



Highways England
The Cube
199 Wharfside Street
Birmingham
B1 1RN

Guy Dangerfield
Transport Focus
3rd floor, Fleetbank House
2-6 Salisbury Square
London
EC4Y 8JX

Dear Guy,

Incidents and roadwork; a road user perspective

Since Transport Focus published the above report, we've been engaging with you on the topics of incidents and roadworks, and building the results of these conversations into our customer service strategic plan, which we recently published. Now is an opportune time for us to pull the results of this engagement together into a response to the report itself.

To frame our response we have set it out as follows:

- our overarching ambition for roadworks and incidents, as set out in our strategic customer plan;
- our strategic intent relating to the different recommendations of the report;
- specific actions we have taken and will take under each recommendation.

Our ambition for managing incidents better and creating a better roadworks experience.

As stated in our strategic customer plan, our ambition is to make a step change in how we manage incidents, by improving how we return the network to normal running, reduce delays and minimise any impact on our customers.

We want our roadworks to be safe and efficient and, in customers' eyes, to feel proportionate to the work taking place and the benefits being delivered. We want our customers to trust the information we provide and be aware of the improvements the roadworks will give them.

Traffic information is also referenced heavily throughout the Incidents and Roadworks report, and our ambition is to create a step change in the provision of traffic information by using insight from customers and stakeholders. We will address existing "pain points" in information accuracy by delivering the basics consistently, ensuring that services are available when, where and how customers want them.

Overarching recommendation and recommendation 1

The report's overarching recommendation, and specific recommendation 1, is that "Highways England should put road users' needs at the heart of how it plans roadworks, whether they are needed to deliver a new road, upgrade what is there already or carry out routine maintenance. Thinking about the needs of road users

must become part of Highways England's culture, alongside considerations of cost and time to complete the work."

Our strategic intent

Customer service is one of our key imperatives. We've taken a lot of action to improve roadworks already and our intent is to be better able to demonstrate that we're putting customers' needs at the heart of what we do. In doing this we always have to keep our workforce and our customers safe in roadworks – and this can require us to balance aspects of roadworks such as length, speed limits, and how often we completely shut the road. We also have to balance the needs of road users compared to communities living beside our roads.

Actions we have taken

- We've set out our strategic approach to roadworks as part of our recently published strategic customer plan which we engaged with yourselves on.
- We've developed this further into a roadworks strategy, setting out to our own people how we ensure we take account of customers' safety and needs.
- We created a 'customer view' roadworks guide for project managers of large schemes, which we engaged with Transport Focus on and amended based on your feedback. We've issued it to our teams and will be building it into our project plans, so the customer view is hardwired into how we do things.
- We've introduced two tools to our area Service Providers (Working Windows and Travel Impact Assessment). These modelling tools help to understand and assess the impact of works to determine the optimum traffic management arrangements. Working windows was identified as a highly effective tool for our smaller projects, in work by the ORR looking into Highways England's roadworks management.
- We issued a new template for our major projects traffic management plans, to put customer needs far more centrally within this process.

Actions we will take

- We will develop the existing roadworks guide to also apply to smaller schemes, as a pan company guide. We would welcome your continued input.
- We'll keep running engagement forums on our biggest schemes to promote real dialogue between road users and project teams. This work began in 2017 and we commissioned it for 2 years. Emily O'Toole, who manages this process, has spoken with you about how we're using the insight, and we would like to keep working closely with you.
- We'll develop an approach to Travel Demand Management to reduce, re-time, re-mode and/or re-route journeys to minimise congestion through roadworks.

Recommendation 2

"Highways England should deliver future projects using shorter sections of roadworks than has been recent practice. Larger schemes should be carried out in phases where possible."

Our strategic intent

We know long lengths of roadworks can frustrate customers; and our intent is to adopt the shortest lengths we can. Sometimes this won't be as short as road users want, so we want to make our decision-making about the length of our roadworks more transparent and able to be better scrutinised, so our customers and stakeholders can be satisfied we've properly accounted for their interests. We do face challenges in this intent. Working in shorter sections can make the works take longer overall; so we have to balance time and distance. It can be the case that local communities prefer shorter durations, whilst long distance road users would prefer shorter lengths even if they take longer. In addition, the longer a project takes to deliver, the more costly it can be, as fixed costs such as works depots remain for the duration of the construction.

Actions we have taken

- To understand this issue fully, we undertook customer audits on 6 major projects, to compare satisfaction levels between them. From this we know the length of roadworks isn't the only factor driving satisfaction; this has shaped the package of measures we're undertaking in our customer service plan.
- This has resulted in shorter roadworks being highlighted in our 'customer view' roadworks guide, and we will continue to use this to drive innovative approaches.
- These innovative approaches are already happening, as we've scrutinised our longest projects to look for opportunities to reduce the length. We've previously spoken to you for example about the M4 smart motorways scheme which will be delivered in non-overlapping phases, and the M6 13-15 smart motorway scheme which will be delivered in phases which ramp up and ramp down using contraflow (and do overlap).

