

## RTPI/TPS TRANSPORT PLANNING NETWORK HOT TOPICS

### *Your views on the key issues*

#### Hot Topic 3: Ecotowns, transition cities and sustainable transport options

Summary by Alan Wenban-Smith, RTPI/TPS Transport Planning Network Member

The first question was, in essence, what can we do to make people's locational choices less carbon-intensive? The response emphasised conventional measures, such as integrated planning (reducing the need to travel by co-location of housing and jobs, and ensuring a good range of public transport services from the start. However, there was a recognition that behavioural changes may be more significant than planning. An interesting idea was that lower densities/larger houses may encourage people to stay put (though it was less clear how they would afford them, or why this would make them travel less in their daily lives!)

The second question concerned reducing travel demand and transport CO<sub>2</sub> generated by existing places. The response was again centred on reducing the need to travel by having local facilities and home-working technologies, plus more affordable housing in rural areas to support local services (and never mind the NIMBYs). Of course this rather assumes that there will be enough rural jobs (as well as rural services) for rural residents – and that they will be 'local jobs for local people'. The caveat about behavioural responses would seem to be in order here too!

The third question concerned the part that eco-towns could play – could they lead to lower CO<sub>2</sub>, or are they a dangerous diversion of resources and attention? The responses saw the benefit of eco-towns as a platform for trying out new ideas with a clean slate – like the 'garden cities' in their time. This could include large-scale demonstration of technologies (such as CHP) and new approaches to planning and management of development. On the other hand 'free-standing' locations and dependence on public transport for travel outside the eco-town, look like an Achilles's heel: eco-towns could simply become an opportunity for more high-priced housing in the countryside, leading to more car-dependency (while developers and residents resist the affordable housing component).

The last question concerned the balance between supply-side 'technical fixes' (HSR, electric cars, and better local public transport) and demand-side management (road pricing, fuel taxes, less out-of-town development and more urban regeneration). The response here was essentially 'a bit of both', though HSR was seen as potentially adding to the problem by disadvantaging areas not directly served (and potentially adding to CO<sub>2</sub> per person-km). The political room for manoeuvre on pricing was thought to be limited (though it was recognised that increasing world oil prices might have the same effect). Policies for urban regeneration and restraint of out-of-town development were thought to be fairly strong at present (though once again, the proviso about behavioural responses would seem to be appropriate)

The holiday season seems to have taken its toll of respondents to the August 'hot topic', but hopefully the responses summarised above will provoke some further comment – perhaps easing you back into work mode by crystallising thoughts from your sunloungers! Surely there is a bigger picture here: 'Peak Oil' and climate change represent enormous challenges, even without financial sector melt-down, economic recession and inevitability of public expenditure reductions. Surely there is much more that land-use and transport planners will need to grapple with together if transport is to have any chance of being sustainable?