

GUIDANCE ON PORT MASTER PLANS

CONSULTATION DOCUMENT

CONTENTS

	Page Numbers
Ministerial Foreword	2
Draft Guidance on the Preparation of Port Master Plans	4
Impact Assessments	22
Freedom of Information	25
Conclusion	26
List of Consultees	27

MINISTERIAL FOREWORD

The commercial ports in the North of Ireland are a vital element of our economy. I believe that they have served us well, acting as key generators for economic growth across the region. I want to ensure that they continue to thrive as they respond to the changing economy and patterns of trade.

Port management is clearly best placed to make decisions about their future investment plans and development needs. However, it is also Government's responsibility to ensure that the ports develop in a way which maximises their economic potential, but which also mitigates the possible adverse impacts on their local environment or communities. Accordingly, I wish to encourage our major commercial ports in Belfast, Derry, Larne and Warrenpoint to produce port master plans.

I believe that a master plan should identify the strategic options for the medium to long-term development at each port. Such master plans would also provide a focus for informed engagement with the planning authorities, the Roads Service, environmental stakeholders and local communities on the possible future needs of the ports, and how best these can be aligned with their locations.

The attached draft guidance which is now issued for consultation is non-prescriptive and will not be a mandatory requirement on the ports. However, I strongly recommend that each port develops a master plan.

I am keen to have as much input as possible through this consultation exercise from stakeholders both inside and outside the ports before finalising the Guidance Document and making it available to the ports.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Conor Murphy". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

**Conor Murphy MP MLA
Minister for Regional Development.**

FOCAL ÓN AIRE

Tá na calafoirt tráchtála i dTuaisceart Éireann mar ghné ríthábhachtach dár ngeilleagar. Creidim gur chuidigh siad go mór linn, sa mhéid is gur spreag siad fás geilleagrach trasna an réigiúin. Is mian liom a chinntiú go mbeidh rath orthu san am atá le teacht de réir mar a rachaidh siad i ngleic leis an dóigh a bhfuil cúrsaí geilleagracha agus patrúin trádála ag athrú.

Is é lucht bainistíochta na gcalafort an dream is fearr le cinntí a dhéanamh faoina bpleananna infheistíochta agus a gcuid riachtanas forbartha san am atá le teacht. Mar sin féin, tá freagracht ar an rialtas fosta lena chinntiú go bhforbrófar na calafoirt ar dhóigh a mhéadóidh a n-acmhainneacht gheilleagrach, ach a mhaolóidh na héifeachtaí diúltacha a d'fhéadfadh a bheith ar an timpeallacht áitiúil nó ar na pobail áitiúla. Dá réir sin, is mian liom ár bpríomhcalafoirt tráchtála i mBéal Feirste, i nDoire, i Latharna agus ar an Phointe a spreagadh le máistirphleananna a dhéanamh.

Creidim gur chóir do mháistirphlean na roghanna straitéiseacha a shainithint i dtaca le cúrsaí forbartha de ag gach calafort ar bhonn meántéarmach go fadtéarmach. Lena chois sin, soláthróidh na pleananna sin fócas ionas go dtig leis na húdarais phleanála, an tSeirbhís Bóithre, páirtithe leasmhara timpeallachta agus pobail áitiúla plé mar is ceart a dhéanamh ar na riachtanais a d'fhéadfadh a bheith ag na calafoirt amach anseo, agus ar an dóigh is fearr le freastal orthu.

Níl an dréacht-threoir atá á eisiúint anois le haghaidh comhairliúcháin saintreorach agus ní riachtanas éigeantach a bheas ann do na calafoirt. Mar sin féin, molaim go láidir do gach calafort máistirphlean a fhorbairt.

Tá mé ag iarraidh go nglacfaidh na páirtithe leasmhara taobh istigh agus taobh amuigh de na calafoirt páirt mhór sa phróiseas chomhairliúcháin seo sula ndéanfar leagan deiridh den Doiciméad Treorach agus sula gcuirfear ar fáil é do na calafoirt.



Conor Murphy TP CTR
An tAire Forbartha Réigiúnaí.

