



Alliance against road building

Briefing on Appraisal for local road schemes

What is “appraisal”? How can I make them look at alternatives?
Where can I find the right info? How can I use it?

“How to ensure alternatives to road building are considered”

How to use this briefing sheet

Many road schemes are now promoted by local authorities, but central government still decides (or, to use the jargon, “appraises”) whether they go ahead or not. On paper, government transport policy is actually very good: it says that road building should be a last resort. Despite this, local authorities are often not following the central government guidance. Campaigners have found that most councils do not consider alternatives to road building, or if they do, they are deliberately putting forward ridiculous proposals that would never work or gather support. There are signs the government have grown tired of this, and it is our job to ensure their patience finally runs out with the tarmac-happy councils.

The aim of this briefing is to demystify the appraisal process. We do not expect you to acquire the knowledge and expertise of a transport planner, or to plough through Internet pages or policy documents – we have produced this briefing to save you that! We simply want to give you the key parts of the government’s appraisal guidance, so you can use them in your campaign to point out to decision makers, government offices, the media or the public where a council is not following the government’s guidance, and to arm you with the quotes you need to insist that alternatives to road building are considered.

In theory, you could fight off a road scheme simply by scrutinizing the appraisal process and pointing out any shortcomings. In practice, of course, you need to make this part of a much broader local campaign based on persuading decision makers to come round to your way of thinking and raising awareness about the road scheme in your local community. You may win the arguments but, without a strong local campaign, that may not be enough to stop your road.

What is “appraisal”

Appraisal is the means by which the Department for Transport (DfT) makes its decision on whether a local road scheme is good value for money, based on how well it performs against **five core criteria**. If a council decides to build a road it has to follow a lengthy and detailed appraisal process, set out by the DfT on a special website called WebTAG (see reference at end). This explains the different procedures for assessing the effects of the road on environmental, traffic and economic grounds. The aim is that road scheme bids should demonstrate a clear path from identifying the problem to arriving at a preferred solution. This gives you an opportunity to examine all the evidence for the decision, and if necessary to challenge it.

History

The appraisal process has changed dramatically for the better since 1998. Before, the appraisal system was simply a Cost Benefit Analysis (COBA), which looked only at the economic case for a road, with the environmental impact ignored in the calculations. In 1998, after the road protests of the 1990s, the government introduced “A New Approach To Appraisal” or NATA. This new approach had to look at five core criteria: **environment, safety, accessibility, integration, and economy**, on an equal basis. NATA is now used for many policy areas, not just transport.

The language of the appraisal documents is very ‘green’. The aims are laid out in ‘Introduction to Transport Analysis’, Tag Unit 1.1: *“Our quality of life depends on transport. Most of us travel every day, even if only locally. And we need an efficient transport system to support a strong and prosperous economy. But in turn, the way we travel is damaging our towns and cities and harming our countryside. As demand for transport grows, we are even changing the very climate of our planet”*.

NATA was updated in 2003 by the Treasury’s “Green Book”, in order to keep a tighter control of the construction costs, and to prove value for money. New draft guidance for road schemes in the second Local Transport Plan (LTP2), published in April 2005, has tightened the process up further, and this draft guidance (DGLTP2 for the purposes of this briefing) has to be followed by all councils preparing their Major Scheme bids in LTP2, which councils are drafting now for the period 2006-11. This draft guidance may change after 30 September 2005 however.

NATA, and paperwork to ask for

A road scheme has to be appraised according to the government objectives identified in 1998 in New Approach To Appraisal (NATA). This guidance is continually evolving, and is laid out on a website called WebTAG – www.webtag.org.uk. NATA identifies five objectives, the environment – to protect the built and natural environment, safety - to reduce accidents, economy to support sustainable economic activity and get good value for money, accessibility to improve access to facilities, for those without a car and to reduce severance; integration, to ensure that all decisions are taken in the context of the governments integrated transport policy, and other relevant policies (TAG Unit 1.4, para 2.5.1). It should also cover Social Inclusion (TAG Unit 1.4, paras 1.1.9 and 2.7.4) and Public Acceptability (TAG Unit 1.4, para 2.7.6).

The details of the exact paperwork that should be produced are on the WebTAG website, TAG Unit 3.2. The assessment of the scheme against the five core objectives (as above), and the sub-objectives, all go into an Appraisal Summary Table (AST). This is crucial, and will be the key document with which Ministers and officials will decide to go ahead or not. The AST is an A3 summary of all the objectives, giving them a rating. This should be backed up by worksheets. There should also be an AST of the alternative option, and sheets explaining why other options were discarded. You can ask for all these under the Freedom of Information Act. There is an excellent guide to the Act on the Campaign for Freedom of Information website – www.cfoi.org.uk

Transport Economic Efficiency tables (TEEs) also have to be produced. Do not be alarmed by the maths! The TEEs represent how many minutes of journey time will be saved by the new road, and then this is put into monetary terms. This is a simplistic and controversial tool that is currently being debated amongst transport planners. The construction cost to the taxpayer is also included, in the Public Accounts section of the AST, and controversially includes revenue raised through petrol taxes from the increase in traffic! Accidents include the cost of over £1million for a human life. All these figures are explained in depth in the WebTAG website at TAG Unit 3.5.