Actions we will take

- We're going to focus on the projects most likely to require long roadworks – smart motorways – and undertake impact assessments looking at the implications on time, costs and communities of different lengths of roadworks. We will undertake impact assessments of our Smart Motorway Programme for RIS2, the results of which we will share with you to determine the best-balanced way forward on the length of these roadworks. Following discussions with you, we've carefully thought about implementing a fixed 'maximum' length of roadworks, to go above which any project must justify itself to a senior board. As this will result in our projects undertaking impact assessments anyway, we're going straight into impact assessments now.

Recommendation 3

"Highways England should consider 24/7 working where possible for new schemes, with a clear explanation to road users whenever this is not possible."

Our strategic intent

We don't believe that working 24/7 is always the right answer but we know that this affects our customers' opinion of our commitment to them. So our intent is to alleviate customer impact by raising speed limits during periods of limited working,



where we can safely do so. We also intend to find ways to better explain to our customers why they sometimes can't see us working and to demonstrate that we're working as hard for them as we can.

Our customers often look at working practices on the rail network and ask why we can't work 24/7, as they perceive is common there. The Strategic Road Network carries an enormous amount of people and goods (4 million journeys a day) and there is no alternative method of transport which can pick up the load if we reduce capacity on the SRN during peak hours. So we have to work in a way that maintains capacity. This means keeping 3 lanes narrowed but open, generally closing only overnight, which substantially extends the duration of our works compared to what we could achieve if we shut sections of the motorway for days at a time.

The impact to our workforce is that they work in constrained spaces and in shift patterns which include a large proportion of overnight works. Working 24/7 not only has implications on their wellbeing and productivity, but also our efficiency given the number of shifts needed to run so many roadworks on such a scale all year round.

Actions we have taken

- We recently undertook a piece of work to look at different scenarios and how working patterns impact safety, productivity and customer experience, and recommend the best working patterns. We presented the methodology and approach to the Motorists' Forum roadworks sub-group, of which Transport Focus are part, at the end of October, to allow that important stakeholder group to influence our approach. We reported back to the same group in April. This work demonstrated why 24/7 isn't always the best way forward for roadworks, and recommended that we continue to drive quicker roadworks through better incentives in our contracts, which we are doing.

Action we will take

- We are undertaking feasibility and risk assessments to run roadworks at 60mph during periods when there is limited work taking place. Subject to our safety assessments, we hope to trial this during this financial year.
- We're working hard to develop better ways to communicate with our customers on-road, to explain things like our working patterns. We've been talking to Transport Focus about our work to try to develop electronic billboards, and we would appreciate your continued support.

Recommendations 4 and 5

"Highways England should actively involve freight companies in how roadworks are planned, in particular when roads will be closed completely and diversions are involved."

And

"Highways England should significantly improve the accuracy and clarity of roadworks information in the public domain, whether provided through its own channels or through an 'open data' feed that others can use."

Our strategic intent

Our intent is to look for sustainable ways to protect key freight routes from multiple substantial closures, and to improve our communication about roadworks to all our customers, including freight companies. We work to minimise disruption from our roadworks, and often this means closing roads overnight when alternative routes are capable of taking the weight of remaining traffic. Our freight customers, like Royal Mail, DPD and others, who travel a lot at night, have told us we aren't communicating as effectively as we should with them, and that when there are multiple closures on long haulage routes this can have a substantial impact on their business.

Actions we have taken

- As you know, we're undertaking regular assurance that our supply chain accurately populate our roadspace booking system by 1pm the day of any roadworks.
- We've delivered our new roadspace booking systems – NOMS – which is a major successful milestone.
- We improved Traffic England's functionality to make it more user-friendly and we've engaged with our strategic road users to help them make best use of that functionality when planning their routes.
- We cancelled and moved several total road closures to help freight stakeholders manage their peak period following Black Friday and Cyber Monday, and have more recently done the same for Valentine's Day.
- We're actively engaging across the business with strategic road users – such as Royal Mail – to improve the co-ordination of our road closures and the timeliness and accuracy of our closure notifications

Actions we will take

- We'll roll out freight engagement to gather industry insight, through stakeholder surveys, our segmentation exercise and our customer connection programme; and develop a plan of initiatives which will deliver better customer service for the freight industry.
- We'll establish a network of regional roadworks accuracy champions, to help us deliver a roadworks accuracy improvement plan and introducing a leading metric into Operations and Major Project contracts to improve accuracy.

Recommendation 6

“Highways England should set speed limits in roadworks no lower than is required to maintain safety, and should encourage compliance by explaining why a limit is required (i.e. more than just saying ‘for safety reasons’).”

