



Ministry of Infrastructure and the  
Environment

# Summary Draft National Policy Strategy for Infrastructure and Spatial Planning with the Strategic Environmental Impact Assessment





# Summary Draft National Policy Strategy for Infrastructure and Spatial Planning

Making the Netherlands competitive, accessible,  
liveable and safe

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# Comprehensive vision

Making the Netherlands competitive, accessible, liveable and safe

Making the Netherlands competitive, accessible, liveable and safe. This is what central government wants to achieve, taking a robust approach that allows scope for regional variation, puts users first, clearly prioritises investment, and links spatial developments and infrastructure. It will work towards this goal alongside other authorities, on the basis of a philosophy based on trust, clearly defined responsibilities, simple rules and selective involvement.

This new approach calls for an update of central government policy on spatial planning and mobility. The various policy documents on these issues have become dated as new political priorities have emerged and circumstances have changed in the face of the economic crisis, climate change and growing differences between regions which have come about partly because the population is facing growth, stagnation and contraction simultaneously.

## Changing tack

To make the Netherlands competitive, accessible, liveable and safe, we need to change tack in our spatial planning and mobility policy. Excessive layers of government, complex regulations and compartmentalisation are all too common. Central government therefore intends to bring spatial planning as close as possible to those directly affected (people and businesses), and leave more to the municipal and provincial authorities (decentralisation as the first option). This will mean less focus on national interests and simpler regulations.

For example, the government plans to transfer responsibility for balancing urbanisation and green spaces at regional level to the provincial authorities. This will drastically reduce the number of different landscape and nature management regimes. Furthermore, the municipal and interlocal coordination and implementation of urbanisation plans will be left to local authorities working independently or in collaboration within provincial frameworks. Central government will no longer be involved in determining percentages of built land in inner city areas, or defining National Buffer Zones and objectives for restructuring. Only in the urban regions around major transport hubs and ports (the 'mainports' of Amsterdam and Rotterdam) will central government agree the programming of urbanisation with local and

regional authorities. To promote the careful use of space, central government will only set out a ‘ladder’ to guide sustainable urbanisation decisions (based on the model devised by the Social and Economic Council of the Netherlands). Mobility policy will focus more on users, with greater cohesion between the various modes of transport, and better coordination of spatial development and mobility. This will create scope for regional variation.

#### **Based on trust**

Trust in other authorities will form the basis for redefining responsibilities, regulations and central government involvement. With their regional knowledge and partnerships, the municipal and provincial authorities are well equipped to meet the challenges comprehensively and effectively.

Clear allocation of tasks and partnership agreements between all concerned will be vital in cases where the goals of central government and national interests touch on regional responsibilities. Central government will enter into comprehensive agreements covering all spatial and mobility issues, based on its own regional agenda and that of the region, in the consultations with the regions involved in the multiyear infrastructure, spatial planning and transport programme (MIRT regions). It will also form strategic alliances with knowledge institutions, companies and civil society organisations where necessary.

Central government will have to assume responsibility when:

- an issue entails benefits or drawbacks for the country as a whole, and is beyond the powers of the municipal and provincial authorities to override the authority of other parties. This might include space for military activities and challenges in urban regions associated with the mainports, brainport and greenports;
- international commitments or agreements apply, for example on matters of biodiversity, sustainable energy or world heritage;
- an issue transcends provincial or national boundaries and there is either a risk of administrative deadlock or responsibility is in the hands of central government. Examples include the main transport network (roads, rail, water and air), the energy supply network, flood protection and public health.

These three criteria were the decisive factors in defining the central government goals and associated national interests referred to in the National Policy Strategy. The section on implementation indicates what central government intends to do to ensure these goals are achieved (clearly defined responsibilities).

# 2040: developments and ambitions

## Ambition to be competitive, accessible, liveable and safe

Central government has clear ambitions for the Netherlands in 2040, which tie in with national and international developments that will determine the challenges for spatial planning and mobility in the run-up to that date. Central government intends to use spatial planning and mobility policy to make the Netherlands competitive, accessible, liveable and safe.

### *Competitiveness*

Our open economy is becoming steadily more interwoven with that of powerful competitors like Germany, China and India. Our international opportunities lie primarily in the following key sectors: logistics, water, high-tech, the creative industries, energy, chemicals, food and horticulture. Many of these sectors are concentrated in the urban regions around the mainports, brainport and greenports. Our ambition is for the Netherlands to be among the top ten most competitive economies in the world by 2040, with a good spatial and economic infrastructure that offers an excellent environment for businesses and knowledge workers. This will entail optimum international mobility for our urban regions by 2040, and excellent connections for the mainports of Rotterdam and Schiphol, the Southeast Netherlands brainport and the greenports with Europe and the rest of the world.

### *Mobility*

Individual mobility (by car and public transport) and freight transport will continue to grow over the coming decades, particularly in the urban regions and on major routes to Germany and Belgium. Steps will be taken to facilitate this growth in mobility by road, rail and waterway, putting users first. Our ambition is for users to enjoy an optimum mobility chain by 2040, with good connections between the various networks via multimodal hubs (for passengers and freight), and close coordination of infrastructure and spatial development.

### *Liveability and safety*

Spatial and mobility policy will cater for the growing spatial differentiation in the Netherlands. The rapid population growth we have become accustomed to is over. Though our towns and cities, particularly those in the west of the country, will have an extra million residents ten years from now, more than half of the municipalities in the Netherlands will soon face the impact of a shrinking population. Changing needs in terms of housing and jobs will place extra pressure on markets where demand as a whole is in decline. It will be a matter of quality rather than quantity. The aim is for housing and work premises in towns, cities and villages to cater for demand (in terms of quality) and for as many existing locations as possible to be used for transformation and restructuring projects.

Climate change is causing sea level rise, and increasing the frequency of extreme weather events. Flood protection and adequate freshwater supplies require space, and place certain demands on urban development. To ensure our country remains an attractive place to live and do business, we must cherish and enhance those qualities that make us unique and distinguish us from other countries. This means we must safeguard our natural habitats and biodiversity, unique cultural heritage values and environmental quality, for today and for the future. Our ambition for 2040 in terms of liveability and safety is for the Netherlands to offer its inhabitants a safe and healthy living environment with good environmental quality, in both urban and rural areas. By 2040, the Netherlands should also be permanently protected from flooding, with an adequate freshwater supply for dry periods, and it should be a leading player in the international transition to sustainable mobility, while retaining its current nationally and internationally unique cultural heritage, as well as a network of wildlife habitats that protects the country's flora and fauna.

The demand for gas and electricity will continue to grow along with our economy. Geopolitical relations, the exhaustion of fossil fuel resources and our ambitions to reduce carbon emissions mean there will have to be a transition to sustainable, renewable energy supplies. Sufficient space will need to be reserved to generate and transport energy (both within and across our borders). The proportion of our energy needs supplied by sustainable sources like wind, solar, biomass and geothermal energy will have to increase, and these take a lot of space. The aim for 2040 is for the Netherlands to have a robust international energy supply network, and for our energy transition to be well under way by that time.

