Planning our Nationally Significant Transport Infrastructure: time for a re-think or business as usual?

A research paper produced for the Transport Planning Society

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John Bradburn

Abstract

Our nationally significant transport infrastructure supports the economic competitiveness and quality of life of the nation, enabling the movement of people and goods both within the country and beyond. Yet the process of planning for such infrastructure is far from ideal, with a growing momentum over the past year for a fundamental shift in the way in which we plan our nationally significant transport infrastructure.

Through a literature review and programme of stakeholder consultation, this paper analyses the current challenges associated with the way in which we plan for nationally significant transport infrastructure and investigates the alternative policy scenarios which could be adopted by the next government to help overcome them.

The results of this research lead to the recommendation that the next government should form an independent Commission, powered to develop a National Spatial Strategy covering a range of areas including, inter alia, land use, transport, climate change and economic development. The principle of subsidiarity should be at the core of such an approach.

A National Spatial Strategy would provide a more steadfast approach to the long term planning of our nationally significant transport infrastructure, helping to overcome short termism by advocating an evidence based approach and removing, as much as possible, political influences from the process. For transport, the end benefit of the NSS would be a national transport network that capitalises on its opportunity to drive growth and improve quality of life for all.
1. **Introduction and Research Questions**

1.1. Our nationally significant transport infrastructure supports the economic competitiveness and quality of life of the nation, enabling the movement of people and goods both within the country and beyond. Yet the way in which we plan for such infrastructure is far from ideal, with a growing momentum over the past year for a fundamental shift in the way in which we plan our nationally significant transport infrastructure.

1.2. The Transport Committee has highlighted the need for integration between the planning for different transport modes, as well as the need for transport to be developed as part of a wider strategy (House of Commons Transport Committee, 2014). Elsewhere, industry bodies (see Institution of Civil Engineers, 2013) have been joined by the Labour party (Oliver, 2014) in calling for a national infrastructure strategy.

1.3. Such a strategy could help deal with the challenges facing our strategic transport networks in the coming decades, including providing capacity to meet a growing population and stimulating economic activity and re-balancing the geography of economics away from London.

1.4. Historically, governments have adopted White Papers for setting high level strategy on transport, and at one stage there was even a ten year plan for transport. However, in more recent years government has backed away from such an approach in setting the agenda for nationally strategic transport infrastructure, now adopting the National Infrastructure Plan (2013) and National Policy Statement on National Networks (NN NPS) (2014).

1.5. Under the Transport Planning Society’s 2014 Bursary topic of ‘What should an incoming government do to improve planning for transport?’; this paper analyses the current challenges associated with the way in which we plan for nationally significant transport infrastructure, investigating the alternative policy scenarios which could be adopted by the next government to help overcome them, providing a recommendation to how the next government could improve the planning of nationally significantly transport infrastructure.

1.6. In responding to the topic, the following research questions are posed:

- What are the main challenges associated with the planning of nationally significant transport infrastructure today?; and

- What policy scenarios could be adopted to overcome these challenges?
2. **Methodology**

2.1. ‘Nationally significant transport infrastructure’ relates here to the planning of major strategic road network schemes (such as the A3 Hindhead tunnel), major rail network schemes (such as East-West Rail), airports and seaports. The research has been limited to England due to the different governance and planning arrangements adopted in the devolved nations.

2.2. The methodology adopted is twofold. Firstly, a literature review has been undertaken, covering a breadth of sources, including, *et al*:

- National policy on transport and land use planning;
- Select Committee statements;
- Political position papers and studies;
- Professional institution position papers;
- Academic and independent research papers;
- Scottish government transport and spatial policy;
- International comparisons of planning for strategic transport infrastructure;
- Statements from business; and
- Press.

2.3. Through this review, an assessment of the most pressing challenges concerning the planning of nationally significant transport infrastructure was undertaken. From this assessment, a sifting of challenges was carried out in order to prioritise those for further study.

2.4. The literature review also involved identifying alternative policy scenarios that the next government could adopt to overcome the challenges identified.

2.5. The second stage of the methodology involved a programme of semi-structured telephone interviews, which were undertaken to collate the views of stakeholders from across the industry. Interviews were identified as the most appropriate method of engaging with stakeholders, given the detailed and wide-ranging nature of the topic.

2.6. Interviews were split into two parts:

- A discussion of the main challenges associated with the planning of nationally significant transport infrastructure, as identified through the literature review, including opportunities for interviewees to raise any other challenges they felt needed addressing; and
- A discussion as to how the challenges could be overcome, including an assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of the policy scenarios identified through the literature review. Interviewees were also given the opportunity to forward other policy scenarios, before determining which scenario the next government should adopt to overcome the challenges.

