

Road user needs and experiences – full report

March 2015



Foreword

Our new remit to represent road users of the Strategic Road Network has begun. It is an exciting new phase for our organisation that is marked by a name change to Transport Focus.

We have always been guided by three key principles and they will continue to guide us. Firstly, we are an independent watchdog that represents the interests of consumers, be they passengers on trains, buses, coaches and trams or, from 30 March 2015, users of the Strategic Road Network (SRN) in England. We have no vested interest in promoting one mode of travel over any other – it is the consumer's choice. However, having made that choice they have a right to expect a good service that reflects their needs.

We have and will continue to respect that choice, and focus on what we can do to make sure that their views are heard by the organisations that provide these services. In the case of the SRN this will be the new company Highways England.

The second principle is that we are evidence based. Insight based on research is what informs our views. Research is also our main lever to bringing about change. This is why as a watchdog we place such importance on the research we carry out to ensure that when we speak, it is with the voice of passengers or road users.

Our third principle is to be useful to the organisations that provide services to those we represent. We set great store on our effective engagement with the organisations that provide the services. Over the last few months we have been actively working with the Highways Agency as it moves to become Highways England.

Road users are a diverse group, including motorised and non-motorised users, and embracing personal and business trips as well as freight. Building our knowledge in this new world has been our main emphasis so far and we have had the help of a number of organisations representing different road user groups to do this. We are very grateful for that assistance and look forward to strengthening these relationships over time.

There are of course many challenges ahead in developing a major road network that meets the needs of an expanding economy whilst also delivering real improvements for road users.

We look forward to the challenge.

Anthony Smith
Chief Executive
Transport Focus

Key themes and findings

Driver psychology

It may seem obvious, but driving is a different experience from being a passenger in a car or on public transport. The act of driving requires a blend of knowledge, skill, and observation, an understanding of road conditions and of other drivers' behaviour, as well as concentration and the ability to make rapid decisions. Even when roads are relatively quiet the need to remain alert and to make decisions to changing circumstances remains important.

Both the design and management of the road environment need to take account of the complexity of the task of driving and help the driver to make appropriate decisions that will result in the experience being positive and safe.

Our research indicates that the mindset of the driver can change when they are behind the wheel. Driving is not simply a logical process – emotions are also involved. Some participants in the research talked about a shift to a more competitive type of behaviour, where they see the road as an opportunity to display their skills and to get to the front of the queue. Some participants also recognised that their language changed to reflect this.

Although just touched on in this report, we consider this is an important observation. It is worthy of further exploration, and has implications for the way Highways England manages and communicates with road users.

Knowledge of the SRN

Virtually all road users were unfamiliar with the term Strategic Road Network (SRN). Even highly-experienced heavy goods vehicle (HGV) drivers did not use this term and talk instead about 'trunking loads' up and down the 'main corridors'. Other drivers generally used the term 'motorways and main A roads'.

Road users didn't differentiate the SRN from roads run by local authorities. They thought about the door-to-door journey rather than separating out the SRN from other roads.

Engagement

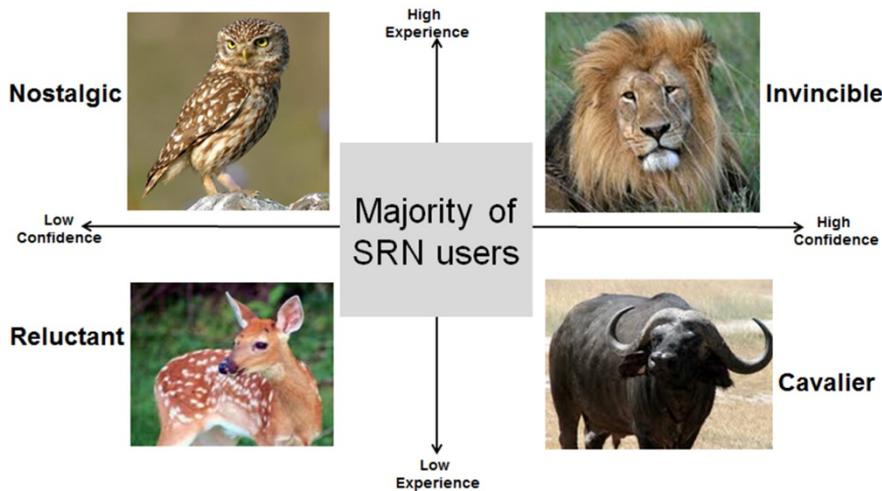
Road users had a low level of engagement with the Highways Agency. They were unsure who was responsible for the SRN. Many had not given the subject consideration prior to attending the research discussion groups. When asked, most participants tended to think the SRN was either the responsibility of Government or the local authority.

When prompted participants said they had heard of the Highways Agency. However, they were unclear about its role and responsibilities.

Highways Agency Traffic Officers are the most visible manifestation of the Agency. However, again they were unsure of their function and powers.

Segmentation

Drivers' attitudes to the SRN are not all the same. Some of the differences in attitudes appeared to be a result of their experience of driving on it, and confidence. Four types of attitude were identified:



The four types are Invincible, Cavalier, Nostalgic and Reluctant.

- Invincibles include most HGV/professional /coach drivers and some business and leisure drivers. They tended to see other drivers as less able than themselves, and had little respect for 'Sunday' drivers. They thought other drivers needed more education to drive safely.
- Nostalgics were mostly leisure drivers, typically older drivers who remembered when driving on motorways was easier and less busy. They were anxious about busy motorway driving and preferred using A roads.
- Cavalier drivers tended not to have held their licence for long and/or had limited motorway experience. They underestimated risks, and were over-confident in their own driving skills.
- Reluctants tended to find driving on the SRN to be stressful and behaved very cautiously in difficult driving situations. Occasionally this cautious behaviour was considered to be dangerous by other drivers.

We consider that this approach, though simple, can be helpful in understanding attitudes at the extremes of using the SRN. The majority of drivers will be closer to the middle of this chart, and there are other limitations. If we develop a more detailed breakdown based on future research we think it will help us to better understand road users.

Control

Views about the driving experience were dependent on the journey purpose, the length, the driving environment, how time critical the journey was, and other drivers' behaviour.

When talking about their experience of using the SRN, many drivers talked about a need to feel in control. A good experience was one where the driver felt in control. By contrast, a bad experience was one where they felt less in control.

When recounting their SRN experiences, drivers tended to focus on negative events – even though they were relatively infrequent.

The positive aspects of driving on the SRN were primarily the cost, convenience and comfort of the journey. The negative aspects were primarily concerned with the external environment and other drivers' behaviour. Negative experiences often involved bad weather, poor visibility and road conditions, delays and congestion.

Safety

All drivers saw the provision of safe roads as their most fundamental requirement. In general the SRN was seen as good in this respect.

However, bad weather was a major concern as it affected visibility and created a variety of problems (longer braking distances and aquaplaning). A few road users were concerned about their own driving skills, but many more were concerned about how safely their fellow drivers were responding to difficult conditions.

'Other drivers' were always seen as responsible for bad behaviour on the roads – drivers were often blind to their own shortcomings. The main bugbears were using a mobile phone when driving, speeding, lane switching, middle-lane hogging, tailgating, overly-cautious drivers, and drivers who ignored rules.

Car drivers and HGV drivers had concerns about how well each other drive. HGV drivers complained about cars. Car drivers complained about HGVs and light goods vehicles (LGVs). Drivers complained about cyclists and pedestrians.

Car drivers were largely unaware of the speed restrictions on HGVs, and of the implications this had for HGV drivers. They were critical of HGVs slowly crawling past when overtaking. Car drivers also criticised HGV drivers for tailgating and driving in a convoy to prevent car drivers cutting in. HGV drivers generally felt other drivers are less skilled and had limited understanding of their issues.

Journey planning

HGV drivers were very familiar with the SRN and their need for journey planning was usually only for the last few miles after leaving the SRN. They used a variety of data sources including a satnav, journey planning apps, Frixo (an online road traffic information service), Facebook and word of mouth. Often HGV drivers also kept a paper map.

Other drivers generally only undertook journey planning for unfamiliar or longer routes. They were mainly interested in journey length, directions and expected journey time. They used a variety of online sources, but rarely checked for information on roadworks, unplanned delays, and congestion prior to setting out.

Although increasingly common, there is a low use of satnavs for SRN journeys across all driver groups. When used it is mainly for information on speed cameras and live traffic information.

Congestion and disruption

Road users considered that the SRN is a network of high-quality roads that are well maintained in comparison with those maintained by local authorities. However, the fact they are well maintained means that road works are frequent.

The majority of drivers adopted a pragmatic view that road works are necessary and inevitable. However, they are critical about the management of planned disruption. Drivers often thought that the stretch of road affected by the road works was too long, that the duration of the works was too long, and that too frequently work was not taking place, despite cones being in place. Many felt that road works were poorly planned with a lot of work during the summer holidays causing high levels of congestion when roads are at their busiest.

Generally drivers were more understanding of delays due to breakdowns and accidents. However, there was a view that the Highways Agency is not responsive enough, that they tended to over-react to health and safety issues, and take too long to reopen roads.

Diversions

As diversions were rare, most private motorists generally had relatively little to say about them. HGV drivers considered that some diversions were unsuitable for their vehicles and that the Highways Agency did not fully take into account the length, height, width or weight of HGV vehicles. They also felt detours are excessively long and involved unsuitable roads. This impacted particularly negatively on HGV drivers as they have legal limitations on their daily hours.

Information and signage

For the most part both fixed signs and variable message signs were seen as helpful in providing useful information or directions. They were reassuring, and generally confirm what drivers already know. However, sometimes signs were difficult to understand as they required the road user to be aware of the road name, junction name, whether they were travelling north or south, or going in a clockwise or anti-clockwise direction.

There was also an issue about trust. Some drivers considered that variable message signs were not updated frequently enough and as a result they did not know whether to trust them. Sometimes this information was at odds with other sources of information such as radio travel updates and satnav information. Some drivers didn't feel the information was reliable enough to inform their decisions.

Smart motorways

While some drivers were aware of smart motorways, some were not. Even those who have driven on smart motorways were not always familiar with the term, nor did they understand clearly how they operated.

Among those that were knowledgeable, they were generally very positive about the introduction of smart motorways. They were seen as a good example of effective traffic management and a sensible alternative to building new roads.

However, across different road user groups there were concerns about safety, particularly around the use of the hard shoulder and breakdowns. Nostalgic and Reluctant types had the greatest concerns.

The M25

The M25 had an almost mythical status in the minds of many drivers – it was perceived to be a unique driving experience in this country. This was the case for both those who drove on it frequently and others who rarely, if ever, drove on it.

Service areas

HGV drivers were concerned about the lack of appropriate facilities alongside the SRN. Availability of suitable spaces at motorway service areas was often limited as were truck stops on other roads. This forced HGVs to use lay-bys. Using lay-bys caused a number of problems for HGV drivers such as access to facilities and security concerns.

Other drivers had concerns about the quality, cost, and facilities available at motorway service areas. Access for disabled users was also a concern.

Education

There was recognition that driving has changed over the years and that there may be a need for further information or training on good driver behaviour and new developments such as smart motorways.

In the future

Transport Focus will share the detailed findings from this research with Highways England and other key stakeholders.

Results from this and other research will be fed into our next investigation. This will look at motorised road users' priorities for improvement on the SRN. Following this we will look at the priorities for non-motorised users.

Transport Focus is also working on developing research to measure road user satisfaction, and in the coming year we plan to pilot some innovative approaches to research design.

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1 Background, research objectives and methodology

1.1 Background

On 30 March 2015 Passenger Focus became Transport Focus, and took on a new remit to look after the interests of users of the Strategic Road Network (SRN) in England. As part of this new role, this initial research was commissioned to understand the needs and experiences of road users using the SRN.

This research was carried out by AECOM on behalf of Transport Focus and this report was written by AECOM.

1.2 Objectives

Qualitative research was carried out in October and November 2014 to meet the following objectives.

- Explore the needs and experiences of road users using the SRN, specifically their views on:
 - journey time
 - disruption
 - information and signage - static road signs and variable message signs
 - speed restrictions, speed limits and cameras
 - feelings of safety when using the SRN
 - road maintenance
 - service stations and rest areas
 - importance/impact of surrounding environment, view, etc
 - driving during severe weather conditions.
- Understand
 - what makes for a good journey experience on the SRN
 - what aspects of the SRN require improvement (sense of priority order)
 - the needs of businesses that rely on the SRN
 - if and how road users distinguish between local roads (managed by local authorities) and the SRN
 - how experience of the local road before or after a SRN journey impacts on the SRN experience
 - the differences in views between users of motorways and A roads
 - Explore some initial methodology options for a road user satisfaction survey.

The research covered the seven regions of the SRN, as defined by the Highways Agency (HA):

- East
- M25 area
- Midlands
- Yorkshire and the North East
- North West
- South East
- South West.

1.3 Methodology

The research comprised a mix of methodologies, as follows:

- 7 x 120 minute groups with motorised personal users making leisure journeys
- 2 x 120 minute groups with motorised personal users making business journeys
- 2 x 120 minute groups with professional drivers
- 4 x 90 minute mini groups with heavy goods vehicles (HGV) drivers (3.5 tonnes+)
- 18 x 60 minute depth interviews among specific road user segments
- 10 x 60 minute accompanied journeys among car drivers and drivers of HGVs.

The detailed composition of the sample structure is shown below in Tables 2.1, 2.2 and 2.3

Table 2.1 Focus group composition

No.	Location	Region	Type	Usage	Age
1	Cambridge	East	Leisure	Less frequent	20-40
2	Cambridge	East	Professional	Frequent	Mixed
3	Birmingham	Midlands	Leisure	Frequent	41-60
4	Birmingham	Midlands	HGV	Frequent	Mixed
5	Manchester	North West	Leisure	Less frequent	20-40
6	Manchester	North West	HGV	Frequent	Mixed
7	Epsom	M25 area	Leisure	Frequent	20-40
8	Epsom	M25 area	Business	Mixed	41-60
9	Darlington	North East	Leisure	Frequent	41-60
10	Newcastle	North East	Business	Mixed	20-40
11	Exeter	South West	HGV	Frequent	Mixed
12	Salisbury	South West	Leisure	Less frequent	41-60
13	Salisbury	South West	Professional	Frequent	Mixed
14	Ashford	South East	Leisure	Frequent	20-40
15	Ashford	South East	HGV	Frequent	Mixed

Groups 3, 7 and 12 completed a pre-sensitisation exercise that required participants to fill in a self-completion questionnaire to provide details about a journey made on the SRN between the time they were recruited and attending the discussion group. The exercise also asked participants to evaluate three route planning websites.

Table 2.2 Depth interview composition

Driver Type	Number of depths	Frequency of use of the SRN	Time pressure of journey	Journey purpose	Location
Coach drivers	3	Frequent	Critical	Work	Distributed across the seven regions
Disabled drivers	3	2 Frequent 1 Less Frequent	Less critical	Leisure	
Novice drivers	3	2 Frequent 1 Less Frequent	Less critical	Leisure	
Older drivers	3	1 Frequent 2 Less Frequent	Less critical	Leisure	
Motorcyclists	3	Frequent	Mixed	Mixed	
Cyclists	3	Frequent	Critical	Commuter	

Table 2.3 Accompanied journey composition

Driver Type	Number of depths	Frequency of use of the network	Time pressure of journey	Journey purpose	Location
Private	4	2 Frequent 2 Less frequent	Mixed	2 Business 2 Leisure	Split between South East, M25, North West and Yorks / North East
Professional	2	2 Frequent	Critical	Work	
HGV	4	4 Frequent	Critical	Work	

Additional recruitment criteria*Motorised personal*

- Motorised personal means private rather than professional drivers
- A mix of both sexes in each group
- A mix of Socio-economic groups (SEG) across the sample
- All made journeys on the SRN
- Good representation of motorways, dual carriageway and single carriageway sections of the SRN used in the local area in each group
- All recruited as drivers (but some also had experience of travelling as a passenger when using the SRN)
- Leisure users' use of the SRN was most often for leisure purposes
- Professional users' use of the SRN was more often for professional use rather than leisure use (included a mix of commuting and business related journeys)
- Frequent use defined as twice a week or more
- Less frequent defined as no more than once a week but at least once a month
- Leisure drivers could include some who drive a van rather than a car
- Leisure users could also be making some journeys on the SRN that are time-critical

- Experience of travelling at different times of day and in different weather conditions was mixed in each group and adequately represented across the sample
- Mix of journey lengths in each group
- One or two in each group claimed to have lower level of confidence when driving, especially on the SRN.

Professional drivers

- Professional drivers defined as those who drive for a living
- Include van drivers, taxi drivers, chauffeurs etc. (but not HGV drivers)
- Demographics as mixed as possible (to reflect the profile of professional drivers in each area).

HGV drivers

- All were making frequent journeys on any part of the SRN, especially in the area local to where they were recruited
- All lived and worked in England (none were based in other countries)

2 Context

2.1 Mentality

An interesting observation from the research participants is that driving can create a mindset of what they would consider to be uncharacteristic behaviour. Many are prepared to openly admit to this, even in the environment of a group discussion. Driving is often seen as a competitive activity and the SRN as a competitive arena, given the opportunity to drive at higher speeds. Some drivers are aware that being behind the wheel of a car can create a particular mentality that can change the way they behave, especially in relation to others around them.