# Central government goals and national interests

Central government will set out three main goals designed to keep the Netherlands competitive, accessible, liveable and safe in the medium term (2028):

- enhance the Netherlands' competitiveness by strengthening its spatial and economic infrastructure;
- improve, preserve and physically guarantee mobility, putting users first;
- guarantee a safe environment in which it is pleasant to live, and in which unique natural and cultural heritage values are preserved.

The planned bid for the 2028 Olympic and Paralympic Games is in line with the goal of enhancing the Netherlands' competitiveness (see appendix 5).

These three goals define issues of national interest. Central government thereby indicates what it is responsible for, and where it hopes to achieve results.

## **Strengthen the Netherlands' spatial and economic infrastructure**

*An outstanding, internationally accessible business climate in the urban regions, with a concentration of key sectors*

Strengthening the spatial and economic infrastructure will require integrated use and expansion of the strengths of the urban regions, with their concentration of key sectors, and their international connections and mainports. Central government is therefore working with industry and knowledge institutions to produce a policy agenda that covers the entire range of government policy on the nine top sectors.

Most of the key sectors are concentrated in urban regions, particularly around the mainports, brainport and greenports. In view of this, and of the national interests at stake, central government intends to make an extra effort to enhance competitiveness in these regions. This will involve an urgent regional programme strategy entailing agreements between local and regional authorities and central government on measures to strengthen the spatial and economic infrastructure in the broad sense. In accordance with the coalition agreement, after 2020 central government will fund priority measures to resolve certain bottlenecks affecting the mobility of the mainports, brainport and greenports (including connections with the hinterland) from the extended Infrastructure Fund. Central government will also continue to foster regional

developments that benefit the country as a whole (such as the Zuidas development, Schiphol-Almere, Brainport Avenue and Rotterdam-Zuid).

Central government will define objectives designed to ensure the housing market in the Netherlands functions effectively, guaranteeing a sufficient variety and number of good quality homes. In addressing housing needs, it is important that supply meets demand in terms of quality. Only in the urban regions around the mainports (Amsterdam and Rotterdam) will central government become involved in urbanisation plans as part of a regional strategy. Existing urbanisation agreements will be subsumed into the comprehensive strategy for these urban regions.<sup>1</sup>

Transport networks for passengers and freight and good international communications networks are crucial to the spatial and economic infrastructure. Central government will guarantee the capacity and safety of the air transport network, ensure smooth traffic flows on connections with the hinterland and space for ports, and guarantee the safety of the waterways for goods transport.

#### *Space for the main (sustainable) energy supply network and the energy transition*

Energy security is an important economic good, which both individuals and companies need. The further integration of the European energy market will mean greater reliance on international connections, and our electricity grid may need to be expanded. Central government will specify routes for any expansion (from 220 kilovolts) and sites for the generation of electricity (from 500 megawatts), and ensure they are incorporated into the grid.

Central government will initiate a transition to a sustainable, renewable energy supply, and will make the electricity infrastructure suitable for more decentralised electricity generation in the longer term. Central government and the provincial authorities will plan space for more wind farms, so that at least 6,000 MW is generated by this method in 2020. Central government will also ensure space is reserved to generate 6,000 MW offshore in the longer term.

#### *Space for the main pipeline network for the transport of hazardous and other substances*

The pipelines for natural gas, oil and oil products and removal of CO<sub>2</sub> are part of the national energy infrastructure. The network of pipelines for the transport of hazardous and other substances is economically important to the Netherlands in terms of European gas imports and exports, and for the functioning of the Port of Rotterdam. Central government intends to allow space for pipelines to be laid, prevent any disruption and ensure good connections with the European network.

#### *Efficient use of the subsurface*

The subsurface is important for the current energy supply (extraction, storage and transport of oil and gas) and for new energy supplies (geothermal energy, underground thermal energy storage, and the storage of CO<sub>2</sub> and nuclear waste). In view of the limited space in the subsurface, its significance to our economic performance, the need to prevent unacceptable disturbance to the subsurface and the need to coordinate with above-ground activity, efficient use of the subsurface and the extraction of surface resources are matters of national interest.

### **Improve mobility: clever investment, innovation and preservation**

#### *A robust main road, rail and waterway network around and between the most important urban regions, including connections with the hinterland*

Central government will put users (both passengers and freight carriers) first in the Netherlands' mobility system. A robust and coherent mobility system with sufficient capacity to cope with the growth in mobility in the medium (2028) and long term (2040) will offer users improved mobility.

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<sup>1</sup> Existing urbanisation agreements reached in the autumn 2010 consultations with the MIRT regions will be updated where necessary. Central government will no longer be party to the existing urbanisation agreements in the other urban regions.

A robust system provides reliable performance both in normal circumstances and in the event of accidents, extreme weather events and other disruptions. A coherent transport system will give users choices that are consistent with their lifestyle and use patterns. This will be achieved by reinforcing each mode of transport (road, public transport, waterways) in response to demand, ensuring better connections between them, improving coordination with other spatial developments and influencing the demand for mobility. Door-to-door mobility will be the key: improving the mobility chain and strengthening multimodal hubs that function as crucial links in it.

Clever investment will help us tackle bottlenecks where this will have the greatest economic benefit. The urban regions around the mainports, brainport and greenports and the main connections with neighbouring countries will therefore be given priority. To substantiate the choices made, central government will introduce an Mobility Indicator that will reveal the quality of mobility, with a strong focus on the interaction between all modes of transport: road, rail, air and water in relation to spatial development.

The Mobility Indicator will define the quality of mobility in each region, expressed in terms of the effort (time and money) required to reach a particular location. All modalities will be examined in conjunction. The Mobility Indicator currently only allows for a relative comparison. Over the coming year, it will be developed to make it suitable for use in projects and regional studies. In efforts to improve mobility, investments will be made where they are likely to yield the greatest benefit for the mobility system as a whole. This will include the links between different forms of transport, such as park and ride centres and multimodal transhipment points.

From 2020, rail passengers will no longer need to use a timetable to travel between major destinations. On the busiest routes, there will be six intercity and six stopping services an hour. The rail infrastructure will be simplified, thus increasing the reliability of services.

On the roads, through traffic and local traffic will be separated as much as possible in order to improve flow. On the main trunk routes outside the Randstad conurbation where congestion is a structural problem, three-lane carriageways will become the norm. In the Randstad, four-lane carriageways will be the norm. Central government will ensure any infrastructural improvements comply with the statutory requirements (in terms of noise, for example).