2.7. To identify interviewees, a list of cross-industry stakeholders was drawn up, with representatives from each group approached for interview. The final interviewees represent the industry well, with stakeholders from all backgrounds being involved. A list of the stakeholders interviewed is presented in Appendix A, alongside the interview plan issued to participants ahead of each interview.
3. What are the main challenges associated with the planning of nationally significant transport infrastructure?

3.1. In order to reflect on how transport planning should develop, we must understand its shortcomings today. Through the literature review and sifting process, the following main challenges emerged:

- The lack of a long term strategy for growth and an understanding of transport’s role in delivering said growth;
- The impact of short termism and the political cycle;
- The impact that uncertainty around future direction has on investor confidence;
- Silo working across the industry preventing holistic planning from being undertaken; and
- The lack of a demand management strategy at a national level.

3.2. These challenges are interwoven and strongly relate to the way national government sets the agenda for transport and determines the governance of its planning and delivery. They also relate to the way in which transport can help drive economic growth.

3.3. There was a strong consensus amongst interviewees that the challenges raised were of importance and that the next government needs to focus on overcoming them.

3.4. The following sections consider the detail of the literature review and stakeholder consultation responses.

The lack of a long term strategy for growth and an understanding of transport’s role in delivering said growth

3.5. England does not have a long term growth strategy. In the context of transport planning this means there is no clear vision for how the strategic transport networks are to be developed to deliver wider aspirations around the economy, housing and growth. A respondent to the Armitt review provided a useful summary of this predicament in stating that, ‘at present, no single body in the UK takes a view of what the picture on the front of the jigsaw box looks like. Rather we hope it comes together, mainly by chance, via the work of a number of separate parties such as investors, regulators and Government’ (Armitt, 2013).

3.6. Without an overarching strategy, transport planning practitioners and decision makers are restricted in their ability to understand transport’s wider role in supporting the long term prosperity of the nation and to effectively deliver the right connectivity to support economic competitiveness and deliver housing and job growth, to the detriment of our quality of life.

3.7. In terms of global competitiveness, the position of the United Kingdom (UK) is made most clear in the World Economic Forum’s Global Competitiveness Report 2013-14 (World Economic Forum, 2013), as summarised in Table 1. Whilst overall the UK ranks highly, the quality of our transport infrastructure, particularly road and air, was found to fall behind that of many other nations.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>UK</th>
<th>Germany</th>
<th>France</th>
<th>Spain</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Overall global competitiveness index</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality of road infrastructure</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality of air transport infrastructure</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality of railroad infrastructure</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3.8. Arguably the closest thing that the transport industry has to guide priorities and investment in line with a wider government strategy is the National Infrastructure Plan (NIP), which supposedly sets out a *holistic view of the challenges facing UK infrastructure and its approach to meeting them* (HM Treasury, 2013). Yet, the NIP has been widely criticised for being simply a list of projects with no strategic purpose or clear priorities (House of Commons Committee of Public Accounts, 2013 and Walker, 2014).

3.9. The general consensus amongst interviewees was that England lacks a sense of strategy and direction for both the economy and transport, and that some form of national strategy is required. This was best summed up by one interviewee who stated that:

*Government should regard its role as steward of the long term prosperity of a country…and if that is the case then government should be taking a long term view as to how the country should best invest in its future prosperity and economic competitiveness…If you accept that that is the role of government…then it seems to me impossible that government could properly discharge that duty unless it has a view as to the future growth it was trying to drive in the county.*

3.10. A number of interviewees commented that whilst individual modes have long term plans, there was a lack of an overarching strategy or joined up thinking, acting as an inhibitor to effective transport planning. An example repeatedly given was that the planning of high speed rail and the review of airport capacity being undertaken by the Davis Commission were happening in isolation of one another.

3.11. Additionally, it was felt that transport’s role in enabling housing and employment growth was not fully articulated or planned for at a national level, and neither was transport’s role in balancing regional economies.

3.12. A minority of interviewees felt that because England is not a centralised state, such as Germany or Japan, and given our liberalised economy, a national strategy for growth would not be suitable.

**The impact of short termism and the political cycle**

3.13. The nature of our political system is such that changes in power are not uncommon. One problem associated with this is that when such swings in power occur, party politics quite often leads to significant changes in transport policy, spending and governance.

3.14. Critics note that party politics leads to short termism in decision making, which is no doubt helped by the lack of an overarching growth strategy for government to work within. Lord Heseltine’s *No Stone Unturned* (2012) found that the private sector lament the fact that policy changes, political cycles and the stop-start nature of funding, result in investment uncertainty which limits the private sector’s ability to act as an effective investment partner.