Driving is an area in which men often perceive themselves to be more proficient. This can occasionally create macho attitudes around the subject of driving, and overtly sexist language from a small minority of participants. Interestingly, driving behaviour appears to be an area in which the discussion of stereotypes by men and women is considered to be more acceptable than in other areas of their life.

“I tend to forget which is which, I don’t know if it is the M62, I just know how to get on it and once I’m on the motorway I’ll follow the signs. But if somebody was to tell me oh, get on this, that or the other road, I wouldn’t have a clue.”

[Manchester, Leisure (Female)]

(In response) “I think that’s a woman thing, that.”

[Manchester, Leisure (Male)]

The assertiveness of some drivers can create a degree of trepidation in others who may respond by driving in a passive or defensive manner, especially on the SRN. Perhaps providing some foundation for the stereotyping, there were indications from the participants in the groups that the majority of those who tend to drive over-confidently are male and women are most likely to be the ones who tend to drive more cautiously. This is illustrated by the typologies identified in section 3.3.

“I’m sorry, but lane hoppers tend to be really confident men. They are probably excellent drivers but what they don’t realise is that they terrify people.”

[Epsom, Business (Female)]

“Occasionally people drive too slowly, especially women, and that can cause accidents.”

[M25 area, Older (male)]

“Drivers going too fast, as a women, I’m sorry to say, the amount of guys that try to take me on for some reason. Because they’re bored I suppose.”

[Newcastle, Business (Female)]

2.2 Behaviour

The mentality that driving creates can induce distinctive behavior by some when using the SRN. It creates a feeling of impatience and a desire to get from one place to another as quickly as possible. This is not just the case for professional drivers who may have particular deadlines or other time constraints but can be equally true for leisure journeys that are not time-critical. Some drivers recognise that other road users are not prepared to wait or queue in situations when this would be sensible and may help to improve the flow of traffic. There were occasional references to the fact that there is no established culture of alternating vehicles joining traffic from a slip-road in the way that 'zip-merging' is common practice in other countries.

“If you have 200 yards to merge into a lane, if you take it right down to the wire and then you put your indicator on, you’ll be surprised how long you’ve got to wait before somebody lets you in, I find it quite bizarre. They don’t teach you to zip do they, to leave a space for others to zip in.”

[Darlington, Leisure]

“Road users need to speak the same language but at the moment there is no common understanding or agreement.”

[M25 area, Older]

Some drivers find it difficult to accept that other drivers might be making faster progress with their journeys. This can create problems on the SRN especially when roads are perceived as 'race-tracks' that promote dangerous driving. There is a commonly-held view that speed regulations and some other rules of the road are perceived to have tolerance limits. They are regarded as 'soft' laws that many drivers are under some circumstances prepared to break, with impunity. There is evidence to suggest that some drivers apply double standards. Some claimed it to be unacceptable for others to commit offences such as 'tailgating' or using a mobile phone while driving, or 'hogging' the middle lane - while admitting to transgressions such as 'lane-hopping' themselves.

“My biggest bugbear on any road, but especially motorways, is people on their mobiles.”

[Birmingham, Leisure]

“I find people drive horrendously on the motorways. I think they should have another test, once they have passed their driving test have another test for the motorway.”

[Epsom, Leisure]

It was often suggested or implied by participants that driver impatience can lead to frustration and in extreme circumstances this could turn into aggression or road-rage. There is a shared feeling that stricter enforcement of certain rules would make the SRN a safer environment for all road users.

“It’s dangerous when people get road rage because they get angry and put their foot down and go flying off.”

[Epsom, Leisure]

“People can get really aggressive and other people’s emotions can affect yours. I got followed about two months ago for about two miles by someone who was really out of order because I had just beeped at him. He followed me to my son’s school and I had to phone the police. You see the aggression with other people. So now, I move away from people driving aggressively. In the past I would have stood my ground, now I just get out of their way.”

[Newcastle, Business (Female)]

2.3 Experiences

Road users’ experience is affected by a wide range of factors including: journey purpose, whether the journey is perceived to be time-critical or not, variables relating to the road and weather conditions, and specific factors that are individual to the driver such as general levels of confidence and experience and temporal factors such as mood, attitude and other emotional influences.

However, despite this there are many commonalities of experience. The majority of users feel that most journeys made on the SRN are successful and have positive outcomes and on balance are happy with their experiences.

Notwithstanding this, when asked about their experience, research participants find it easier to focus on the negative elements of the journeys they made, partly because bad experiences tend to be easier to recall than good ones (due to their scarcity) and partly due to the perception that recounting them makes a better ‘story’ for other participants. So while the overall tone of the discussion within the sessions seemed to be more negative this is unlikely to be a wholly accurate reflection of the reality for the majority of users.

2.4 Strategic Road Network - positives

Throughout the research a wide range of both positive and negative issues were highlighted in relation to making journeys on the SRN. Through the analysis process it was possible to cluster these around a small number of consistent themes. Many positive factors are taken for granted, or focus around the controllable aspects of the journey.

Much of the discussion in this area was around generic benefits associated with driving rather than things specifically to do with journeys on the SRN. Having one’s own personal space was a clear positive for many participants and particularly so on longer trips. The familiarity and comfort of this space tends to create a more relaxed approach to the journey than might otherwise be the case when using public transport, for example. This is often enhanced by additional touches of personalisation such as having a music playlist and a selection of sweets prepared for the journey in advance.

“I really like driving and I kind of look forward to it. As long as I’ve got tunes I’m happy.”

[Cambridge, Leisure]

“I’m relaxed when driving for work, I just put the radio on, it’s work time, it’ll take as long as it does for me to get there but I can just relax and enjoy the music and chat.”

[Newcastle, Business]

“The thought of being stuck on a motorway with no sugar makes me nervous. I would always have Percy Pigs or something going on in the car, it’s like a comfort blanket.”
[Epsom, Leisure]

Other positives were linked to a sense of being in control and included experiences where there is good quality information and signage, and where traffic is generally flowing freely.

“I had a positive experience three or four weeks ago. The M20 was empty, it was cats and dogs weather. I can’t remember rain so hard, but the road was empty and it was just a completely different experience, because you don’t have to deal with spray from other vehicles, even the spray that you get from the vehicles going in the opposite direction.”
[Ashford, Leisure]

“It’s lovely driving on a clear motorway with no traffic. I find it quite relaxing to be honest. I listen to some music and have some time to myself, a bit of peace and quiet.”
[Epsom, Leisure]

“I think it’s because I expected to be sitting in traffic, but the roads were clear, I had a really good run. It was effortless and on a really sunny day, I felt blessed and really cheered up.”
[Newcastle, Business]

2.5 Strategic Road Network - negatives

By contrast negative experiences were those that added to a sense of not being in control.

Other road users

Participants referred to the way that aggressive and irresponsible drivers can make many journeys on the SRN a tiring and stressful experience and one that can feel dangerous. They recognise the dangers associated with sharing the road space with other vehicles that are travelling at high speeds. However, in addition to this some are concerned that speeding, poor lane discipline and using mobile phones are likely to increase the chances of being affected by accidents which then cause delays to journeys or, even worse, of being involved in an accident due to the bad driving of others.

“I associate it with danger. I know it sounds a bit dramatic, but I think it’s a bit dangerous. It’s always at the back of my mind that if you go on one of those roads, certainly in bad or adverse conditions, you’ve got to be careful.”
[Manchester, Leisure]

“When my kids are in the car I drive safely so when people are cutting you up and driving like an idiot I get quite frustrated and annoyed.”
[Epsom, Leisure]

Each of the road user groups tends to consider others as being the main cause of problems on the SRN. Car drivers tend to have negative perceptions of HGV drivers and HGV drivers feel that other road users are less skilled than themselves and are more likely to be a liability to others.

Leisure users blame the arrogant attitudes of those making journeys for business and professional reasons and these segments are frustrated by the relative inexperience of 'Sunday' drivers who get in their way. Cyclists and motorists seem to have mutual disrespect for each other on occasions where they are required to share the same road space.

“I used to love driving but now I think of it as being an effort because it's got busier and busier and I'd rather not go somewhere at all than go at rush hour.”
[Manchester, Leisure]

Other factors beyond drivers' control

Negative experiences are linked to factors that are beyond the control of drivers, such as traffic problems, road works, speed cameras and poor quality road surfaces, bad weather conditions and driving in the dark.

“There's certain things you can't control, like traffic. If I go on a long journey I try to prepare for it so it's comfortable but there are things that are out of your control and that's when you get peeved.”
[Manchester, Leisure]

“People used to say ‘come on, let's get in the car and go for a drive’ but people don't do that anymore, do they?”
[Manchester, Leisure]

2.6 M25

The M25 is often considered to be a separate sub-category of the SRN that is different from other motorways in England. This was a consistent theme across groups held in various locations in the research. The M25 has an almost mythical status in the minds of many drivers to the extent that it is perceived to be a different and unique driving experience in this country. This is equally true of those who drive on it frequently and others (who are likely to be fearful of it and its reputation).

“The M40 is lovely and such a pleasure to drive on and a completely different driving experience after being on the M25. I find the M25 is just so unpredictable, you don't know what's going to happen and people seem to drive on it with blinkers on. It's just horrendous.”
[Epsom, Leisure]

“If I have to use the M25, I get the kids out of bed and out of the door by 6.30, even at the weekend because I know I will spend an extra two hours because of a car fire or something going on. If you get round hassle you're surprised. Even if you don't have an accident there's always a bit where you are doing 40mph.”
[Epsom, Leisure]

Perceptions of the SRN are often negative but the M25 is universally felt to be the worst part of it. Drivers in London and the South East consider it to be an unavoidable necessary evil and many others try to avoid having to use it if possible. Almost all expect journeys on the M25 to

take longer than on any other road and are surprised if their experience turns out to be hassle-free.

There are a number of things that are felt to set the M25 apart from other motorways:

- multiple lanes in each direction can make the driving experience feel more confusing and intimidating (especially for less experienced drivers)
- signage assumes that all users are familiar with the geography of London and the South East (as directions often use unfamiliar references and directional cues that are not always obvious or intuitive)
- there is a feeling among users and non-users that specific driving skills are required in order to be able to negotiate and navigate the M25
- Some believe that London drivers are likely to be more aggressive or that the delays associated with the M25 are likely to create impatience and aggressive driving behaviour.

“The M25 doesn’t feel the same as other motorways, I don’t know if it’s because it’s not going anywhere. It’s also so much bigger, you don’t have the same lane structure so it’s a bit more of a free for all.”

[Epsom, Leisure]

“I think the M25 is more aggressive. When you get near Heathrow there are six lanes and if you need to change lane no-one lets you in. But when you drive to Gatwick, it’s not a problem on the M23.”

[Epsom, Business]

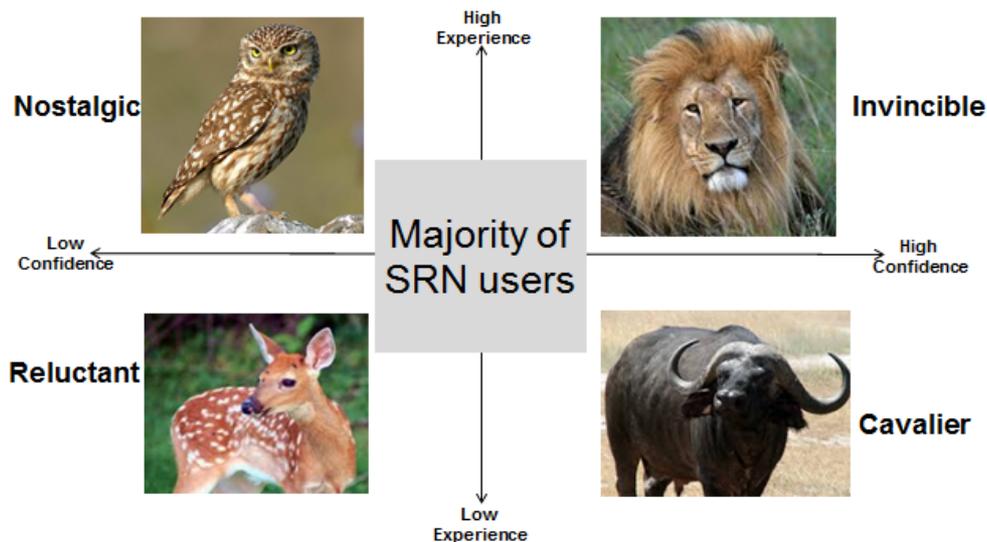
“I get confused with clockwise and anti-clockwise on the M25. I haven’t gone the wrong way round it yet but I don’t live in London but they assume that the rest of the country is exactly the same and knows what’s going on.”

[Birmingham, Leisure]

3 Typology

3.1 Mapping

Based on this relatively large qualitative sample of road users, it is possible to identify a number of driver types based on the range of views and attitudes expressed at the discussion groups and interviews. This typology maps levels of confidence against experience of using the SRN, as follows:



Experience and confidence are the most obvious axes to use for this mapping since both are relevant to all SRN users. However, it is important to note that in many cases, it relates more to experience and confidence of using motorways specifically rather than the SRN generally. This is partly due to the different set of rules and driving circumstances that participants felt to apply to motorways.

The typology is intended to illustrate extremes since the majority of drivers will be clustered around the centre of the map on most usage occasions. Most people are likely to display characteristics of one typology most often, although it would be possible to display characteristics of different typologies for different journeys or in response to specific circumstances.

Explanations of the characteristics associated with each user type are provided in the following sections.

3.2 Invincible (high confidence and high experience)

'Invincibles' are so called because they tend to regard themselves as the kings of the road. They are often perceived by others to have arrogant and superior attitudes to road use and other road users.

This segment includes most of the professionals, HGV and coach drivers but it is not confined to them only.

Invincibles are characterised by the belief that they are the best drivers on the road, especially on the basis of the frequency with which they use the SRN. They tend to have a low regard for other road users who are often considered to be bad drivers and will have little respect for infrequent or leisure-only users who are perceived as ‘Sunday drivers’. They often claim that others need more education about how to drive properly on the SRN (and especially on motorways) but are typically unable to recognise their own faults or prepared to concede that these even exist.

“We all have to undergo training in a classroom for seven hours every five years to get your license for the next five years.”

[Manchester, HGV]

“If you’re a fairly confident driver I don’t see why you’d have any inhibitions or fears of what you’re about to do, you just do it as second nature.”

[Darlington, Leisure]

Other types are usually very critical of this group and can feel intimidated by them. They are perceived as not having sufficient consideration for other road users who are less experienced or confident about driving on the SRN.

“Business people, like salesmen who use the motorways all the time, drive up your backside even if you can’t move. They think because they have more experience it gives them the right to drive like complete idiots. It’s always the same type of people who have an appointment to get to and will flash you to let you know they are coming.”

[Epsom, Leisure]

3.3 Cavalier (high confidence and low experience)

Only a few participants in this research fell into this group because we recruited participants that tended to have more experience of the SRN, however it is likely to represent a significant proportion of all SRN users.

This group typically comprises motorists who may not have held a full license for long or those with limited experience of driving on motorways (although they may have a lot more experience on local roads).

These are people who recognise or think that they have an aptitude for driving and consider it to be enjoyable and empowering. This is especially likely to be the case among those who are still becoming accustomed to driving as a relatively new experience. In certain situations, high levels of confidence may result in an over-exuberance that is associated with the feeling of being ‘let free’ to drive independently on the SRN. Initial positive experiences can create a feeling of being in complete control, even of uncontrollable elements (such as other road users). This can lead to a cavalier attitude to driving at speed on major roads and under-estimating the risks. These drivers lack the experience to have a full appreciation of the dangers involved and may not always approach driving on the SRN with sufficient thought or care.

There is an important distinction to be made between cavalier and reckless attitudes and driving behaviour. Drivers conforming to the characteristics of this type are not exclusively ‘boy racers’ (although these would be a small sub-set within this segment). Instead they can be defined by an approach to driving that is inappropriate based on their age or experience of driving (especially on the SRN). Many other drivers expressed concern about new drivers who they felt are not adequately equipped to cope with the specific requirements of motorway driving.

3.4 Nostalgic (low confidence and high experience)

This is an easy segment to identify and understand. These people acknowledge that they feel increasingly uncomfortable about motorway driving.

This type is likely to be found exclusively within the motorised personal sector and is much more likely to comprise leisure users rather than those who are most likely to be driving for business purposes. They are typically older and included those recruited specifically on the basis of being over 65 in this sample.

Many of these motorists have a lot of experience and long memories of driving on the SRN. They recognise that motorways are now busier than ever and how this discourages them from making journeys on them.

“I used to be happy to drive to Manchester and back in a day but now the roads are too crowded and I will only drive in daylight.”

[M25 area, Older]

“I don’t have a problem driving on any roads but I have lost confidence driving at night or when it’s busy or an unfamiliar area due to my age and illness.”