DRAFT GUIDANCE ON THE PREPARATION OF PORT MASTER PLANS

Table of contents

- Introduction
- The purpose of master plans
- Which ports should produce master plans?
- When should master plans be produced?
 - How long will it take?
 - Timetable
- Period of plans
 - Review period
- Content of plans
 - Forecasts
 - Infrastructure proposals
 - Safeguarding, property and blight
 - Commercial sensitivity
 - Inland connectivity
 - Other social and economic impacts
 - Safety and security
 - Environmental impacts: overview
 - Habitats
 - Water pollution and the Water Framework Directive
 - 'Local' emissions and 'cold ironing'
 - 'Global' emissions, climate change and extreme weather events
 - Noise
- Process
 - Legal considerations
 - Pre-consultation
 - Consultation
 - Publication
- Follow-up
 - Realism of assumptions
 - Success of consultation procedures
 - Effectiveness of implementation
 - Overall evaluation
- Appendix
 - Checklist for possible Master Plan contents

INTRODUCTION

1. A thriving, efficient and competitive ports sector is vital for supporting the growth of the economy in the North of Ireland. As the economy grows and the shipping industry and methods of trade continues to evolve, so the land requirements of the ports and how they link into the wider transportation infrastructure will change.

2. The nature of the ports' business means that investment decisions are generally over the medium to long term. Port master planning is therefore designed to provide an objective basis for the ports to engage with local stakeholders, including planning authorities and development agencies, in order to help co-ordinate medium-term planning of the port within their wider context.

3. The attached document is guidance. There is no statutory requirement on the ports to produce master plans. However, master planning has been embraced constructively by the airport sector, and it is hoped that this positive experience can be replicated in the ports.

4. The major commercial ports (only) are encouraged to produce master plans: effectively – these are the ports of Belfast, Derry, Larne and Warrenpoint.

5. By means of this consultation exercise, DRD welcomes comments on any aspect of this draft guidance document, before it is finally adopted.

THE PURPOSE OF MASTER PLANS

6. The main purposes of a master plan are to:

- clarify the port's own strategic planning for the medium to long term;
- assist planning authorities (at both regional and local level), and Roads Service, in the preparation and revision of their own strategies and plans; and

- inform port users, employees and local communities as to how they can expect to see the port develop over the coming years.

7. It does this by setting out:

- how the port expects to grow and develop its business over time;
- why this is feasible in the context of wider patterns of supply and demand;
- how the port's policy on land-use management will support business growth and development;
- the port's approach to environmental management so that not only are adverse effects mitigated, but as far as possible, a positive contribution is made to the environment and amenity;
- the potential timetable for the promotion of individual development proposals; and
- how stakeholders will be consulted — both within the master planning process itself, and beyond.

8. What a master plan is not intended to do is to be restrictive. Ports operate in a dynamic commercial world and it is essential that they should have the flexibility to adapt to changing patterns of demand, and to competitive opportunities. The master plan should therefore present a framework within which such adaptation can occur without undue bureaucracy. Neither should the master planning process impose a bureaucratic burden on the ports. Its purpose is to be of assistance.

WHICH PORTS SHOULD PRODUCE MASTER PLANS?

9. It is envisaged that Northern Ireland's major commercial ports will find advantage in producing master plans; namely Belfast, Derry, Larne and Warrenpoint.

WHEN SHOULD MASTER PLANS BE PRODUCED?

10. In deciding when to begin work on a master plan, it is preferable to coordinate with the Regional Development Strategy (revision to be completed mid 2010). The local Area Planning cycle will also be relevant.

11. The optimal timing cannot be determined by a mechanistic formula, but broadly speaking a port should, ideally, aim to complete the master plan before public consultation on a substantive planning application. Similarly, the port master plan should help to inform revisions of the Regional Development Strategy, and of the Local Area plan.

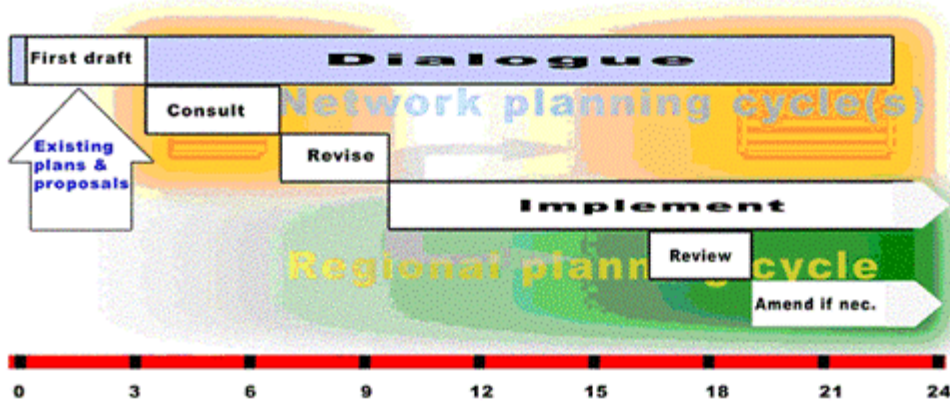
How long will it take?