3.15. Short termism also means that when hard decision need to be made about long term investments, politicians defer judgement. The ongoing saga over south-east airport capacity is one such example, which once the Davies Commission produces its final report in 2015, will mark the Diamond Jubilee of the debate (Cox, 2013).

3.16. This situation has led to calls for party politics to be taken out of infrastructure investment decisions, in an attempt for a more long term view to be taken, with the creation of some form of independent panel to assess our long term infrastructure needs (Cox, 2013 and Armitt, 2013).

3.17. Many interviewees argued that the political cycle was damaging to the transport industry, and that political interference made long term planning very difficult. However, a number of interviewees argued that short termism is an element of the democratic model that we have adopted and as such we have to tolerate it. Others noted that the rail industry’s long term planning process, with guaranteed funding cycles over five years, goes some way to overcoming short termism, with hope that the Highways Agency’s (HA) move towards a similar model could help improve long term decision making in the highway sector.

**The impact uncertainty of future direction has on investor confidence**

3.18. There has been criticism that political short termism and the lack of a long term vision for growth and prosperity in England has undermined business confidence, with the Public Accounts Committee writing:

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1 Such as Network Rail’s long term planning process
Uncertainty over government policy can deter or delay investment in infrastructure projects and lead to additional costs. Investors will be reluctant to invest in projects until government policy is clear and consistent. Government plans are inevitably subject to change, but unexpected changes create unnecessary investor uncertainty.

House of Commons Committee of Public Accounts, 2013

3.19. The feeling amongst a number of interviewees was that businesses expect some level of certainty about the environment in which they operate, with government expected to provide this. With uncertainty comes increased risks, deterring investment and damaging our economic potential.

3.20. Again, the debate over south-east airport capacity was widely held among interviewees as damaging to stakeholders and investment. This is evidenced in Willie Walsh’s exasperation over the expansion of Heathrow, calling it a ‘lost cause’ (Topham, 2014).

3.21. Two interviewees suggested that too much weight was given to the argument that short termism impacts significantly on investor confidence. Rather, it was suggested that macro-economic conditions and the potential withdrawal of the UK from the Europe Union, have bigger impacts on investor confidence.

Silo working across the industry preventing a holistic approach from being developed

3.22. Players in the transport industry are often criticised for having a silo mentality, with there being three facets to this, as briefly detailed below.

3.23. Firstly, silo working between transport modes is a significant challenge, with strong criticism being made that, at a national level, integrated planning between different modes is negligible, leading to the highly inefficient development of our transport networks (Chartered Institute of Highways and Transportation, 2013 and Royal Town Planning Institute, 2014).

3.24. The lack of integration between Network Rail and the HA for planning their networks was one example, as noted by Professor Stephen Glaister of the RAC Foundation:

*I do not think there is any forum in which anybody is going to say, “Here is a corridor of need. To what extent will we meet that by road or by rail?” That is not on the table, and it should be.*

House of Commons Transport Committee, 2014

3.25. Secondly, silo working within modes is a challenge. Principally this relates to the highway sector, where the HA and local highway authority planning is not always integrated, as raised by a number of interviewees.

3.26. Finally, stakeholders in the transport industry fail to take a more holistic view as to how transport interacts with and impacts upon many other factors, including land-use, employment and economic competitiveness. These relationships have been well noted, including by the Lyons Review (2014) and the RTPI, who write:

*Planning for transport infrastructure provision…needs to be carried out in combination with the development of national and local policies for, amongst other things: housing provision, business development, tackling unemployment, social care services, energy supply, global economic competitiveness and environmental sustainability…This kind of integrated planning is how we will capture the true scale of the wider benefits from transport infrastructure investment*

Royal Town Planning Institute, 2014

3.27. The issue of silo working was of high importance amongst the majority of interviewees with a range of concerns emerging, including:

- The failure to see transport more holistically. A number of interviewees made reference to the housing crisis in England and that there was little planning at a national level as to how transport infrastructure fits into delivering the homes needed. In 2012 the University of Manchester produced A Map for England, mapping the policies and proposals of central government departments. This work showed the lack of integration between departments, particularly in the transport and land use planning sector. As an example, the report shows that East Anglia is expected to deliver high levels of housing growth and yet plans to support this through transport infrastructure were lacking (Centre for Urban Policy Studies, 2014);
The lack of integration between the HA and Network Rail was repeatedly referenced. Two interviewees gave the example of the M27 between Southampton and Portsmouth, where highway congestion is a serious issue. There is potential for improved rail services to relieve some of the pressure, yet because there is no mechanism for holistic planning, such an option cannot be pursued; and

Finally, it was noted that the objective driven nature of stakeholders prevented holistic working, as each player looks out for their own interests rather than the bigger picture. Without an overarching holistic view to work towards, or, as one interviewee referred to it, a controlling mind, achieving integrated working is very difficult. A number of interviewees suggested that the power and influence of Transport for London (TfL) and the Mayor in London had helped overcome this.