#### *Better use of the capacity of the existing road, rail and waterway networks*

We must be innovative in our use of the existing infrastructure. Efficient use is essential to ensure traffic flows smoothly on our roads, railways and waterways. Central government plans to launch a programme setting out a whole range of measures to improve use of the transport infrastructure. Examples include longer opening times for rush-hour lanes and the introduction of intelligent transport systems, arrangements with employers to reduce commuter traffic and expansion of bicycle storage capacity at railway stations. Central government, local and regional authorities and companies will compile a list of measures to be taken in each region. Users should notice the benefits by 2015. The packages of measures will include objectives agreed by the partners.

Central government intends to work with the local and regional authorities to set up public transport systems based on users' needs, so that different systems (buses, regional public transport networks and railways) and transport to and from hubs connect up better. Easily accessible and comprehensive real-time travel information is essential. Central government has a responsibility, in collaboration with local and regional authorities and the private sector, to foster strong multimodal hubs by, for example, helping to create new park and ride locations and upgrade existing ones, and contributing to measures to tackle logistical bottlenecks.

Inland navigation provides an important alternative form of transport that can help reduce traffic on our busy roads. Vessels must be able to travel as efficiently and reliably as possible. We are therefore working to achieve a maximum waiting time of 30 minutes at locks and bridges on the national waterway network.

*Preserve the main road, rail and waterway networks to ensure they operate effectively*

The road, public transport and waterway infrastructure in the Netherlands is among the busiest in the world. The country is highly dependent on this infrastructure and it is vital that it functions properly. Good management and maintenance of the existing national infrastructure is an essential prerequisite for a robust mobility system and a flourishing economy. This includes the maintenance, replacement or renovation of the infrastructure and the simplification of timetables and the railway infrastructure to enhance reliability. On the national waterways network, the main hinterland connections will be given priority (with measures at locks and bridges, and measures to improve navigability), alongside the routes via the IJsselmeer and the delta in the southwest of the country.

**Safeguard the quality of the living environment**

A safe and healthy living environment is a basic prerequisite for both people and business. A safe society in which it is pleasant to live needs good environmental quality, protection from flooding and a reliable drinking water supply, protection of its cultural heritage and unique natural values, and sites allocated to national defence.

*Improve environmental quality (air, soil, water) and provide protection from noise pollution and external safety risks*

Good environmental quality means that the quality of the soil, water and air must at least comply with current standards, both national and international. People's health must be protected from negative influences like noise pollution. To prevent future costs and harm to society, the environmental impact of spatial and infrastructural developments must be taken into account.

*Room for flood protection, sustainable drinking water supply and climate-ready urban development and redevelopment*

Central government is responsible for the integrated management of the main water system and, along with the water authorities, for protecting the Netherlands from flooding. To prevent pollution or peak loads in a river catchment from causing problems elsewhere, frameworks and standards must be defined and management measures taken at national and international level to safeguard both the quality and quantity of our water supply. Central government will protect the primary water defences and the coastal foundation, and ensure that the river system has enough room to carry water to the sea via the Rhine distributaries and the Maas, both now and in the future. Within the national Delta Plan, the authorities will work together under the leadership of the Delta Programme Commissioner to produce a comprehensive package of measures, both water-related and spatial, guaranteeing flood protection and securing drinking water supplies in the short and long term, in conjunction with spatial developments.

*Room to preserve and strengthen nationally and internationally unique cultural heritage and natural values*

Landscape and cultural heritage values define a region's identity. Culture and cultural heritage also play an increasingly important role in keeping the Netherlands attractive and competitive. Central government will remain responsible for UNESCO World Heritage Sites in the Netherlands (including the Tentative List), as well as for urban conservation sites, scheduled national monuments and historic buildings and the maritime heritage. Policy on landscape will no longer be a central government responsibility; it will devolve instead to the provincial authorities.

*Room for a national network of wildlife habitats to aid the survival and development of flora and fauna*

To enable species of flora and fauna to survive and develop in the long term, two factors are essential from a spatial planning perspective: the preservation of their habitats and the opportunity to move from one to another. The revised National Ecological Network is a network of wildlife habitats that extends beyond provincial and national borders, in which the spatial, hydrological and environmental conditions in ecosystems of national and international importance are safeguarded. The Natura 2000 areas (with natural values of European importance) and the 20 National Parks form part of the National Ecological Network.

#### *Room for military sites and activities*

Central government is responsible for designating and protecting sites for military activities (naval bases, barracks, military airfields, training grounds, firing ranges, low-flying routes, helicopter low-flying areas, transmitters/receivers, radar stations and ammunitions depots, as well as the restricted access zones around them). A new method of assessing radar disturbance will allow more scope for wind turbines and high-rise buildings in the future.

#### *Careful consideration and transparent decision-making in all spatial plans*

Besides the three main goals of making the Netherlands competitive, accessible, liveable and safe, central government is also responsible for ensuring the country has a good spatial planning system. To ensure the scarce space in our country is used as carefully as possible, a ‘sustainable urbanisation ladder’ is to be introduced. This will mean first assessing whether there is demand for a certain new development, then deciding whether existing urban areas or existing buildings can be reused and, if new construction is found to be necessary, ensuring it fits in as well as possible, and there is multimodal mobility.

The **sustainable urbanisation** ladder has three ‘rungs’:

1. The authorities concerned assess whether the intended development meets a regional, interlocal demand for industrial sites, offices, residential buildings or other urban amenities. Besides a quantitative assessment (number of hectares, or number of homes), there must also be qualitative demand (e.g. an industrial site where a heavier environmental burden is permitted, or a specific type of living environment) at a regional scale.
2. If the intended development meets a regional, interlocal need, the authorities concerned will assess whether it can be met in a built-up area by restructuring or transforming existing locations.
3. If restructuring or transformation in an existing built-up area offers insufficient potential for the regional, interlocal need to be met, the authorities concerned will assess whether it can be met at locations that can be accessed by multiple modes of transport, or with potential to be developed in such a way that this is possible.

A good design and digital access to good spatial information also facilitate balanced considerations at the planning stage. Central government will foster the early use of design in spatial plans and ensure there is a comprehensive registration system for basic spatial information.

The National Spatial Structure illustrates in geographical terms the matters of national interest for which central government is responsible. The map sets out roughly which areas and structures are of national importance in view of central government’s goals concerning competitiveness, mobility, liveability and safety, thus giving a visual impression of a coherent spatial structure. To reveal how the various national challenges are connected, the National Policy Strategy sets them out for each individual MIRT region.

The North Sea is of major economic importance to the Netherlands in terms of shipping, fisheries, extraction of natural resources and generation of wind power. It is also important for naval exercises, as well as being an important wildlife habitat and a defining feature of our landscape. The map on page 14 highlights spatial challenges in the North Sea region.