12. The time required for preparation will vary widely according to the complexity of plans and circumstances. It is essential that full engagement takes place with stakeholders.

13. It is important that management resources continue to be available and are not diverted by other priority tasks or corporate reorganisation; and that core proposals are well defined at the outset and do not change during the drafting process.

Timetable

14. The following is a possible timetable for production of a master plan, where there are no significant complicating factors:



This is a purely illustrative schema, and the relative lengths of each stage will differ from case to case.

PERIOD OF PLANS

15. Port infrastructure may be very long-lived. Asset lives of 30 years and longer are not unusual, and major investments (which may be scheduled to take place several years into the planning period) would often need to be remunerated over a similar period. Environmental impacts — even if not actually irreversible, though some may be so — can also persist into the long term. On the other hand, trade and associated capacity forecasts become highly uncertain more than 25 to 30 years ahead.

16. A time horizon of 20 to 30 years is therefore recommended. It is also recommended that the plan is revised every 10 years.

Review Period

17. It is recommended that the Plan is revised every 10 years.

CONTENT OF PLANS

18. The content of each master plan will vary, reflecting the diversity of individual port business. However, it is possible to suggest a core set of sub-heads which are likely to appear in many instances. These are discussed below, and the Appendix sets out a 'checklist'.

Forecasts

19. The master plan should set out the port's own demand forecasts, including ranges of uncertainty for the principal traffic. The opportunity should also be taken to relate these to any Northern Ireland-wide port capacity demand forecasts which may be produced from time to time.

Infrastructure proposals

20. The plan should include a description of the port as it currently exists with schematic maps to aid the reader.

21. Such maps are not expected to take the form of detailed engineering or architectural drawings such as those that might accompany a planning application (unless an application has already been prepared). However, to maximise their value, they ought to contain sufficient information, including drawings where available, so that they may be clearly understood by laymen as well as professionals.

22. The plan should describe significant potential changes to the port estate, and show where development is envisaged. The plan should demonstrate how the port intends to make best use of its existing assets from the commercial and environmental standpoints.

23. In the case of a proposed major development it will be worth explaining how alternative ways of meeting demand have been (or are being) considered, especially where the tests required by the Habitats Directive are engaged.

Safeguarding, property and blight

24. Harbour land is a key asset. In the case of the trust ports at Belfast, Derry and Warrenpoint, there is a widespread interest amongst stakeholders and the wider community in land issues. Indeed, disposal of land, or the transfer of land from port to non-port use, is the subject of specific arrangements through a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the Department for Regional Development and each port. Operational port land once disposed off, or surrendered to non-port use, may not easily be recovered (if at all). On the other hand, land is a vital asset which may help meet wider economic, social, or environmental needs in local communities. Ports are therefore encouraged to take a balanced view considering the safeguarding of dormant operational land.

25. As a general rule of thumb, there should be a strong presumption *against* safeguarding land where there is little realistic likelihood of the facility being brought back into significant port operational use within a period of fifteen years or where the alternative use being proposed can easily be terminated and the land reinstated to port use within that time;

26. There should be a strong presumption *in favour* of safeguarding land where there is at least a reasonable likelihood of restitution to significant operational use within fifteen years and where the alternative use being contemplated is one, such as residential development, which will be difficult to reverse.

27. In all cases, judgement based on appraisal of costs and benefits should be exercised.

28. The master plan should set out and briefly justify the port's desired safeguarding strategy.

29. An important consideration in any long-term development context is the risk of blight, whether statutory or non-statutory.

30. The master plan should avoid highly speculative or uncertain statements about aspirations for the expansion of port estate, or extension of environmentally intrusive activities within it. Such statements could easily cause unnecessary non-statutory blight.

31. Where parcels of land are earmarked for potential future development in the plan, these should be included on the basis of seriously-considered intentions. This consideration should not, however, necessarily inhibit the port from making proposals towards the end of the planning period which are dependent upon inevitably-uncertain forecasts.

