

Panel Question (i)

Does the draft RSS sufficiently express a spatial strategy that addresses the region's priorities for growth, regeneration and investment? Does policy RDF1 provide sufficient detail on the spatial priorities for main development locations?

1.1 Draft RSS does support the delivery of the region's priorities for growth, regeneration and investment as set out in the Regional Economic Strategy (RES). The Assembly firmly believes that the approach adopted in Draft RSS is an appropriate one, which will deliver sustainable development – both in terms of sustainable patterns of spatial activity and in terms of individual proposals. Throughout the document the approach that has been adopted sets out:

- to promote economic growth, particularly in key sectors which will either add most value or which will protect investment already made in economic and social capital;
- to provide housing, transport and other infrastructure to support this level of economic growth; and
- to ensure that development which forms the basis of economic growth (and, indeed, other management and improvement activities) makes a positive contribution to overall quality of life – wherever possible by positive enhancement through job opportunities, developing people's skills or environmental improvement, but certainly by avoiding harm, by minimising it where the balance of advantage is in favour of the development, and by compensating for losses.

1.2 While Draft RSS should be read as a whole, the Assembly believes that the Development Framework contained within it, operating alongside the key development principles set out in Policy DP1, *“articulate a spatial vision of what the region will look like at the end of the period of the strategy and show how this will contribute to achieving sustainable development objectives”* and *“provide a concise spatial strategy for achieving the vision, defining its main aims and objectives, illustrated by a key diagram, with the policies clearly highlighted”* required by PPS 11 (paragraph 1.7).

1.3 The Assembly believes that Policy RDF1 does provide sufficient detail on the spatial priorities for main development locations. There was general support in the public consultation response to the Draft RSS for the approach adopted in RDF1, particularly from the NWDA. However a number of respondents then raised detailed concerns about the wording. Some were conflicting in nature about specific geographic locations and their prioritisation for growth, based no doubt on their organisations interests in the particular area. However the Assembly do accept that in presentational terms the policy could be revised to remove some of the confusion over the interpretation and implementation of the policy approach. The Panel may wish to take consider the suggestions from a number of respondents¹ to restructure it to address linkages with:

- RSS vision and objectives,
- Policy DP1
- City Regions \ sub regional policies
- The relationship with key service centres (Matter 2D covers this in more detail).

¹ Including AGMA, CPRE, Cheshire County Council, North West Police Forces, Natural England

1.4 We note GONW concerns raised about the spatial framework. The Assembly invite GONW to provide clarity to the Panel on how it envisages that Draft RSS could be reworded to address their concerns.

1.5 Draft RSS allows sufficient flexibility for each Local Planning Authority to interpret the balance between the regional towns and cities in its area, and between those towns and other parts of the region, in a way, which is responsive to its local circumstances and aspirations. This is a significant focus for LDF's, which should not be frustrated by inappropriately prescriptive policies in RSS.

Panel Question (ii)

Do the thematic policies and sub-regional policies amount to a consistent and coherent regional strategy?

2.1 The policies in Draft RSS have developed through a number of stages of preparation and consultation². At an early stage in the preparation of RSS it was decided to continue the thematic based approach to structuring policies similar to that used in the adopted RSS, supplemented by more detailed sub regional policy as appropriate, all within the context of an overarching Regional Development Framework. The approach is consistent with that set out in paragraphs 1.5 to 1.7 of PPS11.

2.2 It is noted that a wide variety of organisations have given strong support for the use of the City Region concept within RSS, whilst also recognising the needs of other sub regions. Given the wide variety of issues covered by RSS and the different geographic arrangements that apply for policy development and implementation on some issues, it has been necessary in some policy areas to adopt different geographical expression in policy as appropriate³.

2.3 We note GONW concerns raised about how thematic and sub regional aspects are dealt with. The Assembly invite GONW to provide clarity to the Panel on how it envisages that Draft RSS could be reworded to address their concerns.

Panel Question (iii)

Does the spatial strategy provide a framework for improving accessibility to jobs and services particularly by sustainable modes for all parts of the region?

