

Briefing on DfT Guidance to Local Authorities for transport Major Schemes – requirements to consider alternatives

If a local authority would like to submit a bid to government for funding a transport Major Scheme, it must follow the latest government guidance on appraisal of options. If the local authority does not follow the guidance, a scheme is unlikely to receive government funding, and the local authority would be wasting council tax payer's money.

Problem and Option Identification

The key stage is the identification of the 'problems' and the 'options' (option identification stage). The council must identify traffic problems on two sides, with supporting sheets of fuller analyses. The council should 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).

Appraisal of alternatives – requirements

Simply appraising a number of route options for a road is not good enough, and will not meet current government requirements. The latest Department for Transport (DfT) guidance (*'Guidance to Local Authorities seeking DfT funding for transport Major Schemes'*) published April 2005, makes the case loud and clear that appraisal of alternatives is not an "add on". The key section can be found at 1.5 "Development of Options":

The latest guidance 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*" (para 1.5.1). The council must 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 latest DfT guidance, 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 latest guidance at para 1.5.3).

In the latest guidance, it is clearly stated that the council is expected to "*consider at least one public transport alternative*" (para 1.5.4), and "*measures that reduce or influence the need to travel*" (para 1.5.2), and compare the road "*against a realistic do-minimum scenario*" (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 latest guidance, para 1.5.4). The new guidance adds "*We would expect authorities promoting highway schemes to consider at least one public transport alternative*" (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 (para 3.3.1). For schemes over £20 million, the council "*may also need to carry a 'next best' option through the appraisal process*" (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*" (para 1.5.3).

Appraisal requirements

A road scheme has to be appraised according to the government objectives identified in the New Approach To Appraisal (NATA), published in 1998. This guidance is continually evolving, and is laid out on a DfT 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). Appraisal of a road scheme 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 appraisal 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).

The details of the exact paperwork required for the appraisal 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 a crucial document. 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.

The 'Requirements for 'Programme Entry' are laid out in annex A of the latest DfT guidance – see reference below.

References

'Guidance to Local Authorities seeking DfT funding for transport Major Schemes' – This was published in April 2005. You can find this on the DfT website at :

http://www.dft.gov.uk/stellent/groups/dft_localtrans/documents/divisionhomepage/038049.hcsp

'Major Schemes in Local Transport Plans' - TAG Unit 1.4 - This is the main summary document which transport planners should refer to on the WebTAG website. Unit 1.4 was last updated April 2004, and can be found here

http://www.webtag.org.uk/webdocuments/1_Overview/4_Major_Scheme_in_LTPs/index.htm

Useful websites

www.webtag.org.uk has an enormous array of appraisal guidance documents, that are encyclopaedic in scale. Particularly useful is 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.