The lack of a demand management strategy for highways at a national level

3.28. Many transport planners and economists agree with the words of Sir Rod Eddington that road pricing is an economic ‘no brainer’ (Butcher, 2010). It is therefore somewhat surprising that the government’s NN NPS (DfT, 2014b) disregards demand management as a method for managing traffic growth on the strategic road network (Planning Officers Society, 2013 and DfT, 2014a). The Transport Planning Society, in its response to the draft NN NPS, outlined its concern with the lack of a national demand strategy:

The statement that demand management and other policies are ineffective is not justified in the draft statement. This is despite clear evidence from around the country that policies can and do work, and Government allocates significant amounts of money to pursuing such policies... Perhaps the most dramatic example of the effectiveness of packages which include active traffic management together with demand management was the London Olympics.

(Transport Planning Society, 2014)

3.29. There was consensus amongst interviewees that demand management was an important issue and that national transport policy was overlooking it, with one interviewee stating that it was a ‘gaping hole’ in DfT policy.

Other challenges noted by interviewees

3.30. One challenge raised by multiple interviewees concerns the apparent restrictiveness of transport appraisal methodology, as determined by the DfT through its Transport Appraisal Guidance (WebTAG). It was criticised for being piecemeal and lacking a spatial dimension, seeing transport schemes only on an individual level rather than as combined schemes which could have a beneficial impact bigger than the sum of their parts. It was also argued that the appraisal process was ‘deliberately and explicitly’ excluding the wider economic benefits of schemes, an argument supported by leading practitioners (Wenban-Smith, 2013 and Forster, 2014)

Summary

3.31. There was a strong consensus amongst interviewees that the five challenges discussed were of importance and that there was a need for the next government to address each. Interviewees were asked to prioritise the challenges in order of importance. A consensus on priority was lacking, though it was clear that the majority of respondents felt that overcoming silo working and short termism and that the development of a long term strategy were of greatest priority.
4. What policy scenarios could be adopted to overcome these challenges?

Calls for change

4.1. Over the past year calls for a fundamental shift in the planning for nationally significant transport infrastructure have been gaining momentum, with stakeholders from across the industry promoting alternative policy scenarios. Table 2 presents a summary of four such policy scenarios, two of which have recently received significant attention – a National Infrastructure Strategy (NIS) or Assessment and a National Spatial Strategy (NSS) – as well as two other potential policy scenarios which were identified in the literature review.

Assessment of alternative policy scenarios

4.2. The alternative policy scenarios were used to frame the second half of the stakeholder interviews, during which interviewees were asked to consider the positives and negatives of each. An assessment of each scenario has been undertaken using the findings of the literature review and stakeholder interviews. The results of this are presented in Table 3, where each policy scenario has been scored against the challenges identified in Chapter 3 on a scale of 0 to 2, against the following criteria:

- 0 – The policy scenario is unlikely to help in overcoming the challenge;
- 1 – Some potential for the policy scenario to help in overcoming the challenge; and
- 2 – Strong potential for the policy scenario to help in overcoming the challenge.

4.3. The results indicate that a NSS is the policy scenario with the greatest potential to overcome the challenges identified and thereby improve the planning of nationally significant transport infrastructure.

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1 For a more detailed discussion of alternative policy scenarios see Atkins and Hazel, 2006 and Marshall, 2011.
Table 2 – Alternative policy scenarios

