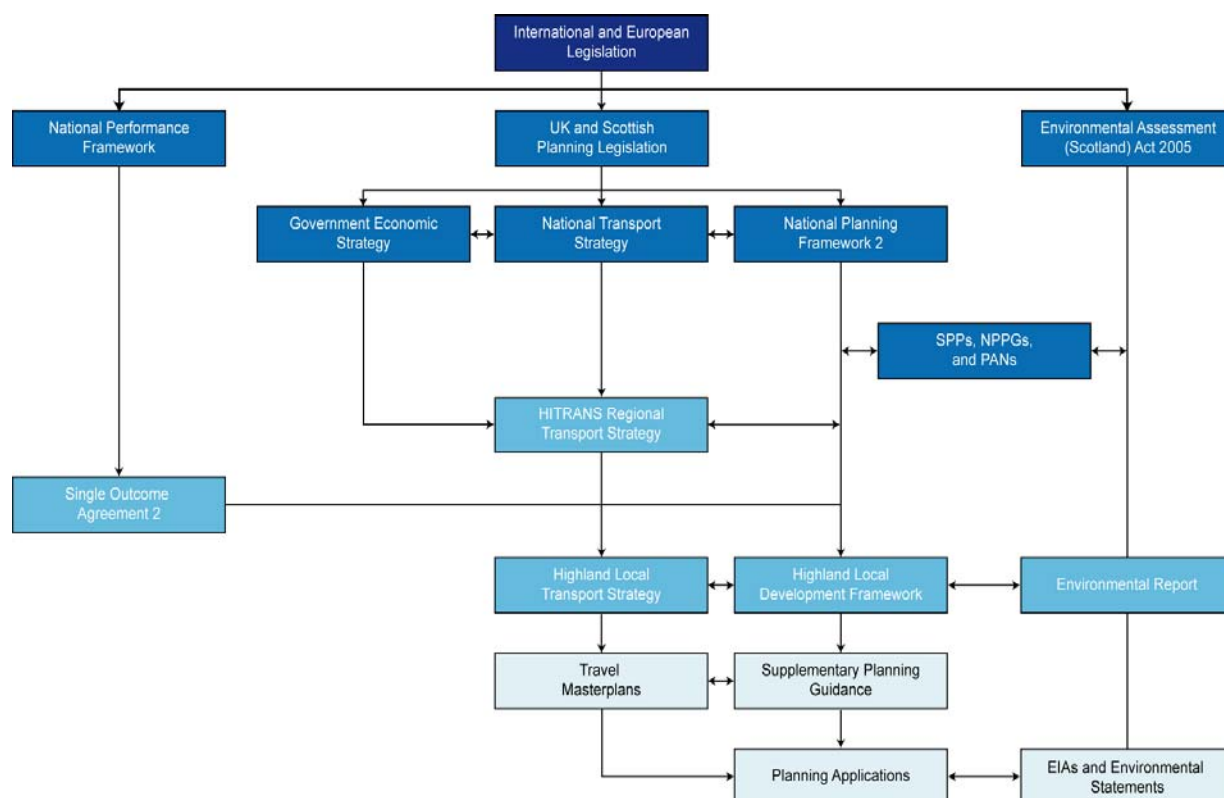


Figure 2: Relationship between the Local Transport Strategy and other Plans, Programmes and Strategies

3.4.2 Analysis of plans, programmes and strategies

A range of plans, programmes and strategies (PPS) have been reviewed to provide a context for the SEA at an international, regional and local level. A detailed review can be found within Appendix A

Consideration of the Local Transport Strategy within the context of a focused range of other PPS to identify current environmental protection objectives is an extremely important aspect of the SEA as it provides a checklist of the range of issues of which the Local Transport Strategy should take cognisance.

A review of the associated environmental protection objectives helps to highlight existing and potential problems, as well as opportunities for environmental enhancement, and serve as an important base upon which to build the SEA Assessment Framework.