## National Spatial Structure map

**Enhance the competitiveness of the Netherlands by strengthening its spatial and economic infrastructure**

- Urban region with top economic sectors
- Schiphol Mainport
- Rotterdam Mainport
- Southeast Netherlands Brainport
- △ Greenport
- Zuidas
- City of international justice, peace and security
- High speed rail network station
- Other airports of national importance
- Seaport of national importance
- Inland port of national importance
- Power station with capacity > 500 megawatts
- Possible location for new power stations
- Potential area for wind farm
- Area designated for wind farm
- Energy supply network
- Pipeline and related buffer zone
- Potential development area for sustainable offshore energy supply after 2020

**Improve, preserve and physically guarantee mobility, putting users first**

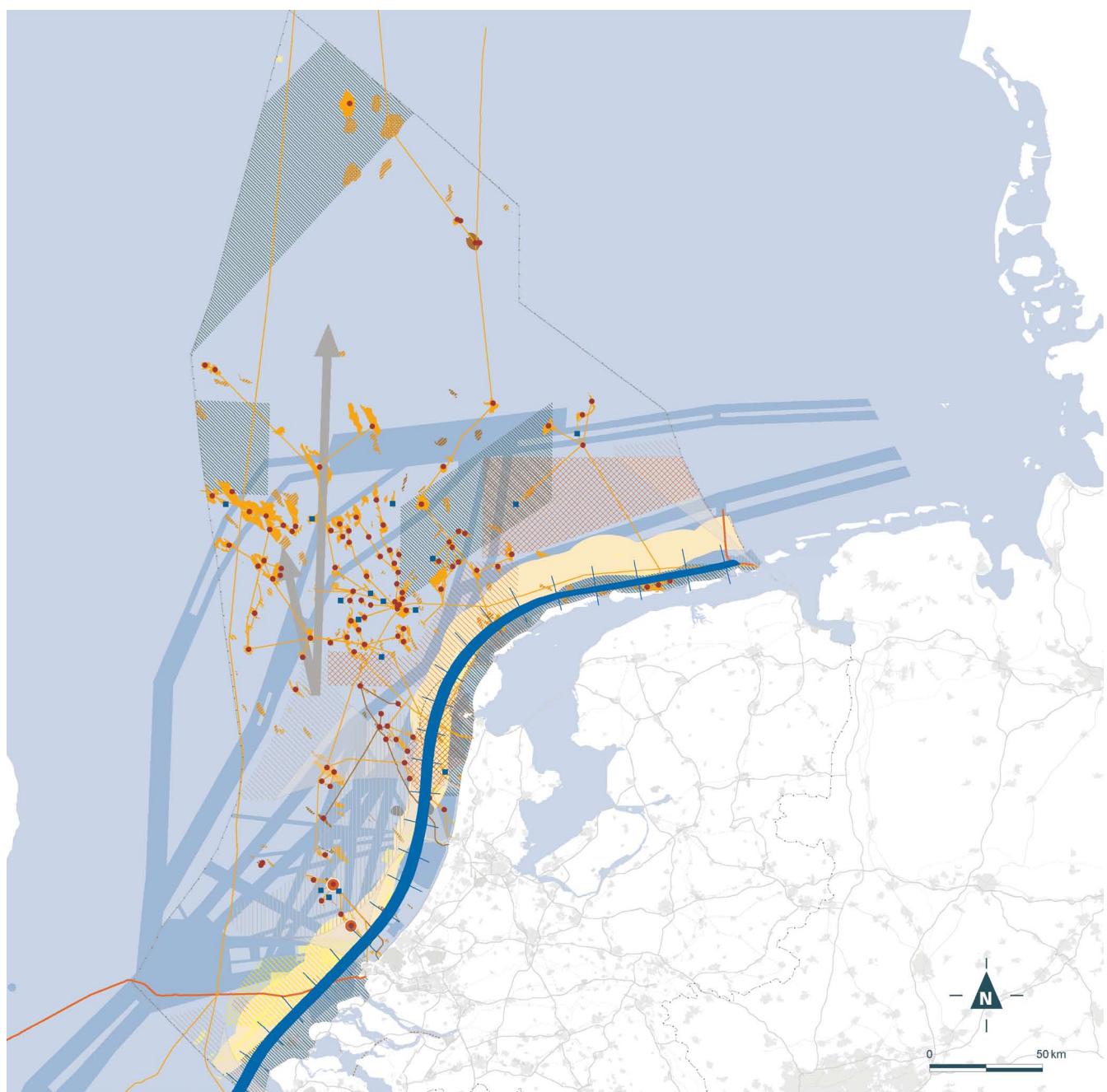
- International and national main road network
- - - International and national main rail network
- ..... International and national main navigable waterways

**Guarantee a safe environment in which it is pleasant to live, and in which unique natural and cultural heritage values are preserved**

- Unique UNESCO World Heritage Site
- National nature network\* (the map will indicate revised national ecological network)
- Coastal foundation to be preserved
- Fresh water supply
- Dykes, sluices and locks
- Zone with military restrictions
- Military airfield
- Naval port
- Large military training area and/or firing range
- Simplified topography

\* The terrestrial areas indicated are in fact potential locations for large scale wind farms, included as an illustration.

North Sea map



#### Shipping

Shipping route

#### Space for military activities

Hazardous zone

Military zone

Radar disturbance area

#### Nature

Natura 2000

#### Pipelines and cables

Gas pipeline

Oil pipeline

Electricity cable

#### Production locations

- Production platform
- Underwater platform

#### Natural resources

- |  |
|--|
| Gas: non-producing                     |
| Gas: producing                         |
| Gas, production terminated             |
| Oil: non-producing                     |
| Oil: producing                         |
| Oil: production terminated             |
| Pilot offshore CO <sub>2</sub> storage |

The whole of the Dutch Continental Shelf is included within the National Ecological Network and as a potential location for CO<sub>2</sub> storage, gas and electricity extraction and gas storage.

#### Sand extraction

Yellow diagonal stripes: Area designated for offshore sand extraction

Yellow: Current sand extraction area

Light orange: Area designated for additional sand extraction

#### Wind power

Diagonal stripes: Designated wind energy supply area

Vertical lines: Potential area for wind farms

Grey: Existing offshore wind farms

Light grey: Potential areas for wind energy cables to landing point

Upward arrow: Potential development direction sustainable offshore energy after 2020

Blue cross: Preservation of unrestricted view of the horizon

Map icon: Simplified topography

# Additional information

The draft National Policy Strategy for Infrastructure and Spatial Planning was compiled by the Ministry of Infrastructure and the Environment.

## **Relationship between the National Policy Strategy for Infrastructure and Spatial Planning and other central government spatial planning documents**

This National Policy Strategy gives a comprehensive overview of central government policy on spatial planning and mobility and will act as a reference frame for all new and existing government policy with spatial planning implications. It replaces the National Spatial Strategy (Nota Ruimte), the Randstad 2040 Structural Vision, the Policy Document on Mobility, the Mobility Strategy and the structure scheme for the motorway environment. It also supersedes the spatial objectives and conclusions in the following documents: Key Planning Decision on the Structure Scheme for Military Sites, the landscape agenda, the Living Countryside agenda and 'Peaks in the Delta'.