[Birmingham, Disabled]

“When I was younger, I used to be dead confident, really, really confident, but now, as I’ve got older and the roads have got busier and busier I don’t feel as confident. If I have a long journey now, like up to Newcastle, I’d rather go on the train.”

[Darlington, Leisure]

“I think you get a bit more aware as you get older of what’s around you, it’s just experience isn’t it because I get more anxious when I’m driving when I’m on the motorway now.”

[Darlington, Leisure]

These drivers are also aware that new technologies and initiatives are constantly being introduced. In addition increased volumes of traffic create the impression that driving conditions on the SRN are becoming more challenging, and this leads to a lower inclination to use motorways.

“You see some crazy things on the roads, especially on motorways. Now that I’m older I’m wiser so I drive more slowly and more carefully.”

[M25 area, Older]

3.5 Reluctant (low confidence and low experience)

Motorists in this segment often have the feeling that they are not well enough equipped to deal with motorway driving in particular. This segment includes some (but not all) novice drivers and others who have many years' experience of driving on local roads and are very confident in their driving ability in this context. However, they recognise that driving on the SRN is a completely different experience and are often uncomfortable about doing so. This group will also include those who make a regular journey on a specific part of the SRN that they are familiar with but do not have the same level of confidence when making an unfamiliar journey.

“I do motorway driving but not often. If it was a long journey I'd either set off early or late or I wouldn't do it.”

[Manchester, Leisure]

The 'Reluctants' recognise that driving on the SRN requires a particular set of driving skills that they feel they do not possess. They prefer to avoid using these roads as they recognise they are driving outside their comfort zone. On occasions when using a motorway is unavoidable, they are more likely than others to engage in detailed journey planning that is likely to take into account traffic volumes in an attempt to avoid the busiest times.

When using the SRN, their lack of experience and confidence means that these people are more likely to drive slowly and defensively and in a way they perceive to be safe, although this behaviour is often criticised and considered to be the cause of accidents and delays by Invincibles and Cavaliers especially.

“I get really anxious driving on motorways and A roads, There's lorries, some people are speeding, especially if I've got my kids in the car, you know, I find it quite nerve wracking, whereas on the smaller roads, because you're not doing the same speed, you can stop.”

[Cambridge, Leisure]

“Maybe do some driving awareness courses for new drivers. I learnt to drive in the summer and then the clocks went back in October and then I got my car in November and it was really foggy and there was ice and I'd never driven in any of that before.”

[Cambridge, Leisure]

“If I'm going somewhere further away I have to plan it at least three or four days before. I need to know what every single A road is called so I can follow the directions otherwise I would panic.” [Epsom, Leisure]

“People who are scared of the motorway don't really get how it works which is why they just sit in the middle lane because they are scared to be on the inside or don't know what's going on.” [Epsom, Business]

“I have only just passed my test and I think it would be good if there could be a lane on motorways that could be assigned to learners to be able to practice with an instructor.”

[Cambridge, Novice]

4 The Strategic Road Network

4.1 Knowledge

The Strategic Road Network is not a term that road users are exposed to so it is not surprising that participants were unfamiliar with it when it was introduced during the course of the research. When prompted with maps of the SRN during the discussions, respondents were still confused about which roads were included within this definition, why some roads are included and others are not and why certain sections of some roads are part of the SRN but not others.

“If you were planning a journey, perhaps it’s the roads you would use for the majority of your route to get there in the most direct way.”

[Epsom, Leisure]

“Can I just clarify something that seems weird? The A449 obviously goes all the way down there but they only look after that little bit of the A449, not the whole of the A449.”

[Birmingham, Leisure]

Some considered the SRN a somewhat artificial categorisation which bears little resemblance to the way that roads are perceived by users. The word ‘strategic’ was often felt to be meaningless, either because of being unfamiliar with the term or because the SRN does not include roads that some consider to be important or significant routes (such as the major roads in Wales and Scotland, for example).

“It’s not very strategic if it doesn’t cover the main route I take down to Wales from the West Midlands.” [Birmingham, Leisure]

4.2 Awareness

In the course of more detailed discussion of the SRN which included scrutiny of the Highways Agency maps (of the SRN in their local area and other regions), it became apparent to participants that the SRN consists of some roads that are readily identifiable and others that are not.

Motorways fall into the former group on the basis of being easy to identify on a map, and being distinctly signed (we did not highlight the fact that some short stretches of motorway are in fact outside the SRN).

The SRN status of other roads presented more of a problem. The use of the term ‘trunk roads’ is generally not helpful and is considered to be old-fashioned by some road users. HGV drivers see it as inappropriate – they often refer to the fact that they ‘trunk loads’ during the course of their jobs irrespective of the roads used. Some were confused why certain A roads (or sections of them) were excluded from the SRN.

“If you need to trunk something down to Birmingham, you just hop onto the M6 and down you go.”

[Manchester, HGV]

“An A road is a trunking road. You trunk a load from A to B so that’s where trunk comes from. You miss out lights and islands and just trunk along.”

[Birmingham, HGV]

4.3 Highways Agency

Amongst participants there was no real understanding of the way in which the SRN is managed or who has responsibility for this role. Most assume or claim to know that smaller roads are managed by Local Authorities with remits that cover specific geographic areas. Some assume that the SRN is managed by the government or perhaps a government department (most likely to be the DfT). Some are able to guess that the SRN is managed by the HA, although this is an unfamiliar entity for many drivers.

“I think their problem is they’re quite discreet, so you don’t really know what they’re doing, because they don’t have a PR voice or a part of them which tells people what their plans are, their sort of overall vision or their global goal or what their short term plans are, so you’re left guessing. I mean even when you asked us who’s responsible, no-one knew, so you can’t really judge what they’re doing, because you don’t know who they are, they’re a bit shadowy.”

[Cambridge, Leisure]

“I personally think they’re pretty good, you know, it’s a difficult job and I don’t think you’re ever going to get it 100%, I think they’re pretty good. They’re working under very difficult circumstances with the volumes of traffic they’ve got to deal with.”

[Exeter, HGV]

We hypothesise that the lack of linkage between the SRN and the HA is due to the fact that users of the SRN do not consider themselves to be customers of the HA. Ignorance of the HA is widespread. Even those who know of the HA have no accurate knowledge of them or what they do. There is no immediately obvious analogy that participants can readily identify in relationship terms. Water companies are perhaps the closest example as service providers that customers are unable to choose. However, a relationship exists here due to the bills that are paid and the contract that is therefore perceived to exist between the service provider and the end user. Users of the SRN do not consider themselves to be customers of the HA.

Given the low levels of awareness of the HA role, it was perhaps unsurprising that participants were unable to comment on aspects of their performance. Even the small minority with limited contact experience in the past had impressions that were limited to a brief phone call.

“I would only associate them with motorways but I wouldn’t think they have anything to do with A roads or anything like that.”

[Birmingham, Leisure]

“Someone was driving really dangerously on the motorway so I reported it and said they should be aware of it and I also did it for debris in the road.”

[Epsom, Leisure]

“I actually made a suggestion once to the Highways Agency about improving the traffic flow on the M25. I got a response saying it was a crap idea and this is the reason why but that was fine.”

[Epsom, Business]

Not surprisingly, therefore, the HA is seen as a faceless organisation and lacks a recognisable profile. This is not an unprompted concern of road users, but an observation in response to direct questioning on this issue. The only exception to this is Highways Agency Traffic Officers (HATO) who are the only manifestation of the HA that many participants were aware of. There were frequent indications that this awareness had been heightened as a consequence of a television documentary series (The Motorway) that was shown just before the research was conducted. This focused on the M6 and the activities of Traffic Officers and motorway police so those in Birmingham and Manchester were especially able to relate to this but the programme had also been of interest to those in other regions.

“The only time I’ve thought of them recently is because there was a documentary, Maintaining Britain’s Motorways, or something that was on recently and it was talking about one of the major roads and the Highways Agency and stuff like that, and that’s the only time I’ve thought of them, other than seeing them when you’re in traffic, buzzing along the hard shoulder as fast as anything.”

[Manchester, Leisure]

“I’ve been watching that motorway programme and the Highways Agency attend incidents but if there’s a death then the police take over.”

[Birmingham, Leisure]

“You feel as though there’s somebody who’s looking after the motorway or looking after the people on it.”

[Salisbury, Leisure]

However, most road users are unclear about what powers traffic officers have and the extent of any overlap of their roles with traffic police. Many of the references to HATO were uncomplimentary on the basis that they were thought to lack any real authority and an assumption therefore that they are not very busy. The majority think the role of HATO is to deal with incidents and close lanes of the roads when necessary. Some felt that this is not always done as efficiently as possible or with the best interests of road users in mind.

“I think one of the problems we have with motorways is when there’s a minor accident it takes a long time to get it cleared and get the traffic moving again, everybody stands round looking at it, instead of doing something. If there is a minor accident abroad, they push it all to the side of the road and get the traffic going again. Over here, they take a photograph of it and then somebody else comes along and they’re trying to find who is to blame before they push it all to the side and get the traffic flowing again. It must cost the country a fortune.”

[Ashford, HGV]

“They’re supposed to keep the roads going, but they don’t. They seem to make a drama out of a minor incident, don’t they? If there’s a car broken down on the edge of the motorway, they go and cordon one lane off or something like that.”

[Ashford, HGV]

“I had a tyre blow-out and it was dangerous for the tyre company to change, so they had to do a lane closure and the HA turned up on the scene first and then the police cordoned the lane off and then the plastic policeman stayed there until the tyre company had finished.”

[Ashford, HGV]

“I just feel safer when I see those cars on the motorway. I know people who have broken down and were waiting for the AA or the RAC and they just stopped to see if everything was alright but I don’t actually know what they do when they get to you but it makes it a bit safer, because they’ll put those triangles out, do you know what I mean?”

[Manchester, Leisure]

“They close motorways for way longer than they need to. If there’s an accident they close the whole carriageway when they could leave one lane open. When there’s an accident in France, they get it off the road as quickly as possible so people can keep moving.”

[Birmingham, HGV]

5 Journey Planning

5.1 Motorised Personal

It was interesting to observe during the research that many of the frustrations and negative aspects of driving are associated with the unpredictability of making journeys on the SRN. All are aware that planning tools are available to help anticipate and mitigate this and many already have access to one or more of these. However, very few claim to take advantage of these tools to help maximise the likelihood of a positive journey experience.

“I haven’t used the satnav on my iPhone because I’d be worried that I’d lose the signal or the connection or the Wi-Fi or whatever and end up getting lost.”
[Manchester, Leisure]

Journey planning among personal road users is minimal and varies according to the experience of the driver and the nature of the journey. Those making the most frequent journeys on the SRN are likely to have the lowest need to plan journeys. Most leisure users are unlikely to need to plan anything other than the likely length of the journey and possibly the number and location of stops likely to be required, especially when travelling with children. Reluctants and some others with lower levels of experience are much more inclined to do journey planning of some sort, even if this is simply to confirm the route in their mind or check a junction number.

“If I go somewhere I’m not familiar with, I will want to know what time to leave to get the whole day there so I will go on Google and find out roughly how long it will take to get there.”
[Epsom, Leisure]

“I wouldn’t do much planning apart from looking to see how much time the journey might take me and then I wouldn’t think any more of it.”
[Epsom, Business]

However, all user types are more likely to require planning for the part of their journey off the SRN. Information and signage on the SRN is generally seen as good enough to negate the need for journeys to be planned in advance. Planning tools are more likely to be employed for local roads, especially those needed to approach the intended destination.

5.2 Professional drivers

Professional drivers (especially HGV drivers) are generally very familiar with the SRN. It is only when they leave the SRN that they may need tools to plan their journey.

In spite of often having access to more sophisticated planning tools than leisure drivers, very few rely on them to minimise the risk of delays when making journeys on the SRN. Some of the HGV drivers claimed to have a relaxed attitude to this, if the delay occurs in their employers’ time rather than their own.

A small number of HGV drivers keep map books in their cabs and would use these as and when required and some also make extensive use of other information sources such as: the HA app;

Frixo; linking with the HGV driver community via Facebook and social media; and informally through word of mouth at meeting places such as Truck Stops and Motorway Service Areas.

“You listen to your radio, you listen to the information that’s given to you and you make changes, don’t you, en route.”

[Ashford, HGV]

“I use a website called Frixo. It’s for the motorways and tells you live speeds through the junctions at the moment and it updates every time you refresh the page.”

[Birmingham, HGV]

5.3 Journey planning tools

Satellite navigation

In spite of the high level of ownership of satnavs across participants, there was minimal evidence of these being used to plan journeys on the SRN. Instead, sat navs tend to be used during journeys more often to warn drivers of the presence of speed cameras.

Respondents’ apparent ambivalence was partly explained by doubts about the trustworthiness of information from Variable Message Signs (VMS) about delays ahead, and of an alternative route to avoid it suggested by their sat nav. Even Reluctants and the least confident SRN users acknowledge that satnavs are more useful for journeys on other roads than on the SRN.

“How many times have you heard on the radio in the car there is a traffic jam on the M6 so you avoid it then find out there wasn’t a traffic jam on the M6?”

[Birmingham, Leisure]

Some are aware that increasingly sophisticated functionality can now be incorporated into satnavs, including features such as live traffic information and updates on road works, although there was little evidence of any use being made of these on the SRN. HGV drivers know that specialist software is available for them to help them to avoid things such as low bridges and road inclines but employers tend not to provide this and most claim to have little interest in using it.

Websites / apps

Attitudes towards websites and apps were relatively consistent across participants in that most tend to have a preferred site that they are loyal to. In this sample, this was most likely to be Google Maps or the AA Route Planner. Awareness and use of the HA site was minimal. Most are aware that these websites and apps can be used to help with journey planning needs but the majority are not using them in this way.

“I do a fair bit of motorway driving so I know the general direction of where I’m going so I would rather find my own way and then work the last bit out when I get there.”

[Epsom, Leisure]

“It might help with traffic and stuff but if I was to look at it before I set off the congestion could have cleared by the time I get there so unless it’s constantly updating there’s no point.”

[Manchester, Leisure]

Instead, users claimed to use the Google Maps app *en route* when they were about to hit congestion to anticipate the length of the likely delay.

Some more specific views on these three websites were provided in the feedback from the pre-sensitisation exercise completed by some leisure users who were asked to record details of a journey made on the SRN and their impressions of each of the following sites.

Google Maps

Google Maps was most frequently claimed to be the default site used by participants. It also emerged as the clear favourite among those who completed the pre-task exercise (including those who were using the AA or another site). Overall, it was felt to combine the advantages of being easy and quick to use with the most sophisticated functionality to provide up-to-date information for users.

“Google Maps do it quite well, because they can do red and amber elements of your journey to show you whether those ones have got a lot of traffic on or not.”

[Cambridge, Leisure]

“Google is by far the best because you put in where you want to go to and if you want to go via somewhere you just drag the route and push it to there.”

[Birmingham, Leisure]

“I find Google maps much better because it looks at where there’s traffic and accidents and tells you how long the journey will be.”

[Epsom, Leisure]

AA Route Planner

Almost all were aware of the AA website and many had used it on an occasional basis. The site was widely felt to be easy to navigate and straightforward to use. The journey planning element was improved by the availability of helpful features such as the traffic news and information about the location of cameras. However, this was occasionally offset by some feeling that the site feels rather basic and one or two had been unable to alter the route of a journey once details had been inputted.

The AA Route Planner was often recognised as being an innovator in this field, especially among older participants but it is felt to have lost ground recently to competitors, especially Google Maps.

HA website

Those who accessed it found it to be the least user-friendly of the sites. The site was not well known to participants and they expressed reservations about using it. It was felt to be difficult to navigate and appeared not to provide journey planning functionality. However, some of the information available was felt to be very helpful among those who spent time exploring the site, especially the live traffic details. Please note, we understand that the accompanying app has been substantially upgraded since the research took place.

“I look on their website if I am going on the motorway because they have good information about any hold-ups or road works.”

[Birmingham, Leisure]

6 Road condition

6.1 Road quality

The quality of roads was a frequently mentioned concern throughout the research (and was highlighted in many of the accompanied journeys. In general terms, the quality of SRN roads is felt to be good and recognised as being much better than many local roads. However, A roads on the SRN are felt more likely to be in a poorer condition than motorways. The presence of potholes is most frequently mentioned in support of this claim, although it is difficult to be sure whether this is in fact about busier local roads, partly as a result of the uncertainty associated with the SRN as previously explained. Drivers also perceive that the surfaces of A roads are more likely to be worn out and in need of resurfacing than motorways.

The majority attach higher importance to the quality of motorways due to the volume of traffic using them and the speeds at which vehicles tend to travel on them. Motorways are generally thought to be repaired quickly when the need arises and it is assumed that this is the reason why there are frequent road works on motorways. The only problem identified in relation to motorways was an occasional reference to ruts caused by HGVs, especially on certain sections of the M1, although this is considered to be less of a problem than it used to be.

“The state of the roads is due to the amount of traffic that goes through them. You get ruts in the road which lorries make and things like that and sometimes you’ve just got to be wary of those.”

