

STAG Technical Database

Section 3

Objective Setting

27 May 2008

Transport Scotland

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3. Objective Setting

This section is intended to provide guidance on the principles involved in setting objectives. The objectives which are central to the STAG Process include:

- Transport Planning Objectives;
- STAG Criteria; and
- Established policy directives, including the Government's Purpose and National Outcomes.

3.1 Introduction

Establishing objectives is essential to the overall quality of the appraisal of transport options and their ultimate results. The relative performance of options against objectives plays a key role in a STAG study.

Objectives should be developed in accordance with the following principles:

- Transport Planning Objectives should express the outcomes sought in the study area as opposed to any of the activities planned to achieve them;
- The formulation of Transport Planning Objectives should take full account of a thorough investigation of the root causes and consequences underlying identified problems or opportunities;
- It is recognised that Transport Planning Objectives may not be entirely SMART (i.e. include targets) at the Pre-Appraisal phase but such Transport Planning Objectives should be set in a way to facilitate the establishment of entirely SMART Transport Planning Objectives in advance of Part 2 Appraisal;
- Any existing resources in the form of previously established sets of objectives or data resulting from surveys or consultation exercises should be fully used in setting Transport Planning Objectives;
- The Government's Purpose and National Outcomes should inform practitioners in setting Transport Planning Objectives;
- Consideration should be given to the relevant established policy directives;
- A regular dialogue should take place between practitioners and Decision Makers throughout the Objective Setting process (as during the transport planning exercise as a whole); and
- Any application for funding, support or approval from the Scottish Government and/or Transport Scotland will be assessed, in part, on whether there is a clear statement of objectives supported by an explanation of their derivation.

3.2 Terminology

Practitioners will be used generically in this document to describe those charged with carrying out any exercise for which STAG provides the framework. This acknowledges that the individuals and organisations involved will in fact vary considerably. Decision Makers is again a generic term describing those who receive the report of the appraisal exercise and who either make funding recommendations, release monies or give approval to proceed. The term study area is used in general to describe the geographic area which the practitioners must consider in their deliberations. These simplifications should not hinder understanding of what follows.

The term stakeholders is used frequently in this section and STAG more generally. It should be understood to refer to all individuals and organisations which stand to be affected by the conclusions reached. This definition naturally includes governmental bodies with responsibilities relating to a study area. Stakeholder involvement is discussed more generally in the Participation and Consultation sections of each section.

In this and subsequent sections, a distinction needs to be made between two classes of objectives:

- The term planning objectives will be used to describe those objectives established or adopted by the practitioners for the purposes of the study in particular (the task for which they are using STAG); and
- The term STAG Criteria will be used to refer to the five appraisal objectives established in *Scotland's Transport Future* and retained in the *National Transport Strategy*; these are environment, safety, economy, integration and accessibility and social inclusion; these have a national level perspective as they sit below that Government's Purpose and reflect the Government's need to balance the needs and resources of different areas and communities.

Established policy directives can also be considered to be an exogenously given set of objectives. These will be used to describe existing objectives to which the practitioners should take cognisance of during the STAG Process. By definition, established policy directives will have been set by a third party or, if set by the body undertaking the appraisal, are independent from the exercise in hand. Established policy directives may be national, regional or local and may be more or less precise; examples are:

- National targets for road safety, cycling and road traffic reduction; and
- Local targets for the control of road traffic set under the Road Traffic Reduction Act

Planning objectives will typically be local in scope but it is quite possible for the geographic compass of planning objectives to be greater than that of certain established policy directives relevant to a given exercise. For example, a transport corridor study may well have to be conducted with awareness of the existing objectives (i.e. established policy directives) of the local transport strategies for several areas through which the corridor passes.

Practitioners should take cognisance of the Government's Purpose and National Transport Strategy (NTS). The associated strategic outcomes and indicators, including the Government's National Outcomes, outlined below, should be recognised during the Objective Setting process and should contribute towards the appraisal of options.

A number of other words and expressions are frequently used to describe objectives. Examples are:

- Goals and aims, which are generally used in describing strategic objectives;

- Targets, which normally refer to measures and indicators in which objectives can be expressed; and
- Thresholds, which might be minimum requirements or “hurdles” which an option must pass.