The figures are fed into a computer program called COBA (Cost Benefit Analysis). This tries to put money values on the positive “benefits” and the negative “costs” of building the road to see whether the overall road plan makes financial case. The entire economic case for the road is summarised by a single number called the Benefit Cost Ratio (BCR). However the BCR is only part of the picture in analysing the need for a road. The environment is also an equal part in determining value for money. A BCR of less than one counts as low value for money and is very unlikely to get funding. A BCR of over 2 counts as high value for money and is very likely to get funding. However a big negative effect on the environment will change the value for money. Road Block have produced another briefing sheet on COBA and BCR.

The new guidance now requires councils to produce a Business Case for the road scheme, in an attempt to tackle the way that costs have escalated on local authority road schemes that have already been given the go-ahead. If the DfT approves the Business Case, the road will go into the road programme (achieve ‘Programme Entry’). The ‘Requirements for Programme Entry’ are laid out in annex A of the new draft guidance.

Once the scheme has been taken through the Statutory procedures (acquiring planning permission, holding Public Inquiries if appropriate, and compulsory purchase of property), it may be ‘conditionally approved’. The council must then go through the procurement process where they will receive tenders for the scheme. Once satisfied, the DfT will give ‘Final Approval’

Also for schemes over £40 million “Gateway Reviews” at crucial stages will usually be required, administered by the Office of the Government Commerce (OGC), to keep a tight control of the costs, and reassure the DfT of value for money. Annual Progress Reports (APR) of the LTP must be produced every July. Quarterly progress reports for the road are also required, which you can ask for.

Ask for the following paperwork: Appraisal Summary Table (AST), problems and objectives identified, assessment of alternative options, supporting analyses, and overall Value for Money (vfm) conclusions. When you have had a look at them, and have more questions then ring Road Block.

The Process

1. Council identifies the ‘problems’ and the ‘objectives’.
2. Council identifies the ‘options’.
3. Council appraises the preferred option, a lower cost alternative, and a do-minimum scenario
4. Council Cabinet vote on what is included in the LTP2.
5. Draft LTP2 goes to DfT on 31st July 2005
6. Final LTP2 goes to DfT end of March 2006.

The key stage for a campaign group to be involved is when the council is identifying the 'problems' and the 'options' (option identification stage). It is not made clear how the public and campaign groups can be involved at this stage, but it is key that you should contribute to this process, and ensure that non-road building options are identified. As a first step, contact the transport planners at your local authority, establish exactly what they are doing, and ensure that your ideas are heard, loud and clear. Try not to be confrontational, straight off; see if you can establish a more productive dialogue first. Make it clear that you understand the process, even if they don't, and use this briefing to help you point out any parts of the guidance they are not following. Some groups put forward their own public-transport alternatives and ask the council planners to consider them as realistic alternatives. Do this job well and you're not only helping the planners to do their job, you're helping them to help you achieve your campaign objectives. But don't hesitate to take the planners on if they show no interest in what you have to say.

The council has to identify traffic problems on two sides, with supporting sheets of fuller analyses. The council should first see if the problems can be solved with the standard LTP funding, then look at a range of options, including public transport, and the final submission for funding should "*carry at least two options fully through appraisal, the preferred option and a lower cost alternative*" (TAG Unit 1.4, para 1.1.10).

In the draft guidance for LTP2, it says "*The starting point for preparing a major scheme bid is to identify the problems to be addressed, and the objectives that the bid would support. The bid should not start from an assertion about a preferred modal solution.*" (DGLTP2, para 1.5.1). The council has to look at a wide range of options, not just one route for a road: "*The assessment of alternatives should start from an initial wide base of possible options. Those options should include measures that reduce or influence the need to travel*" (TAG Unit 1.4, para 2.9.3 and DGLTP2, para 1.5.2). A stern warning is given: "*The testing of alternatives is not an add-on to the appraisal but an integral part of the process of determining the preferred option*" (TAG Unit 1.4, para 2.9.1 and DGLTP2, para 1.5.3).

In the new draft guidance, the biggest changes are that the council is expected to "*consider at least one public transport alternative*" (DGLTP2, para 1.5.4), and "*measures that reduce or influence the need to travel*" (DGLTP2, para 1.5.2), and compare the road "*against a realistic do-minimum scenario*" (DGLTP2, para 1.5.3).

The council has to look at alternatives to road building, "*such as public transport provision, demand management policies, traffic management measures and strategies*" (TAG Unit 1.4, para 2.9.2 and DGLTP2, para 1.5.4). The new guidance adds "*We would expect authorities promoting highway schemes to consider at least one public transport alternative*" (DGLTP2, para 1.5.4).

Once the options are identified, the council must appraise the 'preferred option' alongside another 'lower cost alternative', and the do minimum option (DGLTP2, para 3.3.1). For schemes over £20 million, the council "*may also need to carry a 'next best' option through the appraisal process*" (DGLTP2, para 3.3.1). It is critical to the whole process that a range of options are looked at, including a "*realistic do-minimum scenario*" (DGLTP2, para 1.5.3).

