

West of England Partnership
Joint Local Transport Plan 3 (2011-2026)

Appropriate Assessment
November 2010

Halcrow Group Limited

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West of England Partnership Joint Local Transport Plan 3 (2011-2026)

Habitats Regulations Assessment (Preliminary Screening Report)

November 2010

Contents Amendment Record

This report has been issued and amended as follows:

Issue	Revision	Description	Date	Signed Author	Reviewers
1	0	Draft for WoEP and client comments.	23/6/ 2010	S. Isaac	CM, JW
2	0	Revised after consultation with Natural England	11/2010	S. Isaac	

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1 Introduction

1.1 Background

In October 2009, Halcrow Group Ltd was appointed by the West of England Partnership (WEP) to undertake a screening for Appropriate Assessment (AA)(also known as Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA)) of their third Joint Local Transport Plan (JLTP3). This has been carried out in parallel with a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA).

The screening report found that several transport schemes in the JLTP3 could potentially cause a significant effect on the integrity of several Natura 2000 sites. It was therefore necessary to produce an AA report in order to determine whether these significant effects may have an adverse effect on Natura 2000 site integrity. Non-significant effects from the screening stage were not taken forward for further examination at this stage. Similarly, the Natura 2000 sites for which no significant effects were predicted are not further assessed in this report.

The other purpose of this report is to demonstrate that potentially adverse effects can be avoided or mitigated. This AA report therefore builds on the screening report and, at the request of Natural England, includes further evidence to show that the Habitats Regulations have and will be applied. This report should be read in conjunction with the baseline and screening reports. The background to the project and HRA in general can be found in these documents and is not repeated here.

1.2 Consultation on the HRA

A list of international sites that could potentially be impacted upon by the JLTP3 and the general approach for undertaking the HRA was agreed with Natural England by email on the 30th November 2009. Natural England also signed off the initial baseline screening report by email received on the 18th December 2009. Two minor amendments were made to reflect the variability of bat foraging distances and a fuller reference to the possible influence of projects in the in-combination assessment.

Consultation on the HRA screening report took place at the same time as the SEA, between June and September 2010. Comments were received from Natural England in a letter dated 11th October 2010. Natural England was also consulted to clarify some of their comments from their consultation response.

2 JLTP3 Transport Schemes

2.1 JLTP3 scheme options

The West of England Partnership has identified a series of transport schemes to receive priority funding as part of the preferred JLTP3. The preferred JLTP3 strategy is to apply an integrated approach to transport planning to ensure a choice of provision across all modes, and in particular to encourage greater use of public transport, walking and cycling. In addition, a number of other potential schemes have been identified that would be relevant if an alternative JLTP3 strategy was proposed. The alternative JLTP3 strategies assume the same amount of funding as has been assumed in developing the draft JLTP3 but include alternative transport policy focuses, for example highway focused improvements, demand management, “Smarter Choices” or a heavier focus on public transport improvements. The potential schemes identified under the draft JLTP3 and alternative options are listed in Table 1;

Table 1: JLTP3 options

Schemes within Preferred JLTP3 Options	Potential Schemes Within Alternative JLTP3 Options
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Weston Package (indicative area of improvements) • Rapid Transit Ashton Vale to Emersons Green Phase 1 • North Fringe to Hengrove Package • South Bristol Link Road • Greater Bristol Metro Project • M5 Junction 21 Bypass • Portishead Rail corridor • Rapid Transit Ashton Vale to Emersons Green Ph 2 (indicative location) • Callington Road Link/Bath Road Improvements • Yate Package (indicative area of improvements) • Hicks Gate to Bath Bus Rapid Transit (indicative location) • Park & Ride (proposed expansions) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • M5 Junction 19 • A38-A370 Barrow Gurney Bypass (indicative location) • A4 Saltford Bypass (indicative location) • M4 Link • Banwell Bypass (indicative location) • Whitchurch Bypass (indicative location) • Avon Ring Road Improvements (S. Gloucestershire) (indicative locations) • Weston Package Airfield Bridge Link and Cross Airfield Link • A371 to Wolvershill Rd • A370 Herluin Way to B3440