Different authors will also use terms such as “criteria” and “indicators” to describe the thing measured, such as the number of accidents. Sometimes, a hierarchy of objectives is proposed which goes from a general or strategic statement of an objective (for example to “improve safety”) to increasingly specific aims (for example “to reduce traffic accidents by 25% in the study area by 2005”). In this guidance, a single term (objectives) is used throughout, on the assumption that it will generally be clear what is meant.

Practitioners can, if they wish, create more complex structures, especially where the achievement of final or strategic “outcome” objectives requires the achievement of intermediate objectives and/or targets. As discussed later in the section on Monitoring and Evaluation, the use of such a hierarchy is generally useful in establishing a monitoring framework and for formal evaluation, and hence should be considered at the objective setting stage. Simplicity, clarity and adherence to SMART principles (see section 3.4) will ensure that there should be no difficulty in terms of either precision or understanding of objectives.

In addition to objectives, three other classes are defined and used particularly in this section, but more generally in this document:

- Problems;
- Constraints; and
- Uncertainties.

There are many terms used to describe the outcome of transport planning activities, including strategy, programme, plan, scheme, project and option. More generically, the terms measure and intervention are also used. In STAG, the term ‘option’ is used until implementation, and thereafter the term ‘project’ is appropriate for monitoring and evaluation.

3.3 Transport Planning Objectives

In developing a transport option it is essential to be clear as to what the study aims to achieve. The term 'Transport Planning Objectives' is used to describe those objectives adopted for the purposes of the specific study being undertaken, for which STAG is being used.

The Transport Planning Objectives should express the outcomes sought for the study and will describe (while avoiding indications of potential solutions) how problems will be alleviated. Additionally, the Transport Planning Objectives provide the basis for the appraisal of alternative options and, during Post Appraisal, will be central to Monitoring and Evaluation.

The setting of Transport Planning Objectives is important and offers significant value for a number of reasons. They:

- Provide all stakeholders with a clear indication of what practitioners are trying to accomplish;
- Serve as a basis for directing and guiding the entire study process;
- Can provide motivation, unity and integration;
- Facilitate accountability from the decision maker, from the STAG perspective both during the transport planning, appraisal, implementation process and Post Appraisal (a key concern in light of the need for Monitoring and Evaluation); and
- Introduce clarity where there may exist strong vested interests and entrenched views on priorities.

In the context of STAG, Transport Planning Objectives offer the following additional benefits:

- Transport Planning Objectives allow the proper appraisal of candidate options, allowing the decision maker to make an informed choice;
- They can help the practitioner to develop apposite and creative options by focussing thought; and
- They establish the main purpose for proceeding with a decision thus allowing the option development to be revalidated to avoid project 'creep'.

The definition of Transport Planning Objectives for a particular exercise is not new to STAG. The case for the formulation of appropriate Transport Planning Objectives is compelling, most notably through taking into consideration the many unwelcome potential outcomes of proceeding without specific objectives.

Transport Planning Objectives will be specific to each individual study and the specific problems and opportunities to be addressed. Consequently, it is expected that Transport Planning Objectives would differ between individual studies. It is, therefore, not practical to be prescriptive in STAG about the formulation of the Transport Planning Objectives.

In some cases, Transport Planning Objectives may not appear to be directly related to the STAG Criteria. In many cases, these will be subsidiary objectives, devised to focus on the way in which the STAG Criteria can be achieved.

3.4 SMART Transport Planning Objectives

Transport planning should be about delivering the desired changes in a study area and it is therefore crucial that the Transport Planning Objectives reflect this and should therefore express outcomes.

At Pre-Appraisal, Transport Planning Objectives may be articulated in general terms indicating the desired direction of change. It is recommended that this is sufficient for the purposes of qualitative Part 1 Appraisal.

It is imperative that Transport Planning Objectives are expressed with SMART principles in mind. This will enable them to be finalised as the STAG study progresses and more information becomes available. The analysis of data and evidence of problems and/or opportunities is crucial in setting robust Transport Planning Objectives.

In advance of Part 2 Appraisal, Transport Planning Objectives must be finalised in more specific terms and where appropriate, include a target.

