



Spatial Economics Research Centre

Friday, 28 November 2008

Response to the Sub-National Review

The government published its [response to the public consultation on the SNR](#) earlier this week.

Despite the current economic situation, government still needs to make progress on fundamental questions about the future of urban and regional policy. Indeed, for local policy makers, because there is little they can do that will affect the impact of the economic downturn, it is doubly important not to lose sight of medium to long term issues.

So, then, to the SNR. There is more detail on how the local authority economic assessment duty will be implemented and the form that sub-regional collaborative agreements might take. There's also confirmation of the move to integrated regional strategies. As I have [discussed elsewhere](#), these strategies will need to make a decision on the extent to which efforts to deliver regional growth rely on the spatial concentration of resources as opposed to "jam spreading". Sign off by a "local authority leaders' forum" (the original plan) would tend to favour the latter. In the new proposals, a "local authority leaders' board" will have joint responsibility with the RDAs (with disputes resolved by ministers). This will, in principle, allow more concentration and less jam spreading.

From the view point of achieving regional economic growth, current evidence suggests this may make sense. The problem, of course, is that this reduces democratic legitimacy. In the absence of elected regional bodies, squaring that particular circle will require careful thought about how to provide local authorities with incentives to sign up to integrated strategies that concentrate resources. I have talked about this in the past with [relation to housing targets](#). Successfully agreeing (rather than imposing) integrated regional strategies will require far more work to tackle this difficult issue.

Posted by [Prof Henry G. Overman](#) on [Friday, November 28, 2008](#)

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