

# **DISTILLATE**

Improved Indicators for Sustainable Transport and  
Planning

## **Deliverable C3**

Improving Monitoring and Reporting for Local  
Authorities: Lessons from the Transport Sector

Greg Marsden, Mary Kimble  
Institute for Transport Studies, University of Leeds

Angela Hull, Reginald Tricker  
University of West of England

Karen Lucas, Michael Brookes  
Transport Studies Group, University of Westminster

Carolyn Snell, John Forrester  
SEI, University of York

Version 9  
05/03/08

## 1 Executive Summary

In the UK, performance monitoring and reporting have become an essential part of the accountability process between central and local government and their delivery agencies and with the media and general public. The policy agenda is also becoming increasingly integrated with a need for more cross-sectoral working.

The DISTILLATE<sup>1</sup> project is seeking to develop, through a focused, inter-disciplinary research programme, ways of overcoming the barriers to the effective development and delivery of sustainable urban transport and land use strategies and, through them, enhanced quality of life. Two surveys of local authorities have identified indicators to be a problem area in developing and delivering effective strategies. The “specification of core, statutory multi-sector indicators/targets for transport that can be adopted in all sectors at the local level in their policy and operational decisions” was highlighted as a key need to permit the development of more integrated strategies.

Initial work in this project (Marsden et al., 2005) developed a core list of outcome indicators from existing sources and a process for selecting sub-sets of these indicators and for establishing a coherent and efficient monitoring framework to understand progress towards these key outcomes. This deliverable describes work to test the application of that framework and those processes in the current decision-making framework. In particular it addresses three key objectives:

1. To understand the extent to which there is a common understanding of sustainability and quality of life across local authority departments and to what extent this understanding is achieved through shared monitoring processes
2. To examine key barriers relating to indicators identified by the cross-authority survey, namely:
  - a. The role of information exchange in integrating land-use and transport
  - b. The ability of authorities to set targets and monitor progress in their delivery
3. To test the indicators and processes for selecting indicators developed in the initial stages of this project through practical applications

To answer these objectives four case studies were established taking a ‘partnered enquiry’ approach which involves working with local and regional government employees that have an involvement in (either through development, measurement, use or impact on) indicators. The key methods employed to facilitate the partnered enquiry were:

- Desktop review
- Interviews
- Workshops

---

<sup>1</sup> Design and Implementation Support Tools for Integrated Local Land use, Transport and the Environment

In order to consider the broader integration of information across local authorities the approach has involved participants from a range of local government functions.

The studies reported above have examined the processes for setting indicators and their use across a range of applications and governmental levels. Whilst each case study is an individual application of the DISTILLATE approach, taken together they allow us to make the following observations and recommendations.

## **Monitoring Processes (Section 5)**

### *General Issues*

1. A holistic approach is needed to the development of indicators for sustainable development. Those for transport (or any other sector) should be determined within this context.
2. This in turn implies that indicators should be determined through collaboration between government departments (at any level) rather than by individual departments alone. The latter will create a silo effect, and lead to duplication and inconsistency.
3. The indicators required, and their level of detail, will vary by level of government and between local authorities depending, for example, on their demography. It is therefore inappropriate to specify too broad a set of mandatory indicators. Instead, higher levels of government should focus on advice on how to specify indicators.
4. To be useful, the definition of indicators needs to remain stable over a period of several years. Governments should, where possible, avoid seeking re-specification as policies change.
5. Indicators, and particularly outcome indicators, should relate to government (national, regional or local) objectives. As additional objectives are introduced there will be a case for additional indicators.

### *National government*

1. Government departments should collaborate in the development of national level indicators, to avoid the silo effect, which can lead to redundancy and gaps in coverage.
2. Government departments should only specify mandatory indicators where there is a national need for the information. Over-use of mandatory indicators can lead local government to question their relevance.
3. To an even greater extent, government departments should be aware of the problems created by mandatory targets. This is particularly true when targets relate to outputs and intermediate outcomes. Such targets often fail to reflect the diversity of conditions in local government, and remove from local government the responsibility for, and ownership of, appropriate targets.

4. The definition of the reduced set of mandatory local authority indicators should be accompanied by guidance on how to apply these within a local context.
5. There is a particular mismatch at present between the use of output indicators in land use planning (e.g. % of decisions within 8 weeks) and outcome indicators in transport. This makes it harder to develop consistent land use and transport strategies.