Key points arising from the analysis:

- (i) Protect and enhance where appropriate designated areas of natural heritage and conservation.
- (ii) Recommend appropriate measures to avoid deterioration of these habitats and avoid disturbance of scheduled, scarce or rare species

- (iii) Recognise the statutory importance of protected sites and strive to ensure they are adequately protected.
- (iv) Consider the issue of Flood Risk and look at the potential impacts and required mitigation measures
- (v) Take account of targets for reducing CO2 emissions and strive to reduce greenhouse gas emissions
- (vi) Minimise the risk of pollution and damage to surface and ground waters
- (vii) Prevent deterioration of the status of water bodies
- (viii) Recommend safe disposal and recycling of waste materials
- (ix) Consider the impact of transport infrastructure on coastal biodiversity and coastal Ensure the protection of the historic features and the continued provision of access defences
- (x) Consider the aims of the landscape convention in the development of its core policies
- (xi) Maintain and enhance woodland networks
- (xii) Reduce social exclusion and improve quality of life for all
- (xiii) Reduce adverse impact on health of the population
- (xiv) Improve connectivity for all communities and user groups
- (xv) Improve access to goods, markets and services

From the review of the plans programmes and strategies a series of objectives were identified and carried forward in the process of establishing a complete set of objectives of the SEA.

3.5 Supporting Assessments

3.5.1 Appropriate Assessment (AA)

An Appropriate Assessment (AA) on the Local Transport has been carried out in tandem with this SEA. An AA is required where any plan is likely to have a significant effect on a 'Natura 2000' site, which has been designated under the EU Habitats and Birds Directives, which are transposed into Scottish law by the 'Conservation (natural Habitats &c) Amendment (Scotland) Regulations 2007'. Natura 2000 sites include Special Areas of Conservation and Special Protection

Areas. However, wetland sites designated under the international 'Ramsar' convention are also included, in accordance with advice from Scottish Natural Heritage.

The AA found that there were possible significant impacts on 41 Natura 2000 sites in total, yet impacts were unlikely to occur on 14 of these sites. For all sites where there was an uncertain impact, further details of the transport schemes will be needed to assess their likely impacts. A large number of schemes, including those listed as having uncertain effects, will require further, site-level AA.

The AA screening is provided as Appendix F to this report.

3.6 Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA)

As the detailed design develops, elements of the Local Transport Strategy will likely be subject to an Environmental Impact Assessment under Schedule 2 of the Environmental Impact Assessment (Scotland) regulations 1999. The Environmental Report will assess the overall impact of the Strategy; however there may be some assessment results of the SEA that will require further assessment by EIA at a project level. This will be highlighted in the assessment matrices.

3.7 Baseline Issues

3.7.1 Background and Approach

Part 2 of Schedule 3 (in relation to Section 14) of the Environmental Assessment (Scotland) Act 2005 establishes that Environmental Reports should record “*the relevant aspects of the current state of the environment and the likely evolution thereof without the implementation of the plan or programme.*” This section summarises the key environmental issues which have been identified from a review of the baseline data, plans, programmes and strategies and the responses from the consultation authorities

Available Baseline data was collated and identified during the scoping stage and a detailed report can be found in Appendix B. The Baseline data has been updated from that presented in the Scoping Report to include additions suggested during the scoping consultation.

Appropriate baseline information is important to allow consideration of a Base Case and Business as usual option

3.7.2 Summary of Key Issues

With regard to Biodiversity, Flora and Fauna:

- A significant proportion of The Highland Council area is covered by international, European, national and/or local environmental designations for the protection of important species or habitats. This includes the Cairngorms National Park which extends into the study area.
- A significant proportion of the priority species and habitats in Scotland are found in the Highland region, and an extensive list of species and habitats are covered by local biodiversity action plans.
- Protected species such as otter and badger are known to be vulnerable to road traffic collisions, where these occur it should be noted by the Highland Council’s road maintenance crews to help inform the design of road improvements, contribute to Scotland’s duty to undertake surveillance, and to inform the Scottish Badgers database of Road Traffic Accidents (RTAs). If there are found to be development areas which potentially affect protected species, or are in the vicinity of a known

badger RTA site then site specific survey work should be undertaken to determine the need for a detailed mitigation strategy to be developed during further detailed site specific environmental assessments.