32. A port needs to exercise its best judgement as to the balance of interest between bringing well-defined proposals to wider notice, and the risk of avoidably affecting property prices and/or causing anxiety.

33. Depending on timing, master plans should address, as far as is prudently possible, any proposals for compensation measures that may be required where the scale of impacts is such that they cannot adequately be mitigated. Non-statutory as well as statutory blight should be considered.

Commercial sensitivity

34. Ports are under no compulsion to disclose, in master plans, information which they regard as commercially confidential or sensitive. They must, however, ensure that the plan is as transparent as possible. Ports are to consider whether any commercial sensitivity considerations (going beyond unavoidable legal or moral commitments to third parties) really outweigh the benefits of open consultation from an early stage.

35. Where it is considered absolutely necessary to withhold information on confidentiality grounds, the port should consider whether some indication of that fact, together if possible with an account of the issue stripping out sensitive elements, could be given in the master plan. This could help to avoid unnecessary surprises for stakeholders, or worse, accusations of bad faith, later on.

Inland connectivity

36. Access to ports and connectivity to the strategic road network is critical to the efficiency and effectiveness of ports as gateways to the economy. Modern commerce and industry increasingly depends on supply chains which deliver goods and services at the moment they are needed. The quick, economic and reliable movement of goods to the marketplace is therefore vital for economic development. A central part of developing the master plan will therefore be positive engagement with the roads authority – Roads Service.

37. It is in the port's interest to ensure that expansion plans are highlighted as early as possible.

38. A master plan cannot be expected to resolve all questions relating to scope of works; modal shares; demand management; developer funding and so on. These matters will require detailed discussion at project level. However, it should deal with the medium to long term outlook for the port's connectivity in the round, and the broad implications to be expected from growth and changing patterns of demand. This will help in the development and review of the Regional Transportation Strategy (RTS).

Other social and economic impacts

39. The plan should normally include an assessment of the projected wider economic and social effects of port development. This might include, for example, employment and (where applicable) any regeneration benefits for the locality of the port. Key performance indicators in the Code of Practice on Trust Ports Governance, provides a point of reference for all the ports (not just the trust ports) in considering this matter.

Safety and security

40. Safety and security considerations should be referenced where relevant and to the extent that they are considered disclosable.

41. Where proposed development is likely (because of safety and security considerations) to affect public access to land and rights of way, the plan should set out proposals (so far as they have been worked up) for alternative roads, paths and/or access rights.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS: OVERVIEW

42. Port operations have significant environmental impact, frequently in areas of high sensitivity. The master plan may usefully include not only the port's strategy to mitigate adverse environmental impact of new development, but also mitigation of the effects of everyday operations; and new measures specifically designed to improve the environment. It will typically not be possible to identify detailed mitigation measures at master plan stage: this will be done in the light of the Environmental Impact Assessments (EIA) prepared for specific projects. This being so, the master plan should describe the proposed environmental control measures in more general terms, and describe (preferably with an illustrative timeline) the work that is programmed to determine details. The master plan can, however, usefully contain descriptions of what the port already undertakes to mitigate its existing operational impacts.

43. Environmental impacts will vary greatly depending on the port's situation and activities, and on the nature of proposed development. They may include:

- habitats and biodiversity, including marine habitat;
- water quality and pollution;
- the impacts of capital and maintenance dredging on the sea and estuary floor;
- contaminated land;
- 'local' air emissions;
- 'global' air emissions;

- noise;
- cultural and architectural heritage; and
- landscape.

44. This is a purely illustrative list: not all aspects may be material to an individual port, and there may be other significant environmental issues in some instances.

45. The master plan is not expected to go into the same degree of detail as would be necessary for an EIA.

Habitats

46. Particular care is often needed when development is contemplated which may adversely affect Natura 2000 sites or other nature conservation areas and European protected species. Some guidance on the application of the habitats (and wild birds) Directive and implementing regulations may be found in the Department for Transport's (DfT) Project Appraisal Framework for Ports.

47. As proposer, the port is responsible at the outset for ensuring that possible alternative means, within its control, of securing the objectives of development, have been considered and eliminated as demonstrably infeasible before any proposal interfering with a protected site is pursued further.

48. The master plan process may, depending on timing, present a useful opportunity to test, in liaison with stakeholders, perceptions of what might constitute such alternatives, and whether or not they are in fact feasible.