A SMART objective will be:

- **Specific**, it will say in precise terms what is sought;
- **Measurable**, there will exist means to establish to stakeholders' satisfaction whether or not the objective has been achieved;
- **Attainable**, there is general agreement that the objective set can be reached;
- **Relevant**, the objective is a sensible indicator or proxy for the change which is sought; and
- **Timed**, the objective will be associated with an agreed future point by which it will have been met.

SMART Transport Planning Objectives can be challenging to set - they demand insight, careful consideration and impose greater accountability. There is, however, an importance attached to making the necessary effort in arriving at SMART Transport Planning Objectives as:

- The SMART Transport Planning Objectives provide an essential focus on the outcomes sought for the study area and, if intelligently set, will facilitate the satisfactory resolution of any conflicting priorities; and
- May foster and shared enthusiasm for the achievement of such Transport Planning Objectives.

SMART Transport Planning Objectives provide a unique opportunity for recognition of achievement. As discussed in more detail under the heading of Monitoring and Evaluation, during Post Appraisal, indicators must be developed from the Transport Planning Objectives established for the study.

It is important that SMART Transport Planning Objectives are finalised in advance of Part 2 Appraisal with the intention of developing meaningful indicators for detailed quantitative appraisal and subsequent Monitoring and Evaluation purposes.

3.4.1 Setting Transport Planning Objectives

The approach to setting Transport Planning Objectives is outlined below and should be followed thoroughly as a two step process within the overarching transport appraisal process:

- At the Pre-Appraisal stage, Transport Planning Objectives should be set with SMART principles in mind - it is recognised that Transport Planning Objectives

- may not be entirely SMART (i.e. include targets or indicators) at the Pre-Appraisal phase but these should be set in manner which enables them to be made SMARTer as the transport planning and appraisal process progresses; and
- As further information becomes available the Transport Planning Objectives should be sharpened and in advance of Part 2 should be refined to ensure that, where possible, they are sufficiently SMART (i.e. include targets or indicators).

The approach described in Section 3.4.1.1 to developing planning objectives is set out as an example rather than a template. It is an effective approach which can be carried out quite quickly. It can also function effectively when used in a more detailed planning exercise involving substantial consultation elements. Its outputs can readily be incorporated into a partially developed objective framework by a process of pair-wise comparison.

3.4.1.1 Setting Objectives: Analysis of Problems and Opportunities

This approach allows for a broad consideration of the actual and potential situation in the study area and encourages both lateral thinking and openness to perhaps unexpected factors and issues. It draws significantly on the guidance provided in Section 2.

Problems and Opportunities

Practitioners should ask what are the key problems affecting the study area. They may approach this task with an existing set of defined problems (such as those set out in a study brief, for example) but there are likely to be many other aspects of life in the area that are affected by transport. Together with considering the widest range of issues, practitioners should adhere to the principle of seeking out the root causes and consequences.

The following are some suggested areas to consider in identifying problems (this is not an exhaustive list):

- General quality of life: how does transport contribute directly or indirectly to the quality of life in an area; is the contribution on balance, positive or negative;
- The economic performance of an area: employment, investment, development of business opportunities, and land-use in general;
- Amenities and public services: what is the role of transport in enabling access, and are there groups in society who are disadvantaged by current transport provision;
- The environment: how does current infrastructure and its use contribute to environmental problems, both locally, nationally and globally;
- Safety and security (real and perceived);
- Use of transport generally: are there real or perceived conflicts between users of different transport types or journey-making habits;
- Public transport: its quality, its use and how this is affected by the provision of fixed and other infrastructure; and
- What is the scope to increase use of other forms of transport (walking, cycling, horse-riding).

It is common in transport planning to focus on what is wrong and how to fix it. This approach misses the very important point that transport can unlock opportunities to make life better in an area. It is helpful therefore to ask the question "what good things could emerge in the study area from changes to transport?" It is important not to be unrealistic about what can be achieved but, at the same time, to imagine the extent to which things might change. For example, if road safety in the study area could be considerably improved, what might happen to residential roads? Could children play more freely?

It may be most helpful to look at opportunities using the same series of suggested areas listed for problem analysis. Alternatively, practitioners may consider the problems identified and ask whether there are any naturally opposite opportunities. For example, a current problem that walking is dangerous could be linked to an opportunity to make walking a popular recreational activity with urban safety and health benefits.

