

Integrated Transport Project of the Year

DPMTAG: Effective Transport and Land Use Planning Policy in Aberdeenshire

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Background

Effective local development plans take full account of the relationship between land use and transport, and particularly the capacity of the existing transport network, environmental and operational constraints, and proposed or committed transport projects. Aberdeenshire Council have taken an innovative approach to undertaking a DPMTAG assessment (Development Planning Management Transport Appraisal

Guidance) which has provided clear benefits for the preparation of Aberdeenshire's 2016 Local Development Plan (LDP).

New Guidance

Scottish Planning Policy, updated in June 2014, emphasised the requirement for DPMTAG assessments to be undertaken, which should appraise the impact of the spatial strategy and its reasonable alternatives on the transport network. The policy guidance coincided with Transport Scotland committing to review their existing DPMTAG guidance, which to date had not been widely embraced.





The Existing Issue

Individual assessments are undertaken for all new candidate site allocations being considered for inclusion with the LDP. However, with a large number of sites in the previous LDP being rolled forward to the current plan, there was a challenge ensuring that these assessments remained relevant, in line with current guidance, and in line with most recent policy. Furthermore, taking the assessments on a “site by site” basis, opportunities were missed in some cases to consider interactions on a settlement by settlement basis, as well as across a wider corridor.

In preparing to undertake the DPMTAG assessment, other challenges were apparent. These included the fact that in August 2014 the LDP had already progressed to “Main Issues” stage, and any DPMTAG assessments needed to be completed by early 2015 in order to meet wider timescales for completion of the LDP.

A Pragmatic and Innovative Approach

There was a clear requirement for Aberdeenshire Council’s Transportation team to develop a proportionate and pragmatic approach, founded on the basis of Scottish Transport Appraisal Guidance (STAG). The approach had to make best use of existing available information; be focussed on the key corridors of interest; and relate to what were the specific policy and operational issues faced on Aberdeenshire’s strategic transport network.

- Area of interest – the strategic development plan promotes growth along three strategic growth corridors, which correspond with the

area’s trunk road and rail network. These formed definite focus for the appraisal, which was also extended to include other principal settlements in the Authority. Taking a corridor by corridor approach corresponded with cumulative assessment work undertaken for the SDP.

- Developments of interest – the work focussed on unconsented but allocated developments that were significant in the context of their settlement, or in terms of their impact on the adjacent trunk road network.
- Transport Planning Objectives – these were developed based on local plan settlement objectives, policy priorities established in SPP, and corridor objectives established for each of the three trunk road sections which were previously set out in STPR. These reflected the need to respond to safety issues, traffic capacity issues, making best use of existing capacity, promoting opportunities for sustainable travel, and also facilitating freight connections.
- Other Appraisal Criteria – with no desire to recreate existing advice, the established appraisal criteria used for a STAG 1 assessment were deemed appropriate, covering off deliverability considerations, as well as impact on safety, environment, economy, integration, and accessibility / inclusion.

A key to the success of Aberdeenshire’s DPMTAG appraisal was the willingness of Transport Scotland to engage in early, open and largely positive discussions about the Council’s proposed approach, and joint sharing of available information for specific settlements. Using a STAG 1 appraisal approach, which had widespread understanding within the transportation teams at the Council and Transport Scotland, also facilitated clear communication of impacts.

DPMTAG is also being used by Transport Scotland to inform their review of existing DPMTAG guidance.

An Emerging Picture

An initial appraisal of the allocations enabled early sight of the key issues. Typically, the most significant issues corresponded with the cumulative impact of numerous developments, super-imposed onto congested networks. This situation was identified at Inverurie / Kintore on the A96, Ellon (A90N), and Portlethen (A90S). The use of information from previous S-Paramics modelling runs was invaluable in unpacking the impact of individual elements, and considering potential changes to the allocations in the development plan.

Other issues included allocations that had the potential to significantly increase traffic through junctions which had safety issues. A number of allocations also required either new, or significantly modified trunk road junctions for access. In each case, alternative access strategies could be tested to inform a recommended approach for the specific allocation.

The Added Value

At the end of the DPMTAG process, each allocation had been fully assessed, outcomes discussed with local plan team and transport Scotland, and agreement reached on recommended modifications. These recommendations were then used as a basis for the finalisation of the draft Local Plan, considered by committee in February 2015.

The added value of the DPMTAG process was a far more informed picture being provided to officers, Councillors and Transport Scotland, than could have been achieved through individual site assessments. Numerous positive amendments and alterations were made as a result of the DPMTAG report. Where no changes were made, the assessments provided a clear and consistent statement of the likely issues that would require to be resolved during the application process for any sites coming forward. The experience of Aberdeenshire Council, and their proportionate and pragmatic approach to the

Conclusion

Aberdeenshire Council's approach to the production of a DPMTAG assessment to support the preparation of their 2016 Local Development Plan has been both proportionate and pragmatic, but yielded significant benefit to the Local Plan Process. It has provided relevant stakeholders with a broad evidence base, facilitated by existing available information, enabling recommendations to be made on changes to proposed allocations. Despite the exercise being taken at a potentially sub-optimal time, the approach taken has not delayed the LDP process, and been flexible enough to accommodate late revisions and additions to proposed allocations. The approach has sufficient merit to be recommended to other authorities undertaking the revision of their LDPs.



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