[Exeter, HGV]

6.2 Road surface

The nature of the road surface makes an important contribution to perceptions of the overall quality of the road. Respondents distinguished between the two broad categories of road surface:

Tarmac is generally considered to be the best surface to drive on, especially over long distances. It is felt to provide a smoother and superior ride and also makes road markings more visible. The overall opinion among drivers is therefore that black tarmac is the ‘proper’ surface for motorways and other major roads and anything else gives the impression of being unfinished. Some assume that this surface is designed to ensure more effective braking, especially at higher speeds and this often creates a sense of reassurance when driving on this surface. The only exception to this view is among motorcyclists who claim that newly laid tarmac can be slippery and some preference was expressed for it to be slightly worn.

The other main type of road type that drivers are aware of is referred to as **concrete**. The irregularity of this surface often creates a less comfortable driving experience, especially for those with older vehicles. Participants experienced the ride as bumpy and noisy. There is a view that the road surface is more likely to retain rain water which creates a dangerous spray problem when overtaking (HGVs especially). This was frequently identified as an important source of safety concerns when making journeys on the SRN in poor weather conditions.

“There’s sections on the M25 particularly that I really dislike using, lots of it’s tarmac, but there’s a few concrete sections.”

[Ashford, Leisure]

“On the way to Wakefield it goes from rough to smooth and if you start veering over you can literally hear the hum under your tyres.”

[Manchester, Leisure]

“Certain parts of the motorway are concrete and it’s horrendous. You wonder whether you have a flat tyre as you are going along. It’s not smooth, it’s juddering and you are nervous in case something happens. If my wife is driving she gets stressed by the noise.”

[Birmingham, Leisure]

“On the M25, between junctions 8 and 9, the surface sounds really loud in your car and if it rains it holds loads of water.”

[Epsom, Leisure]

“Bits of the M25 are hideous because they still have concrete sections. The different surfaces make a big difference when it’s raining because a lot of spray comes off the concrete road but on the newer surface the spray isn’t anywhere near as bad.”

[Epsom, Business]

Road users can readily differentiate between these two surface types but they are not aware of whether one type is safer than the other.

6.3 Road markings

Participants are positive about road markings. All recognise the role that these play in helping to promote safety on the SRN (although there is occasional evidence to suggest that not all are aware of the meaning and significance of different types of road markings). Chevrons were spontaneously mentioned on a number of occasions as being a simple and effective way of helping to remind motorists to keep a sensible distance between them and the vehicle in front and some felt that these could therefore be used to greater effect on more roads than is currently the case. Although often overlooked and taken for granted, cat’s eyes are always appreciated by motorists who universally consider these to be a helpful aid to making journeys on the SRN.

“If all the roads had chevrons, they could even put the speed limit up. I think the chevrons work quite well, they make the traffic flow faster and better, because you’ve got that gap, you’re not going to have people tailgating.”

[Cambridge, Professional]

“I’ve been on the motorway somewhere and they’ve got chevrons, it says keep your distance, I think they’re really good.”

[Salisbury, Professional]

“I always thought those chevrons were a great thing because it spaces the traffic out but you don’t see them anymore.”

[Manchester, HGV]

Participants highlighted a number of observations about road markings:

- Road markings on motorways are generally felt to be better (maintained) than on A roads
- Markings on motorways are often less good after a period of road works. The residual temporary lane markings can create confusion and lane discipline problems
- Freshly painted lines especially can be slippery or can create an uneven road surface that can be perceived as a hazard by cyclists and motorcyclists
- Road markings get worn out quickly by HGVs, especially at busy junctions on A roads
- Lanes at roundabouts are not always marked clearly enough to ensure drivers position their vehicles correctly for the exit they intend to take.

“On the M25 where they have widened the road, every lane has got the markings all wrong. The new lines are a lot brighter but you can still see the old ones where they’re not meant to be.”

[Epsom, Leisure]

“Road markings could sometimes be better because trucks are using the road all the time and wear the markings away.”

[Birmingham, HGV]

“On the M1 you can see the imprints from the weight of the trucks. You can let go of the steering wheel and stick in the rut. That’s when they need to resurface the road.”

[Birmingham, HGV]

“I think the M5 needs to be marked, because there’s lots of places on the M5 that aren’t marked very well at the moment.”

[Exeter, HGV]

“They put some new roundabouts in, and they put this lovely signage on the floor, and it guides you right round the right lane and everything else. But that was two years ago, the road markings now have gone.”

[Professional, Salisbury]

“They left the white lines on after a contraflow and everyone was just going where they wanted to. Some people were following the cat’s eyes and others were following the white lines.”

[Manchester, HGV]

“There’s nothing worse than seeing white lines that have deteriorated that much you can’t see the white line anymore, it’s quite frustrating, especially on some of the roads where there are no cat’s eyes. So you’ve lost your road marking and you’re just basically down to black tarmac until the white lines come on again, but it can be quite dangerous.”

[Darlington, Leisure]

6.4 Lighting

The general consensus appears to be that the provision of lighting is desirable when driving in the dark, especially on motorways. This is often based on intuitive feelings that this seems like the right thing to do, rather than as a result of comparisons or experiences that drivers are able to provide when asked about this subject. It also comes from a perception that driving on an unlit motorway is likely to exacerbate the natural dangers and concerns that many are aware of, especially in poor weather conditions.

“They’ve reduced the lighting as well, haven’t they, it’s only some sections that are lit now. The M2 in the dark is terrifying. Its bright lights all the way from the A2 and then on the M2, but you get to Gillingham and then it’s just pitch black.”

[Ashford, Leisure]

“I think it’s dangerous if you’re driving in light and then it goes off and then you come back into it, because your eyes are adjusting all the time. If you’re doing night driving, the roads should just be lit all the way.”

[Salisbury, Leisure]

Some perceive that A roads are less likely to be lit than motorways and generally accept this if a choice needs to be made between lighting motorways or A roads. At a pragmatic level, the majority also seem to support the current policy of switching road lights off in the early hours of the morning when roads tend to be quietest. When no lighting is provided, cat’s eyes are especially welcomed and appreciated by drivers.

“I think the A roads are poor on lighting, they’ve got blind bends, I think they could be lit up a bit more definitely.”

[Salisbury, Leisure]

“There are a few places, up by Middlesbrough, where if it’s dark and bad weather you could do with more lighting. People use their main beam but then you have to keep dipping as traffic comes towards you. The A69 is quite bad too.”

[Newcastle, Business]

“There’s a road near here that is horrendous. You have to guess where you are going because you can’t put your lights on main beam because cars are coming the other way and there are no cat’s eyes, it’s a really dangerous run.”

[Birmingham, Leisure]

“One thing that makes me nervous on motorways is when there is no lighting and it’s raining. You have to concentrate on a motorway anyway and it makes it a lot more difficult to judge the distances.”

[Birmingham, Leisure]

Some driver types identified specific issues, as follows:

- Some HGV drivers prefer to drive on unlit roads as it can help them to concentrate on long journeys.

- Novice drivers feel that good lighting is important as they may lack the confidence to drive in the dark. This is also likely to apply to the Reluctant segment as a whole.
- A couple of the cyclists mentioned that lighting in the centre of roads can mean that the outer edges are not sufficiently well lit and can therefore make these busy A roads feel even more dangerous.

“I have a problem with A roads and how well lit they are at night time. I think that makes a real difference to how safe you feel on the journey.”

[Manchester, Leisure]

“I get nervous when I go down the motorway and all of a sudden the lights stop. It’s stupid but it feels like I am suddenly out of my comfort zone.”

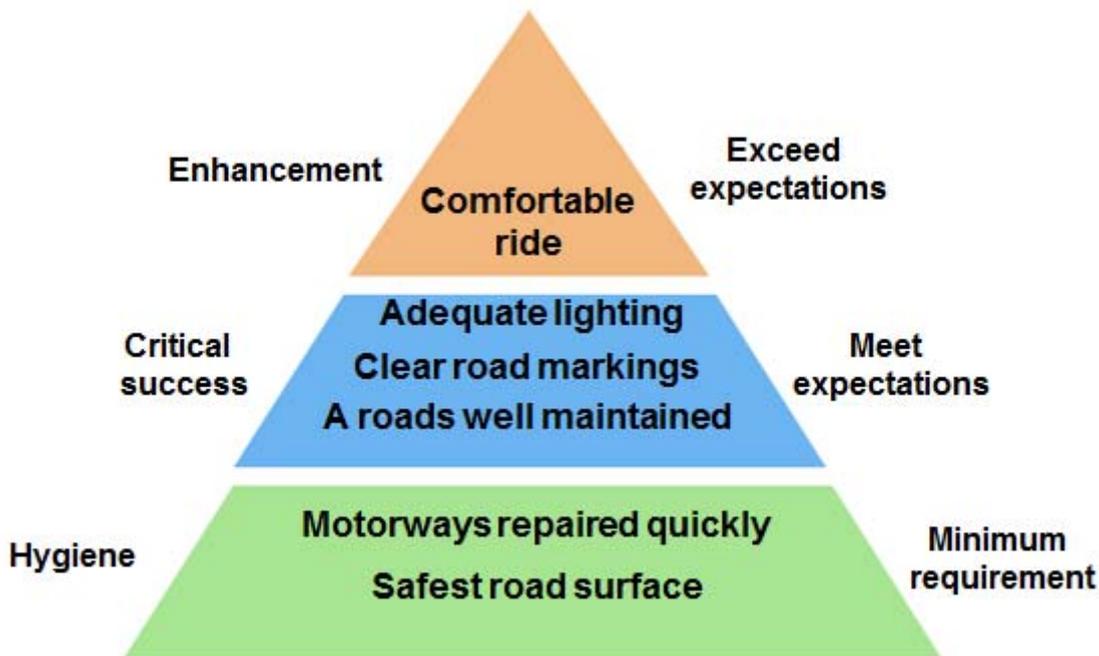
[Epsom, Business]

6.5 Summary of user needs: road conditions

Throughout this report, we have attempted to summarise the needs of SRN users using a model that is based on a hierarchy of needs. This is an analytical tool that helps to illustrate the relative importance of various attributes and requirements by categorising them as Hygiene, Critical Success or Enhancement factors. This information will be fed into further research to quantify road users’ priorities for improvement. The three areas of the needs hierarchy can be defined as follows:

- Hygiene factors are of fundamental importance that they are regarded as minimum requirements of the SRN. There is no credit to be gained for delivering against expectations in this area but a lot to lose for falling short of them in terms of road users’ levels of confidence in the SRN (and by implication therefore, the HA).
- Critical Success factors determine the extent to which the experience of using the SRN is considered to be enjoyable and successful and will be used by drivers to differentiate between journeys made and roads used.
- Enhancements are aspects of SRN usage that are usually not expected to be delivered and as such will have the potential to ‘surprise and delight’ when experienced.

The diagram below illustrates how factors relating to road conditions can be interpreted using this model. This particular hierarchy applies almost exclusively to car drivers. HGV drivers are aware that they are responsible for causing road conditions to deteriorate but they are largely unaffected by the things that can cause problems for other road users, such as bumps and cracks. The hygiene area demonstrates that it is unclear whether the fundamental needs of road users are being met as a consequence of the uncertainty that exists regarding the relative safety of different road surfaces.



7 Road environment

7.1 Landscape

This is an issue of relatively low importance to the majority of participants, especially in the context of other subjects covered by the research. The landscape of the SRN is felt to exert an aesthetic rather than a practical influence on attitudes to the overall journey experience. This is an area in which there are likely to be significant differences in the perspectives of drivers and passengers.

“I don’t think it matters that much personally, if I’m doing 70 down a motorway. I’m not going to go on the M25 to take in the local scenery, do you know what I mean, I’m going to where I’ve got to be.”

[Cambridge, Professional]

“A roads are more picturesque and countrified so I prefer someone else to drive so I can look at the view.”

[Manchester, Leisure]

Some road users feel that the dangers associated with motorway driving can be made worse by the monotony of long journeys. Some will take breaks to help prevent fatigue setting in. This is generally felt to be more of a problem with motorways than A roads. When probed on the subject of landscape during the research, many expressed the view that some type of visual interest can be helpful, even if this is just in the form of pleasant countryside.

“It’s just so boring and repetitive, you’re going down a straight road and it just never seems to end. At least smaller roads chop and change a little bit, keeps your attention a bit more.”

[Cambridge, Leisure]

“The trees are changing colour and you think ‘Oh, it’s really pleasant’, it makes quite a pleasant journey sometimes. I think you need the landscape around definitely and it’s good to have milestones, so you could say ‘right we’ve past that bridge and now we’re going to see that or whatever’, you know. It does stimulate your mind a bit more, doesn’t it?”

[Salisbury, Leisure]

“Well, it just calms you down and it’s nice to have a look at, it’s nice to see nice scenery. You know, as you get past Carlisle, it’s beautiful, absolutely beautiful. Yeah, I’d rather see the scenery personally.”

[Exeter, HGV]

I’m quite a confident driver, but I’ve never driven more than two hours because I just get bored of looking at the same scenery all that way and lose concentration. Some people who must be doing that as their commute and they’re like zombies and I think that’s why it’s dangerous on motorways.”

[Manchester, Leisure]

“It’s nice to have landmarks. There’s a place next to the M25 and they always put Santas on their roof at Christmas.”

[Epsom, Business]

However, this was balanced to some extent by awareness that it would be possible for such visual stimulus to become a distraction and therefore dangerous. In the Birmingham discussion group, participants were aware of advertising signs that fell into this category and as such were cited as an example of undesirable motorway landscape.

“It’s nice to have some good scenery but you don’t want anything too eye-catching, because you’re meant to be paying attention to the road.”

[Manchester, Leisure]

“One thing I don’t like on the elevated section of the M5 is those big flashing advertising signs, I think they are distracting. They are so big and bright, especially if the light is just going. They are so bright.”

[Birmingham, Leisure]

There is recognition among drivers that this can be a difficult balance to strike, although it is not a major issue for the majority. One important concern was however around roadside foliage, which must be well enough maintained to ensure that it does not represent a hazard for cyclists or obscure road signs.

“I never tend to notice until they have cut it back and then I think ‘oh God, that’s better’ but it didn’t occur to me that it was bad in the first place.”

[Manchester, Leisure]

7.2 Debris and litter

Participants tended to have little to say about debris and litter on the SRN since neither are regarded as a significant problem by motorists. They are unlikely to be mentioned spontaneously by drivers in the context of positive journey experiences but would become a negative influence if not removed quickly.

It is generally agreed that the only time that this becomes an issue is when it becomes a safety hazard. Debris is more of a concern than litter, especially items large enough to cause damage to a vehicle, or things that could potentially cause an accident in the event of drivers swerving to avoid them.

“On the M2, more often than not there’s bits of old tyre on the hard shoulder, bits of bumper and stuff like that, but it’s not something I’ve ever reported.”

[Ashford, Leisure]

Litter is disliked on the basis that road users considered it to be unsightly but it is generally not thought to be a problem. Some are aware that litter can accumulate in certain areas, especially in lay-bys and on roads near service areas but not to the extent that drivers feel this is a cause for concern. The only time that this was viewed more negatively was on a couple of occasions

when participants commented that major roads elsewhere in Europe were perceived to be kept cleaner and tidier.

This may be a good example of an area that is unlikely to be mentioned spontaneously by drivers in the context of positive journey experiences but would become a negative influence if debris and litter were not removed quickly.

“I think that the motorways are quite clean and there isn’t that much rubbish and debris laying on the roads, I would say the motorways are fairly clean.”

[Cambridge, Professional]

7.3 Summary of user needs: road environment

The needs hierarchy below demonstrates that most aspects of the road environment are not considered to be key issues for the majority of SRN users. It is worth noting that the position of litter removal (and landscape maintenance) in the hierarchy reflects the fact that none in this sample consider it to be a problem at the moment (although others may do).



8 Service areas

8.1 HGVs

Some HGV drivers avoid using Motorway Service Areas (MSAs) for a number of reasons. Some object to the prices charged for food and other items that they perceive to be unfairly inflated by these retailers to exploit the captive market. Some also consider MSAs to be variable in terms of their offer for HGV drivers, so it is unwise to generalise about them. HGV drivers will have certain brands that they prefer or avoid. MSAs that are especially disliked are those with facilities perceived to be inadequate for HGV drivers. Some mentioned that being unable to find space at certain MSAs is an increasing problem. There is a perception that foreign drivers are able to get first choice of spaces due to the nature of their work and shift patterns. A more irritating problem however is when HGV spaces are occupied by cars towing caravans, especially during the summer months.

“They are expensive but they have offers like free breakfast if you park for £25.”
[Manchester, HGV]

“You get bloody caravans parking in lorry spaces so you have nowhere to park. That winds me up.”
[Birmingham, HGV]

“You are hard pushed to find a place to sleep at a service station on the M1 because it’s full of foreigners. Their hours are sporadic so they might pull up at 2pm so by the time you get there it’s full of wagons from Poland.”
[Birmingham, HGV]

“For the amount of money we pay to park at a service station the car park is rubbish and there might be only one shower.”
[Birmingham, HGV]

“At a service station you pay £7.89 for a Burger King meal that is £5.50 on the high street. The food is rubbish there, we can’t get good quality food which is why we all end up big and have heart attacks.”
[Birmingham, HGV]

Some HGV drivers prefer to use truck stops rather than MSAs when there is a choice. These cater more specifically for HGV drivers and tend to be better equipped to meet their needs. There is also a view, although not shared by all, that truck stops are likely to be quieter and easier to get into when required (although this is likely to vary by location rather than being a generic truck stop benefit).

