



RTPI Discussion: Peak Oil - Implications for Planning Policy
Information Note:
Chartered Institute of Highways and Transportation Offices, London
17th January 2012

This information note has been compiled following the RTPI's discussion held on 17th January 2012 in London to discuss peak oil. Around 20 professionals attended.

The RTPI would like to thank the speakers.

Speakers:

Chair: Chris Ferrary, Temple Group

Guest Speaker: David Strahan, ODAC Trustee, Energy Journalist and Author

The speakers presentations are available at <http://www.rtpi.org.uk/item/4936&ap=1> and should be read in conjunction with this note.

Presentation by David Strahan

David provided an excellent overview of the issues around the peak oil phenomenon. Key points raised by David's presentation were:

- There is a close relationship between levels of oil production and GDP (which mirrors the basis of transport demand forecasting), which means there is a strong link between fluctuations in oil price and economic recession;
- In terms of new oil finds, replacing depleted stocks is 2-3 times more important than keeping pace with growing demand for oil; and
- 95% of transport is fuelled by oil, and ⅓ of oil production goes to fuel transport. This makes it the sector most vulnerable to the effects of peak oil.

Discussion

The discussion started with the chair asking attendees if, through the discussion paper and earlier presentations we focusing on the right issues? Is there anything that we are missing and finally, what can the RTPI do to help integrate peak oil into planning practice?

The importance of professionals and the profession as a whole thinking globally, not just locally or individually was stressed.

It was felt that there are two important influencing factors:

- 1) political response (top down, driving policy); and
- 2) public choices and individual decisions on consumption.

We tend to think about the short term but we need to start thinking longer term, in particular in terms of our political response. One way of achieving this is to ask ourselves, what is in the long term public interest, as opposed to shorter term thinking.

It was recognised that public choice and behaviour are difficult to influence, for example it is difficult to get people to stop using their car.

This event was sponsored by:

**TEMPLE***...intelligent strategy, responsible delivery*

The link between recession and the price fluctuation of oil was discussed in some depth. It is well established that there is a strong link between the two, but it isn't something that people are widely aware of. Again shortness of political perspective was considered an issue.

In terms of transport policy attendees felt that we are already aware of what needs to be done, but that there was a lack of political will. Although, it is often the planning system itself that is held to blame for delaying/stopping the development of renewables. However, there appears to be a lack of understanding of issues such as climate change, peak oil and energy security among planning professionals. A programme of education would help to raise the profile of the subject and issues surrounding it and help drive forward political agendas.

Attendees discussed the best mechanism to address the challenge. In what area(s) do we need to concentrate our efforts? For example high density urban living or achieving a green grid? Is our time well spent negotiating for a percentage of on site renewables or is our time better spent in other areas? So what are our priorities and how should we approach this? Attendees felt that the best way of addressing the issues with government is to frame it around current "hot topics". Infrastructure was noted as a potential hook.

One suggestion for change was a campaign for the electrification of your second car, particularly given that there are on going improvements on range and battery charging etc. Focusing on congestion as a visible impact on daily lives was another. Attendees felt it was important that we address public concerns such as time, safety etc. and making it easier to walk and cycle. Public health professions should be involved in this. We need to consider what policies we need in place to encourage these trends. In particular, a better understanding of what changes will really matter in terms of addressing the problems presented by peak oil, and what it is that we need to prioritise.

As planners we rarely talk about energy scarcity, in particular it isn't something which is covered in Local Development Frameworks. It was considered that often a lot of the requirement to demonstrate energy efficiency is put on the developer, but it is vital we start to address this.

Attendees were asked if planners are clear about what we mean by creating places that reduce the need to travel? We are missing the opportunity to change peoples behaviour when they move - jobs, schools etc. It was the experience of some attendees that it can be difficult to get a reduced car scheme through the local political process. This then results in the need for large amounts of car parking that can often make schemes undevelopable.

A number of cross-cutting issues highlighted the need for collaboration between business, economists, planners, transport planners and health professionals developing a coherent approach to tackle peak oil's effects.

There is a perception that there are similarities between peak oil policy and climate change policy, and one will help achieve good results for the other, however this is not the case. There is no specific policy on peak oil and it is likely that the impact of peak oil will be felt much sooner by the West than climate change.

It was noted that in the short time available there were a number of issues that we were not able to discuss, including localism, the NPPF, sustainable development, SEA etc.

In summary the key initiatives that need to be promoted within the planning profession, and where the RTPI should be seeking to provide leadership were felt to be:

- Making connections with other professional institutes, particularly health and transport professionals, to work together to improve the level of knowledge, understanding and awareness of the issues raised by peak oil¹;
- Helping to develop a better understanding of the motivations for people's behaviour in terms of how they travel and where they choose to live, so that the benefits of lower-energy lifestyles can be promoted more effectively in ways that people will respond to more readily;
- Identifying what the key information needs for understanding the effects of peak oil are going forward, reflecting that "if you can't measure it, you can't manage it"; and
- Developing thinking on responses to peak oil in terms of "resilience", putting the focus on how people's behaviour needs to change, and how they can work together for a purpose.

¹ In this respect, it is acknowledged that the co-operation of the Institution of Highways and Transport in providing a venue for the debate, and the attendance of officers and staff from the Institute at the event was an important first step.