Constraints and Uncertainties

Constraints are slightly subtler than problems and opportunities. Here, instead of looking for things which are bad now or which could be bad in the future, practitioners should think of factors which might stand in the way of tackling problems or taking opportunities. They will ordinarily stand outside the practitioners' sphere of influence, but this need not be the case.

The following are some areas in which constraints might exist (again, this is not an exhaustive list):

- Statutory/legal (planning boundaries, procedures, inter-departmental issues);
- Funding (quantity, availability, conditions imposed);
- Geography/topology (features constraining change);
- Future events/developments;
- Vested interests or sensitivities; and
- Habits (responses to options, behavioural responses).

It is easy to confuse constraints as defined here with problems. Practitioners should therefore be careful only to consider things here which fit the description above. There may be things that are both current problems and constraints, in which case they should be considered under both headings.

Uncertainties encompass matters relevant to the study but which have yet to be decided at the time of the planning exercise. A local authority may have to develop its local transport strategy without knowing whether a major trunk road scheme will be built. What is important in considering uncertainties is to bear in mind that the ideal option would fit with whatever outcome transpires. And whilst the ideal option will elude the practitioners in almost all instances, there remains a need to set objectives which do not depend for their relevance or attainability on a particular outcome.

3.4.1.2 Moving to Planning Objectives

Having listed problems, opportunities, constraints and uncertainties, practitioners should now attempt to draw these items together into a cogent framework of draft objectives. The term 'draft objectives' is used because it is accepted that, at this stage, objectives may not be entirely SMART, instead being set with SMART principles.

The Government framework provides a useful basis for this, so practitioners may wish to use the five STAG Criteria as a guide (the interpretation which follows each is an attempt to encapsulate the range of impact areas under each heading):

- Environment (maximising the quality of the built and natural environment for enjoyment by all);
- Safety (reducing the risk and incidence of accidents and improving the security of all transport users);
- Economy (saving people's and business's time and money and facilitating desired economic development);
- Integration (fitting the transport network together and ensuring a rational relationship between transport, land-use and wider policy);

- Accessibility (providing everyone, not just users but also non-users, with the means to travel to opportunities of all kinds).

There is no reason to expect an equal number of objectives to be formulated under each of the five STAG Criteria.

Where there already exist other, perhaps more pertinent, objectives, practitioners may find it more helpful to work from those. Consideration of the STAG Criteria would still be helpful in checking that all areas have been covered.

For options requiring SEA, it should be noted that the STAG environment criterion does not cover all of the topics that need to be included in SEA. An SEA must address the following topics:

- Biodiversity and habitats, flora and fauna;
- Population and human health;
- Water and soil;
- Air;
- Climate factors;
- Cultural heritage and landscape; and
- Material assets.

It is quite likely that this process will run itself, since the discussion of problems, opportunities etc. should have prompted a focussed idea of planning issues. If this is not the case, practitioners can use the list of problems and opportunities to generate objectives. For example, if a problem is "bus services are unreliable", an objective which might seem to follow from this would be "remove obstacles (such as illegal parking) to bus movement". It may be helpful to number the objectives that are developed and cross-reference the problems/opportunities from which they have arisen. This will help to ensure that all the important items identified in the first stage feature in some way in the objectives.

The objectives are likely to spring mostly from problems and opportunities but constraints should still play a part at this stage: an objective based on the removal of a constraint may in fact prove the most effective way of relieving a problem or grasping an opportunity.

3.4.1.3 Refinement, Identification of Conflicts

The above process is likely to produce a substantial number of draft objectives which now will need to be worked up in more detail. Practitioners should aim to apply the SMART principles, described above, in moving towards precise and relevant final objectives. It is important to remember that the specific values associated with objectives can be altered at a subsequent stage in light of new data or experience, so practitioners should not be unduly wary of proposing provisional figures.

The process of refining the various objectives will make any conflicts between them increasingly explicit. It is helpful to address these conflicts directly by comparing each pair of SMART objectives and identifying those for which there is a possibility that one could be met at the cost of achieving the other. Where conflicts are identified, it will be necessary to do one of two things:

- One or both of the objectives can be altered so as to remove the conflict; or
- Accept that weighting will ensure the relative importance of these objectives which will be reflected in the outcome of the appraisal.