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Detail</th>
<th>Stakeholder Support</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>High Level Framework National Plan</strong></td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A High Level Framework National Plan setting out the guiding principles for developing the country’s transport system in accordance with government aims, a model adopted in Sweden (Atkins and Hazel, 2006). Whilst there would be a degree of modal integration, delivery bodies would still be responsible for developing their own strategies in line with the framework plan.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>National Transport Strategy</strong></td>
<td>HS2 Ltd1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A NTS, as adopted in New Zealand, focuses on an evidence based approach to planning nationally significant transport infrastructure, identifying problems and potentially appraising solutions. This approach is similar to that of the NIS however it remit covers only transport infrastructure. The NTS model is supported by HS2 Ltd (2014), who argue that such an approach would help overcome ad-hoc and short-term decision making, helping to address pressures and trade-offs in the transport system.</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>National Infrastructure Strategy or Assessment</strong></td>
<td>Labour Party2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A NIS or assessment considers the infrastructure needs of a country, including transport, energy and waste. Within England, calls for such a body stem from the Armitt Review’s proposals for a National Infrastructure Assessment and an independent National Infrastructure Commission (NIC), similar to that adopted in Australia. This proposal has received support for a range of stakeholders, particularly those in industry. Armitt’s proposals would see the NIC producing an evidence based assessment of the nation’s infrastructure needs every decade, with a 25-30 year outlook. Government departments would then be responsible for drawing up and delivering policies and plans to meet the identified needs. The NIC would retain an overseeing role to ensure that delivery plans were fit for purpose and being effectively implemented. It is argued that this approach would hold politicians to account ‘to produce and implement robust proposals within clear timescales’ (Armitt, 2013).</td>
<td>EEF The Manufacturers’ Association3, KPMG4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>National Spatial Strategy</strong></td>
<td>Transport Planning Society5, Chartered Institute of Logistics and Transport6, Town and Country Planning Association7, Lyons Housing Review8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The land use and transport planning professional institutions all call for a NSS to provide a strategy for delivering economic growth through effective land use, transport and environmental planning. The Lyons Housing Review called for a ‘national spatial dimension’ to planning policy, whilst a joint publication by the TPS and CILT call for a NSS to be developed on a five year cycle, taking a 15-25 year outlook. Through the development of a NSS, a National Transport Strategy would emerge, designed in order to support the wide objectives of the NSS. Such an approach would help address issues ranging from climate change, energy security, regional imbalances and economic competitiveness (Town and Country Planning Association, 2011). Examples of such an approach can be seen in the Netherlands and to some extent Scotland.</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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1 HS2 Ltd, 2014  
2 Oliver, 2014  
3 EEF. The Manufacturers’ Association, 2014  
4 Threlfall, 2014  
5 Chartered Institute of Logistics and Transport and the Transport Planning Society, 2014  
6 Chartered Institute of Logistics and Transport and the Transport Planning Society, 2014  
7 Town and Country Planning Association, 2011  
8 Lyons, 2014
### Table 3 – Assessment of alternative policy scenarios

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Policy scenario</th>
<th>The lack of a long term strategy for growth and an understanding of transport’s role in delivering said growth</th>
<th>The impact of short termism and the political cycle</th>
<th>The impact uncertainty of future direction has on investor confidence</th>
<th>Silo working across the industry preventing a holistic approach from being developed</th>
<th>The lack of a demand management strategy at a national level</th>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Discussion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High Level Framework National Plan</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>- There was a consensus amongst interviewees that a High Level Framework National Plan would not be the most appropriate policy for improving the planning of nationally significant transport infrastructure, particularly in overcoming the five main challenges identified.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Transport Strategy</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>- A NTS was viewed by a number of interviewees as an improvement on the current policy system – though there was concern amongst some interviewees about the role of the city-regions in development such a document.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Infrastructure Assessment or Strategy</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>- A NIS, as envisaged by the Arnott Review (2013) received support from the majority of interviewees as an improvement over the existing policy system, being seen as a significant step towards overcoming the five main challenges raised, particularly around developing a more integrated and long term approach.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Spatial Strategy</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>- There was a general consensus amongst interviewees that a NSS would be the best policy scenario to adopt to try to overcome the five main challenges identified and improve the way we plan for nationally significant transport infrastructure.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A ‘change nothing’ approach</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>- Interviewees made it clear that continuing with the current policy system was not an option if we wanted to improve the way we improve the planning of nationally significant transport infrastructure.</td>
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</table>

Continuing with the current policy situation would do little to overcome the challenges identified.

As with the other scenarios, there is potential that a NTS could set its own objectives for supporting long term economic growth in lieu of a higher level strategy.

As with the High Level Framework National Plan, an NTS plan is unlikely to prove a strong enough tool to overcome short termism.

A NTS could provide an opportunity to improve investor confidence in investing in infrastructure projects and the wider economy.

A NIS has the potential to be a more steadfast approach to long term planning given that it encompasses a wide range of issues and changing the strategy could have significant, cross-industry implications.

A NIS could provide an opportunity to improve investor confidence in government infrastructure investments, as well as in the housing construction industry.

The NTS would provide a strong opportunity for breaking down silo working across modes, though it would fail to take a fully holistic approach given the lack of integration with land use planning.

The NTS plan is unlikely to provide greater confidence to the business sector regarding long term planning.