## **Scope**

The National Policy Strategy applies to the entire Kingdom of the Netherlands, both its terrestrial areas and waters (territorial zone<sup>2</sup>, the Dutch Exclusive Economic Zone and the Caribbean Exclusive Economic Zone<sup>3</sup>), with the exception of the islands of Aruba, Bonaire, Curaçao, St Maarten, St Eustatius and Saba.

Parts of the National Policy Strategy that pertain to spatial matters of national importance and which require legal measures have been addressed in the Order in Council on Spatial Planning. A strategic environmental report has also been drawn up.

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<sup>2</sup> Waters from the baseline to 12 nautical miles where the Netherlands is free to make its own laws, and over which it has jurisdiction.

<sup>3</sup> That part of the coastal waters outside the territorial zone where the Netherlands claims rights, up to a maximum of 200 nautical miles offshore, calculated from the low tide mark and taking into account the restrictions imposed by international law.

### **Monitoring**

The Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency will be asked to work with the Mobility Expertise Centre to monitor policy on mobility and spatial planning every two years, enabling the government to report to the House of Representatives.

### **Regulation**

During the adoption phase, central government will not assess whether zoning plans take proper account of spatial matters of national importance. It will, however, conduct systematic or thematic studies in retrospect to establish whether zoning plans comply with national legislation.

# Summary of the Strategic Environmental Impact Assessment Report



## Summary of the Strategic Environmental Impact Assessment Report

### National Policy Strategy for Infrastructure and Spatial Planning

Department of Infrastructure and the Environment  
June 9<sup>th</sup>, 2011



**ROYAL HASKONING**  
SMC | Strategie en Management Consultants

## **Summary**

To foster sustainable development, the environment must be considered at an early stage in decisions on any plans involving choices that may ultimately have a negative impact on it. A strategic environmental report must be drawn up for plans of this type. This is an environmental impact statement relating to government plans. A strategic environmental report has been produced to aid decision-making on the National Policy Strategy for Infrastructure and Spatial Planning, setting out information on the environmental impacts of the new policy, to allow environmental interests to be fully considered in the decisions. The strategic environmental report also serves as a basis for informing stakeholders of the implications of the proposed policy. Furthermore, the report includes a preliminary assessment that explores potential implications for the conservation of strictly protected Natura 2000 areas.

### **Understanding the environmental implications of a trend reversal in spatial and mobility policy**

The National Policy Strategy for Infrastructure and Spatial Planning sets out the Government's vision of how central government should approach issues of spatial planning and mobility up to 2040. As such, it also provides a framework for decisions that central government intends to take in the period up to 2028 to strengthen the spatial and economic infrastructure in the Netherlands. The National Policy Strategy defines spatial and mobility challenges that are of national importance, as well as the instruments central government intends to use. The Government proposes a trend reversal in several elements of the policy pursued to date. The strategic environmental report considers the environmental impact of the basic policy choices, and compares them with the policy pursued to date. These policy choices concern:

- 1) the spatial and economic infrastructure and urbanisation
- 2) investment, innovation and preservation in the interests of mobility
- 3) protection of ecological networks
- 4) protection of unique landscape values.

The trend reversals which the Government envisages for urbanisation, and the protection of ecological networks and unique landscape values mainly concern decentralisation, with responsibility for the details of policy largely devolving to local and regional authorities. On these issues, the strategic environmental report uses the alternative of continuing current central government policy (business as usual) as a reference. The precise implications of decentralisation cannot be foreseen, however, since the effects depend on how local and regional authorities actually implement the policy. The strategic environmental report therefore identifies potential impacts within a certain bandwidth.

### ***Environmental impact of other policy choices***

Policy choices where there is no causal link between the policy currently being proposed and potential future environmental effects are not considered in the strategic environmental report. The same applies to issues where policy choices are covered by other policy documents, for which the National Policy Strategy for Infrastructure and Spatial Development is not the primary framework in terms of spatial planning. For instance, central government's vision on flood protection and the

drinking water supply is set down in the National Water Plan, which also defines the spatial framework for developments in the North Sea up to 2015, including offshore windfarms, CO<sub>2</sub> storage, and oil and gas drilling. And the government vision on the electricity supply and spatial choices concerning the terrestrial electricity grid has already been laid down in the National Structure Plan on Electricity Supply.

Environmental impact statements (EIS) have already been drawn up to aid decision-making on these matters. On other matters involving spatial issues, a decision is not yet called for in this National Policy Strategy. Separate decisions and possibly also National Policy Strategies will be prepared in the near future on matters including the central government vision on the subsurface, the large-scale development of terrestrial windfarms, and the Olympic bid. Whether an EIS is required will be decided in due course.

#### Assessment framework

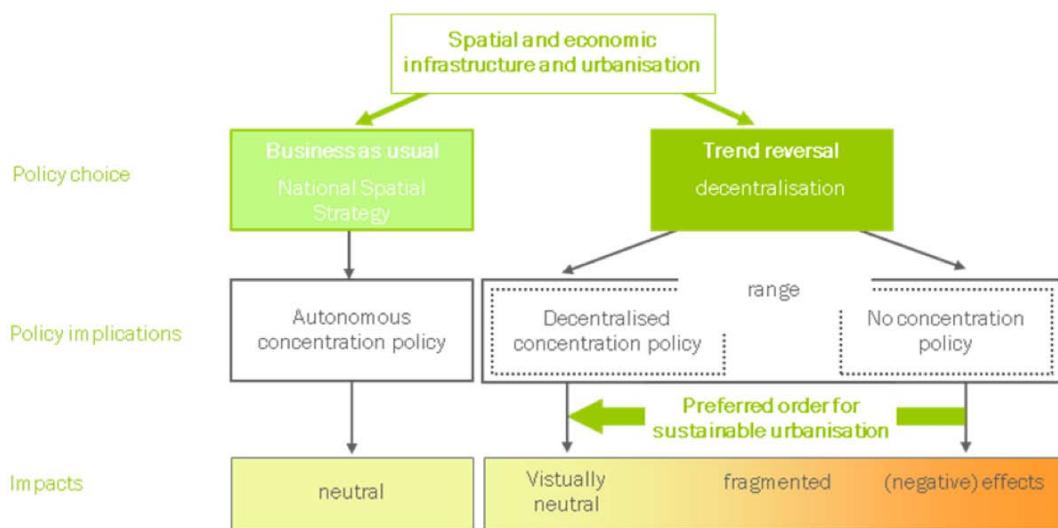
To allow the proposed policy to be described and assessed at the correct level, the strategic environmental report uses a reference framework that focuses on the relevant criteria and impacts associated with each individual policy choice. Together, this gives an impression of the implications of the proposed policy for sustainable development. It has been assumed that sustainable development will benefit if there is a positive effect on ecology (planet), the living environment (people) and the economy (profit). The strategic environmental report uses the following assessment framework, describing the effects at the level of the five factors set out below:

	Factor:	Criteria (examples):
Planet	Climate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Flexibility to absorb change (adaptation)</li><li>- CO<sub>2</sub> emissions and energy transition (mitigation)</li></ul>
	Biodiversity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Species richness (protected species)</li><li>- Quality of protected areas (conservation areas)</li><li>- Spatial coherence of ecological networks</li></ul>
People	Safe and healthy living environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Environmental quality: soil, water, air, noise</li><li>- Availability of freshwater</li><li>- Protection from flooding</li><li>- Protection from security risks (external or otherwise)</li><li>- Space for housing, restructuring and transformation</li></ul>
	Vital and attractive living environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Multimodal door-to-door access</li><li>- Balance between infrastructure, green spaces, water,</li><li>- Spatial quality, coherence and cultural heritage</li></ul>
Profit	Good climate for national and international business	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Locations accessible, including internationally</li><li>- Space for international hubs</li><li>- Space for other economic functions (farming, ...)</li><li>- Vital and attractive living environment (see people)</li></ul>

Given the fact that the National Policy Strategy for Infrastructure and Spatial Development and the policy choices it sets out relate to the longer term (2028-2040), the strategic environmental report also focuses on impacts that are likely to occur within that timeframe. After all, many choices concerning investments in the shorter term (2020) have already been made. The conclusions of the strategic environmental report concerning the policy choices in question are summarised below.

### Spatial and economic infrastructure and urbanisation

Current urbanisation policy as set out in the National Spatial Strategy will be replaced by a focus on strengthening the spatial and economic infrastructure to enhance the functioning of the urban regions, where key sectors are concentrated, as in the mainports, brainport and greenports. Central government will define urbanisation challenges with the regional authorities. The local and regional authorities will also be given more freedom to flesh out the details of urbanisation policy as they see fit. This will, for example, allow provincial and municipal authorities to opt for either concentrated urbanisation or more dispersed developments. Central government will however require local and regional authorities to substantiate their spatial planning choices using the 'ladder' for sustainable urban development. The 'ladder' – based on the model devised by the Social and Economic Council of the Netherlands – defines an order of preference for sustainable urbanisation. This will offer guidance for spatial planning decisions associated with regional and local urbanisation challenges, with a clear preference for concentration. However, the obligation will merely be to present arguments, and local and regional governments will still be required to make their own choices.



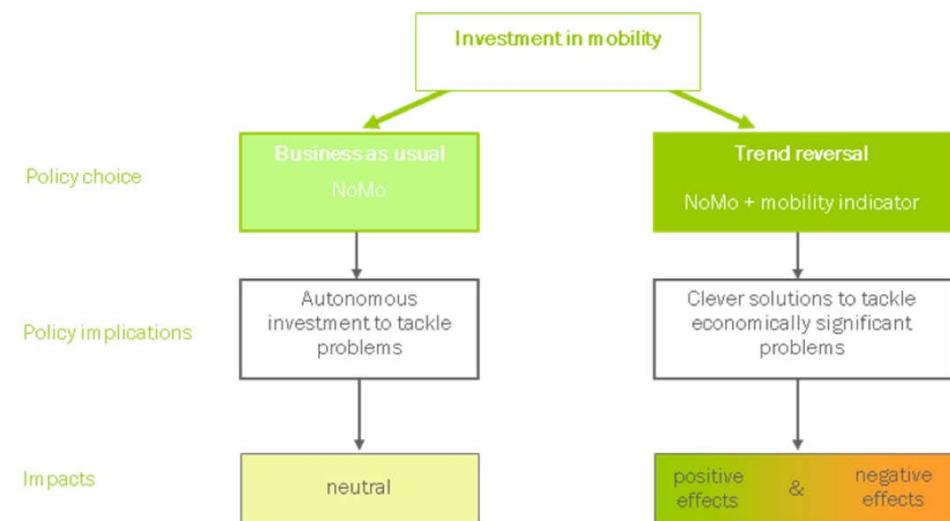
The spatial developments to which these considerations give rise will depend on what provincial and municipal authorities actually do. If provincial authorities leave their policy intact, or even make it more restrictive (decentralised concentration policy), there will be little change relative to developments that would have occurred under the National Spatial Strategy. If provincial and municipal authorities follow the central government line of making policy less restrictive (decentralised, with no concentration policy), further urbanisation will be most likely to occur in areas near and between the major cities, where the restrictions in the National Spatial Strategy will cease to apply (PBL Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency 2011). It is likely that a larger proportion of the demand for housing and jobs will arise in the heavily urbanised Randstad conurbation. Within the Randstad, this may be accompanied by less crowding and restructuring in existing urban areas, and comparatively strong growth in suburban areas. PBL calculations show that this would curb the shift from the

Randstad to Flevoland and Gelderland, and exacerbate population decline in areas already hit by this phenomenon. The trend towards a stronger concentration of developments in the Randstad would then be enhanced, probably causing further urban agglomeration. More suburbanisation in the Randstad could lead to even greater pressure on the heavily burdened infrastructure. This could make the infrastructural challenges for the Randstad even greater (PBL, 2011). It could, however, also lead to increased public transport capacity.

Outside the Randstad the pressure of urbanisation is expected to decrease, though it is likely that more space will be created locally for attractive housing and commercial developments outside urban areas (rural living and working). This wider distribution of functions will lead to more frequent use of private vehicles, resulting in more emissions of pollutants and CO<sub>2</sub>, higher energy consumption and more fragmentation, visual disturbance and more roads in rural areas. The decentralisation of urbanisation policy might remove an incentive for inner city restructuring and transformation, which could lead to the emergence or persistence of neglected, rundown areas, with negative consequences for the local and regional business climate.

#### Investment, innovation and preservation in the interests of mobility

Under current policy, choices concerning investment in mobility are determined on the basis of mobility norms, known as 'NoMo targets'. All modalities are examined separately to identify where these targets are not being met. Any problems can then be investigated and dealt with. The most important changes relative to current policy will be a more stringent assessment of proposed investments in mobility using a new mobility indicator, regional multimodal use of utilisation measures (targeting both supply and demand) and the integration of mobility and spatial planning policy. Innovation will play a greater role. The mobility indicator will reveal the quality of mobility in the system as a whole, rather than in individual modalities, in conjunction with economic and spatial developments, and will pinpoint where solutions to mobility problems are likely to yield the most added value. Problems can then be investigated and dealt with.



The new mobility indicator may cause changes in the spatial pattern of investment. In other words, the mobility indicator is expected to lead to a slightly different distribution of investment, probably with more investment in and around the mainports, brainport and greenports than is currently the case. Measures are likely to be the same type as under current policy. Efforts to achieve a more integrated approach are new.

As a result, mobility and the climate for national and international business is likely to improve around the mainports, brainport and greenports, possibly leading to extra mobility, agglomeration and a change in the environmental burden in those regions. The fragmentation and disruption of wildlife habitats and landscape may be especially pronounced in these regions.