3.1 Although specific reference to accessibility is made in PPS11 as part of the guidance on developing a strategic framework for public transport, the Assembly considers it to be much more than just a public transport issue. Accessibility is determined principally by land-use planning decisions rather than transport decisions (although it should be noted that changes to both the commercial and tendered bus network can also have a significant impact). Transport generally reacts to such decisions therefore, given the nature of public transport provision in the North West, it is imperative that new developments are located in areas where there are already high levels of accessibility. This points towards development taking place within established centres in the City Regions or the regional public transport corridors identified in the document. Consequently, the Assembly decided that the most

² NWRA (January 2006), Pre-Submission Consultation Statement

³ For example, energy, and minerals and waste.

appropriate place to reference accessibility was in policy DP1 (Regional Development Principles).

3.2 In response to concerns expressed regarding early drafts of the RSS, the Assembly commissioned an independent review⁴ to consider the “accessibility” content of the RTS and to provide a view as to its compliance with Government guidance. The review concluded that the RSS does meet the criteria set out in guidance with regards to accessibility. Nevertheless, a number of recommendations for improvements were made. In particular, two pieces of work were recommended, which will be considered prior to any partial or full review of the RSS⁵:

1. “A process for monitoring the connectivity between identified regional transport hubs and service centres.
2. A comparison of the approach to choosing appropriate development locations and for developing regional parking standards (linked to the public transport accessibility of the sites).” (Source: *ibid.*)

It should be noted that the report concluded that there would be no worth in defining a regional measure of accessibility given the huge variations in local conditions which exist across the region. The findings of the study have been accepted by Assembly officers and, as stated previously, will be considering its recommendations for further work as part of subsequent reviews.

3.3 A number of respondents⁶ to the consultation on the Draft RSS objected to policies on the grounds that they do not provide sufficient guidance on accessibility for LTPs and LDDs. DfT provides clear guidance on accessibility for LTPs⁷ and the RSS should not simply repeat national guidance. As accessibility is predominantly a local transport issue it is considered inappropriate for the RSS to provide more than an overarching, strategic consideration of the issue.

Panel Question (iv)

Is it appropriate for the draft RSS to omit the previous designation of Regeneration Priority Areas?

4.1 It is considered unnecessary to include Regeneration Priority Areas (RPAs) in the Draft RSS given that Policy W1 and the sub-regional policy framework, and in particular, policies MCR1, LCR1, CLCR1 and CNL1 provide a spatial framework that will help to deliver the transformational actions associated with skills and increasing the size of the workforce identified in the RES⁸. The RES identifies a number of local

⁴ An Appraisal of the Consideration of Accessibility in the North West Regional Transport Strategy, Marsden G., and Jopson, A., Institute for Transport Studies, University of Leeds, 2006

⁵ Pending the outcome of the Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR07) no funding currently exists beyond 31st March 2008, to support the Assembly’s RPB function (including the employment of staff). Therefore the Assembly is only able to commission new research that will be completed by 31st March 2008. Until the medium - long term funding situation is resolved, the Assembly is also unable to give a firm timescale commitments on undertaking a future review of RSS, as it may not be possible to comply with all the procedural process requirements of PPS11 over next 18 months, to ensure submission of a Draft RSS to Government before 31st March 2008.

⁶ Including Lancashire County Council, Cumbria County Council, Cumbria Chamber of Commerce, Friends of the Earth, Stockport PCT, AGMA, East Lancashire Chief Executives Group, Forestry Commission, Blackpool

⁷ Guidance on Accessibility in Local Transport Plans, DfT, July 2004

⁸ Northwest Regional Economic Strategy, NWDA, 2006 (Transformational Actions 26 to 38 and 43 to 54) (**ECO10**)

authorities and areas that require particular efforts in addressing low skills attainment and growing the size of the workforce.

Panel Question (v)

Is the Key Diagram fit for purpose and do the sub-regional diagrams add value?

5.1 The Key Diagram meets the expectation set out in PPS11 to '*...illustrate the policies for the development and use of land, which will comprise the strategy for spatial development for the region...*'. For the purposes of clarification, Assembly officers have suggested a revision to the RTS to ensure an explicit link between the Key Diagram and the RTS⁹. The sub-regional diagrams provide assistance in navigating the various geographical aspects of the sub-regional policy frameworks, and hence add value to the Draft RSS.

⁹ Paragraph 1.5, Matter 5A (i)