“Truck stops on A roads are few and far between now but the quality of food is better and you get showers whereas at motorway services there is just a toilet.”
[Manchester, HGV]

“A motorway service station is constantly being used. People come in and out so there is wagon noise. You don’t get that at a truck stop until the morning when people start rolling out.”

[Birmingham, HGV]

“Truck stops are better because the food is good and there are about 10 showers. That’s why it’s a truck stop, because it caters for trucks but service stations don’t.”

[Birmingham, HGV]

“To be honest, if I’m with my brother I don’t use motorway services because he’s a truck driver and we always go to truck stops which are a lot more friendly and reasonably priced. You might have to go half a mile or a mile off the motorway but it’s well worth it.”

[Darlington, Leisure]

The main concern identified during this research is the extent of overall provision, not just an inconvenience to HGV drivers but also causing great problems given working time regulation. This occasionally forces drivers to park in residential areas or lay-bys and this led to requests by some for continental-style lay-bys with picnic benches and toilet facilities.

“There’s not enough of them in this country. They’re not the same as in Europe, even lay-bys in Europe you can pull over and there’s toilet facilities, there’s showers and all sorts.”

[Ashford, HGV]

8.2 Others

Views among other road users are broadly consistent with those of HGV drivers in that MSAs are also acknowledged to be of variable quality. Some regard these facilities as an essential element of any long journey and look forward to stopping. In these instances, the MSA break will be regarded as an integral element of the journey and may represent the only part of it that is planned in advance. Others try to avoid using MSAs unless absolutely necessary. This may be due to a reluctance to pay the high costs associated with these outlets or based on dissatisfaction with previous experiences.

“People need a drink, but it’s off putting when you know if you go in there and have a sandwich, it’s just £10 gone.”

[Cambridge, Professional]

Reactions to MSAs are typified by a grudging acceptance of their presence serving a captive market of those making journeys on motorways who have minimal other convenient choices available. Notwithstanding these reservations, most are felt to fulfil the function they provide adequately but a number of specific issues were identified as priorities for future improvement, as follows:

- Levels of cleanliness could be improved (although some positive comments about newer facilities, especially on the M25)
- Never enough female toilets
- Clearer advance signposting of brands and outlets required (to facilitate decision making)

- Wider choice of MSA brands should be available (some positive comments received regarding an independent outlet in the style of a farmers' market)
- Some access / egress slip roads can be too short (for older or smaller cars)

“If you’re stuck in traffic it’s something to look forward to. I was in Cobham the other day which is great because you can have a Chinese, or Indian or whatever you want in there and there is loads of parking.”

[Epsom, Leisure]

“There’s never enough ladies toilets. They should have double the amount of ladies toilet because they always take longer, there’s always a queue in the ladies, especially when you take children in there as well.”

[Ashford, Leisure]

“Some of them say they’re KFC, McDonalds, Costa or whatever but others are just service stations and then you get there and it’s closed and there’s nothing there, there’s no toilets, it’s just a petrol station.”

[Cambridge, Leisure]

“There are some good ones. I get excited if there’s a Costa, it means I have a nice half hour.”

[Newcastle, Business]

“Cobham is more effective because it’s both sides of the road, so no matter which direction you’re going in you go to that one service station, so it’s a better experience, because they can centralise the staff and centralise the facilities. To be fair to Cobham, it’s quite reasonably priced, I was quite surprised. When you go to Clacket Lane, it costs a fortune to get a drink.”

[Birmingham, Leisure]

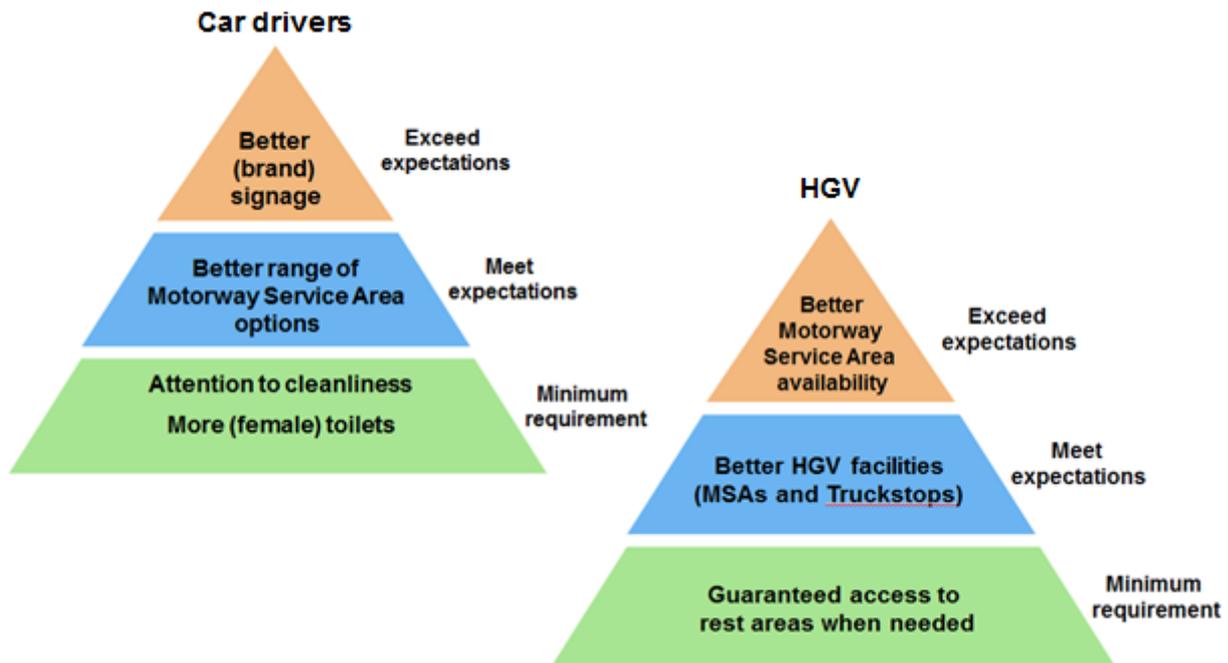
“There is one on the M40 where you have to come off the motorway and round the roundabout and over the top and you feel like you are in the back of beyond.”

[Epsom, Business]

These discussions tended to focus on motorway services since these tend to be a specific style of facility, as opposed to other parts of the SRN where a wider range of options is available. One comment here worthy of note is the view expressed by one of the disabled drivers about the lack of accessible facilities on A roads.

8.3 Summary of user needs: service areas

The needs hierarchies below demonstrate that HGV drivers have some important unmet needs in this area.



9 Disruption

9.1 Road works

Perhaps unsurprisingly, this was consistently identified as an important issue as all users of the SRN will have been affected by road works at some time. The strength of feeling on this subject indicates that it could be the subject of a dedicated project in its own right and it was not possible to cover all issues raised in detail in the context of this work. However, there was considerable consistency in terms of the key themes that emerged most frequently and these are outlined below.

It is important to acknowledge that most road users are pragmatic rather than negative about road works since the need for them is recognised. The main concerns raised relate to the perceived lack of efficient planning of road works rather than the fact that road works are frequently experienced when making journeys on the SRN.

There was some feeling among participants that SRN road works seem to occur more frequently now than has been the case in recent years. Although increased activity in this area may be welcomed in principle, this also adds to the inconvenience caused to journeys if experienced on a regular basis (especially among professional drivers and others using the SRN most frequently). This irritation is exacerbated by a common perception that road works seem not to be sufficiently well planned to minimise the disruption caused to road users. A number of areas were consistently identified during the course of the research that can be explained as follows:

- Some question why it is necessary for such long stretches of road to be coned off when road works are happening. All recognise this is to protect contractors from passing traffic, but this often does not correspond to areas where work seems to be taking place. There is a perception that the length of road affected correlates with the length of the delay caused to motorists so the claimed preference is to have shorter stretches of road coned off as and when needed.

“They take up loads of room. They seem to have cones absolutely everywhere along the side they are doing the work and when you finally get there it’s just for a tiny thing.”
[Epsom, Leisure]

“Why not do two miles then the next two miles rather than block it off from one junction to the next so you are sat in it for flipping hours?”
[Birmingham, HGV]

“It’s the way they do it, they just finish one bit and you don’t get time to appreciate it because they start another bit. You never see the benefits.”
[Newcastle, Business]

- The duration of works can be a separate issue that is unrelated to the length of road affected. Some claim to be unable to understand why sections of roads need to be closed for such long periods of time, especially when they have no understanding of the reason for the works and when there is no tangible benefit to users on completion.

“There seem to be a lot of road works around nowadays and they seem to last for months, which is quite frustrating.”

[Cambridge, Leisure]

“It can be a really minor thing and it causes so much disruption. They have closed a main road near to me at the moment and it has doubled if not tripled some people’s commute to work.”

[Manchester, Leisure]

“It’s the length of time they go on for. The ones on the M6 on the other side of Manchester are there until 2017.”

[Manchester, HGV]

- The lack of visible activity at areas of road works is a source of major irritation for many motorists and is naturally related to the previous two points. The general belief is that when a road needs to be partially closed to be maintained, work should be constantly ongoing in order to minimise the inconvenience to road users. It is widely felt to be unacceptable for nothing to be happening on a section of road with one or more lanes closed with no information or explanation provided.

“I hate how the average speed checks don’t change when no-one is working that day. There’s no-one around for miles so it’s quite unnecessary.”

[Epsom, Leisure]

“It irritates me when you never see a single person working on it and I never understand why they don’t do it 24 hours and get it done in much less time.”

[Epsom, Business]

“They have average speed cameras set up but you never see a workman in the road. It’s unbelievable.”

[Manchester, HGV]

Frustration around road works is therefore often made worse as a result of a lack of understanding of the need for the work in the first place and the way it is carried out among those affected. There is also a belief that the way road works are dealt with in the rest of Europe and the USA is better, with work conducted throughout the day and night to ensure the job is completed as quickly as possible in order to minimise the disruption for road users.

“They must be the best people to make the decisions and I don’t mind road works being done but why not let people know what improvements are being done so at least you know it will be better and it would be informative.”

[Epsom, Leisure]

“Why not work through the night? You go abroad and they’re working in the night. Maybe they have more money and the operatives but it would show they are getting the job done and it would be quicker.”

[Birmingham, Leisure]

“I drove trucks in America for a while and they have a law which is if you want to lay a road you have to do it at night and make sure the road is open by 7am.”

[Birmingham, HGV]

9.2 Delays

Delays fall broadly into two categories. Planned delays such as road works can be anticipated in advance and time can be allowed to take account of them. Unplanned delays are caused by unexpected events such as accidents and they are not possible to predict in advance.

Planned

Even for delays that are planned or known about in advance, the primary concern among motorists is the unpredictable impact they will have on overall journey times. This is especially felt to be the case since the scale of the works often seems not to relate to the length of the resulting delay. Major road works can be organised to ensure that traffic flows smoothly with minimal disruption and seemingly minor works can occasionally cause considerable problems. The timing and planning of road works can seem illogical to motorists and is often a source of frustration for them. Specific examples cited in this research were road works that start very soon after others in an adjacent section of the same road have finished, and work on roads leading to popular tourist destinations that always seem to happen all at once during the summer holidays.

“It just seems that sometimes things could be thought through a little bit better, like doing it through the night rather than during rush hour traffic.”

[Manchester, Leisure]

“They should give more consideration to the timing and execution of road works. I know it needs to be done but they always pull the M5 apart in the summer holidays. They seem to pick the worst time and don’t consider the impact.”

[Birmingham, Leisure]

In spite of minimal awareness of the role of the HA (as previously discussed), it is widely assumed that the planning of road works will be the HA’s responsibility. The majority therefore assume that this must be an area in which the HA have established expertise, which makes the problems identified above even more difficult to understand. Discussion of these issues in the groups often caused participants to speculate on the possible reasons for why the planning of road works seems to lack thought and strategy. Some assumed that as a government-funded agency, this could be due to a lack of resources, especially in the current climate of spending cuts and austerity. Another possible suggestion was that the annual budget for road works may need to be spent by a certain date in order to secure the same funding for the next year and this could be a possible explanation for multiple road works being conducted on the SRN at the same time and at the same time of year.

“I have got no reason to distrust the work the Highways Agency do and I assume they are the experts and manage it in the way that is most effective but I sometimes feel they couldn’t organise a p up in a brewery.”***

[Manchester, Leisure]

Unplanned

Unplanned delays can naturally be more disruptive to journeys than those that can be anticipated in advance. However, the attitude to them is very different since most participants are sanguine and accept that unforeseen events on the SRN are unavoidable. When discussed during the research, most talked about accidents and breakdowns with understanding and sympathy rather than irritation. When caught in this type of delay, most feel grateful not to be involved themselves rather than frustrated by the inconvenience of it.

Dealing with the causes of unplanned delays is generally regarded as an area of HA responsibility although views in this respect are not always positive. The main criticism is that the HA are often too slow to respond to incidents which means that the resulting disruption is often worse than it needs to be. Once on the scene, the perception is that the HA are inclined to over-react, probably as a result of needing to adhere to strict health and safety guidelines but then applying these too rigorously. Consequently, some feel that roads are often closed too easily as a precautionary measure and that once closed, the HA takes too long to re-open them.

9.3 Diversions

When prompted by the moderator during the discussion groups, this was not considered to be a frequent enough occurrence when making journeys on the SRN to have strong views on although the inconvenience of diversions when experienced is acknowledged by all.

“If they send you on a diversion, continue the diversion, don’t let the diversion run out and then you haven’t got a clue where you are. Sometimes you come off the motorway, they send you off through some town and then there’s no diversion signs.”

[Salisbury, Leisure]

“Road diversions, I’m on the A1 North an awful lot and it’s shocking, the amount of times I have to go by York and Doncaster and all sorts of interesting places.”

[Newcastle, Business]

However, this is an area of much bigger concern among HGV drivers than other user groups. This is due to the fact that many work at night when the SRN is less busy and when diversions are more likely to be in place. HGV drivers believe that the HA plan diversions with the needs of car drivers in mind and fail to give adequate consideration to the needs of HGV drivers that revolve around the practicalities of their vehicles. The main concern in this respect is that traffic following the diversion is often routed onto roads that are unsuitable for the dimensions of HGVs. There is also a feeling that some diversions seem to be longer than they need to be to avoid the section of road being worked on. An additional consideration for HGV drivers is that a lengthy diversion, or one that causes a long delay to their planned journey, could cause difficulties in terms of the hours they are able to work.

“They tend to set up diversions, if they put a diversion sign on, they disappear after the first one or two.”

[Exeter, HGV]

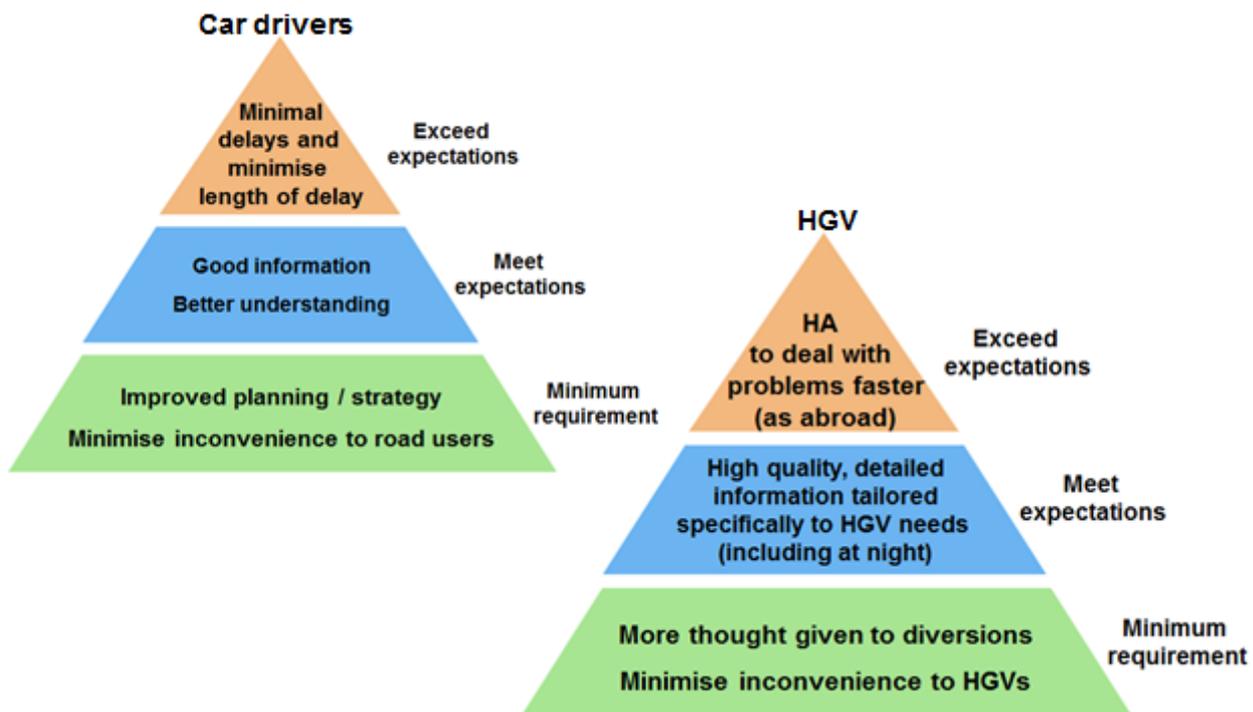
“The diversions they send you on, especially around blooming Lincolnshire, Jesus! They send you down little narrow roads and suddenly you’re confronted with a bridge because they haven’t thought about driving antics.”

