

FOR INFORMATION

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TO: SFDF Executive, SFDF Members' Forum

FROM: Steven Birrell

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SFDF response to Scottish Executive's Transport Scotland Consultation Document

Summary

In December, SFDF made a formal response to the Scottish Executive's Transport Scotland consultation document. The submission has been included as Annex SCM-007-04-A1, of this circular for information.

For further details regarding this response, please contact SFDF Director, Flora A McLean, flora.mclean@sdfd.org.uk

Steven Birrell
SFDF Secretariat

17 December 2003

Scottish Executive
Transport Scotland Consultation
Victoria Quay
EDINBURGH
EH6 6QQ

Dear Sir / Madam,

Re: Scotland's Transport: Proposals for a New Approach to Transport in Scotland

I would like to submit comments on the Scottish Executive's proposals for a new approach to transport in Scotland on behalf of the Scottish Food and Drink Federation (SFDF).

SFDF represents the common interests of food and drink manufacturing industry. We work to improve the environment in which the individual companies who make up the industry operate: be it legislative, economic, social or political. In so doing we aim to help maximise the competitiveness and profitability of the industry.

59,300 people are employed in the food and drink sector in Scotland (54,000 in food industry alone) – some 11.8% of total British food and drink sector employees. The industry in Scotland also accounts for annual sales of around £4.2 billion (exc. whisky).

Summary

As I am sure you will appreciate, an efficient and properly integrated transport system and infrastructure are of considerable importance to food and drink manufacturing companies in Scotland who have to rely on the facilities in place to transport their produce to market.

Given the fact that, relatively speaking, producers in Scotland are on the periphery of our major markets, it is extremely important that the system is integrated, efficient and fit for purpose.

Therefore, SFDF welcomes the move proposed by the Scottish Executive towards a more strategic approach to transport projects in Scotland.

Whilst SFDF supports the Scottish Executive's ambitions for Transport Scotland to:

1. Work for an integrated, multi-modal approach to the delivery of transport services;
2. Provide for the development of Scotland's largest transport / infrastructure projects; and
3. Become a centre of excellence in delivering transport services.

We are concerned as to whether or not an Executive Agency such as Transport Scotland is the most suitable vehicle to be able to deliver these ambitions.

Whilst the desire to move at speed is understandable, SFDF is concerned that, in its haste to go down the Executive Agency route, the Scottish Executive is in danger of establishing a national transport body with a strategic remit, but without adequate powers to fulfil that role.

In our view, it is more important to establish a body with the powers to enable it to deliver, than it is to establish a body quickly. From an industry perspective, there is no point in setting up a body with a remit to do things differently, unless that body also has sufficient powers to ensure it also does things better in the future than has been the case to date.

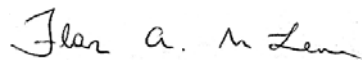
It would be disappointing if, in our haste to make the change and do things differently, we miss the opportunity to ensure we also do things better.

These and other points are addressed in greater detail in the attached submission.

I trust these comments will be taken into consideration and I look forward to hearing how this initiative will be taken forward in the coming months by the Scottish Executive.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on these proposals for Transport Scotland.

Yours sincerely,



Flora A McLean
Director

CONSULTATION QUESTIONS:

Q1. We seek views on the overall aims for a new national transport body (paragraph 26).

SFDF welcomes the move proposed by the Scottish Executive towards a more strategic approach to transport projects in Scotland and the overall aims for a new transport body, namely for it to:

- Be a centre of excellence in delivering transport
- Provide a foundation for the development of Scotland's largest transport projects
- Work for an integrated, multi-modal approach to services
- Take social justice and sustainable transport as central goals
- Aim to achieve reliable and improving services across Scotland

However, whilst the desire to move at speed is understandable, SFDF is concerned that in its haste to go down the Executive Agency route, the Scottish Executive could end up establishing a body that is expected to fulfil a strategic role but which will not in fact have sufficient powers to live up to this expectation.

From an industry perspective, SFDF is of the view that it is important to ensure that any new body established must be capable of delivering a better output than is currently the case. There will be little point in setting up a new agency unless its structure and powers are clearly defined and adequate to ensure the new body is enabled to achieve its objectives efficiently.

It would be disappointing if, in our haste to make the change and do things differently, we miss the opportunity to ensure we also do things better.

Q2. We would welcome comments on the best way of widening public involvement in the planning of transport services in Scotland (paragraph 27).

It is also important to ensure direct input from industry and the business community regarding projects of national and strategic significance, given the importance of an efficient transport system and integrated infrastructure to the success of the economy.

Q3. We have an open mind at present on any transfer of powers but would welcome views on whether changes should be made to the existing balance. In particular (paragraph 39):

(a) Are there any transport powers currently with Scottish Ministers that might more effectively be exercised by local government, whether at regional partnership or local authority level?