Some potential for cross-mode planning, but interviewees were concerned with the lack of spatial consideration.

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There is potential that a national plan could include policies on demand management.

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The NTS would provide a strong opportunity for breaking down silo working across modes, though it would fail to take a fully holistic approach given the lack of integration with land use planning.

A framework national plan is unlikely to prove a strong enough tool to overcome short termism, given its similarity with previous government policy which has failed to overcome short termism.

The NTS would provide a strong opportunity for breaking down silo working across modes, though it would fail to take a fully holistic approach given the lack of integration with land use planning.

A NIS could provide an opportunity to improve investor confidence in investing in infrastructure projects and the wider economy.

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Other issues noted by interviewees

4.4. A small minority of interviewees were concerned with how any form of national strategy, be it infrastructure, transport or spatial, could be developed in England given the nature of our political system. One interviewee argued that as we have no recent history of strategising in England and that, rather, government leaves strategising to stakeholders and third parties, efforts to achieve a national strategy would fail.

4.5. One interviewee was also concerned that attempts at developing long term strategies or in setting out scheme prioritisation could become too restrictive as new challenges or issues emerge and priorities change.

4.6. A point noted by a number of interviewees was that any form of government policy could be subject to changes following shifts in government, and that this was a common occurrence in England. Therefore, the argument follows that the policy scenarios discussed should not be seen as cure for overcoming political short termism and the political cycle.

4.7. A number of interviewees made reference to the Armitt Review's (2013) proposals for a National Infrastructure Commission (NIC), which could help overcome policy drift and ensure that when governments do change policy, this is done on an evidence based approach. The NIC would be charged with assessing the UK's long term infrastructure needs (with a time horizon of 25-30 years), with Government departments then responsible for producing plans to meet the assessed needs. Interviewees raised the concern that decisions by the NIC would still need political approval and that leaving delivery to Whitehall departments meant no improvement on the existing situation. The fact that the NIC would not be locally driven was also raised as a concern.
5. A National Spatial Strategy for England

5.1. The results of this research suggest strong support for a NSS to help overcome the main challenges preventing the effective planning of nationally significant transport infrastructure. As highlighted in Table 3, this approach would help to overcome silo working, short termism and the impact of uncertainty on investor confidence.

5.2. Detailed below is a discussion of the benefits of a NSS, as well as recommendations as to how the NSS should be scoped, developed and delivered. This is not intended as a perfect blueprint, rather a collection of ideas to enhance the discussion of the topic in the lead up to the next election.

Benefits of the NSS

5.3. A NSS would consider why transport infrastructure is needed by first assessing factors such as land use and population change. In doing so, the strategy would take a holistic and evidence based approach to our future needs. In terms of the main challenges associated with the planning of nationally significant transport infrastructure noted in Chapter 3, the NSS would:

- Provide a more steadfast approach to long term planning, helping to overcome short termism by advocating an evidence based approach and removing, as much as possible, political influences from the process;
- Help overcome silo working by integrating the planning of nationally significant land use and transport projects. This would set a framework for integrated working for other government bodies to follow;
- Improve investor confidence by providing more certainty to government plans. Financiers would be more confident to invest in both transport projects and their own businesses;
- Consider fully the benefits and impacts of a national demand management strategy; and
- Set its own objectives for supporting long term economic growth in lieu of a higher level strategy.

5.4. For transport, the end benefit of the NSS would be a national transport network that capitalises on its opportunity to drive growth and improve quality of life. A NSS would provide broad benefits beyond transport planning, in particular in helping deliver housing growth, as recognised in the Lyons Housing Review (2014). The strategy would speed up decision making, an issue which has long plagued infrastructure development in England, whilst supporting the economy and enhancing our quality of life.

Scope of the NSS

5.5. The NSS should be developed through an evidence based assessment of existing need, covering a range of sectors from land use and transport to waste, economic development, climate change, energy security and flood defences. Having identified need, the NSS would assess options and recommend to government solutions for meeting the needs. These would be presented in an implementation plan covering all sectors, including transport.

5.6. The NSS should take a view over 20-40 years, planning for horizons across that time frame.

5.7. The Commission requires strong leadership and a national voice, with the leadership of Sir David Higgins at HS2 being a good example to emulate.

Subsidiarity

5.8. The NSS should be succinct and developed on the principle of subsidiarity, so that where decisions are best made at a local or regional level, they are done so. The importance of subsidiarity to such a policy approach cannot be stated enough, particularly given the current discourse around devolution. The success of Greater Manchester in gaining greater fiscal and policy powers has shown that central government may finally be serious about devolving significant powers to lower tiers of government.