With regard to Population and Human Health:

- A large proportion of Highland region is classified as “fragile” due to compounding pressures including population decline, unemployment and access by private car or public transport to key services.
- Health concerns relating to physical inactivity remain a key concern nationally. Walking and cycling statistics for the Highland region compare favourably to the rest of Scotland, however there is limited region-specific information regarding physical activity in general.
- The most recent road accident statistics available indicate that there were 626 reported injury accidents and 929 casualties in the Highland region in 2007. The long-term trend for reported casualties is significantly less in the Highland region than is being experienced nationally.

With regard to Water:

- The Highland region presents a diverse water environment, with a number of protected areas designated for their water quality, ecological potential or commercial outputs.
- The overall water quality in the Argyll (Lochaber) and West Highland Regions is very high. The overall water quality in the North East Scotland and North Highland region is lower with some areas of particular concern.
- There is a flood risk associated with coastal areas and waterbodies across the Highland region.

With regard to Soil:

- The Highland region is primarily dominated by highly organic peaty soils (peat, peaty gleys and peaty podzols). This type of soil stores significant concentrations of carbon which could result in the soils becoming significant sources of greenhouse gases.
- There is no region-specific data with regard to soil quality available for the Highlands, however soil quality in Scotland is considered to be generally good.
- Erosion, compaction, contamination and salinisation are considered to be the key localised threats with regard to soil quality.
- The Highland region has experienced an increase in the availability of derelict and urban vacant land in recent years. It has the third highest rate of derelict land in the Scotland.

- The Highland region includes 34.7% of the agricultural land in Scotland. The percentage of prime agricultural land is not known and is seen as a data gap at this stage.

With regard to Air Quality:

- Air quality in the Highland region is generally very good. However, increased traffic flows, particularly within existing built up areas, could potentially lead to a deterioration of air quality to levels below national targets.
- Any increase in air travel could potentially impact on air quality and should be carefully monitored.

With regard to Climate Factors:

- Increase traffic generation may contribute to greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and therefore impact upon the government's targets to reduce GHG emissions by 60% by 2050.
- Climate induced sea level rise will increase risk of flooding above that outlined in SEPA's flood risk maps which outline a 1 in 200 year event, but do not incorporate estimates of increased risk due to climatic factors.
- The impacts of climate change as related to bioclimate will likely have a significant effect on the distribution of species and habitats over time, with implications for local conservation management.
- SNH has advised that Highland Council climatic data is currently being collated. This information is currently unavailable for assessment under this SEA. Consideration should be given to this data as it becomes available and as travel masterplans are being developed.
- Consideration should be given to the potential for landslips and/or flooding where interventions are proposed in coastal areas, areas of known flood risk, and areas of the Highlands where interventions would be bounded by steep sided slopes.

With regard to Cultural Heritage:

- A significant number of sites and structures across the Highland region are protected for their significance to the cultural heritage and historic environment. Conflict with archaeological sites is of particular concern in selecting sites and aligning transport infrastructure.

With regard to Landscape

- There are a significant number of sites designated for their contribution to the landscape character and quality of the region.

- The landscape character of the Highlands is distinct. This is shaped by the local land form and the historic lack of human activity and development to form an overall sense of 'remoteness' through the region.

With regard to Material Assets:

- The Highland Council area includes over a quarter of the total trunk road network and about one-seventh of the Scottish road network, more than any other local authority. Roughly 28% of all trunk roads and 39% of the roads network in The Highland Council area were estimated to be in need of repair in 2006.
- Scottish Water is currently making significant improvements to the water, wastewater and drainage infrastructure in the Highlands. These need to be considered in line with individual transport assessments.
- The Highland Council does not compare well to other local authority areas with regard to recycling. It had a recycling and composting rate of 30.7% for 2007/8. In order to achieve the 2010 target of 40%, it will be important to increase residents' access to recycling services, either through kerbside pickup or to local recycling points and centres. This should be considered through individual transport assessments.
- There are a number of pedestrian and cycle networks throughout the Highland region. LTS policy should link to existing routes and use existing infrastructure where possible.