Schemes within Preferred JLTP3 Options	Potential Schemes Within Alternative JLTP3 Options
and new sites)	Locking Road Link <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whitchurch-Hengrove BRT Extension • Further Rail (Station Re-openings) • Further Rapid Transit (mostly on-line improvements) • Further P&R (Weston, SE Bath)

The following sections summarise the information known about the transport schemes;

3 Impact Assessment Results

3.1 Introduction

Unless the JLTP3 were to have a negligible effect on the site integrity of all international sites, the Habitats Directive would require that other plans and projects that may have an 'in-combination effect' with the JLTP3 need to be considered. Many of the most relevant plans for the JLTP3 HRA and AA have been collated and summarised as part of the Plans and Programmes Review for the SEA. These were examined in more detail to determine whether there were any 'in-combination' effects on the international sites listed in chapter 3.

3.2 Plans and projects with potential in-combination impacts with JLTP3

The following table lists the key plans¹ that were examined in order to determine whether there might be any in-combination impacts of the JLTP3 with other plans, programmes or projects;

Table 2: In-combination plans

International Site	In-combination plans examined
Severn Estuary SAC, SPA, Ramsar	Draft South West Regional Spatial Strategy ² Wales Spatial Plan Draft nuclear National Policy Statement (NPS) South East Wales Regional Transport Plan Severn Estuary Shoreline Management Plan Gloucestershire Council Minerals and Waste

¹ Natural England (2007) guidance on HRA states that it should be possible to identify the other plans and projects in a targeted way; not trawling for every conceivable plan or project (page 15).

² Note: Since this exercise was undertaken the new coalition government has announced plans to abolish regional spatial strategies and announced that decisions on housing supply "will rest with LPAs without the framework of regional numbers and plans". Nevertheless the draft RSS has had an influence on measures within the emerging Core Strategies.

	<p>Core Strategy</p> <p>North Somerset Minerals and Waste Core Strategy</p> <p>Emerging Local Development Framework Core Strategies (Bristol, Sedgemoor, North Somerset, South Gloucestershire, Gloucestershire, Forest of Dean)</p> <p>Local Development Plans (Newport, Monmouthshire, Cardiff, Vale of Glamorgan)</p>
Avon Gorge Woodlands SAC	<p>Emerging Bristol Core Strategy</p> <p>Draft South West Regional Spatial Strategy (or replacement plans after RSS abolition)</p> <p>Emerging North Somerset Core Strategy</p> <p>West of England Joint Waste Core Strategy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Energy from Waste (EfW) Sites <p>Seabank Power Station, Hallen, Bristol (<10km distant)</p> <p>Ashton Park (approx. 10,000 homes plus employment and other development)</p>
North Somerset and Mendip Bats SAC	<p>Draft South West Regional Spatial Strategy (or replacement plans after RSS abolition)</p> <p>West of England Joint Waste Core Strategy</p>
Mendip Limestone Grasslands SAC	None considered relevant
Mendip Woodlands SAC	None considered relevant
Chew Valley Lake SPA	Draft South West Regional Spatial Strategy (or replacement plans after RSS abolition)

	West of England Joint Waste Strategy
Bath and Bradford on Avon Bats	Emerging Bath Core Strategy Wiltshire Minerals and Waste Core Strategy

3.3 Identification of potentially adverse effects

The following table presents a summary of the results of the detailed assessment worksheets for each international site, presented in Appendix 2.

Table 3: JLTP3 Impact assessment summary results

INTERNATIONAL SITE	IMPACT TYPE	ADVERSE EFFECT FROM JLTP3 ALONE, BEFORE AVOIDANCE OR MITIGATION? ✓/✗	RELEVANT SCHEME FROM JLTP3	ADVERSE EFFECT IN COMBINATION WITH OTHER PLANS, PROGRAMMES OR PROJECTS? ✓/✗	ADVERSE EFFECT PREDICTED AFTER AVOIDANCE OR MITIGATION? ✓/✗
Severn Estuary SAC	Habitat loss	✓	Further Rail (Station Re-openings) Portway P&R expansion	✗	✗
Severn Estuary Ramsar	Habitat loss	✓	Further Rail (Station Re-openings) Portway P&R expansion	✗	✗
	Noise disturbance	✓		✗	✗
	Recreation disturbance	✓		✗	✗
	Possible disturbance to	✓		✗	✗