#### *Regional bodies*

1. Regions should focus principally on the indicators which are relevant at the regional scale. For example, CO<sub>2</sub> emissions are relevant at this scale, while accessibility levels are not.
2. It is not clear how responsibility for indicator selection and collection will fall with the abolition of the Regional Assemblies. This needs to be clarified. Regional Assemblies have not had sufficient resource to coordinate the specification and collection of (higher level) indicators for their regions. If there are changes to responsibilities for regional planning as anticipated then a review of the role of monitoring should be conducted.

#### *Higher tier local authorities*

1. In two tier authorities the upper tier is responsible for the LTP and the lower tier for the LDF. Unless these, and the indicators on which they are based, are consistent it will be difficult to formulate coherent strategies.
2. There is a related tendency for higher tier authorities to focus on environmental and economic indicators, while lower tier authorities deal with social indicators. This can lead to an undue emphasis on particular objectives in each authority's actions. It is possible and, indeed, sensible, to maintain these different foci, but only if each tier considers the other's objectives and indicators in developing its strategies and in assessing performance.
3. In two tier authorities, there should ideally be a clear link between responsibility for collecting data for a given indicator and responsibility for any remedial action prompted by that indicator. Where this cannot be achieved, continued collaboration is needed to ensure that the value of the information collected is clear to those responsible.

#### *Lower tier and unitary authorities*

1. Local authorities are currently required to produce too many plans, with overlapping and conflicting requirements for indicators. This in turn results in failure to perceive the synergies between different policy sectors.
2. The LAA should be used to provide a high level overview of the authority's sustainable development strategy, and the indicators relevant to its full set of sustainable development objectives. Indicators for particular policy sectors such as transport should be developed in this context.

3. The New Performance Framework indicators should be used as part of, rather than defining, the monitoring frameworks used in LAAs and supporting strategies.
4. Local authorities have a particular responsibility for involving other agencies in the collection of data and in the development of strategic responses. The process of accessibility planning has been quite successful in this regard, but has served to demonstrate the growing complexity of the policy environment.
5. Both formal and informal channels will need to be established and maintained to agree on suitable indicators, to collect the necessary information, to review the trends which these indicators demonstrate, and to agree on appropriate policy responses.

### **Land-Use and Transport Integration (Section 6)**

The review of the role of indicators in integrating transport and land-use suggests the key metrics which bring together the two policy areas are density of development and public transport accessibility. Whilst these are conceptually well linked in the prioritisation of land to be released for development several practical barriers exist to fully integrating transport and land-use:

1. The sequential approach to development can lead to the identification of sites for development which have poor accessibility relative to other areas which are excluded from consideration.
2. Good public transport accessibility occurs in areas which suffer from other transport problems (such as congestion, overcrowding and unreliability). Transport Assessments are local in nature and are not intended to overcome 'whole corridor' issues.
3. Accessibility is a relative concept (what constitutes good accessibility is likely to vary across contexts e.g. urban vs. rural). A range of approaches to assessing accessibility for planning purposes are emerging. Accessibility assessments offer the opportunity to act as a lever for developer contributions and shared best practice in the area would be helpful.
4. The timescales for the delivery of strategic transport interventions are long and often uncertain. This makes the achievement of strategic land-use transport integration difficult. Examples of integrated delivery demonstrate the added value that joint implementation can bring.

### **Key Features of Best Practice in Monitoring (Section 7)**

The production of lists of recommended indicators will never satisfy nor be appropriate to all partners, particularly when one considers the diversity of spatial scales and policy functions to which such a list might have to talk. We therefore conclude that whatever external requirements exist for monitoring certain pre-specified national indicators should not dictate the monitoring strategy for a local authority. Our research shows that the internal and external processes adopted for identifying and rationalising indicators will dictate the credibility and

acceptability of a monitoring strategy and ensure that is clearly linked to the aims of the authority.

Whilst monitoring is often seen as the preserve of a few technical experts, we have found that a major role of the indicator selection process is in communicating the importance and rationale of monitoring to other stakeholders including local politicians and obtaining buy in to the achievement of targets and goals related to those same indicators. In particular, we identify the following key elements to achieving best practice in integrated monitoring.

1. A clear mapping of the relationship between different strategies (both within an organisation and between organisations at different scales)
2. A process for identifying what needs to be monitored and why in support of each strategy
3. A process to identify where it is important to share information across sectors
4. Establishment of formal mechanisms through which information sharing is discussed
5. Work to develop informal mechanisms to support progress between formal meetings