[Manchester, HGV]

Overall however, this is not an issue that many participants in this sample had strong enough opinions on to be able to provide further details or firm conclusions on the basis of this work alone.

9.4 Summary of user needs: disruption

The dominant theme to emerge in this area is that a better appreciation of the issues around road works would be beneficial to all user groups. There are broadly similar needs across the spectrum of SRN users represented although there are some more specific requirements among HGV drivers, especially in relation to diversions. The needs in relation to delay and disruption can be summarised in the following hierarchies:



10 Information and signage

10.1 Fixed signs

Fixed signs are a familiar part of the SRN landscape and attitudes to them are very positive. There is never any doubt about the accuracy of the information that they convey and at an emotional level, can provide drivers with a sense of being in control. This is likely to be appreciated especially among Reluctants and others with lower levels of confidence, whereas their role is more likely to be regarded as being almost redundant among professional drivers and those with more experience of making journeys on the SRN.

Overall, fixed signage is generally perceived as playing a passive rather than active contribution to journeys, in that the information provided is unlikely to need a response from the driver (and in this respect could be ignored without having a significant impact on the journey outcome). Indeed, there is evidence to indicate that attitudes to this type of signage may be changing as a consequence of increasing exposure to alternatives that in comparison are perceived to be meeting drivers' needs at an enhanced level.

10.2 Variable Message Signs (VMS)

Attitudes to the concept of signage that allows motorists to be provided with variable rather than static information are overwhelmingly positive and VMS is therefore welcomed by all in principle. All are able to appreciate how the use of this technology represents a natural evolution in information delivery that provides an obvious benefit for all motorists. Even though still relatively new, there is evidence to suggest that drivers have come to rely on them as an indispensable source of advice that serves to enhance the overall quality of the journey experience.

“The information boards can be quite useful, when they say ‘16 minutes to junction 4 on the M11’ or whatever it is, or when they say ‘road closures ahead’ or ‘don’t use your phone while you’re driving’, you know, the information that they kind of throw up at you, that’s quite useful.”

[Cambridge, Leisure]

“What they get down south that we don’t get are those signs that tell you congestion is coming up and how long the delay will be. We don’t have many of them but they give you a chance to do something or at least to know what’s going on.”

[Newcastle, Business]

However, opinions were often somewhat divided in terms of the usefulness in practice of VMS across the sample. Leisure users and especially those with lower levels of experience and confidence tend to find the information provided by these signs most useful. This is on the basis that they tend to be making journeys on the SRN on a less frequent basis and therefore have no reason not to believe the messages shown. Others, while positive in principle, feel that the benefits of VMS are not always being delivered in practice. Those making more frequent journeys on motorways are more likely to distrust the information provided by VMS on the basis of their more regular exposure to it. There is a common perception that the details are not updated frequently enough for motorists to be sure they can rely on them. From experience, many will not use VMS information to inform decision making during a journey and question why

it is not possible for the signs to be updated in real time to allow drivers to have more confidence in them.

“They should have a real-time knowledge of the whole network with the infrastructure they have in place and they should be able to share that information freely and readily and they do in parts, sadly in parts.”

[Ashford, Leisure]

“Sometimes you’ll approach it and it’ll say ‘accident ahead’ and you’re thinking ‘well do I turn off and go another way’ and then you carry on and there’s nothing, there’s not even a sign of anything.”

[Exeter, HGV]

“I had an experience of a sign saying the A12 was closed when it wasn’t. It had been closed over-night and they reopened it, yet all the matrix signs were saying it was still closed.”

[Ashford, HGV]

“If there is a problem that has cleared it should say so. The problem is the person who is updating these bloody things isn’t updating them quick enough.”

[Birmingham, HGV]

Reactions to the different types of information provided suggest that it will not be possible to please all road users in terms of the content and level of detail available. However, the general consensus is that too much information is preferable to too little. Responses to some of the specific messages discussed during the discussion groups and accompanied journeys can be summarised as follows:

- *Notice of closure / disruption ahead*



- Helpful information if planning to use the A9
- But assumes knowledge of the road
- Aimed at HGV / professional drivers only?
- Junction numbers - or distance away - would be helpful
- Additional reference points required

“I like the ones telling you there is a queue after a junction because it gives you the opportunity to come off at the next junction and take an alternative route.”

[Epsom, Leisure]

“What cracks me up is on the M25, it’ll say ‘accident on the A525’, I don’t know what road that is. Whereabouts is that? Is that going to affect me? If someone’s going for a picnic for the day, they haven’t got a clue what that number means.”

[Cambridge, Professional]

“I think these signs are aimed at lorry drivers because we have the knowledge and know what roads they are on about.”

[Birmingham, HGV]

- Indication of typical journey time ahead



- Reassuring rather than helpful information
- Suggests no problems ahead
- Some disapprove of time indication
- Issues a challenge to beat 18 minutes!

“I find helpful if you are going somewhere and a sign does come up that says ‘Birmingham 50 miles, forty eight minutes’, that can be helpful.”

[Cambridge, Professional]

“I have heard one of my colleagues say that when she sees one of those signs saying so many minutes to the next junction she always does it quicker. It’s a bet for her that she can do it quicker than the time that comes up.”

[Birmingham, Leisure]

“I love it when I see those signs because it makes me think that the road must be clear, which is a good feeling.”

[Epsom, Business]

- Safety advisory message



- More mixed views on this type of information
- Welcomed due to safety implications
- But can feel patronising / didactic

“I think this type of sign is very helpful. It puts me at ease on the motorway just because it gives you more information about your journey.”

[Epsom, Leisure]

“I was driving on the M25 the other day and a sign said fog and I had my sunglasses on at the time which slightly concerned me and I thought ‘what am I about to drive into?’”

[Epsom, Business]

- Safety instruction



- Instruction rather than information
- Rationale understandable
- Welcomed among those who do not do this
- Ignored by those who do

“I saw a sign saying ‘think bike, think pedestrians’. All it’s telling you is the information that you should know about anyway. Obviously you are going to be careful of cyclists and pedestrians and stuff like that, you know, so it’s good information, but it’s not telling you what’s actually happening on the motorways.”

[Ashford, HGV]

The findings from this research therefore suggest there is a feeling of disappointment among SRN users that the benefits of VMS are not being delivered to their maximum potential on motorways (or at all on other roads). This is an area in which the HA is credited with providing innovation intended to improve journey experiences on the SRN for motorists but the lasting impression is less positive if the technology is failing to live up to the heightened expectations.

“If the motorway’s shut when you’re sat in a queue and you can’t go anywhere it’d be nice to know exactly how long they think it’s going to be. Is it going to be ten minutes, is it going to be two hours?”

[Exeter, HGV]

Reactions to examples of VMS information suggests that an opportunity may exist for these signs to be used to convey a variety of more positive messages to SRN users at regular points on their journey (especially if the intention of the HA is to attempt to establish relationships with them).

10.3 Smart motorways

The response to smart motorways among motorists is similar to the findings outlined above in relation to VMS. Overall, smart motorways are felt to be a positive initiative although the advantages of them are not yet well enough understood to be fully appreciated by all motorway users.

The key barrier to appreciation among motorists is a lack of awareness of the concept and where they are in operation. This can apply even to those who have frequent experience of driving on smart motorways. This is due to a common lack of understanding of how a smart motorway differs from a standard motorway. For example, there is uncertainty about the status of the M25. As previously reported, many consider the M25 to represent a separate category of motorway in its own right. Some therefore assume that the complexity and significance of the M25 mean that it is bound to be a smart motorway but are unsure how this is manifest. Others assume that the presence of VMS is enough to differentiate a smart motorway from those that are not smart but

most are equally unclear and uncertain about this. Smart motorways are therefore currently typified by a lack of understanding of what they are and how they operate.

When a brief definition of a smart motorway was introduced by the moderator, most participants were none the wiser but responded positively to the idea at a conceptual level. The introduction of smart motorways is assumed to be in response to the increasing volume of traffic using the SRN and therefore a sensible initiative that is welcomed by all. This is regarded as a positive example of forward (strategic) thinking by the HA and a measure that is likely to promote more effective traffic management in the future. However, it is then widely assumed that this represents a short term alternative to building additional lanes on existing motorways or new roads from scratch and as such is assumed to be an effective interim solution to an increasing problem. Those who are more knowledgeable and are aware of using smart motorways tend to feel they make a positive contribution to the journey experience, especially at busy times, although the impact is perceived to be compromised somewhat by drivers who are unsure how to behave when using them.

Invincibles and Cavaliers are more likely to understand the rationale of smart motorways and to claim that the rules that apply when driving on them are intuitive and obvious. These drivers accept that lower average speeds are likely to be a sensible and safe solution to traffic flow problems but can perceive this measure to be an over-reaction and may therefore feel that the recommended speed is unnecessarily slow. There is also widespread awareness among these types that average speed cameras are effective and represent a deterrent to speeding as drivers are more likely to get caught when using smart motorways.

“When you go down the hard shoulder because it’s open, people are still in lane one, two and three and not using the hard shoulder, because they don’t know anything about it. There’s no education, once you get your driving licence at 17, 18-years old, you’ve got licence until you’re 70. There’s no more education.”

[Ashford, HGV]

“The majority of the M6 going south is smart motorway and Leeds has got a lot better because it stops people flying and trying to cut you up.”

[Manchester, HGV]

“We’ve got major ‘spy’ roads around here with average speed cameras everywhere, so if I go to Manchester I’m guaranteed to hit at least two sets of average speed cameras and if you’re doing a lot of mileage you end up going to a speed awareness course.”

[Darlington, Leisure]

Concerns about using smart motorways are more apparent among Nostalgics and Reluctants. These admit to having lower levels of confidence when driving on motorways generally and are therefore more likely to be confused about how to behave on this different type of motorway. These drivers lack understanding of how a smart motorway works or how they are supposed to behave when driving on one and can be confused when variable speed limits apply. Perhaps more worryingly, one or two claimed to be unaware that the red cross displayed above the hard

shoulder means that this lane must not be used and assumed that this was advisory rather than mandatory information for road users.

“I find it quite confusing, coming onto the motorway when the hard shoulders are open, because it’s pointing you in one direction and other people are coming on to you and you haven’t got enough time to get onto the motorway.”

[Cambridge, Leisure]

“You need a different sign for when the hard shoulder isn’t open because the amount of people I’ve seen on the hard shoulder when it’s not open.”

[Birmingham, HGV]

A small number of participants felt that the impact of a smart motorway had been less positive. One or two claimed that certain sections of the M6 are now worse than before it became a smart motorway due to the belief that it is likely to promote dangerous driving, either as a result of harsh braking in an attempt to observe the variable speed limits that apply or due to a lack of understanding among motorists about how to behave. This underpins one of our core recommendations, the need for increased driver education to ensure that fundamental needs such as safety and efficient working of the SRN can be met.

“I don’t like fluctuating speeds on a motorway, I think it causes chaos because people panic and slow down.”

[Manchester, Leisure]

“People panic and slam their brakes on because you don’t want to get a fine and it has a knock-on effect, it’s like a concertina effect.”

[Epsom, Leisure]

“Sometimes they slow you down to 40mph when they would be better off leaving you alone. Between junction 10A and junction 4 it’s never been so bad since they put them stupid signs up. Every evening it’s gridlocked when it should be flowing perfectly.”

[Birmingham, HGV]

A small number are also concerned about what to do on a smart motorway in the event of a breakdown. It is possible that attitudes in this respect may be linked to those outlined above on the subject of VMS. If concerns about the safety of using the hard shoulder are supposed to be allayed by the presence of cameras that immediately close it in the event of a breakdown, it is reasonable to ask why it is not possible to use the same technology to ensure information displayed on VMS is always up-to-date and accurate.

“I think they are dumb rather than smart because I think the importance of keeping the traffic flowing has taken over from the safety of people and vehicles.”

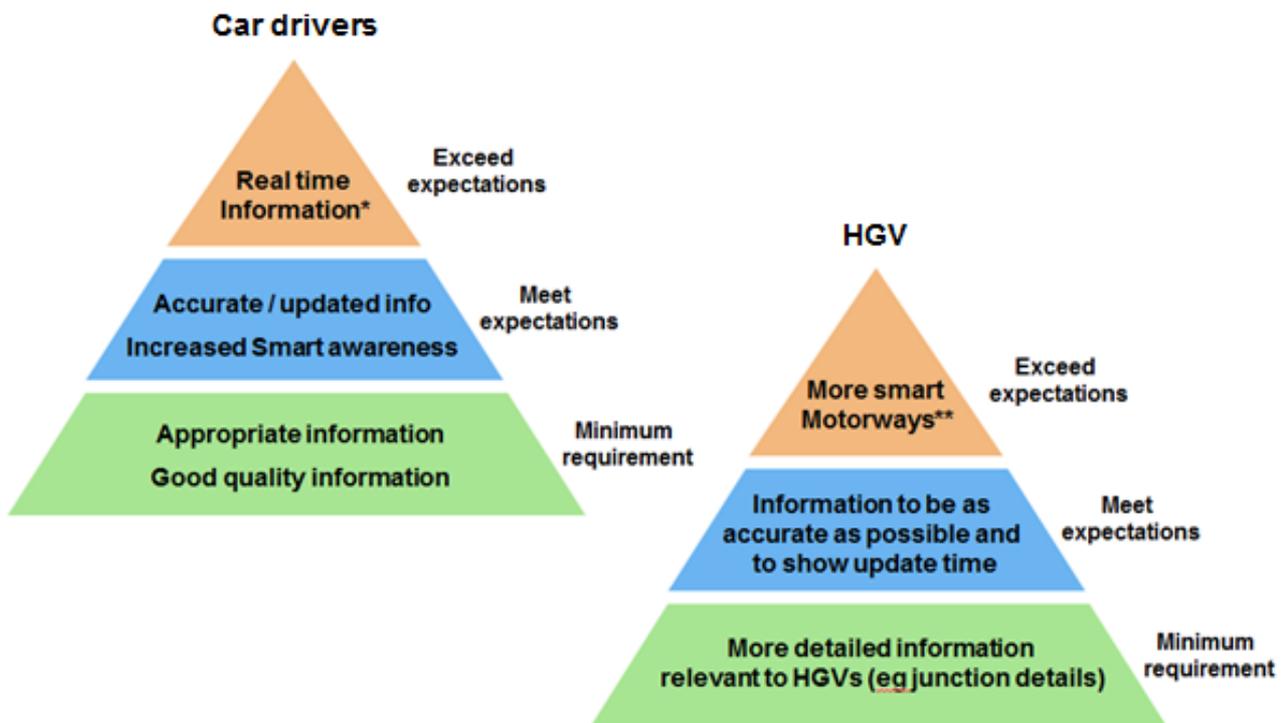
[Birmingham, Leisure]

“I’m just a bit wary of it. At the end of the day if someone breaks down there is nowhere to go. How do you get an ambulance through, that’s the problem, because you’ve got no hard shoulder, you’ve got no emergency lane. I don’t think we should lose hard shoulders.”

[Salisbury, Professional]

10.4 Summary of user needs: information and signage

The small number of unmet but critical needs in this area are all to do with reliability of information provided to drivers. HGV drivers would welcome more detailed information since they have a greater and more frequent need for it and would be able to decode it quickly, although this may be confusing for other road users. The needs in this area are closely linked to the issues identified in the previous section on delays and disruption.



*Having access to real-time information (through signage rather than a satnav or an app) is expected to be so unlikely to happen based on current VMS experiences that it would exceed expectations if provided.

**HGV drivers would like all motorways to be smart motorways due to the higher quality of information available to drivers compared to other roads on the SRN.

11 Safety

11.1 Weather

Poor weather conditions were highlighted as the most frequent cause of concerns about safety. The only exception to this was a small number of HGV drivers who claimed to enjoy the challenge provided by different conditions that can represent a relief from boredom that can be a feature of driving in normal conditions and provides drivers with an opportunity to test their skills. Otherwise, ice and fog are considered to be the most severe hazards likely to be encountered. Most acknowledge that the HA now tends to be proactive in gritting roads when icy conditions are forecast, although some feel that A roads are less likely to be treated than motorways.

“In bad weather I’m only concerned about car drivers because they will be the first ones to panic.”

[Birmingham, HGV]

In thick fog we will drive at 40-50 and Mr Sales Rep goes flying past at 90mph with the sidelights on so no-one can see him.”