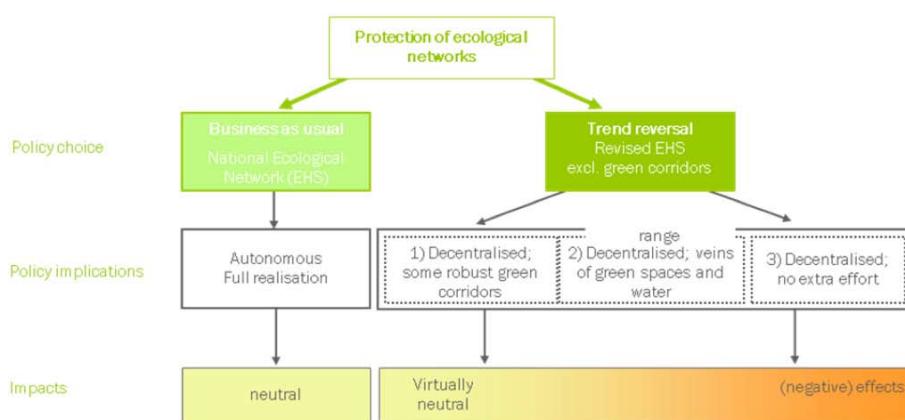
The effect of improved mobility in the urban regions around the mainports, brainport and greenports on pollution and noise is a complex matter, and will depend on the precise measures taken at each location. Traffic flow may improve, which would cause emissions to fall. However, improved mobility can lead to extra mobility and thus to extra emissions. Furthermore, the capacity and quality of public transport may benefit from more agglomeration. People's movements are also affected by agglomeration and spatial investment. This too can have a positive or negative impact on emissions. Given the fact that spatial investments are part of a policy mix, the main aim will be to ensure that they have the most positive impact possible on mobility and traffic flow, and thus also on emissions.

#### Protection of ecological networks

The policy pursued to date was to put in place an interprovincial and cross-border ecological network measuring 728,500 hectares, known as the National Ecological Network, or EHS. In addition, a buffer policy was launched to create environmental conditions in the EHS that allow the desired natural values to develop. The EHS will be reviewed and decentralised in accordance with the coalition agreement, and will be accorded planning protection under the National Policy Strategy for Infrastructure and Spatial Development and the associated Order in Council. The revised EHS will comprise the Natura 2000 areas, the National Parks, the existing EHS land and a limited expansion in the form of new nature areas, designed to achieve Natura 2000 targets. Central government's goal is for the revised EHS to keep the international biodiversity targets within reach. The emphasis will be on managing existing areas. Plans to create robust connections between habitats will be scrapped, and as a result the revised EHS will be considerably smaller than originally envisaged. Central government's aim is for the revised EHS to be at least as effective as the projected results under the old EHS policy.

Central government is currently negotiating the review of the EHS with the provincial authorities. As soon as agreement has been reached, a more detailed assessment will be made of the likely impact on biodiversity. Pending such an agreement, the strategic environmental report describes the possible environmental impact in general terms, using a certain bandwidth. At one end of the spectrum is a scenario in which the local and regional authorities do not designate any new nature conservation areas. At the other is a scenario in which they do. These scenarios were compared

with a reference situation in which autonomous policy and developments are extrapolated to 2040, and include full implementation of the EHS as originally envisaged. It should, however, be noted that central government and the provincial authorities are working towards agreements on the revised EHS, for which the latter will assume responsibility in accordance with the decentralisation announced in the coalition agreement. Since realisation of the EHS has been very slow under current policy, results have so far failed to live up to expectations. The review of the EHS will mean that fewer hectares of protected wildlife habitat are created, which might mean that habitats are less connected, and that the network will ultimately be less extensive.



As a result of the review the EHS will be smaller than originally conceived. This may hamper the long-term spread and exchange of species in some areas, which could have a negative impact on the conservation of certain species and the quality of their habitats. However, the Government states in the National Policy Strategy that it plans to foster the mobility of species between nature conservation areas in some other way, perhaps by ensuring the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) becomes more sustainable, and by creating 'veins' of green spaces and water in the landscape. Furthermore, certain areas may become available for other uses, as land reserved for the development of wildlife habitats or robust green corridors is freed up. This may provide more potential scope for farming, commerce or housing, for example.

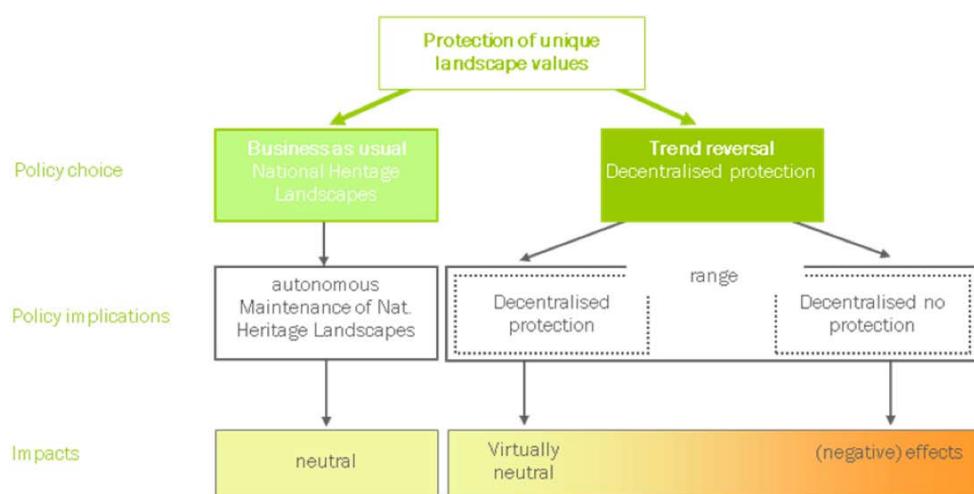
In the short term (within a few years), the plans currently being announced are expected to have no significant negative impact on the conservation objectives for the Natura 2000 areas. After all, the EHS as it stands today (including the Natura 2000 areas) will not be affected by the review. Furthermore, the revised EHS will ultimately be larger than the network that exists today.

As a result of the review, and given the fact that plans to create robust green corridors are to be scrapped, certain species may experience negative impacts in the long term (2040). These are difficult to identify at this stage, partly because of the uncertainty surrounding climate change and the mitigating measures planned by the provincial authorities, for example. The positive impact of recently introduced supporting policies such as the PAS programme on nitrogen and the green infrastructure is difficult to assess at the present time. Furthermore, no deadline has been set for the

achievement of the conservation objectives, so any delay in achieving them cannot be labelled significant. In view of the time horizon in the National Policy Strategy (2040), it is appropriate to view the long-term effects of the revised EHS in the light of external influences, such as climate change. As the details of the review are fleshed out, it is important that any arrangements agreed between central government and the provincial authorities are environmentally assessed in terms of the risks they pose to Natura 2000 areas, and opportunities that exist to reduce or eliminate them. Central government's position will remain that international biodiversity objectives can still be achieved even with a revised EHS. The effects of the policy will be identified through the regular channels, such as the annual Environmental Balance.