49. The master plan could also usefully explain to stakeholders the wider significance of possible future developments.

Water pollution and the Water Framework Directive

50. The Water Framework Directive (WFD) has established a Euro-legislative programme for classification, standard-setting, risk-assessment and pollution control in coastal and inland waters. A series of River Basin Management Plans (RBMPs) are being consulted on in 2009 and will be finalised by the end of the year. The ports are represented locally on the Department for the Environment's WFD Stakeholder Liaison Group. Thereafter, a process entailing interim reports and six-yearly revisions to the RBMPs will be required.

51. The plan should take account of the emerging requirements of the WFD and its daughter legislation in so far as they are relevant to the port. Advice is available (for example, through the UK Technical Advice Group or through contact with the Water Management Unit of the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) at www.ni-environment.gov.uk).

'Local' emissions and 'cold ironing'

52. A master plan should describe how, up to the planning horizon, the port intends to contribute to efforts to tackle airborne emissions hazardous to human and other forms of life. These include sulphur and nitrogen oxides (SOX and NOX), carbon monoxide (CO), methane (CH₄) and other hydrocarbons, and generalized particulates (PM₁₀ and PM_{2.5}).

53. It should describe any currently applicable air quality management area (AQMA) monitoring arrangements, and any locations on or near the port where limit values are exceeded at present, or are liable to be if developments proceed. The master plan may well be an appropriate juncture at which to examine the merits of requiring use of low sulphur fuels for powering auxiliary generators.

54. 'Cold-ironing' is the provision and use of shore side electricity supply to replace ships' generators. It has the potential to produce environmental

gains, particularly where emissions from ships are contributing significantly to local air quality problems. The DfT Ports Policy Interim Report stated that:

"... we will in future expect newly developed terminals to make advance provision for 'cold ironing' facilities. We will also expect major ports to formulate plans for introducing such facilities at existing terminals once a standard has been agreed."

55. The master planning process therefore provides an opportunity for ports to review their strategy in respect of this issue.

'Global' emissions, climate change and extreme weather events

56. The main 'global' emissions effects associated with ports will be attributable to ships and HGVs, and the policy responses to these at national and international level lie beyond the scope of an individual port master plan. Nevertheless, the plan may discuss any measures within the port's control which are proposed to reduce the relevant emissions. These may, for example, include the increased use of renewable energy to power shore side facilities.

57. It would also be appropriate for a master plan to set out the port's strategy for dealing with extreme weather events (along with any assumptions made about prospective changes in the frequency of such events as part of a climatic trend). The plan may appropriately include any intended investment in sea defences, whether incidental to commercial investment in the port itself, or in association with public authorities in the wider public interest.

Noise

58. The master plan is an opportunity for the port to examine its arrangements for minimization and mitigation of noise from existing, as well as planned, activities. The port should look for opportunities to relocate the noisiest operations as far as possible from dwellings and from other noise-sensitive places. The noisiest activities should be subject to acoustic screening wherever expert advice shows this can be effective within reasonable cost.

59. New development should be planned according to the same principles, taking due account of planning guidance on noise.

PROCESS

Legal considerations

60. The Department cannot offer legal advice on the port's legal obligations. This is non-prescriptive guidance and there is no requirement for a port to produce a master plan.

61. Nevertheless it is for each port to determine (for example) whether or not, in producing a master plan, it is affected by the requirements of the Strategic Environmental Assessment Directive (2001/42/EC) and implementing Regulations (in course of development), relevant aspects of the WFD, and whether and when an Environmental Impact Assessment may be required for any individual development proposal.

Pre-consultation

62. Before embarking upon formal consultation on a fully worked draft of the master plan, it will almost always be wise to engage in less formal dialogue with interested parties. From the outset, these should encompass all major categories of prospective respondent, potentially including shipping lines, hauliers, tenants, and local amenity groups, national NGOs, regulators, transport planning authorities, local government and environmental interests. The port user forums encouraged by the Code of Practice for the trust ports, should prove useful for such considerations.

63. Consultation will usually be best focused by issuing a draft plan for discussion. Depending on resources, the port may find it useful to retain consultants for this task.

64. Although it is reasonable to assume that most consultees will have ready access to the Internet, the consultation documents should also be available in

hard copy. Consideration should also be given to making the documents available in alternative formats.

Consultation

65. The object initially should be to undertake a single formal consultation process, although it may in some more complex cases prove necessary to undertake a two-stage consultation.

