

## Connecting Local Economies

### Summary

The government is consulting on new National Policy Statements (NPSs) that will set the framework for decisions by the Infrastructure Planning Commission on nationally significant infrastructure projects.

The first NPS on transport – ports – is out for consultation. The national networks and airports NPSs will follow in 2010 and 2011 respectively.

To influence the debate, the LGA has supported a report from the Town and Country Planning Association *Connecting local economies – the transport implications*, which makes the case for an integrated approach to national infrastructure.

### Recommendations

- For information, members to note report.

### Action

- Officers to follow up members' comments.

## Connecting local economies

### Background

1. The Planning Act 2008 set out a new system for nationally significant infrastructure projects (NSIPs) in England and Wales. It has 3 principal pillars:
  - A series of national policy statements on specified types of development, such as nuclear power – consultation on 7 statements began in late 2009<sup>1</sup>, with others to follow in 2010. The National Policy Statements are not intended to develop new policy - but to express existing policy, make the case for new national infrastructure, explain the generic impacts and mitigation of adverse impacts. Some of their content is inevitably technical;
  - The creation of the Infrastructure Planning Commission (IPC) which will accept applications for nationally significant infrastructure projects from March 2010;
  - The Development Consent Order which replaces the myriad of consents currently required for NSIPs.
2. The LGA has been broadly supportive of the principle of a new approach to national; infrastructure because of the weakness of the current arrangements which do not amount to a joined up and efficient approach to infrastructure investment and do not adequately reflect the views and needs of local communities.
3. Councils have a number of responsibilities at each phase of the new planning regime for major projects. These include working with the developer in the pre-application phase to help shape their proposal and consult local people, prepare a Local Impact Report for the Infrastructure Planning Commission, propose lines of enquiry to the IPC during the examination phase, and to enforce the consent order. The LGA (led by the Environment Board) is lobbying to ensure that councils are fully resourced to carry out these roles.
4. There are five key tests that the LGA believe should be applied to the suite of NPS:
  - Does it address economic and social impacts?
  - Does it give due weight to climate change?
  - Do the National Policy Statements “talk to each other”, are they integrated?
  - Do they unlock economic potential across the UK, tackling regional disparities in economic performance?

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<sup>1</sup> Overarching energy, renewables, fossil fuel, electricity networks, oil and gas infrastructure, nuclear power, and ports

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- Do they complement local development frameworks or integrated regional strategies?

## National Policy Statement on Ports

5. We have seen one draft transport related national policy statement so far – on ports. The consultation closes on 15 February. ( A copy of the consultation paper can be found at <http://www.dft.gov.uk/consultations/open/portsnps/npsports.pdf>)
6. Our initial analysis, in consultation with the Planning Officers' Society is that the draft NPS fails to integrate national policy for ports with development of inland transport infrastructure and regional and local policy for development of sub-regional economies. **The proposed key points of the LGA's response to the Ports NPS are:**
  - a) the draft statement fails in its primary purpose, which should be to provide policy direction to the IPC and other decision-makers to guide them in decision-making. Instead decisions about new port development are left entirely to the commercial judgement of scheme promoters. This does not address the issues of how to improve port services in parts of the country where suitable port services are relatively remote or working at capacity.
  - b) A more strategic approach is needed. One that is better integrated with national policy for inland transport (road and rail) and with other national policy statements dealing with energy and waste.
  - c) A strategic approach would take account of rail and road freight pressures at the largest ports. Enhancements to the rail network (specifically rail gauge enhancement) could help take freight traffic off the roads, reduce congestion and stimulate port development in less congested regions – thereby promoting economic development.
  - d) The ports NPS also misses an important opportunity to advance the Government's national policy for climate change mitigation and adaptation, and the sustainable development agenda more generally. Essentially the draft statement does not join up with Government policy in other areas of crucial importance to our national future.
  - e) The NPS does not pay sufficient attention to regional spatial strategies, local development frameworks, and other relevant local strategies. The NPS needs to understand the implications of major infrastructure projects for local areas in terms of additional housing need and waste management requirements and impact on local economies. The NPS should incorporate reference to the significance of the development plan as a consideration to be taken into account notably in relation to economic and social impacts.

Members are invited to comment on the proposed response set out in a) – e) above.

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7. The central point of the paper “Connecting Local Economies – the Transport implications” paper produced by the Town and Country Planning Association is to challenge whether the NPSs will amount to a joined up framework for planning. It makes a strong case for a highly focused and coordinated national framework for planning and investment to go hand in hand with strengthened local decision making. In particular, the report explores the need for an improved national strategy for transport that is consistent and developed alongside other national strategies, for example on waste and energy, and is based on the connectivity needs of local economies.
8. We expect the report, with a foreword signed jointly by Cllr Dame Margaret Eaton and Professor Sir Peter Hall, President of the LGA to be published before the Board meeting. Hard copies will be provided at the meeting.

## **Financial Implications**

9. None arising from this report. LGA support for the *Connecting Local Economics* report has also been provided from existing resources.

## **Implications for Wales**

10. Some nationally significant infrastructure projects are proposed for Wales. The LGA will liaise with WLGA colleagues as appropriate on these issues.

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