[Manchester, HGV]

Rain is regarded as much less of a hazard but is experienced more frequently and can still be a cause for concern, especially among those with less confidence and experience of driving on the SRN. Apart from having to deal with reduced visibility and keeping the windscreen clear, a number of specific problems associated with driving in wet conditions were also identified. Many car drivers are concerned about overtaking HGVs even on dry roads but this is considered to be especially hazardous in wet weather. The spray from the tyres of a truck can reduce visibility to the extent that drivers feel they may as well close their eyes and hope for the best when overtaking. As previously explained, this is more of a problem on concrete surfaces. These safety fears are heightened by an awareness that some other drivers fail to adjust their driving to suit the weather conditions and there is minimal evidence of additional policing to enforce this. This exacerbates concerns about the risk of aquaplaning on wet surfaces and the longer braking distances that are required, which need to be heeded by all road users.

“That’s one thing that I’ve found, that I quite often have aquaplaned.”

[Ashford, Leisure]

“If there’s a torrential downpour and you have got your windscreen wipers going and you have to go past a lorry, there’s a couple of seconds where you might as well be driving with your eyes shut.”

[Manchester, Leisure]

“If it’s raining or it’s dark I don’t like driving. I would try and take the quieter, smaller roads, the long route because I feel uneasy about it. I think it makes other people more dangerous, people who are fast drivers anyway, won’t change the way they drive and they can slide.”

[Newcastle, Business]

“I don’t like being on the motorway when it’s pouring with rain and there are all those big lorries. I just feel my windscreen wipers don’t go fast enough.”

[Epsom, Leisure]

Respondents understand that little can be done by the HA to mitigate poor weather conditions (other than ensuring that gritting is proactive rather than reactive and that road surfaces are designed to drain adequately). Information has an important role to play and most are receptive to information about road conditions that will help them to drive safely. Only a minority consider this to be unnecessary and patronising (most likely to be Invincibles).

Now that variable speed limits are being introduced at various locations across the SRN, some motorists feel that a logical extension of their functionality would be to use this as a way to adjust the maximum limit according to road conditions (which could include allowing an increase when roads are clear and dry, at night for example). Some are aware that speed limits that are adjusted according to the weather conditions apply in France and other European countries and this is felt to be a sensible measure.

“French roads have variable speed limits in different weather conditions. They change it from 130kmh to 90kmh or whatever it is when it is raining, which is good.”

[Birmingham, Leisure]

11.2 Cameras

Attitudes expressed on the subject of cameras during this research were interesting and somewhat mixed. A commonly held view is that the primary role of cameras on the SRN is law enforcement rather than safety. Some claim that their main role is to generate revenue. A few even go so far as to suggest that the presence of safety cameras is unsafe because drivers tend to look for cameras rather than focus on the road and this can cause drivers to brake suddenly and heavily when approaching a camera and accelerate quickly away from them. There is also a feeling among those with higher confidence levels that safety cameras make others drive too slowly and defensively and this can be as unsafe in certain circumstances as driving above the speed limit.

“Do you know what, I reckon the speed cameras are a major cause of accidents. If someone who doesn’t know the road is doing 80 mile an hour and they see a speed camera and the person behind is doing 80 miles an hour, whether he’s left enough space or not, and the guy in front slams on his brakes, bingo, done.”

[Cambridge, Professional]

“I think many times when they change the speeds it’s a bit confusing; 60 then 50 then 40 and then 60 again. On the M62, you have to keep slowing down and speeding up. It’s confusing for people and then the cameras make people panic and slam on their brakes.”

[Newcastle, Business]

“At Launceston there’s a speed camera, if you’re coming down the hill it’s 50 miles an hour for lorries, 70 for cars, but the number of cars that come down the hill, see the camera and slam the brakes on and nearly cause an accident, because they don’t know what the speed limit is for the road. They see the camera and slam the brakes on.”
[Exeter, HGV]

More experienced drivers tend to believe that average speed check areas are more effective at promoting safe driving behaviour than isolated safety cameras. They tend to believe that they have a calming effect on traffic over long stretches of road by eliminating the causes of erratic driving behaviour. Some feel that the effectiveness of average speed checks used to monitor speeds through road works could be used more widely to enforce speed limits in other areas of the SRN.

“My pet hate is the average speed camera. They are damn well annoying because they are so effective. They used to be just in road works but they are becoming a permanent feature on the M3.”
[Epsom, Business]

11.3 HGVs vs others

In general HGV drivers regard their driving as safer than drivers of many other types of vehicles on the road. They consider that they are highly trained and proficient on the SRN as a result of the ongoing mandatory training requirement to maintain their licence. They highlight how they are constantly monitored and that they must drive their vehicles within more stringent speed limits on the SRN. HGV drivers also say they are monitored and receive feedback on the way they drive, and this all helps them improve their driving skills. Many are also car drivers and feel that helps them understand safety issues from the perspective of other types of road users.

HGV drivers consider that many other drivers are less skilled and in the discussions provided a number of examples to demonstrate that car drivers are less safe when driving on the SRN. Some HGV drivers are especially concerned about the presence of cyclists and pedestrians on A roads and one or two feel that a minimum speed for cars should apply on motorways, perhaps set at 56 miles per hour (the maximum speed that HGVs are restricted to).

“I think the only thing that’s dangerous is when you get cars doing 50 miles an hour on the motorway, that’s dangerous.”
[Exeter, HGV]

“If people left gaps and were a bit more considerate it would be great but car drivers don’t, they are bumper to bumper.”
[Manchester, HGV]

“When the road goes down to one lane, Mr Idiot is still doing 60mph two feet from the last cone and cuts in front of you with 44 tonnes on the move.”
[Manchester, HGV]

“90 per cent of wagon drivers are pretty courteous, especially to other wagons. We let another wagon in and make room for another wagon but car drivers don’t [care].”

[Manchester, HGV]

“I think car drivers should have to do some sort of education like we have to do because the education of car drivers is so poor, it’s unbelievable.”

[Birmingham, HGV]

“Car drivers will sit in the middle lane doing 40mph and we are in a wagon keeping left. You shouldn’t be going slower than a wagon on a motorway so if a car is doing less than 56mph they should be pulled in.”

[Birmingham, HGV]

11.4 Others vs HGVs

For many car drivers HGVs are a major cause of concern. They sometimes talk about car drivers and HGV drivers as a ‘them and us’ situation. Much of the negativity expressed towards HGVs relates to a perception of vulnerability among car drivers rather than concerns about HGVs being driven unsafely. A few car drivers in the discussion groups recounted ‘terrifying’ experiences of being ‘boxed in’ by HGVs or other forms of ‘aggressive’ behaviour from HGV drivers. This emotional language seems to be related at least in part to a lack of understanding of how HGVs operate. For example, many are unaware of the speed restrictions that apply to HGVs.

“I was once in a Toyota Yaris and I was I felt like an ant that was about to be trodden on because there was one at the front, one at the back and one at the side and I thought ‘Oh my God, I’m going to be squished.’”

[Birmingham, Leisure]

The most frequent causes of concern are:

- HGVs tailgating at high speeds
- HGVs performing lengthy manoeuvres when overtaking which can cause traffic problems and delays, especially when it prevents cars from overtaking at higher speeds.
- HGVs travelling in lengthy convoys which prevent car drivers from cutting into spaces in between them, especially on the approaches to motorway junctions.
- foreign HGVs using the SRN. This is not so much to do with concerns about the quality of driving but more about the fact that the visibility from a left-hand drive vehicle is likely to be compromised (and therefore less safe).
- those who are most concerned about sharing the road with HGVs would like to see some restrictions imposed in relation to the hours or days they are allowed to use the SRN, as was occasionally thought to be the case in some other countries.

“On a dual carriageway like the A14 it can literally take 20 minutes for trucks to overtake and you are stuck behind them.”

[Birmingham, Leisure]

“The majority of the accidents that you see on the A14 involve a lorry and I would say that most of the time it’s a foreign lorry driver.”

[Cambridge, Professional]

“All the foreign lorries, they don’t indicate, they don’t know where they’re going, they don’t care if they’re in the wrong lane, they just pull out, they pull over.”

[Ashford, Leisure]

“Most of the lorries are foreign which means their steering wheel is on the other side so they can’t see you.”

[Epsom, Leisure]

11.5 Bad behaviour

Many participants talked about other drivers’ bad behaviour. Virtually no one is prepared to admit to their own actions being a safety risk. There is widespread agreement about the most common examples of bad driving:

- using a mobile phone (either making a call or texting) especially at high speeds
- applying make-up while driving
- looking in the rear-view mirror for reasons not related to driving
- failing to observe speed limits
- frequent lane switching or weaving between lanes and around other vehicles in order to gain a small advantage, especially in fast-moving traffic
- middle/outer-lane ‘hogging’ (driving in a middle/outer-lane when there are no vehicles on the inside)
- tailgating at any speed (driving too close to the vehicle in front to allow adequate space for braking)
- driving in a way that indicates insufficient control of the vehicle– often something associated with drivers that are seen as too elderly or infirm
- ignoring any other rules or warnings.

“You see idiots on their phones, not looking where they’re going or doing their make-up, in the middle lane on the M6 in slow moving traffic.”

[Ashford, HGV]

“They bring in laws for no mobile phones, no undertaking, no hogging the middle lane, but you don’t see anybody getting done for it.”

[Ashford, HGV]

You see people on the phone, having a drink, reading the paper, putting make-up on, we see it every day.”

[Manchester, HGV]

“There are a lot of people on their phones still, a lot of people. I’ve seen people reading maps and books, and I’m thinking ‘what are you doing, putting make up on?’”

[Darlington, Leisure]

“What I hate most on motorways is that people don’t seem to understand lane discipline, so they think it’s a slow lane, medium lane and fast lane and it isn’t. It’s a lane and some overtaking lanes, so once you’ve overtaken, you move back in and it really annoys me that people don’t seem to get that if the traffic constantly goes like that, as it’s going forward we’d all get everywhere much more quickly.”
[Cambridge, Leisure]

“One of the things that does freak me out on motorways is when people just sit in the middle lane.”
[Manchester, Leisure]

“I really hate being tailgated, it really annoys me when you’re doing 80 miles an hour and they’re three feet behind you, because you know they can’t stop, if you have to break for any reason they’re going to hit you for sure.”
[Cambridge, Leisure]

“I think the worst thing you could do is get behind someone and travel at speed, you need to be able to move, basically, don’t you? You’ve just got to make sure you leave enough space, that’s the biggest thing for me.”
[Cambridge, Professional]

“I know this sounds horrible and I love elderly people but I don’t think they should be allowed to drive on the motorway. They just go so slow, bless them, they don’t go anywhere fast.”
[Epsom, Leisure]

Bad driving is seen by participants as likely to compromise safety on the roads. Many of the examples cited by participants illustrate the view that other drivers see the rules of the highways as being “soft laws” and further that they are not sufficiently enforced by the authorities. Some also consider that these examples of bad driving demonstrate a need for better education, especially for motorway driving. This was seen as a particular issue in regard to middle-lane hogging and frequent lane switching.

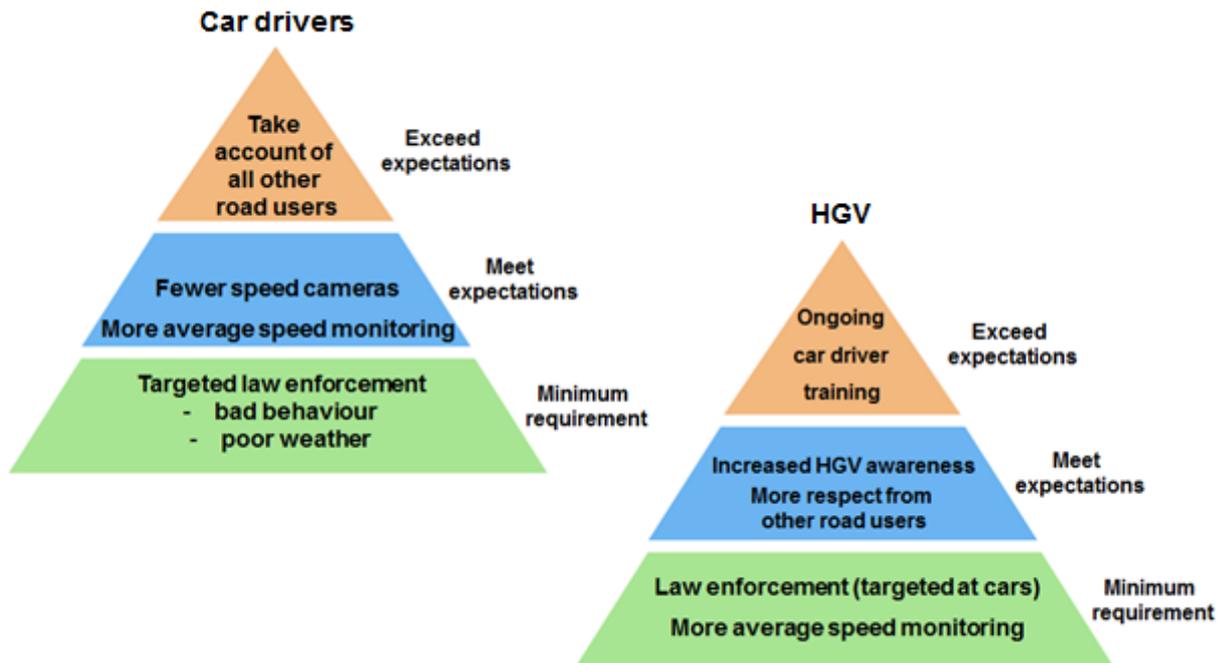
“A Highways Officer should have more power to get people to pull over and tell them when they are doing something wrong.”
[Birmingham, HGV]

“I think the HA should do more to teach people to use the inside lane when they aren’t overtaking. Drivers in Europe are much better educated on that.”
[Birmingham, Coach driver]

“The Highways Agency could track bad behaviour with their cameras and let the police know. It should be a joint thing.”
[Newcastle, Business]

11.6 Summary of user needs: safety

There is universal agreement that safety has to be the main priority when making journeys on the SRN. In spite of the differences between them, there are also some similarities between HGV drivers and others in terms of what is required in order to achieve and enhance this, especially in the areas of enforcement and improved levels of empathy between different road user groups. Given the apparent difficulty associated with enforcing some of these rules, it may be that an initiative to make certain driving behaviours socially unacceptable is required.



12 Segment specifics

12.1 Coach drivers

Coach drivers are broadly similar to HGV drivers in terms of their experience and confidence in relation to the SRN. In terms of the characteristics, attitudes and experiences, they display more similarities to HGV drivers than other road user types. They recognise that their ongoing training makes them especially well equipped to deal with driving on the SRN (and all other roads) and have similar views about the lack of respect shown to them by the majority of car drivers. Like HGV drivers, they too are often also car drivers so feel they are able to appreciate issues from this point of view too.

Uniquely however they say they need to think on behalf of their passengers when planning and making journeys on the SRN. This was most evident in the following areas:

- Like HGV drivers, they are aware of the differing quality of road surfaces but do not consider this to be an issue that affects them personally. Instead, they are more conscious about the way in which this might impact on the ride quality for their passengers and how this affects perceptions of their passengers overall levels of satisfaction with the journey experience.
- They have similar views in relation to the SRN landscape. This is not an important enough consideration to influence their choice of route but they are aware that this is something that is likely to be of greater importance to passengers than themselves when driving.
- Coach drivers have similar view about MSAs as HGV drivers but need to use them more frequently for the benefit of their passengers. Although decisions about which outlet to visit are likely to be subject to individual preferences, there are certain considerations that are likely to apply to all. One of the key issues in this respect is the need to plan visits in advance to maximise the time efficiency of the break in the journey, so ease of access (from the road) is more important than for those who visit MSAs less frequently. The facilities available are also an essential consideration since they must be able to cater for the needs of a large number of passengers rather than the coach driver personally.

“The smoothness of the road is important for passengers because it makes it a more pleasant journey for them and it’s nice for them to have some scenery to look at on the motorways.”

[Birmingham, Coach driver]

“I have to use service stations a lot but I don’t like the fact that you can’t get a decent meal at most of them now and I always think the staff could be friendlier.”

[Birmingham, Coach driver]

“There are some services I won’t use and others that I will [because they] have great facilities and toilet areas so I build it into the journey. I want to use services that are in the direction of travel, I don’t want to be coming off and going round a roundabout.”

[Manchester, Coach driver]

Coach drivers are equally positive about the concept of smart motorways as HGV drivers and also think that VMS could be used more effectively than is currently the case. They welcome these and any other initiatives that will improve the efficient management and running of the

SRN but also feel that this needs to be coupled with enhanced awareness and education for other road user groups.

“I’m aware of smart motorways and variable speed limits and using the hard shoulder but I think there are people who haven’t been on a motorway for a long time and think ‘What’s all this?’ so I think more education is a big thing.”

[Birmingham, Coach driver]

12.2 Motorcyclists

Motorcyclists are less concerned about some issues that are important to other road users such as traffic volumes, congestion, delays, information, signage, etc, since much of this will not affect them and the way they use the SRN. Instead, they are much more focused on a number of specific safety concerns that are relevant to them as vulnerable road users, especially given the speed that they can be travelling at on the SRN compared with local roads.