INTERNATIONAL SITE	IMPACT TYPE	ADVERSE EFFECT FROM JLTP3 ALONE, BEFORE AVOIDANCE OR MITIGATION? ✓/✗	RELEVANT SCHEME FROM JLTP3	ADVERSE EFFECT IN COMBINATION WITH OTHER PLANS, PROGRAMMES OR PROJECTS? ✓/✗	ADVERSE EFFECT PREDICTED AFTER AVOIDANCE OR MITIGATION? ✓/✗
	flight lines				
Severn Estuary SPA	Noise disturbance	✓	Further Rail (Station Re-openings) Portway P&R expansion	✗	✗
	Recreation disturbance	✓		✗	✗
	Possible disturbance to flight lines	✓		✗	✗
Avon Gorge Woodlands SAC	NOx and nitrogen deposition from traffic associated with schemes	✓	Greater Bristol Metro Portishead Rail Corridor South Bristol Link BRT Ashton Vale to	✓	✗

INTERNATIONAL SITE	IMPACT TYPE	ADVERSE EFFECT FROM JLTP3 ALONE, BEFORE AVOIDANCE OR MITIGATION? ✓/✗	RELEVANT SCHEME FROM JLTP3	ADVERSE EFFECT IN COMBINATION WITH OTHER PLANS, PROGRAMMES OR PROJECTS? ✓/✗	ADVERSE EFFECT PREDICTED AFTER AVOIDANCE OR MITIGATION? ✓/✗
			Emersons Green M5 Junction 19 improvements Avon Ring Road (S. Glos) Proposed A370 Park and Ride Scheme		
	Habitat loss	✓	Portishead Rail Corridor	✗	✗
North Somerset and Mendip Bats SAC	Lighting disturbance	✓	M5 Junction 21 Bypass A371 Banwell Bypass	✓	✗
	Disturbance of flight paths	✓		✓	✗

INTERNATIONAL SITE	IMPACT TYPE	ADVERSE EFFECT FROM JLTP3 ALONE, BEFORE AVOIDANCE OR MITIGATION? ✓/✗	RELEVANT SCHEME FROM JLTP3	ADVERSE EFFECT IN COMBINATION WITH OTHER PLANS, PROGRAMMES OR PROJECTS? ✓/✗	ADVERSE EFFECT PREDICTED AFTER AVOIDANCE OR MITIGATION? ✓/✗
	Collision risk	✓		✓	✗
	Habitat loss	✓		✓	✗
Mendip Limestone Grasslands SAC	Lighting disturbance to bat species	✓	A371 Banwell Bypass	✗	✗
	Disturbance of flight paths of bat species	✓		✗	✗
	Collision risk to bat species	✓		✗	✗
	Habitat loss for bat species	✓		✗	✗

INTERNATIONAL SITE	IMPACT TYPE	ADVERSE EFFECT FROM JLTP3 ALONE, BEFORE AVOIDANCE OR MITIGATION? ✓/✗	RELEVANT SCHEME FROM JLTP3	ADVERSE EFFECT IN COMBINATION WITH OTHER PLANS, PROGRAMMES OR PROJECTS? ✓/✗	ADVERSE EFFECT PREDICTED AFTER AVOIDANCE OR MITIGATION? ✓/✗
Bath and Bradford on Avon Bats	Lighting disturbance	✓	Bath Transport Package (Odd Down Park and Ride expansion, further Park and Ride – Weston or SE Bath)	✗	✗
	Disturbance of flight paths	✓		✗	✗
	Collision risk	✓		✗	✗
	Habitat loss	✓		✗	✗

3.4 Possible avoidance measures

Since the publication of the screening report, the JLTP3 has been updated to show the findings of the HRA. It also describes the need for project-level HRA for many of the transport schemes.