#### Protection of unique landscape values

The National Policy Strategy for Infrastructure and Spatial Planning transfers responsibility for the landscape to the provincial authorities. The planning status of and regulations governing the National Heritage Landscapes (including the 'Green Heart' of the Randstad) and the National Buffer Zones will be abolished. New areas will however be nominated for the UNESCO World Heritage List and given planning protection, and a new generation of urban conservation areas from the reconstruction era (1945-1965) will be designated and protected through development under agreements with municipal authorities.



The abolition of the national planning status of and regulations governing the National Heritage Landscapes and National Buffer Zones will put the care and management of the landscape and cultural heritage of these areas entirely in the hands of the provincial authorities. It is unclear whether the current restrictions on building will continue to apply. It is possible that the provincial authorities will use this freedom to relax policy. The same applies to the fairly high level of protection afforded in the National Buffer Zones, particularly in the Randstad provinces.

Given the fact that the strongest economic and population growth is likely to occur in the Randstad, this region may well see an increase in urbanisation in areas that were originally intended as protected landscapes. Model simulations by the PBL suggest

that construction is likely to increase sharply around the conurbations in the Randstad, in particular. Though the space that becomes available for homes and businesses will enhance the vitality of the living environment, the characteristic features of the historic landscapes in the Randstad in particular (such as marsh pasture and polder) will be adversely affected. Negative impacts on unique historic landscapes may also make the living environment less attractive, which will mean that the regions in question ultimately become less attractive to businesses, both national and international. And where restrictions in former National Heritage Landscapes are abolished, an increase in urbanisation may result, for example in the open countryside around the major cities of the Randstad. This may have a negative impact on the landscape and recreational value of these areas. Characteristic natural values like marsh pastureland, in particular, will face growing pressure from urbanisation, which may cause internationally significant meadow bird populations to decline. This of course only applies to those parts of the landscape that are not afforded extra protection, as part of the EHS, for example.

#### **Knock-on effects in regions**

The strategic environmental report also considers the knock-on effects of the proposed policy in various regions, based on the eight regions identified in the National Policy Strategy for Infrastructure and Spatial Planning for the multiyear infrastructure, spatial planning and transport programme (MIRT). It is difficult to say how exactly decentralisation of central government policy will impact on each of these regions. This will depend partly on how the provincial authorities approach the tasks designated to them. Differences in approach are expected to increase the differences between regions. In many of the regions, central government plays a facilitating role in spatial developments. In the growth regions of the northwest Netherlands, the Utrecht region, the southern Zuidleugel region and parts of the Brabant region, central government will take an active role in managing urbanisation and mobility. The focus in these regions will be on an increase in housing and employment, and measures to tackle bottlenecks in transport systems. If this leads to a stronger concentration of developments and greater residential suburbanisation in the Randstad, this will place extra pressure on its heavily burdened infrastructure. This in turn may lead to more congestion. Suburbanisation might also give rise to developments that are not ideally located for public transport, resulting in a negative impact on mobility (PBL, 2011). However, investments planned for these regions should have a positive impact on the capacity of the mobility system. This, combined with the abolition of concentration policy, is likely to prompt a concentration of housing and jobs in the Randstad, at the expense of the intermediate and peripheral regions, where the decline in population and employment will be reinforced by further concentration in the urban growth regions. Within the Randstad, the Zuidleugel and outer suburban regions like the major rivers area and the 'Green Heart' are likely to see concentration. Growing urbanisation will increase pressure on the environment. Furthermore, this growth will lead to the urbanisation of rural areas, which may cause fragmentation, loss of quality and/or loss of wildlife habitats and landscapes – depending on what precise form urbanisation ultimately takes. However, more space will be made available for housing, jobs and mobility.

### **Implications for protected Natura 2000 areas**

A preliminary assessment has already been conducted to establish whether, on the basis of objective data, some of the choices that the Government has made in the National Policy Strategy for Infrastructure and Spatial Planning will have significant negative effects on conservation objectives in the Natura 2000 areas. It looked at the effects of the policy choices (trend reversals), and concluded that, at this level of abstraction, they will have no significant negative impact. More specific follow-up decisions, on the infrastructure for example, will have to be assessed again to establish whether significant negative effects can be ruled out and, if not, what can be done to mitigate or compensate for them. As regards the proposed trend reversal in nature conservation policy, failure to implement elements that do not yet exist will have no immediate negative impact. However, longer-term risks have been highlighted that must be taken into account in any follow-up decisions. The precise scale and significance of these risks cannot yet be predicted with any certainty, given the abstract nature of the policy choices, and the more detailed follow-up that has yet to be specified.

To prevent the degradation of Natura 2000 areas, the follow-up decisions taken in the framework of the National Policy Strategy must be monitored closely. Local and regional authorities will also have to take into account any Natura 2000 values when taking decisions concerning spatial and economic issues and urbanisation. Local problems may after all arise. In terms of investment, innovation and preservation in the interests of mobility, more investments are expected to be made after 2020 in the urban regions around the mainports, brainport and greenports, and in connections with the hinterland. Decisions at project level should take account of potential local negative effects on Natura 2000 areas as a result of fragmentation and disruption. It will also be important in any follow-up decision on the review of the EHS to reassess any major environmental risks to Natura 200 areas, as well as options for reducing or removing them. Any follow-up decision must take account of the strict Natura 2000 regime.

### **Cross-border effects**

No cross-border effects on the environment, wildlife habitats and sustainability are expected as a result of policy on the spatial and economic infrastructure and urbanisation, nor as a result of the policy on the protection of unique landscape values. The policy of investment, innovation and preservation in the interests of mobility is not expected to have any effects across national borders. However, given the focus on investment in the urban regions around the mainports, brainport and greenports, and in connections with the hinterland, cross-border effects on the environment and on mobility will need to be a focus of attention at project level. Similarly, policy on the protection of ecological networks is not expected to have any immediate cross-border effects, but follow-up decisions – on the review of the EHS – could have an impact on the robustness of the Northwest European ecological network, particularly in terms of links between the delta habitat of the Netherlands and regions in neighbouring Belgium and Germany, for example. Again, this will need to be considered in assessing the implications for the Natura 2000 network of the follow-up decisions concerning the EHS.

### **Follow up**

The draft National Policy Strategy and the strategic environmental report will be available for inspection from summer 2011. Everyone will have the opportunity to respond to the proposed policy and the environmental assessment. The Netherlands Commission for Environmental Assessment will issue independent recommendations on the strategic environmental report. The Minister of Infrastructure and the Environment will then take a final decision on the National Policy Strategy for Infrastructure and Spatial Planning, probably in autumn 2011.



Published by

**Ministry of Infrastructure and the  
Environment**

Postbus 20901 | 2500 EX The Hague | The Netherlands  
[www.rijksoverheid.nl/ienm](http://www.rijksoverheid.nl/ienm)

July 2011