5.9. Interviewees were cautiously optimistic about the devolution agenda, with the general feeling being that we can balance having a national strategy with devolution of powers and funding. There will always been a need for a national tier of planning and policy making, to take a strategic view of national issues to consider how we want our country to develop in the future, such as where
new garden cities should be developed, how a future high speed rail network should look and where new nuclear facilities should be located.

Developing the NSS

5.10. The development of the NSS should be undertaken by an independent Commission, detached from government, vested interests and departmental agendas. As the failure of the Department for the Environment, Transport and the Regions showed us, internal-government cross-departmental working in the field of strategic planning is rarely successful in breaking down silos. We should learn from this, as well as the successes of other models, such as the Olympic Delivery Authority (ODA).

5.11. It is worth noting that an independent Commission on transport did exist, in the form of the Commission for Integrated Transport (CiIT), which provided independent advice to government. Though abolished in 2010, an earlier review of CiIT found that it had performed effectively against its remit (Rice, 2003). However a key problem for the CiIT was its relationship with the DfT, which deteriorated over time – a lesson which should be learnt for the future.

5.12. Development of the NSS should be managed by experts and academics, who would set out the framework for the strategy and provide sound evidence to inform debate. However, the central decision making body of the Commission would be a forum of representatives from the city-regions, shires, and central government. This will ensure that local government takes a lead role in determining what is needed to support the cities and communities across England.

5.13. The NSS will need to be approved by parliament, which could propose changes. Once approved, the NSS should be sufficiently flexible so that it can be updated as necessary but based on reason and evidence, not political motivation. This is similar to the accountability model proposed by Armitt (2013).

Delivery of the NSS

5.14. Counter to the Armitt Review (2013) and TPS/CILT (2014) proposals, government departments should not be responsible for delivery of the NSS. A number of interviewees raised this as an important point, being concerned that Whitehall has failed to prove itself an effective delivery body.

5.15. Rather, delivery of the proposals set out in the NSS should take a subsidiarity approach. Whilst the Commission should retain accountability for the strategy's delivery, where possible, city-regions should be devolved the responsibility of delivery. Where this is not appropriate, national bodies, such as the HA or non-departmental bodies such as HS2 Ltd, should be responsible for delivery.

Disbenefits of the NSS

5.16. There are a number of disbenefits associated with the development and delivery of a NSS, including:

- The time taken to develop and ratify the NSS, during which decisions on projects may not be made. This could lead to stagnation, hampering economic growth potential;
- A NSS could stifle innovation and creativity by being inflexible to change and by the Commission failing to listen to all stakeholders effectively;
- A lack of consensus within the Commission leading to a watered down strategy;
- A failure to fully embrace subsidiarity, resulting in a top-down decision making process.

5.17. It is important that such disbenefits are considered further, with methods for reducing their likelihood of occurring being developed if the NSS approach is to be perused.

Summary of recommendations

5.18. In order to improve the planning of nationally significant transport infrastructure, the following recommendations are made to the next government:

- An independent Commission should be formed, empowered to develop a NSS covering a range of areas including land use, transport, energy security, waste, climate change, economic development and flood protection. The Commission should be managed by experts and academics, with a central forum representing the city-regions, shires, and central government;
The NSS should have a remit to assess existing need in each sector of coverage and to appraise and recommend options to meet each need;

The NSS should be sufficiently flexible such that once approved by parliament, it can be updated as necessary but based on reason and evidence, not political motivation;

The development and delivery of the NSS should be routed in the principle of subsidiarity. The NSS will only concern itself with nationally strategic issues such as high speed rail, significant housing developments (such as garden cities) and energy security; and

The Commission should be empowered to devolve responsibility of delivery to the most appropriate level of government, based on a subsidiarity approach.
Appendix A: Stakeholders and Interview Plan

The stakeholders interviewed for this research were:

- Airport Operators Association;
- Association of Directors of Environment, Economy, Planning and Transport;
- Greater Birmingham and Solihull Local Enterprise Partnership;
- Greater London Authority;
- Highways Agency;
- Institute of Civil Engineers;
- KPMG;
- Mott MacDonald;
- University of Manchester;
- Town and Country Planning Association;
- Transport Planning Society;
- Transport Scotland;
- Network Rail; and
- Royal Town Planning Institute.

Additionally, two additional participants responded to the interview in regard to their previous roles at the Northwest Development Agency and Manchester City Council.

A copy of the interview plan issued to each participant ahead of their interview is presented on the following pages.
National transport planning: time for a re-think or business as usual?

