

The New NPPF: Key Considerations for Transport Planning

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The Growing Importance of Location

One of the clearest messages within the revised NPPF is that the location of development matters as much as the transport impacts it generates. The framework strengthens support for directing growth towards areas with strong public transport accessibility, particularly around well-connected rail stations.

A significant addition is the introduction of a default 'Yes' approach to developments within reasonable walking distance of a well-connected station. This is defined as 800 metres, or roughly a ten-minute walk, although local factors such as topography, route quality and the walking environment remain important. A well-connected station is defined nationally as one located within the top 80 Travel to Work Areas by GVA and served by at least four trains per hour, or two services in each direction.

The framework also promotes more efficient use of accessible land through minimum residential density expectations. Development around qualifying stations should generally achieve at least 35 dwellings per hectare, increasing to 45 dwellings per hectare where rail services are particularly frequent. While exemptions apply in some circumstances, the direction of policy is clear, accessibility and density are becoming increasingly linked.



This places greater emphasis on demonstrating not only how a site operates, but also how effectively it connects people to jobs, services and opportunities. The Department for Transport's Connectivity Tool is therefore likely to become a more important part of planning evidence, helping assess accessibility across different modes and supporting the wider policy focus on connectivity as a measure of sustainability.



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From Predict and Provide to Vision-Led Planning

The revised NPPF continues to support a vision-led approach to transport planning, reinforcing the move away from traditional predict-and-provide methodologies. Rather than accommodating forecast traffic growth through infrastructure expansion, the focus is on defining the type of place a development seeks to create and identifying transport interventions that support that vision.

For many transport planners, this builds on an existing shift away from solely assessing junction performance and capacity towards understanding how transport supports placemaking, accessibility and long-term sustainability. While highway modelling remains important, transport strategies are increasingly expected to demonstrate how walking, wheeling, cycling and public transport can become realistic and attractive choices from the outset.



This change is also reflected in the framework's approach to sustainable transport. Electric vehicles and car sharing are no longer explicitly identified as sustainable modes in their own right. Instead, greater emphasis is placed on active travel and public transport, reinforcing the objective of reducing car dependency.



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Implications for Developers and Promoters

For developers and land promoters, the revised framework broadens the scope of transport evidence required to support planning applications. Traffic impact, highway safety and network performance remain critical, with the longstanding 'severe' test continuing to apply to capacity, congestion, cumulative impacts and safety. However, mitigation measures and wider network improvements should be considered before concluding that impacts are unacceptable.

Decision makers are also likely to place greater weight on a site's accessibility, integration with surrounding communities and ability to support sustainable travel patterns. Transport Assessments and Transport Statements are expected to remain proportionate to the size and nature of development, while the framework formally introduces a medium-sized development category covering schemes of 10 to 49 dwellings on sites of up to 2.5 hectares.

Policy also provides greater support for shared mobility initiatives, including car clubs and cycle hire schemes, to help reduce parking demand. At the same time, it recognises that some developments may still require higher levels of parking to meet operational, commercial or site-specific needs.



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Creating Safer and More Connected Places

The revised framework places greater emphasis on the quality of environments being created, not simply the efficiency of transport networks. Streets should be safe, inclusive and accessible for all users, with specific reference to women and girls, people with limited mobility and other vulnerable groups. This strengthens the importance of personal security, accessibility and user experience within transport design. There is relatively little additional focus on emerging micromobility modes, with scooters and similar forms of transport largely absent from the framework. Likewise, while large-scale developments are expected to support local services and reduce travel demand where possible, the NPPF acknowledges that they should not be expected to achieve unrealistic levels of self-containment.



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Looking Ahead

The implications of the revised NPPF extend beyond the content of transport assessments. Greater emphasis is placed on understanding transport performance throughout the day rather than focusing solely on traditional peak-hour conditions, reflecting a broader appreciation of how places function during evenings, weekends and night-time periods.

The framework also introduces important considerations for project delivery. Development proposals may be refused where severe transport impacts arise during either the operational or construction phase. As a result, applicants may face greater expectations to provide robust Construction Management Plans that demonstrate how construction traffic and site operations will be managed effectively. These changes reinforce the continuing evolution of transport planning.

While capacity, safety and access design remain fundamental, they now sit alongside a stronger focus on accessibility, connectivity, density, placemaking and sustainable travel. The revised NPPF does not redefine transport planning, but it further strengthens its role in creating successful, connected and sustainable communities.



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