An important part of the refinement process is to ask whether the objectives developed are sufficiently specific in terms of:

- Demographic or social groups;
- Modes;
- Geographic areas; or
- The focus of the option (e.g. provision of transport, management of demand, other areas such as provision of information).

3.4.1.4 Alternative Exercises to Aid Formulation of Planning Objectives

In addition to the process explained above, the following exercises (drawn from classical strategic planning methods) may be very helpful to practitioners in identifying key issues on the way to formulating objectives. Any of them could usefully complement the problems, opportunities and constraints approach; practitioners may instead wish to formulate their own method including elements listed below.

SWOT Analysis

A SWOT analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities & Threats) is a well-established method for analysing the current and likely future state of a situation, service or organisation. Strengths and weaknesses are generally meant to apply to current conditions, with opportunities and threats their counterparts looking to the future.

Practitioners may find it helpful to look at the transport within the study area in general or focus on particular sectors or areas; they might instead look at particular journey types or groups within the population to build up a picture of priorities.

Structured Analysis

Tackling the following questions can be a useful way of identifying key issues and establishing how to respond to current and future challenges.

Practitioners may try to answer the following questions from the point of view of three time-spans. For example on the basis of a five-year plan, one suggestion is the next two years, two to five years from now, and five to twenty, though this should be agreed in light of the study. It should reflect an awareness of the long-term but concentrate in detail on the coming five years.

- What will be the transport demands of people and commerce?
- What will be the characteristics of the transport supply market?
- What will the local economy look like?
- What will change in the political and economic climate?
- What will change in the environment?
- What will change in the planning organisation? (if applicable)
- What resources will be available?

Strategic Choice

This process is designed to combine the setting of objectives with the consideration and selection of options to be taken forward. Further detail is available in Section 4.

3.5 STAG Criteria

The STAG Criteria capture all, or the great majority of, the impacts of a transport option, and hence provide a strategic framework which can be used in developing and setting Transport Planning Objectives. They also provide the tests which will be applied by Government wherever Government funding and/or approval is required for an option.

The STAG Criteria are:

- Environment;
- Safety;
- Economy;
- Integration; and
- Accessibility and Social Inclusion.

The STAG Criteria are central to STAG, as the Scottish Government and Transport Scotland have a national role and must consider, through the application of a consistent methodology, the varying needs of different geographic areas and communities to assess the extent to which transport options represent value for money in allocating available funds. This is therefore the principal reason for carrying out detailed appraisal against these criteria.

A thorough appraisal using the STAG Criteria will also highlight to practitioners any unexpected or undesired impacts additional to those which the Transport Planning Objectives were designed to encompass.

However, while the STAG Criteria provide a framework to ensure all impacts are considered, practitioners should not begin the process of formulating their Transport Planning Objectives by considering only the national objectives. This could dilute the importance of local objectives or the inclusion of items which, for the transport planning context in question, are not relevant.

3.6 Established policy directives

Objectives and policy directives that are already established must also be considered during the Objective Setting process and are used to describe the set of existing objectives of which practitioners should take cognisance of during the STAG study.

By definition, established policy directives will have been set by a third party or, if set by the body undertaking the study, are independent of the study. Established policy directives may be national, regional or local and may be more or less precise.

Transport Planning Objectives will typically be local in scope but it is quite possible for the geographic compass of Transport Planning Objectives to be greater than that of certain established planning directives relevant to a given study.

Established policy directives can quite reasonably be seen as constraints upon the options being put forward. A clear conflict between an option and, say, established land-use planning policy in the area is likely to jeopardise potential for both funding and implementation. A positive contribution towards the achievement of other relevant objectives will be to the option's credit.

Practitioners should take cognisance of the Government's Purpose and the National Transport Strategy (NTS). The associated strategic outcomes and indicators including the Government's National Outcomes, outlined in this Technical Database, should be recognised during the Objective Setting process and should contribute towards the appraisal of options.

It should be noted that the National Transport Strategy (NTS), published in December 2006 sets out the Scottish Government's long-term vision for transport in Scotland together with some key objectives which the practitioner should take cognisance of when assessing established policy directives. The NTS focuses on three strategic outcomes which will set the context for transport policy making for the next twenty years and provide the guiding principles at national, regional and local level when developing strategy and prioritising resources:

- Improve journey times and connections, to tackle congestion and the lack of integration and connections in transport which impact on our high level objectives for economic growth, social inclusion, integration and safety;
- Reduce emissions, to tackle the issues of climate change, air quality and health improvement which impact on our high level objective for protecting the environment and improving health; and
- Improve quality, accessibility and affordability, to give people a choice of public transport, where availability means better quality transport services, value for money and a realistic alternative to the car.