There has been growing momentum over the past year for a fundamental shift in the planning for nationally significant infrastructure in England, particularly in terms of transport. The purpose of this research is to consider the evidence based need for, and the value of, such a shift in national transport planning and to evaluate the alternative scenarios available for planning for nationally significant transport infrastructure.

The methodology adopted to complete this research has involved an initial sifting of priority issues for transport at a national level, based on a literature review. Further to this, alternative policy scenarios for delivering a transport strategy have been reviewed with consideration given to how each scenario could help overcome the identified priority issues.

The purpose of this interview is to validate the issues raised during the review of issues with national transport planning, and to discuss how alternative policy scenarios could overcome these issues and improve the way we plan for nationally significant transport infrastructure.

This research is being undertaken as part of the Transport Planning Society's Bursary programme, which this year has the theme of 'What should an incoming government do to improve planning for transport'? For further information please see http://www.tps.org.uk/main/bursaries/.

Part 1: Priority issues for transport at a national level

During this first part of the interview you will be asked to consider five priority issues for transport at a national level which have emerged through a literature review. The five issues are:

1. Lack of a long term strategy for growth
   *Reasoning:* There are strong calls for a long term strategy or prioritisation for growth in England, including by the Public Accounts Select Committee (2013) and wider industry, such as the Royal Academy of Engineers in their response to the Armitt Review (2014).

2. The need to overcome silo working in order to achieve a holistic view
   *Reasoning:* The lack of integrated planning between different modes, as well consideration of the wider spatial nature of transport and land-use planning is a further notable issue. This has been raised by various sectors, including by the Farrel Review (2014) of architecture and the built environment, and by Imperial College London and the University of Leeds in their response to the Armitt Review (2014).

3. Short termism and the political cycle
   *Reasoning:* A regular criticism from the private sector, including the Royal Academy of Engineers, is that political instability and short termism impede long term decision making. This issue has been noted in numerous political papers including the Armitt Review (2014) and the McNulty Report (2011).

4. Investor confidence being undermined due to uncertainty
   *Reasoning:* Uncertainty over government policy and investment, such as the case of airport capacity in the south-east, has significant impacts on investor and business confidence. A notable proponent of this is the Manufacturers’ Organisation, with numerous political reviews also raising the issue.

5. Lack of demand management at a national level
   *Reasoning:* The Draft National Policy Statement for National Networks (NN NPS, 2013) disregards demand management as a method for reducing traffic growth, instead reverting to the former ‘predict-and-provide’ mentality. This issue has been raised in academic circles by Imperial College London and the University of Leeds in their response to the Armitt Review (2014) as well by the Planning Officers’ Society in their response to the NN NPS (2014).

For each of these issues, you will be asked to consider:

1. To what extent do you agree that the issue is a priority? (discussion and ranking on a 1-5 scale)
2. In what ways does the issue hamper planning for nationally significant transport investment?
3. How could the current system be improved to overcome issue?
4. What are the risks associated with overcoming the issue?

This part ends by asking whether you think there are other issues with national transport planning that are of greater importance than those issues noted above.
Part 2: Alternative policy scenarios

This part of the interview concerns an evaluation of the alternative policy scenarios that a new government could potentially adopt. The scenarios have been formulated based on a review of international practice.

During the interview you will be asked to consider the strengths and weaknesses of each scenario, keeping in mind the priority issues for national transport planning discussed in the previous section.

The scenarios for discussion are:

1. **National transport strategy**
   A modally integrated transport strategy with potentially some scheme prioritisation, as adopted in New Zealand.

2. **National spatial strategy**
   A spatial strategy that considers relationships between many factors, including land use, transport, energy, et al., as adopted in the Netherlands.

3. **National infrastructure strategy**
   A strategy that solely considers the infrastructure needs of a country, including transport, energy, waste, et al., such as in Australia.

4. **High level framework national plan**
   A plan setting out guiding principles for developing a country's transport system, with a degree of modal integration, as adopted in Sweden.

5. **Continuing with the current system**

Part 3: Final thoughts

The interview ends by asking, what, on balance, you think is the best approach an incoming government should take to better improve planning for nationally significant transport infrastructure?

Please note that a list of organisations taking part in this research will be published in the final paper, however individuals will not be identified nor will comments be attributed to individuals/organisations. With your permission, the interview will be recorded to aid with transcription and for validation.

John Bradburn, October 2014
Appendix B: Bibliography


Department for Transport (2014b) National Policy Statement for National Networks. HMSO.


House of Commons Committee of Public Accounts (2013) HM Treasury: Planning for Economic Infrastructure. HMSO.

House of Commons Transport Committee (2014) National Policy Statement on National Networks. HMSO.