(b) Will Transport Scotland need to attract powers that are currently with local government – especially in relation to concessionary fares and quality contracts now that these are to be co-ordinated nationally?

(c) Would it be helpful for Transport Scotland to have powers to promote new railways or tramways in Scotland at its own hand?

Whilst we support the Scottish Executive's ambitions for a new national transport body for Scotland, SFDF is concerned as to whether or not an Executive Agency such as Transport Scotland is the most suitable vehicle to achieve these ambitions and specifically over whether or not it would have adequate powers to ensure it is capable of delivering results. There are similar concerns about an Executive Agency in terms of accountability and responsibility for delivery.

Therefore, from an industry perspective, there is little point in setting up a new agency unless its structure and powers are clearly defined and adequate to ensure the new body is enabled to achieve its objectives efficiently.

It is not clear from the consultation document what relationship the new national transport body for Scotland would have with the Strategic Rail Authority and Network Rail. What influence could the Scottish body bring to bear on these other bodies and their objectives and priorities? Is there any scope for these bodies to delegate / devolve powers over solely Scottish projects to the new national transport body for Scotland? Also, what kind of relationship would a new national transport body for Scotland have to the Scottish local authorities who also have roads and transport responsibilities?

Furthermore, how will a new national transport body fit into planning and funding processes? Surely there is a need for a simultaneous debate on planning and funding in order to ensure that these aspects of the process do not act against the objectives of the new body or prevent it from getting major projects off the ground quickly.

Without clarity over the powers of the new transport body and how it relates to other existing bodies with transport and infrastructure interests, it is difficult to see how any new body could match our ambition of a more strategic approach to the delivery transport services and major infrastructure projects of national significance.

The danger is that if time is not taken to ensure the new body has adequate powers in relation to other key players (local authorities, existing transport bodies, etc) all that will result is a log jam and an inability to deliver.

It would be disappointing if, in our haste to do things differently, we do not take the opportunity to ensure we also do things better.

Q4. We welcome views on the management framework options for regional partnerships (paragraph 63):

- (a) Existing local authorities working together through voluntary partnerships**
- (b) New Passenger Transport Executives across Scotland, repeating the SPT model in the rest of Scotland; while leaving responsibility for local roads with existing Councils**
- (c) The creation of new Joint Committees across Scotland, made up from existing local authorities, building on the benefits of the voluntary partnerships, with more formal structure and constitution, but without strong decision-making and budgetary powers**

(d) The creation of new Joint Boards, also made up from local authorities, properly maintaining the link with the constituent Councils, but with the powers and budget to plan and take difficult decisions on transport matters for their area

(e) The active creation of further special purpose bodies to work with local authorities and the voluntary partnerships.

It is difficult to see how “voluntary partnerships” or Joint Boards “without strong decision-making powers and budget” could be construed as constituting a “management framework”.

There is a need to be clear about the relationship between any of these options and the new national transport body. What scope would there be for a national transport body to succeed in its attempt to take a strategic approach to the provision of transport services and the efficient and timely delivery of major infrastructure projects unless it is clear that body has the power to ensure action at a regional level on a specified timetable?

Q5. We welcome comments on the future of SPT and the challenge of delivering integrated transport in the west of Scotland, particularly if new regional partnerships are established across Scotland (paragraph 69).

The Scottish Executive must be able to clearly demonstrate how new regional partnerships of any description will deliver better integrated, more efficient transport services and infrastructure before consideration is given to the future of SPT.

Using the SPT as a model for the development of new regional partnerships might be an option worthy of consideration.

Q6. We invite views on the appropriate number and geographical extent of regional partnerships (paragraph 75).

Q7. We would welcome views on the options for resourcing effective regional partnerships, recognising that the preferred method will be informed by what model of regional partnership is chosen (paragraph 81):

(a) The majority of funding continuing to be provided to local authorities through GAE, with Councils each deciding individually and separately how much to pass on to the partnership (voluntary partnership or Joint Committee)

How can a strategic authority be held responsible and accountable for timely delivery of major strategic infrastructure projects or integrated and efficient transport services if its work plan can so easily be delayed / derailed by local authorities with other (perhaps competing) priorities? This option could be a recipe for delay and / or inaction.

(b) Funds still provided to local authorities through GAE and regional partnerships requisitioning their budget from their constituent Councils (Joint Board)

Where would the power to requisition budget from Local Authorities come from? On what grounds could such a proposition be justified given local elected representatives expect to be held accountable for how they spend local funds? Would an ability to “requisition” funds from the budgets of local authorities contribute to the current perception of a democratic deficit?

(c) Section 70 paid direct from the strategic transport authority to the regional partnerships replacing some or all of the transport GAE provided to constituent Councils.

This would seem a more straightforward option in so far as it would avoid unnecessary delays / inaction whilst local authorities individually debate whether or not to support projects and to what extent. It would also avoid adding to concerns of a democratic deficit in terms of getting in the way of local accountability should local funds be requisitioned for projects of wider significance.