The quality of roads therefore tends to be the primary concern for motorcyclists. Any irregularities in the road surface can represent a hazard and potholes and bumps can be especially dangerous, so motorcyclists attach even greater priority to the way in which roads are repaired and maintained than other users. The road surface is a more important issue for them compared to other user groups. It has more serious implications for their safety, rather than simply having an impact on perceptions of the comfort of the ride. As previously indicated, the main problems in this area for motorcyclists are newly laid tarmac which can lack grip and is therefore preferred when it is older and has become slightly worn, and road markings which can become slippery in wet weather.

“Potholes and bumps in the road can make motorcyclists lose control. Motorways are better than A roads and most roads outside Kent are better.”

[Ashford, Motorcyclist]

“The quality of roads is important because you are always having to dodge pot holes. New tarmac and road markings can be slippery so I always prefer to ride on dry roads.”

[Birmingham, Motorcyclist]

“There are more hazards to look out for on a motorbike. Pot holes are obviously a problem but even white lines can be slippery in the wet and sticky when it’s hot, especially on A roads.”

[Birmingham, Motorcyclist]

Other issues that are a particular concern for motorcyclists when making journeys on the SRN, identified during this research, are as follows:

- the difficulties associated with driving in poor weather conditions can be amplified for motorcyclists
- icy roads are obviously a particular hazard for a motorised vehicle with only two wheels but too much grit on the road can also be bad for motorbikes
- even the smallest pieces of debris or litter can be dangerous, especially if driven over at speed

- good lighting is felt to be essential in order to maximise the visibility of motorcyclists to other road users.

“Sometimes the lighting isn’t good enough and at other times it can be dazzling so both can make conditions feel even less safe for motorcyclists.”

[Ashford, Motorcyclist]

“Any type of litter can be dangerous if you are on a bike. You always have to look out for rubbish after you pass a McDonalds or anything like that.”

[Ashford, Motorcyclist]

“The lighting on A roads needs to be improved because I am always conscious about being as visible as possible to other motorists.”

[Birmingham, Motorcyclist]

12.3 Cyclists

This is the most vulnerable of the SRN users represented in the research so it is understandable that in these interviews cyclists tended to focus on their safety concerns. They dislike sharing roads with drivers who are perceived to be inconsiderate and insensitive to the needs and requirements of cyclists which are felt to be very different from those of other user groups.

“I will use any road I’m allowed to but I sometimes feel unsafe on dual carriageways because of the volume of traffic and the speed it travels at.”

[Birmingham, Cyclist]

“Motorists are obnoxious and pay no attention to cyclists because they perceive us to be a nuisance.”

[M25 area, Cyclist]

“Cars turn left and don’t look down their inside so as a cyclist I feel like I always need to be driving for them.”

[M25 area, Cyclist]

“You can cycle on the A66 but I wouldn’t, it’s far too dangerous. There’s little stretches where you think ‘I’ve got to get from there to there’ and you’ve got to go over it or go down a little bit and cut across it and it’s scary, it really is scary.”

[Darlington, Leisure]

As a vulnerable user group, some of their concerns are similar to those of motorcyclists. The issues previously highlighted in relation to road quality and debris apply equally if not more so to cyclists. Naturally the specific dangers identified in relation to motorways do not apply to cyclists but they are nevertheless very conscious of the hazards associated with travelling in close proximity to other fast moving traffic on major A roads.

“There are a lot of pot holes and occasionally I have had to stop to allow traffic to pass before I can continue.”

[M25 area, Cyclist]

“When there are cycle lanes you have to look out for drains and potholes. At other times you are in the gutter and cycling through sharp stones and other debris.”

[Salisbury, Cyclist]

The primary requirement for cyclists is therefore to have adequate protection, ideally via the means of dedicated cycle lanes that are clearly marked in order to provide effective segregation from all other traffic (and especially HGVs). These need to be well maintained to ensure they are kept free of pot holes and debris which are especially hazardous for cyclists and difficult for them to avoid. For the same reason, cycle lanes must not have drain covers in them but it is also essential for them to have adequate drainage to keep them as dry as possible and to avoid the possibility of pools of water accumulating.

“There needs to be better provision for cyclists with lanes that we don’t have share with motorbikes and other vehicles.”

[M25 area, Cyclist]

“I would like to see more cycle lanes but most of the roads round here aren’t wide enough for cyclists to share with others.”

[Salisbury, Cyclist]

“Drainage can be a problem because the water goes to the edge of the road and it’s not pleasant to have to cycle through a foot of water.”

[M25 area, Cyclist]

Two specific issues were also identified that are more likely to affect cyclists who are confined to using the outer edges of the roads they use. Roadside foliage needs to be attended to frequently enough to ensure it does not encroach into the road space (or cycle lane). Good visibility is also important from a safety perspective so there is some feeling that lighting on the sides of roads rather than in the centre of them is preferable for cyclists.

“Overgrown shrubbery at the side of the road can force you into the main flow of traffic.”

[M25 area, Cyclist]

“I won’t go out at night on my bike because the lighting on most of the roads is inadequate so I don’t feel the visibility is good enough for me and for others to be able to see me.”

[Birmingham, Cyclist]

“My main issue is that the lighting is positioned for motorists because it doesn’t light the sides of the road which makes it even more dangerous for cyclists.”

[Salisbury, Cyclist]

12.4 Novice drivers

The Novice drivers in this sample admitted to feeling nervous about motorway driving. They feel that the driving test is not considered to be adequate preparation for driving circumstances that are very different to those experienced on other roads. They are more likely to feel intimidated by the behaviour of more confident typologies (Invincible and Cavalier) and also of other vehicles.

Consequently, the safety concerns discussed previously that apply to other drivers tend to be amplified for novices.

“I get nervous if I have to do an unfamiliar journey on a road I haven’t used before and I feel like I need to be more aware on dual carriageways because I find them a bit daunting.”

[Birmingham, Novice]

“Yesterday I had an accident on the way home from work and I’m still shaken up from it so I couldn’t think of going on a motorway or anything, I’m just very nervous at the minute.”

[Manchester, Novice]

“The thing I dislike most about driving on the main roads is when motorcyclists weave in and out of the traffic because it makes me feel unsafe.”

[Cambridge, Novice]

“In Kenya, HGVs can only use the roads early in the morning and late at night and I think it would be good idea to do something similar here too.”

[Cambridge, Novice]

“You need your full attention on the road because people keep cutting in front of you and there’s loads going on so you need to have eyes in the back of your head.”

[Manchester, Novice]

“I don’t drive fast and I sometimes get a bit mixed up with the speed limits on different roads so I would rather go slower to be sure I’m not speeding.”

[Manchester, Novice]

The fact that these drivers feel unprepared for motorway driving is compounded by their general lack of driving experience on any roads. Since novice drivers are most likely to fall within the Reluctants segment, planning journeys in advance is more important for them than most other user groups. Route planning is especially important for unfamiliar journeys and novices may even be inclined to travel only when they can be sure that they will avoid the busiest times.

“I won’t use a diversion unless I have absolutely no choice because I don’t feel confident about driving on roads that I am not familiar with.”

[Birmingham, Novice]

Even with careful planning, driving on motorways can be intimidating for novices who are more likely than others to need constant reassurance during the course of their journeys. Information and signage therefore plays a more important role for novices. Information provided by fixed signs that many others consider to be redundant is likely to be more useful to novices and welcomed by them. As reported, all user groups are concerned by the behaviour of other drivers but this is especially true for novices who feel their own safety is compromised, even by other car drivers. As inexperienced drivers, they generally claim to adhere rigidly to the rules of the road and would therefore like to see these more strictly enforced than currently appears to be the case for others.

“I rely on road markings to show me where the lanes are so I don’t like it if they are faded or confusing. I also need roads to be well lit at night because it makes me feel safer.”
[Birmingham, Novice]

“I think chevrons on the road are good idea to remind people to keep a safe distance but the problem is that people just ignore them.”
[Cambridge, Novice]

“I would like more signs because if I am unsure or hesitant it would be reassuring because sometimes when I need to come off the motorway I miss the turning.”
[Manchester, Novice]

“I like it when there’s [more] traffic on the motorway because it slows everything down and you don’t have cars switching lanes all around you at 70mph.”
[Manchester, Novice]

12.5 Older drivers

Some of the views of older drivers were very similar to those expressed by novices but clearly they also have the benefit of experience. The attitudes of those aged over 65 are therefore influenced by a combination of wisdom and increasing cautiousness as they get older. Older drivers are often able to adopt a more relaxed approach to journeys on the SRN most of which are exclusively for leisure purposes and are less likely to be time-critical. This removes some of the stress associated with motorway driving and is consistent with the natural inclination among this group to take their time and drive more slowly and carefully. Older drivers are also more likely to plan to make journeys at times when roads will be less busy than most other user groups.

“When other people drive much too fast and cut in in front of me I don’t get upset now and try not to respond.”
[M25 area, Older]

“The main thing that worries me is the way that other people drive, especially on motorways. I think a lot more people would benefit from going on one of those speed awareness courses.”
[Cambridge, Older]

These motorists are conscious of considerable changes in relation to the SRN they have observed over their lifetime, especially in terms of the volume of traffic now using the roads and the fact that other drivers seem to be much more impatient. They are also aware of recent changes that impact on the overall motorway driving experience. Smart motorways are the most obvious example of this but other features such as VMS and motorways with more than three lanes can be difficult for motorists in this group to adapt to. Drivers in this group may sometimes prefer to avoid motorway driving and to more actively consider using other modes of transport, such as rail for long-distance journeys.

“The M25 is wider but people drive badly and now you are allowed to undertake I am much more cautious.”

[M25 area, Older]

“I’m good at observing speed limits which is just as well now that there are more average speed check areas.”

[M25 area, Older]

“I drive to Brighton all the time but for longer distances I now prefer not to go by car.”

[M25 area, Older]

12.6 Disabled drivers

Only three interviews were undertaken with disabled drivers. However, they all expressed concern about feeling more vulnerable than other road users if there were delays on the SRN or if they were to break down when making journeys on the SRN.

“If I have to be at an appointment I get really stressed if I think I will be late so if the weather is bad I will leave more time or cancel it until another time if I can.”

[Manchester, Disabled]

“I prefer to drive at night because the roads are well lit and they are also much quieter so I find that makes driving much less stressful.”

[Cambridge, Disabled]

“I like the idea of driving on smart motorways because it makes me feel safer than driving on other roads to know that they are constantly monitored.”

[Birmingham, Disabled]

Careful planning of trips, availability of service stations and access to all the facilities on offer are important priorities for this group. Better signage is also required to help them navigate and use the facilities at service stations.

“If the journey is more than two hours, I will plan to stop every half hour in case I need to use the toilet so I use service stations a lot but find them expensive so we usually take our own food with us.”

[Birmingham, Disabled]

“The only problem with driving at night is that if I need to stop at a service station or somewhere, not all of them have 24 hour disabled access and I have found that some of the staff at them are not trained to deal with disabled people.”

[Cambridge, Disabled]

“The service stations on A roads need to be upgraded to the same standards as the ones on motorways so I know that if I stop they will have accessible toilets.”

[Cambridge, Disabled]

There was also a feeling that smart motorways can be confusing (although there is not sufficient evidence to suggest that this is more so than for certain other user groups). This is especially in relation to the use of the hard shoulder to improve traffic flow at busy times which from the perspective of one of the disabled motorists should be reserved for emergency use only.

“I find them confusing to know what speed I should be travelling at and I don’t like being able to use the hard shoulder. I think that should be reserved for emergency use only.”
[Cambridge, Disabled]

“I haven’t been on a motorway where you can use the hard shoulder but I don’t think it sounds like a very good idea. The hard shoulder is there for a reason so I don’t think I would use it.”
[Birmingham, Disabled]

Conclusions

1 Strategic Road Network

This research has highlighted that road users are unaware of the term “SRN” and that they have difficulty identifying what roads are covered by the SRN. In addition road users have little understanding of who manages the SRN. While there is some awareness of the Highways Agency, their role and responsibilities are not widely understood. There is also little sense that road users see themselves as customers of the Highways Agency.

Road users do however have a clear idea of what makes a positive or negative experience on the network. A sense of feeling in control is critical to a positive experience and when drivers feel that they are less in control this leads to a much more negative experience.

Aspects of the road network and other drivers’ behaviour can affect drivers’ perceptions of how in control they feel. This has a number of implications for actions that the Highways Agency may take to build road users satisfaction with the network.

That said, the majority of SRN users are broadly happy with the majority of their journey experiences now, but they do have expectations that the experience could be improved in some areas.

2 Driver mentality

The research has identified some interesting findings in relation to the mentality and behaviour of road users, especially when driving on the SRN. There is evidence to suggest that the mindset adopted by many is currently not promoting an attitude that is likely to results in positive journey experiences and safest practices, including:

- heightened levels of competitiveness and impatience
- lack of consideration for other road users
- absence of mutual respect and understanding.

Many are intolerant of behaviour in others that they often admit to themselves. This can cause people to behave in an uncharacteristic manner and to drive in a way that causes the safety of themselves and other road users to be compromised (especially at the speeds often associated with the SRN).

It may therefore be helpful to consider initiatives that are intended to promote better driver behaviour and tolerance in future. This could include:

- Exploring how VMS could be used to encourage/reinforce positive driving behaviour
Campaigns to encourage zip / late merging for converging lanes of traffic, as used in some other countries, in an attempt to address driver irritation at those who are not prepared to give way to others

Road users do not currently perceive themselves to be customers of the Highways Agency. That there is not perceived to be a relationship is likely to impact on levels of trust that drivers have in the SRN, with potentially important implications for how these roads and journeys on them are perceived.

At a macro level, this is important to the way in which the Highways Agency is regarded since it is responsible for the efficient running of the SRN (see below). At a micro level, there are number of ways in which a lack of trust may affect drivers' views and experiences and may therefore benefit from stronger relationships including:

- low inclination to use the HA website (versus others) as a way to obtain helpful journey-related information
- uncertainty about choice of road surfacing and the safety implications of decision making in this area
- lack of understanding of how (or whether) road works are planned
- low inclination to believe much of the information that is displayed on VMS
- scepticism over the role and purpose of speed / safety cameras
- dissatisfaction with diversion planning (among HGV drivers especially)
- lack of respect for the role of Traffic Officers

3 Needs hierarchy summary

The research has identified a number of needs hierarchies that relate to various aspects of SRN usage and journey experiences and that are split between HGV drivers and all other user segments. We suggest that these can be distilled to produce a needs hierarchy that applies to all road users as follows:



4 Safety

- Safety is the most fundamental need of all user groups.
- This will apply to all motorists for all journeys on all roads but is especially important for journeys made on the SRN due to the additional element of risk often associated with driving on these roads.
- In the most basic terms, few would be prepared to continue making journeys on the SRN if the perceived level of risk attached to those journeys is not considered to be acceptable.
- Those with low levels of confidence can have safety concerns about driving on motorways especially and therefore avoid using them or are only prepared to do so at certain times.
- Even those with high levels of confidence can readily identify driving behaviour in others that they consider to represent a safety risk to the extent that some journeys can feel unsafe.
- This work included only drivers who use the SRN. It is highly possible that there are other motorists who currently choose not to make journeys on the SRN for reasons that are directly or indirectly related to safety concerns about using these roads.

5 Efficient running of the SRN

- SRN users evaluate journey experiences in terms of how the SRN performs against their expectations.
- On a range of areas covered in this research they have expectations about the management of the SRN and have expressed concerns that the running of the SRN could be more efficient. This is particularly the case with the management of planned delays, such as roadworks. Here they feel that the Highways Agency should be more strategic in their planning of roadworks to cause less disruption during summer periods. They would also like to feel that the Highways Agency is trying to minimise delays where roadworks are in place, and feel that current arrangement could be more efficient.
- Some users feel that there are certain aspects of the SRN that do not currently run efficiently enough but are nevertheless prepared to continue making journeys by road rather than considering other modes as an alternative.

6 Trusted information

- Access to high-quality information is universally considered to be important particularly when the SRN does not perform to expectations
- SRN users do not always trust the information that is available to them
- SRN users want information that helps them feel in control and helps them make appropriate decisions. When information is limited or difficult to understand SRN users feel let down.

- Making drivers more aware of the technology that is available could help to address some of the dissatisfaction associated with disruption and delays.
- Ensure that drivers have access to the best quality information possible during the course of their journeys. All understand why occasional delays to journeys are unavoidable but most find it less easy to accept that information provided about the nature of these delays is inaccurate or not sufficiently up to date.

7 Training

- Everybody tends to have their own views on driver training. HGV and coach drivers were positive about the CPC training they received on an ongoing basis and felt other road users would benefit from additional training
- Other road user groups also recognised that a need for training or information to help update drivers' skills and fill knowledge gaps. This is particularly in relation to good motorway driving and recent developments such as the operation of smart motorways
- Many are unaware of how the SRN is evolving to include smart motorways. This lack of familiarity can cause discomfort among certain driver types but the lack of understanding of the basic functionality of these roads may represent a serious safety risk.