66. It is recommended that at least twelve weeks should be allowed in each consultation process for responses, probably longer where the consultation period encompasses public holidays or the main summer holiday period. This should allow sufficient time for responses allowing for absences and for committee cycles to run their course, to ensure that responses from consultees such as local authorities have sufficient consideration and weight.

67. Depending on the scale, immediacy and contentiousness of proposals, the port may find it useful to arrange one or more public exhibition or seminar events in order to stimulate discussion. Where there is an existing consultation forum that could be used to help focus responses of those most intimately involved with the port. It is important, of course, to listen carefully to what consultees have to say and consider arguments on their merits; but almost as important to make it clear to them that it will be impossible to satisfy every representation made; and indeed that consultation is not a vote-counting exercise, and even a majority view will not always necessarily prevail.

68. Along with draft port master plans, consideration should also be given to the publication of research and other evidence upon which port development needs have been estimated. Transparency in respect of such information can prove very helpful in ensuring that stakeholders are appropriately informed about future port needs. Specifically, worldwide experience has demonstrated that there is a direct correlation between investment in research and consultation with the success of planning applications for major port infrastructural developments.

Publication

69. The master plan should be made readily available to interested parties, again both on paper and in web form. The version published on the port's website should be clearly flagged from the home page.

FOLLOW UP

Realism of assumptions

70. The master plan should be a living document. Its underlying assumptions should be reviewed, in relation to the wider economic environment, the business plans of the port and its resident businesses and the success or otherwise of development aspirations.

71. Review milestones should be planned at the outset, in such a way that feedback from the findings will be available in time to inform the next update of the plan itself.

72. For example, has demand met expectations? If it has turned out substantially higher or lower, why? Has the port lost market-share, or has overall market demand specific commodities changed? What are these reasons? The answers may to some extent be subjective, but the process of review will help the port to decide whether the initial master plan strategy remains valid, or if a change of course is required.

Success of consultation procedures

73. Consulting on the master plan may also lead a port to review its practices for more routine consultation with stakeholders on the management and administration of the port.

Effectiveness of implementation

74. Once one or more major elements in the plan have been implemented, it may be appropriate to begin a review of its effectiveness. Were expectations

realized, and if not did the plans adapt flexibly? Were interested parties kept informed?

Overall evaluation

75. After a period of around five years, depending on development implementation timescales, it should be possible to assess the overall effectiveness of the master plan. Did it help to expose critical issues at an early stage? Were the planning processes expedited as a result? Were better environmental solutions achieved? If not, why not?

APPENDIX

Checklist for possible Master Plan contents

The following list represents a possible contents list for a master plan. In practice the nature and emphasis of contents should be tailored to local circumstances and priorities and we certainly would not expect every plan to conform to this pattern. However, it offers a checklist of core issues, and ports should be able to satisfy themselves and the public, if any item is to be omitted, that there is good reason for this.

Executive Summary

1. Introduction
2. Forecasts
3. Infrastructure proposals
4. Safeguarding, property and blight
5. Inland connectivity
6. Social and economic impacts
7. Safety and security
8. Environmental impacts: overview

- Habitats

- Water pollution, marine spatial planning and the Water Framework Directive
- Local' emissions and 'cold ironing'
- 'Global' emissions, climate change and extreme weather events
- Noise

9. Next steps

10. Arrangements for later review and update

11. Summary of questions (in consultation draft)

IMPACT ASSESSMENTS

This draft master planning guidance document has been screened to assess the need for a detailed impact analysis in respect of social, economic and environmental policy considerations.

The outcome of this screening process is set out in Table 1 below and in the supporting commentary. Fuller details of the screening exercise can be obtained from the Department, using the contact details provided at the Conclusion section.

Table 1

IMPACT	IMPACT ASSESSMENT REQUIRED	COMMENTS
Social		
Health	No	
Rural	No	
Crime	No	
Community Safety & Victims	No	
Equality	No	But also see comments below
Human Rights	No	
Social Inclusion		
Economic		
Economic Appraisal	No	All individual investment proposals will be taken forward and funded by the ports without government aid
Economic Impact Assessments	No	
Regulatory Impact Assessments	No	But also see comments below
Legal Aid Impact	No	
State Aid Compliance Assessment	No	Investment is to be taken forward by the ports without Government Grant Aid
Environmental		
Environmental impact	No	But also see comments below
Strategic Environmental Assessment	No	But also see comments below

Equality Impact

Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 requires public authorities to have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity and to have regard to the desirability of promoting good relations between certain groups of people. The facilities and services provided by the ports are available to and benefit all Section 75 groups.