The road scheme has to fit in with regional objectives (DGLTP2, para 1.5.2), i.e. the Regional Transport Strategy (RTS), which will be part of the Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) - see the website of your Regional Assembly. It should also be consistent with the objectives and principles of the rest of the LTP, the draft of which should be on the website of your county council or unitary authority (DGLTP2, para 1.5.2).

Submissions must also cover how the scheme will contribute towards meeting the Department's 10 Year Plan, and Public Service Agreement (PSA) targets on such crucial areas such as 20% CO2 reduction by 2010, increasing rail use by 50% by 2010, reducing road accidents, beating congestion, and increasing bus and light rail use (TAG Unit 1.4, para 2.7.10).

Your first step, then, is to check whether the council has covered all these things. If not, why not?

How to use this in campaigning.

Currently local authorities are drafting their second 5 year Local Transport Plans for the period 2006-11 (LTP2), and they are currently deciding which road schemes will be included. A provisional version has to be with the DfT by 3rd July, with the final draft having to go in at the end of March 2006. Start lobbying now to remove road schemes from the draft LTP2. Once the draft LTP2 is into the DfT at the end of July 2005, this will be another chance for local groups to start lobbying to have the schemes removed. It is essential to try and stop a scheme making it into the final version of the LTP2 which has to go to DfT by March 2006. If the DfT accept bids for funding, there is no longer a requirement for the council to appraise alternatives, and you will have lost your chance.

CHECKLIST FOR ACTION

Pre 31st July 2005 (before the draft LTP2 goes to DfT)

1. Contact your local authority LTP team and ask which road schemes are being considered for inclusion in the LTP2.
2. Ask to see the Environmental Statement for the road schemes.
3. Ask to be included in their list of 'stakeholders' that are consulted.
4. Form a group if you haven't already, and start campaigning for any road scheme proposals to be removed from the draft LTP.
5. Start lobbying your County Councillors who will be voting very shortly on what will be included in the draft LTP2.
6. Ask to see the results of earlier consultations on what should go into the LTP2. Most consultations have resulted in people demanding investment for better public transport, not roads.
7. Using this briefing, ask to see how they came to the conclusion that the road scheme would be the 'preferred option', and that 'demand management' measures would not achieve the same objectives.
8. Point out to the council all the quotes in this briefing that mean that road building should be a last resort, and that they should be looking at measures that reduce travel.
9. Publicise what is happening by writing to your local newspapers, your local MP and crucially your County Councillors who be voting shortly on whether the road goes into the LTP2.
10. When the council vote, pack your council meetings with local people. Large public involvement usually makes officials think twice, especially if the case or the road is shown to be faulty.
11. Contact Road Block at any time for help with any of this.

Post 1st August 2005 (after the draft LTP2, but before the final version in March 2006)

1. Keep up the pressure on the council to drop the road scheme from its draft LTP2, and publicise how damaging / futile the proposal is. Quote from this briefing sheet.
2. However, the main focus of your campaign should now switch to the regional government offices which will be looking at the draft LTP2, and will make the recommendations to Ministers.
3. Find out who in your regional government office is looking at Major Scheme bids for your local authority.
4. Strike up a good relationship with them, and start informing them of your concerns about the road, quoting from this briefing sheet.
5. You could make them aware of how much local opposition there is to the road, by organising letters or postcards to go to the government offices, or to the Secretary of State for Transport.
6. Keep up the pressure locally by making the case against road building, using the government's own guidance (as above) to back up your case.

References

TAG Unit 1.4 - This is the main summary document which transport planners should refer to on the WebTAG website. Unit 1.4 is called 'Major Schemes in Local Transport Plans', and was last updated April 2004. If you would like to refer to the original, and do not have access to the Internet, Road Block can post you hard copies. If you have access to the Internet, you can find it at www.webtag.org.uk and then click on Documents, then Guidance Documents, and then select Unit 1.4.

New draft guidance – This is actually called 'Guidance to Local Authorities seeking DfT funding for transport Major Schemes' and was published in April 2005. You can find this on the DfT website. Again, we can post you hard copies if you do not have access to the Internet. You can access it by going to www.dft.gov.uk and then clicking on Regional and Local Transport in the menu on the left hand side. Then click on Consultations. You should then see the Guidance document as above. Please refer to it by its full name when referencing it, *not* by our abbreviation – DGLTP2.

Useful websites

www.webtag.org.uk has an enormous array of appraisal guidance documents, and it is up to you how deep you want to go! You particularly will need TAG Unit 1.4, as above

www.dft.gov.uk is the home page of the Department for Transport (DfT). Go to Regional and Local transport in the menu on the left hand side.

www.roadblock.org.uk is our website, and if you look under Campaign Resources, you will find under Transport Policy a document called "Sustainable Road Transport - key government policies". This quotes key government policies that you can use as ammunition.

Road Block

office@roadblock.org.uk

www.roadblock.org.uk

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(check the Road Block website regularly, as this briefing will be updated regularly)