With regard to Noise:

- There is currently no readily available data to current baseline noise levels in the Highland region.
- Consideration should be given to the impact of noise and vibration on the marine environment and on Listed Buildings.
- Consideration should be given to impact of noise and vibration if there is an increase in air travel

3.7.3 Data Gaps

The following data gaps were identified:

- The percentage of agricultural land within the Highlands which is classed as Prime Quality Agricultural land by the Macaulay Institute is not currently known;
- Consultation with SNH highlighted the need to include information relating to Upland Paths across the Highland region, however no comprehensive information has been obtained and this is therefore seen as a data gap.
- There is no comprehensive region-specific climatic trend data for the Highland region. SNH has advised that THC climatic data is currently

being collated. This information is currently unavailable for assessment under this SEA. Consideration should be given to this data as it becomes available and as travel appraisals are being developed.

The implications of the identified data gaps are not considered detrimental to the SEA process. Wherever possible, information regarding designated areas has been inferred from general management information or national databases. Routes to acquiring site-specific information are considered in the Environmental Report.

3.8 Existing environmental problems and issues

Schedule 3 paragraph 4 of the Environmental Assessment (Scotland) Act 2005 requires that the Environmental Report includes a description of existing environmental problems, in particular those relating to any areas of particular environmental importance. The purpose of this section is to explain how existing environmental problems will affect or be affected by the Local Transport Strategy and whether the Strategy is likely to aggravate, reduce or otherwise affect existing environmental problems.

Environmental problems were identified through discussions with Historic Scotland (HS), Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH), Scottish Environmental Protection Agency (SEPA) and an analysis of the baseline data. Relevant environmental problems are summarised in Table 5.

Table 5: Environmental problems relevant to Highland Local Transport Strategy

Problem	Supporting Data	Implication
Natura 2000 sites in The Highland Council area.	SNH	Impacts to internationally designated sites to be assessed through Appropriate Assessment.
Nationally and locally designated sites of ecological value in The Highland Council area.	SNH	Impacts to nationally and locally designated sites to be assessed at EIA level.
Protected species in The Highland Council area.	Environmental designations / management plans HAPs, SAPs, BAPs	Impacts to habitat sites to be assessed at EIA level.
Fragile (Rural) Areas in The Highland Council area.	The Highland Council	SEA to ensure LTS policies address regional issues relating to geographic access deprivation. Impacts of specific proposals to be assessed at EIA level.

Problem	Supporting Data	Implication
Deprivation with regard to geographic access in The Highland Council area.	Scottish Government SIMD	SEA to ensure LTS Policies address regional issues relating to geographic access deprivation. Impacts of specific proposals to be assessed at EIA level.
Comparatively high road casualty trends in The Highland Council area.	Scottish Government Road Casualty Statistics	SEA to ensure LTS Policies address regional issues relating to road safety. Impacts of specific proposals to be assessed at EIA level.
Flood Risk (coastal and active flood plain).	SEPA Flood Maps; Climate Change indicators	Flood risk and impacts to be assessed at EIA level.
Areas of poor water quality, particularly in North Highland.	SEPA Draft Area Management Plans	Impacts to water quality to be assessed at EIA level.
Increasing availability of derelict and urban vacant land in The Highland Council area.	Scottish Government Planning Statistics	SEA to ensure LTS Policies address regional opportunities to re-use derelict and urban vacant land. Impacts of specific proposals to be assessed at EIA level.
Sites of cultural significance in The Highland Council area.	Pastmap	Impacts to setting of Listed Buildings and Scheduled Ancient Monument to be assessed at EIA level.
Sites of archaeological importance in The Highland Council area.	Pastmap	Impacts to archaeological sites to be assessed at EIA level.
Sites of landscape value and local character in The Highland Council area.	SNH	Impacts to landscape and character sites to be assessed at EIA level.
Reduced air quality as a result of traffic-related emissions in built-up areas.	Air Quality Scotland	Impacts to congestion and emissions levels to be assessed at EIA level.
Site-specific soil quality data is beyond the scope of this SEA.		Ground investigations and potential mitigation strategy for specific proposals to be at EIA level.
Site-specific noise data is beyond the scope of this SEA.		Potential impacts of specific proposals to be assessed at EIA level.
Site-specific light pollution data is beyond the scope of this SEA.		Potential impacts of specific proposals to be assessed at EIA level.
No region-specific climatic trend data.		Potential impacts of specific proposals to be assessed at EIA level.

