

South Yorkshire LNRS

Specific Audiences Consultation Findings Report: Transport Professionals

Thursday 16 July: 1pm – 2pm

Participants

Representatives included:

- South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority (transport)
- National Highways
- Peak District National Park Authority
- Transport project and assurance specialists

The discussion explored how transport infrastructure can actively contribute to delivering the South Yorkshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) and what changes would be needed for this to become standard practice rather than isolated examples.

Overall sentiment

Support for the South Yorkshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy was unanimous.

Participants felt the strategy articulated the right ambitions and recognised the important relationship between transport and nature recovery.

However, they consistently questioned whether the strategy, as currently written, would be sufficiently influential to change investment decisions.

The dominant concern was implementation rather than aspiration.

Key Themes

1. The strategy needs to influence decision-making much earlier

This was the strongest message throughout the discussion.

Participants explained that by the time transport schemes reach delivery teams, many fundamental decisions have already been made.

Nature therefore needs to become part of:

- strategic business cases
- option appraisal
- investment prioritisation
- assurance processes

- funding decisions

rather than simply appearing later during environmental assessment.

One participant summarised this by saying the strategy needs to become "more than a tick box" and should actively shape which options progress in the first place.

Suggested improvements

Participants suggested:

- mandatory consideration of LNRS priorities within business cases
- supplementary biodiversity assessment forms
- integrating nature recovery into organisational assurance frameworks
- embedding biodiversity considerations alongside transport objectives from project inception.

2. Nature needs a stronger value within business cases

A recurring discussion centred around value for money.

Participants recognised that transport projects routinely balance competing objectives:

- cost
- maintenance
- accessibility
- safety
- carbon
- delivery times

Nature recovery often struggles because its benefits are difficult to express using the same language.

One participant questioned: How do we compare mature trees with an active travel route?

The discussion concluded that the LNRS would be much more influential if it helped organisations translate ecological value into the language already used within transport appraisal.

This was one of the strongest strategic recommendations arising from the session.

3. Transport corridors should be viewed as ecological networks

Participants consistently viewed transport infrastructure as more than roads.

Instead they described transport corridors as:

- habitat connectors
- wildlife corridors
- public access routes
- opportunities to reconnect fragmented landscapes.

Examples discussed included:

- railway corridors
- roadside verges
- cycle routes
- walking trails
- green bridges
- wildlife crossings

Participants felt these linear assets could become some of the region's most valuable ecological infrastructure if managed appropriately.

4. Habitat connectivity is more important than isolated habitat creation

Connectivity emerged repeatedly.

Examples included:

- reconnecting habitats separated by major roads
- improving roadside ecology
- linking fragmented habitats through active travel routes
- connecting people to nature as well as wildlife.

National Highways highlighted recent experience of green bridges successfully reconnecting habitats for bats, sand lizards, badgers and deer, demonstrating that such interventions can deliver tangible ecological benefits.

Participants also highlighted former railway lines and long-distance trails as existing ecological corridors already delivering significant biodiversity benefits.

5. Work with natural processes rather than over-engineering

An interesting discussion emerged around roadside verge management.

While participants acknowledged the popularity of colourful wildflower schemes, several argued that:

- reduced mowing
- allowing natural regeneration
- lower intervention management

may often provide greater ecological value while also reducing maintenance costs.

This was seen as an example where nature recovery and financial efficiency could align.

6. Public support matters

Several participants felt political backing would determine how influential the LNRS becomes.

They suggested:

- high-profile launch
- visible political support
- alignment with existing regional strategies
- ensuring the LNRS is referenced alongside transport strategies

so that practitioners naturally consider it during project development.

The recently adopted Walking and Cycling Strategy was cited as an example of a strategy that quickly became embedded within business case preparation because of its visibility and organisational status.

7. Nature recovery should improve people's experience as well as biodiversity

Participants recognised transport has two connected roles:

Supporting wildlife

through

- habitat creation
- habitat connectivity
- reduced fragmentation
- green infrastructure

and

Supporting people

through

- access to nature
- greener streets
- healthier places
- better active travel environments.

Several reflected that people value nature most when they experience it directly.

Improving everyday transport environments was therefore viewed as an important mechanism for increasing public support for nature recovery.

8. Nature education and engagement remain important

Although primarily a technical discussion, participants also reflected on longer-term cultural change.

Suggestions included:

- engaging schools
- youth involvement
- maintaining children's interest in nature through secondary education
- increasing opportunities for people to experience nature close to where they live.

This connected strongly with wider LNRS ambitions around bringing nature closer to people.

Partnership Priorities

Participants identified a wide partnership needed for successful delivery.

These included:

- South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority
- Local Authorities
- National Highways
- National Park Authority
- Network Rail
- landowners
- farmers
- schools
- communities
- transport operators
- environmental organisations.

However, participants emphasised that partnership alone would not deliver change unless organisations embedded nature recovery into their own governance and investment processes.

Additional Opportunities Identified

Participants also suggested greater consideration of:

- road runoff and water quality
- wildlife mortality from traffic speeds
- Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS)
- mature tree retention
- biodiversity within routine maintenance programmes
- transport's contribution to urban cooling and climate resilience.

Overall Findings

Unlike some stakeholder groups that focused on specific habitats or species, transport professionals concentrated on governance and implementation.

Their strongest message was that the LNRS should become an operational decision-making tool rather than simply an aspirational document.

The consultation suggests transport organisations are largely ready to contribute to nature recovery. The remaining challenge is ensuring that nature recovery carries sufficient weight within appraisal, funding, assurance and project development processes so that ecological outcomes influence investment decisions from the earliest stages.

Implications for the Final LNRS

This discussion suggests several practical enhancements that could strengthen the strategy:

1. Include clearer guidance on how organisations should integrate the LNRS into business case development and appraisal.
2. Develop practical decision-making tools or checklists for infrastructure projects.
3. Explicitly promote transport corridors as priority ecological networks.
4. Strengthen references to habitat connectivity and multifunctional infrastructure.
5. Encourage lower-intervention management approaches where appropriate, recognising both biodiversity and cost benefits.
6. Position the LNRS as a strategic framework that informs investment decisions, rather than solely guiding mitigation measures.
7. Strengthen links with other regional transport, climate and active travel strategies to improve organisational uptake.