Table 4: Avoidance measures

Natura 2000 Sites	Relevant transport schemes & JLTP3 action
Avon Gorge Woodlands SAC	<p>GBM, Portishead Rail, South Bristol Link, BRT Ashton Vale Phases 1 and 2, M5 Junction 19, Avon Ring Road Improvements (South Gloucestershire), Proposed A370 Park and Ride Scheme;</p> <p>Air pollution -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased monitoring of SAC pollution levels (implemented recently) to inform mitigation and understand deposition trends • Measures to reduce private vehicle usage and increase public transport or active travel • Design measures to reduce pollutant emissions from vehicles (including trains) <p>Habitat loss -</p> <p>Avoidance of SAC habitat for works associated with schemes – e.g. vegetation clearance for Portishead rail link</p>
Bath and Bradford Avon Bats SAC	<p>Odd Down Park and Ride expansion; HRA needed at project level for this and any further P&R schemes (Weston, SE Bath). Project level design mitigation (e.g. lighting) or adjustment to location area may be needed.</p>
Mendip Woodlands SAC	<p>A371 Banwell Bypass;</p> <p>Undertake bat surveys to establish foraging use of the area around the proposed bypass. HRA screening needed at</p>

	project level.
North Somerset and Mendip Bats SAC/ Mendip Limestone Grasslands SAC	<p>M5 J21 bypass and A371 Banwell Bypass;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Undertake bat surveys to establish foraging use of the area around the bypasses and better understand potential impacts of additional rural lighting on bats • HRA needed at project level for both schemes
Severn Estuary SAC/ Severn Estuary Ramsar	<p>Greater Bristol Metro, Portway P& R expansion schemes, Weston Package;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Habitat loss should be avoided for all schemes and associated works (including any supporting habitat outside the designated SAC/SPA/Ramsar boundaries) • An HRA should be undertaken at project level for all schemes.
Severn Estuary SPA	<p>Greater Bristol Metro, Portway P& R expansion schemes, Weston Package;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HRA needed at project level – using bird studies and surveys to establish key foraging and movement patterns. • Effects of noise could be mitigated through design or use of noise barriers if necessary • Construction Environmental Management Plans should include Noise Management Plans. • Trains should minimise noise wherever possible through design.

In addition to these measures, the following measure could also be taken to alleviate any potential recreational pressure on the Severn Estuary international designations;

Suitable Accessible Natural Greenspace

To avoid recreational pressure on sites sensitive to this impact Natural England advocates the promotion of Suitable Accessible Natural Greenspace (SANGS)³. The idea behind SANGS is that they will absorb some of the visitors that may otherwise choose sensitive international sites to visit. This could be a potential option if recreation disturbance is likely to affect qualifying interest bird features of the Severn Estuary SPA and Ramsar site. However, further research on expected visitor numbers and presence of species in the area around the Greater Bristol Metro scheme (Severn Beach and Avonmouth station re-openings) is necessary to determine whether this disturbance is likely to happen.

³ Background information available on Natural England website:

<http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/ourwork/enjoying/places/greenspace/greenspacestandards.aspx>

4 Summary of Assessment

4.1 Summary conclusions

The report aims to provide a summary of the international sites that could be affected by JLTP3 and ways in which they could be affected. This includes nine international sites within the West of England, which are described in the report, and five possible sites outside of the West of England boundary. The sites within and near to the borders of the West of England are shown in the map at the end of this report. Potentially adverse impacts from JLTP3 were identified to be:

- Air pollution effects (NO_x and Nitrogen deposition from vehicles);
- Habitat loss and fragmentation;
- Increased recreation impacts on SPA/Ramsar bird species due to increased transport/ access to sites;
- Noise and light disturbance to bird and bat species; and
- Disturbance to flight paths of SPA/Ramsar bird species or bat species

At the screening stage the JLTP3 was assessed to have no likely significant effects on Chew Valley Lake SPA, Mendip Woodlands SAC, Mells Valley SAC, Salisbury Plain SAC and the Somerset Levels and Moors SPA and Ramsar site. These sites were therefore not taken forward to this (AA) stage.

This report has identified that the JLTP3 could potentially have adverse effects on the following international sites;

- Bath and Bradford-on-Avon Bats SAC;
- North Somerset and Mendip Bats SAC;
- Mendip Limestone Grasslands SAC;
- Avon Gorge Woodlands SAC;

- Severn Estuary SAC;
- Severn Estuary SPA; and
- Severn Estuary Ramsar

The report has also identified plans that could potentially cause significant or adverse impacts on international sites in-combination with the JLTP3. These include regional and local spatial development plans (i.e. LDFs) and minerals and waste plans. However, the majority of impacts were predicted to come from the draft JLTP3 alone and are project-specific.

