



RIS2 Route Strategies

SRN User Research – Technical
report

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Background and objectives

As part of the Road Investment Strategy for post 2020 (RIS2) development, Highways England is working together with Transport Focus to better understand experiences and key challenges faced by Strategic Road Network (SRN) users.

- The Strategic Road Network (SRN) is made up of around 4,300 miles of motorways and major A-roads. Highways England replaced the Highways Agency in April 2015 and has ultimate responsibility for the SRN
- As the road user watchdog, Transport Focus helps to ensure that Highways England is fully accountable to SRN users and other stakeholders

The overarching objective of the research is to develop an understanding of road users' problems when using SRN routes and identify further detail around areas for improvement. The research findings will feed into the strategy development for post 2020.

Further to this, the research aimed to:

- Provide a comprehensive understanding of the challenges that road users face when using the SRN focusing on areas highlighted as priorities for improvement
- Explore user perceptions on how the problems they face when using the SRN can be addressed
- Explore business perceptions and experiences of the SRN
- Explore expectations for the future, including how they see the evolution of the user experience post 2020

Method

The programme of research was conducted quantitatively and consisted of 4,422 face to face interviews with SRN users across 18 Highways England routes. Table 1 below gives a breakdown of completed interviews by route.

Table 1

ROUTE	Completed interviews	Completed interviews %
London to Scotland East	310	7%
London Orbital and M23 to Gatwick	191	4%
London to Scotland West	293	7%
London to Wales	208	5%
Felixstowe to Midlands	306	7%
Solent to Midlands	238	5%
M25 to Solent	174	4%
Kent Corridor to M25	192	4%
South Coast Central	152	3%
Birmingham to Exeter	262	6%
South West Peninsula	327	7%
London to Leeds (East)	288	7%
East of England	274	6%
South Pennines	353	8%
North Pennines	204	5%
Midlands to Wales and Gloucestershire	235	5%
North and East Midlands	144	3%
South Midlands	271	6%
Total	4,422	100%

In order to get an accurate view of experiences, interviews were conducted 'in the moment'; all drivers had used the SRN on the day of the survey. The driver survey was conducted using a Computer Assisted Personal Interviewing (CAPI) approach.

The survey targeted the following SRN users:

- Motorcyclists
- Car or van drivers
- HGV/LGV drivers
- Coach drivers

The survey included a mix of those who use the SRN for leisure, business or to commute.

A complementary survey was conducted with fleet managers across all Highways England regions. The survey used a Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI) approach and a total of 250 interviews were conducted. The fleet manager sample was obtained from the Experian database and only those responsible for managing the vehicle fleet or freight/product logistics for their business were included.

Fieldwork dates

The survey with SRN users was conducted between 19 May to 3 July 2016. All surveys were conducted by fully briefed interviewers and all adhere to the MRS code of conduct.

To ensure authenticity, all interviewers were provided with a letter of authorisation from Transport Focus and Highways England to show to participants as required. Furthermore, permission had been sought from all sampling points included for interviewing.

The interviews for each of the routes consisted of a mix the following shift patters:

- Weekday – with shifts scheduled from 9am to 7pm
- Weekend – with shifts scheduled between 1am to 4pm

The survey with fleet managers was conducted between 2 to 28 June 2016. All interviews were conducted Monday to Friday between 9am to 5 pm.

Questionnaire

A questionnaire was developed by Future Thinking in close consultation with Transport Focus and Highways England. The SRN driver questionnaire was between 5-7 minutes in length and covered the following broad areas:

- SRN performance – Motorways and Major A roads
- Using the SRN
- Journey planning
- SRN future improvements/developments
- Demographics

The questionnaire for fleet managers was between 7 to 10 minutes in length and covered the following broad areas:

- SRN performance – Motorways and Major A roads
- Driver experiences of the SRN
- SRN future improvements/developments
- Company classification information

The questionnaires were scripted and extensively checked by the Future Thinking team prior to launch. The survey with SRN users was administered on an Android tablet (CAPI) while the survey with drivers was conducted via CATI.

Sampling

A total of 173 points were initially selected for inclusion in the survey, with 139 successfully interviewed from. The number of sampling points selected for each route were proportionately aligned to the Highways England Annual Average Daily Traffic flow.

The research was route focused and sites were chosen to ensure a spread across the roads on each route. Site locations consisted of:

- Motorway Service Areas (MSAs)
- A road services
- HGV truck stops
- Retail Parks and Business Parks
- Town centres
- Visitor attractions

Consent for MSAs and some A road services was secured through Highways England.