3.9 Likely evolution of the Environment without the Highland Local Transport Strategy

Table 6 provides a draft summary of the evolution of the environmental baseline without the LTS against each of the topic headings.

Table 6: Evolution of the baseline without the LTS

SEA Topic	Evolution of the baseline without the LTS
Biodiversity, Flora & Fauna	Where a habitat is connected to transport infrastructure it would remain predominately unchanged. There would be no impact from policies proposed in the LTS i.e. trunk road extensions. Loss would still occur through development promoted through the Structure and Local Plan and the Regional Transport Strategy.
Water	There would be no impact on water quality from construction highlighted in the LTS. There would be a continued impact from maintenance. Construction in line with other plans would still occur and potentially cause pollution of water bodies.
Climatic Factors	Without the promotion of walking, cycling and the use of public transport there could be an increase in greenhouse gas emissions.
Material Assets	Impacts of projects promoted in the LTS would not occur. However the LTS promotes access to material assets i.e. recycling facilities which could result in a decrease in recycling.
Population & Human Health	<p>Without the promotion of more sustainable modes of transport through the LTS there would be an increase in congestion. This would lead to a decrease in local air quality and effects on human health arising from poor air quality and increase noise.</p> <p>A lack of improvement to public transport and cycleway/footways could result in fewer opportunities for people to exercise.</p>
Cultural Heritage/ Historic Environment	Impacts on the historic environment from policies promoted in the LTS would not occur. Impacts from other strategic plans will not be altered.
Landscape	Any impact on landscape and visual impacts from projects promoted in the LTS would not occur. An increase in traffic congestion in certain areas may have minor effects on features of landscape value.
Air	Without a push for sustainable modes such as walking and cycling, air quality would deteriorate.
Soil	Soil will still be impacted through other schemes so the lack of LTS will not minimise impact significantly.
Noise	An increase in road traffic and congestion could lead to an increase ambient noise levels in some areas.

4 Scoping

4.1 Introduction

The purpose of the Scoping Report is to provide sufficient information on the Local Transport Strategy, and the proposed SEA assessment methodology, to enable the Consultation Authorities (CA) to form a view on the scope for assessment and the level of detail to be included in the SEA Environmental Report (ER).

A SEA Scoping Workshop was hosted by The Highland Council on the 30 July 2009. The Scoping Workshop was convened to identify the most appropriate issues for consideration and to help focus the scope of the SEA. SNH and Historic Scotland were in attendance and SEPA has been kept up to date on all correspondence.

The Scoping Report was prepared in accordance with:

- the European SEA Directive (2001/42/EC);
- national SEA Regulations (the 2005 Act) as noted above;
- Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM, now DCLG) Guidelines (2005);
- Scottish Executive SEA Gateway SEA Templates (2005); and
- current best practice.

4.2 Results of Scoping Consultation

A scoping workshop was held on the 30 July 2009 with representative stakeholders from the Highland Council, Halcrow, Historic Scotland and Scottish Natural Heritage.

During the Scoping Workshop it was agreed that all SEA topics are to be considered during the assessment and reporting phase of the project. The formal Consultee responses that followed the meeting confirmed acceptance of this approach.