Progress on these outcomes will be measured against a series of indicators including:

- Improved journey times and connections;
- Congestion – through the existing measure of time lost on trunk roads due to congestion (or other causes) and if, appropriate, through the development of new measures (see box on traffic growth);
- Number of international routes from Scottish airports;
- ScotRail passenger kilometres;
- Rail punctuality;
- Reduced emissions;

- CO₂ emissions from the transport sector;
- Tonnes of CO₂ saved;
- Average distance walked and cycled per person per year;
- Improved quality, accessibility and affordability;
- Passenger numbers on buses, through lifeline airports and on lifeline ferries;
- Satisfaction of bus and rail passengers;
- Walking time to nearest bus stop and frequency of bus service at nearest bus stop (for urban and rural areas); and
- Access to key services.

The delivery of the Government's Purpose is supported by 15 National Outcomes, which describe in more detail what the government wants to achieve over a ten year period. These are:

1. We live in a Scotland that is the most attractive place for doing business in Europe;
2. We realise our full economic potential with more and better employment opportunities for our people;
3. We are better educated, more skilled and more successful, renowned for our research and innovation;
4. Our young people are successful learners, confident individuals, effective contributors and responsible citizens;
5. Our children have the best start in life and are ready to succeed;
6. We live longer, healthier lives;
7. We have tackled the significant inequalities in Scottish society;
8. We have improved the life chances for children, young people and families at risk;
9. We live our lives safe from crime, disorder and danger;
10. We live in well-designed, sustainable places where we are able to access the amenities and services we need;
11. We have strong, resilient and supportive communities where people take responsibility for their own actions and how they affect others;
12. We value and enjoy our built and natural environment and protect it and enhance it for future generations;
13. We take pride in a strong, fair and inclusive national identity;
14. We reduce the local and global environmental impact of our consumption and production; and
15. Our public services are high quality, continually improving, efficient and responsive to local people's needs.

Progress on these outcomes will be measured through 45 indicators and target as set in the Scottish Budget Spending Review 2007.

(<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2007/11/13092240/0>)

These should be recognised during the Objective Setting process and should contribute towards Part 1 Appraisal of options.

3.7 Participation and Consultation

There should be appropriate involvement of stakeholders through participation and consultation as early as possible in the process and this begins with the iterative nature of the Pre-Appraisal process with respect to the analysis of problems, issues, constraints and opportunities, and Objective Setting.

Reaching a broad agreement on the Transport Planning Objectives of the study, particularly amongst interested stakeholders and the wider public, is of value at this phase. It will provide a focus for the continued development of the study and will prove vital if, at a later date, objections to specific options emerge. If it can be demonstrated that particular options meet the agreed objectives for a study, it can be asserted that such options are in keeping with the view of the wider public and that there is evidence to support these options. The application of structured thinking and proper consultation will pay significant dividends.

3.8 Reporting

In order to fulfil the requirements of the STAG , the reporting on Objective Setting within the STAG Report should provide a summary of the methodology applied to developing the Transport Planning Objectives.

In the STAG Report, practitioners should outline the approach adopted and state the Transport Planning Objectives clearly. In summarising the methodology used, it should be demonstrated that the principles promoted by STAG, including the establishment of value-led SMART Transport Planning Objectives, have been followed.

Practitioners must present the relationship between the analysis of data, evidence of problems and/or opportunities, and the derivation of the Transport Planning Objectives. These are the essential first phases of Pre-Appraisal and practitioners must not proceed to Option Generation, Sifting and Development until there is confidence in the evidence base and articulation of Transport Planning Objectives.

It is anticipated that to ensure appropriate focus there should be no more than six clearly defined Transport Planning Objectives for the study.

If there is a relationship between any of the Transport Planning Objectives derived and the STAG Criteria, then this should be clearly identified. Similarly, during the Pre-Appraisal process for the study under consideration, the relevant established policy directives for a study should be stated clearly together with the rationale for inclusion of such established policy directives.