Moto, RoadChef, Welcome Break, Extra MSA, Westmoreland Family and Euro Garages (A road services) all gave their permission for Future Thinking to conduct interviews at their premises. These sites tended to be large with a high volume of drivers and in most instances, Future Thinking interviewers were able to easily complete the number of targeted interviews for their shift (20 completed interviews for each interviewer shift).

It was extremely challenging to secure permission for A road services, in many cases we went round in circles with little success. BP, which has a large number of A road services required permission to be sought centrally; their head office did not grant permission to include their sites in the survey.

Other A road services indicated that permission was also to be sought through head office; however in the majority of cases it was challenging to identify a team or individual responsible for granting permission to interview from the sites. We however had some success with Shell. As franchises, most of the Shell A road services we approached did not require permission from head office and the decision to allow interviewing was at the discretion of the site manager. For services run by the Co-operative Group it was necessary to go through an external agency, however permission was ultimately secured. Motor Fuel Group also gave their permission for Future Thinking to conduct interviewing from their premises.

Only a handful of HGV stops were included within the sampling frame, these tended to be easy to secure consent from.

Retail and business parks proved the most problematic to obtain permission from due to the difficulties in identifying the owners or managers of the sites. Where we had success,

we approached individual retailers on the site and requested permission to interview directly.

All councils we spoke to were happy to allow interviewing in town centres. However, some had set protocol for interviewing within their town centres, ranging from interviewers being allowed to interview only from specific locations to a small fee for permission to interview.

Success with visitor attractions such as shopping outlets and activity centres was mixed, usually depending on company policy.

While on the whole it was a challenge and time consuming to secure permission, we managed to successfully interview at the sites that gave their consent with most interviewers achieving their set targets.

For sampling points where permission was refused, replacements were chosen based on the route and proximity to the location of the original site. While we had good coverage of sample points for each route, due to some of the difficulties experienced gaining consent, in some instances we had to conduct multiple shifts at some of the sites.

To optimise the number of completed interviews, shifts were scheduled at the busiest periods for the sampling point. Town centres were mostly visited at high peak times (Fridays and Saturdays). Where possible, we sought advice on the best time to visit when we were given permission to survey; this was particularly important for smaller sites and visitor attractions.

Coach drivers and motorcyclists were the hardest groups to secure interviews with. However, Motorway Service Areas and some A road services were the easiest sites to find coach drivers as they could usually be found taking their breaks in the designated parking areas. Other sampling points proved more difficult as coach drivers were harder to locate. The difficulty in finding motorcyclists is likely to be a combination of the wet weather during the fieldwork period and the lack of designated places where motorcyclists park. Anecdotal feedback from interviewers is that motorcyclists are less likely to use their bikes on rainy days.

Their reduced presence may also suggest that there are significantly less motorcyclists using the specified SRN routes compared with other groups.

Analysis

Data was weighted according to the Highways England Annual Average Daily Traffic (AADT) flow per route for analysis.

Route	Route Name	Sum of AADT	Proportion
1	London to Scotland East	50659206.75	13%
2	London Orbital and M23 to Gatwick	39393966.91	10%
3	London to Scotland West	50812916.32	13%
4	London to Wales	17801661.57	5%
5	Felixstowe to Midlands	17399568.47	5%
6	Solent to Midlands	14232521.17	4%
7	M25 to Solent (A3 and M3)	12687960.67	3%
8	Kent Corridor to M25 (M2 and M20)	12823961.77	3%
9	South Coast Central	8254062.371	2%
10	Birmingham to Exeter	18589572.46	5%
11	South West Peninsula	16613414.94	4%
12	London to Leeds (East)	19692854.96	5%
13	East of England	14789227.97	4%
14	South Pennines	49373892.75	13%
15	North Pennines	4978406.886	1%
16	Midlands to Wales and Gloucestershire	7877284.236	2%
17	North and East Midlands	11328865.95	3%
18	South Midlands	10813924.26	3%

Reporting focused on vehicle type (car/van, motorcycle, coach and HGV) and user type (commuter, on business, leisure), and the differences in journey experiences on each route.

Other learnings

- For quick, in the moment surveys, it is best to conduct interviews only from MSAs as permission to interview can be sought quickly
- If a broad range of sampling points are to be included allow as much time as possible to gain permissions. Six weeks should be the minimum for a survey requiring between 140 to 180 sampling points
- When drawing initial sample, also identify reserves to ensure that replacements are quickly put in place
- For companies that require permission from head office, it is important to identify the individual responsible where possible
- For interviews with coach drivers, it is best to target Motorway Service Areas and A road services with designated parking areas
- For smaller sites and attractions also enquire about the busiest times to ensure that interviewing shifts are successful