Although several of the schemes in the draft JLTP3 were found to cause potentially adverse effects on international sites, it is anticipated that all of the potential effects can be avoided or mitigated at project level. In some cases this may entail alterations to the nature, scale or location of the transport schemes. The following, not necessarily exclusive, list of JLTP3 options will need to have HRA undertaken at project level;

Project-level HRA required

- Greater Bristol Metro
- Further Rail (Station Re-openings)
- Portway P&R expansion
- Portishead Rail Corridor
- South Bristol Link
- BRT Ashton Vale to Emersons Green
- M5 Junction 19
- Avon Ring Road Improvements (South Gloucestershire)
- Proposed A370 Park and Ride Scheme
- M5 Junction 21 Bypass
- Banwell Bypass

In addition, following the precautionary principle for potential effects on Bath and Bradford Avon Bats SAC, the following two schemes should also be screened;

- Hicks Gate to Bath Rapid Transit Scheme
- A4 Saltford Bypass

4.2 Next steps

Further HRA work is needed at project level for a number of JLTP3 options in order to comply with the Habitats Regulations. This need for 'lower tier' assessment is necessary primarily due to the following types of uncertainty listed in the Natural England guidance on HRA⁴;

- Scientific uncertainty – bird surveys are needed for the Severn Estuary SPA and Ramsar sites in order to establish the nature of their usage of the Avonmouth area. Bat surveys are also needed in order to better understand bat usage of the area around Banwell; and
- Implementation uncertainty - the design details, timing and duration of works is unknown for many transport schemes.

In addition to this there is also considerable financial uncertainty. Following the Comprehensive Spending Review in October 2010, there is still uncertainty about funding for many of the schemes and whether they will proceed or not.

Lower tier assessment will also help to understand the implications of the transport schemes and devise appropriate avoidance and mitigation measures that are scheme-specific. No schemes in the JLTP3 were considered to have unavoidable adverse effects on any international sites but further avoidance and mitigation measures will likely be necessary as a result of project-level HRA findings.

⁴ The Habitats Regulations Assessment of Local Development Documents. David Tyldesley & Associates for Natural England, 2009.

6

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Glossary and Abbreviations

Appropriate Assessment (AA)	An assessment of the potential adverse impacts of a proposed plan on an international site, either alone or in combination with other plans. Appropriate Assessment follows a preliminary screening phase to see if 'Appropriate Assessment' is necessary.
BRT	Bristol Rapid Transit
Habitats Regulations	These transpose the requirements of the European Union Habitats Directive into domestic legislation.
Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA)	Assessment under the UK Habitats Regulations to determine whether a plan or programme will have potentially significant impacts on an international site, either alone or in combination with other plans. HRA screening will also determine whether a full Appropriate Assessment will be needed.
JLTP3	Joint Local Transport Plan covering the period 2011 – 2026 (the third local transport plan to be prepared for the West of England area).
LTP	Local Transport Plan
Natura 2000	A network of European-wide sites designated under the Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC) and the Birds Directive (79/409/EEC), comprising Special Areas of Conservation, Special Protection Areas and Ramsar sites. Only Special Areas of Conservation are relevant to this report.
Natural England	Natural England is the government agency responsible for nature conservation in England. It was previously part of two separate bodies, the Nature Conservancy Council, and the Countryside Commission, which merged in 1991. Natural England is in charge of designating SSSIs and NNRs, and other functions, including advising the government and undertaking research.
Special Area of Conservation (SAC)	SACs are designated to protect the 220 habitats and approximately 1000 species listed in Annex I and II of the Habitats Directive which are considered to be of European interest following criteria given in the directive. Each SAC has various conservation objectives.
Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)	SSSIs are designated by Natural England. They underpin other nature conservation designations, such as Special Protection Areas and Special Areas of Conservation. SSSIs can be of biological interest (Biological SSSIs), or geological interest, (Geological SSSIs). A minority of sites are notified for both biological and geological interest.