Notwithstanding the aspirational nature of port master plans as explained above, the Department considers that the focus on good, inclusive and holistic port planning represented by the master planning process, will help to ensure that equality impacts are fully taken into account. Moreover, where port planning addresses the provision of passenger services, it will present an ideal opportunity to ensure that good facilities are available for people with disabilities, specifically mobility-impaired passengers accessing terminal facilities and to board and disembark from vessels.

Accordingly, the Department has concluded that the port master plan process should have a positive general equality impact.

Regulatory Impact

In performing this screening exercise, the Department has taken into account that the preparation of individual port master plans will not be a legislative requirement. It is for each port management to decide whether or not to produce a master plan.

Moreover, this guidance is not prescriptive. This draft guidance document sets out a menu of suggested issues which the Department considers it would be desirable to have addressed in an effective and meaningful port master plan. The content and scope of what may eventually be produced is a matter for determination by each port.

Although it is clear that port master plans must incur a cost, the Department has concluded that given the discretionary and non-prescriptive nature of this master plan guidance, it is impossible to quantify what these might be in any meaningful way. Essentially, the cost benefit of the master plan process will be for each port's management to assess.

Environmental Impact / Strategic Environmental Impact

In conducting this screening exercise, the Department has taken into account that the content of port master plans will essentially be conceptual and aspirational. Master plans will not obviate the need for detailed planning applications to be brought forward for individual schemes, thereby providing for detailed environmental impact assessments to be undertaken in accordance with statutory requirements.

However, an objective of the master plan process is to ensure that ports develop in sympathy with the environment and that they work closely with the planning authorities and stakeholders, including their local communities, to ensure that development proposals are appropriately designed and mitigated. It therefore provides both the port management and port stakeholders, with the opportunity to address a wide range of environmental impacts of a developing port in a holistic way. It also enables such issues, in particular possible concerns in respect of noise, and air and light pollution, to be identified and considered at an early stage as potential development schemes are being formulated.

Accordingly, the Department considers that the master plan process will have a positive general impact on the assessment of environmental issues both individually and strategically.

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION

The Department tries to make its consultation procedure as thorough and open as possible and may publish a summary of responses following completion of this consultation process. Your response, and all other responses to this consultation, may be disclosed on request. The Department can only refuse to disclose information in exceptional circumstances. Before you submit your response, please read the paragraphs below on the confidentiality of consultations.

The Freedom of Information Act (2000) gives the public a right of access to any information held by a public authority including that provided in response to a consultation. However, it does not have responsibility to decide whether any information provided by you in response to this consultation, including information about your identity should be made public or be treated as confidential.

If you do not wish information about your identity to be made public please provide an explanation in your response. Information provided by you in response to this consultation is unlikely to be treated as confidential, except in very particular circumstances.

For further information about confidentiality of responses, please contact the Information Commissioners office (or see the web site at www.informationcommissioner.gov.uk)

CONCLUSION

The Department invites comments on this consultation paper and in particular on the following:

- (i) whether you agree that the ports at Belfast, Derry, Larne and Warrenpoint should be recommended to produce master plans;
- (ii) if you have any comments on the scope of issues which it is suggested should be addressed in port master plans; and
- (iii) if you have any comments on the draft assessment of the impacts of port master planning guidance set out in this consultation document.

Additional copies of this consultation paper can be obtained by contacting the Department at (028) 9054 0646 or (028) 9054 0602 or by visiting the Departments Web Page www.drdni.gov.uk

This consultation paper can also be provided in other formats if so required on request.

Comments may be sent by email to david.mccullough@drdni.gov.uk or by post to Mr David McCullough, Department for Regional Development, Ports and Public Transport Division, 3rd Floor Clarence Court, 10-18 Adelaide Street, BELFAST, BT2 8GB

The Department welcomes comments on these proposals by 23 June 2009.

LIST OF CONSULTEES*

- All NI commercial ports
- Shipping and Ferry Companies
- Government Interests
- Northern Ireland Commercial Business and Trade representatives
- Northern Ireland District Councils
- Crown Estate Commissioners
- Marine and Coastguard Agency
- Port Users and Agents
- Community Interests
- Environmental Bodies
- Northern Ireland Political Parties
- All Bodies listed in Table C of Department's Equality Scheme

*The full list of consultees can be viewed on the Department's website