Our strategic intent

We will design roadworks to the highest practicable speed, because we recognise how important it is to minimise roadworks impacts on journeys. It's our intent to set speed limits no lower than we must to maintain safety, and to challenge ourselves to find innovative ways to raise them where we safely can. Speed limits protect road users as well as our workforce; we set limits appropriate for when we have to narrow lanes, or reduce visibility, to give us room to work whilst maintaining capacity. There

is a perception that if our workforce isn't present, we could increase the speed, but generally the limit needs to stay to protect drivers from inappropriate speeds in reduced widths or visibilities. These are the things we're working hard to find safe solutions to.

Actions we have taken

- We've undertaken trials of 60mph and 55mph in roadworks, monitoring the impact on safety and our customers' experience. These have been successful – we presented the results of 60mph and 55mph to the Motorists' Forum sub-group and shared the full reports.
- We've capitalised on the trials by already expanding our use of 60mph in the right scenarios, such as smart motorway technology commissioning.

Actions we will take

- Our Board have started monitoring what speed limits are implemented on our largest projects, to challenge ourselves that we are always implementing the most appropriate speed we can, within the best practice that exists.
- As mentioned above, we will push ourselves to establish further best practice, by attempting to safely implement 60mph more dynamically, when workers are not heavily present – such as overnight or on Sundays.
- Within this work we'll consider opportunities for speed limits in narrowed lanes, although we recognise that it will be challenging to find innovative ways to do this whilst maintaining our safety standards, which we would never compromise on.
- And as already mentioned, we're looking for ways to better explain why the speed limit is what it is and, if successful, we believe electronic billboards could help with this. Even if they prove unfeasible, we will continue to develop our non-road communications channels such as our project webpages.

Recommendation 7

“Highways England should further develop its CLEAR strategy to reopen roads quickly after an incident, to ‘free’ road users who are stuck in stationary traffic and prevent vehicles from joining the back of a long queue.”

Our strategic intent

Helping customers by managing incidents better is one of the key themes of our 18/19 customer plan. Our strategic intent is to make a step change in consistently improving the customer experience during periods of unplanned disruption, by getting them moving on their journey as quickly as possible and helping ensure as few people as possible join the queuing traffic. We have a crisis management process in place and there have been examples where we have worked well with our responder partners to minimise disruption and support the welfare needs of customers, but we know that this isn't always delivered consistently.

Actions we have taken

- We've increased our focus on how we can make improvements in our incident management and create the right conditions for better welfare management where our customers become trapped on our network for prolonged periods.

- We've reflected on the lessons learned from the September 2017 M1 incident, as well as reminding ourselves of the good work we did in making improvements following the M6 incident back in February 2016.
- We've re-briefed guidance on crisis management and customer welfare (including advice for people in distress) and shared regional best practice.

Actions we will take

- We're in the process of appointing National Operations Managers to co-ordinate consistent incident management response and customer information and messaging – we'll then roll out incident management training.
- An early opportunity for improvement is that we're soon distributing Customer Information Cards: providing customers details on the different ways to contact Highways England for information about their journey.
- We'll start revising standards to clarify our role and responsibilities for mobilising and supporting the delivery of welfare provision.
- Also in our plans is a review of all partnership working protocols (including CLEAR) with emergency services and other partners, to improve incident response and deliver welfare needs during severe network disruption. We'll then embed those working protocols across operations. We also plan to pilot welfare provision training across operations (including our supply chain).

Recommendation 8

"Highways England should communicate more effectively with drivers 'in the moment', by:

- Rolling out travel-time messaging to as many electronic signs as possible using the junction number, place name, journey time and distance format
- Significantly improving the effectiveness of electronic signs at meeting drivers' core information needs:
 - How long the delay will be
 - A succinct explanation of the cause
 - If a road ahead is closed completely what to do instead
 - Key to success will be using 'everyday' language.
- Communicating with road users stuck in stationary traffic, including bespoke messages on relevant electronic signs or involving staff, perhaps Traffic Officers, to provide information on the ground."

Our strategic intent

We know there's more we can do to help our customers when they experience delays to their journeys. It is our intention to do more to help people understand what is going on - and what their alternatives are - when incidents happen on our network. Where there is unplanned disruption we will work harder to deal with incidents quickly and use our tactical and strategic signing and information services to help customers understand the problem and make choices about their journeys.

Actions we have taken

- To communicate with customers stuck in stationary traffic, we've trialled Traffic Officers using portable variable message signs in the South East and we are extending that trial to other regions.

Actions we will take

- We're delivering new variable message sign legends, including improved information on diversions routes, advice to trapped customers and the use of lower case characters.
- We will implement a revised signs and signals policy based on customer insight and human factors best practice.
- We'll also deliver phase 2 of customer focused Variable Signs and Signals training for Control Room Operators.
- We will undertake a review of the appropriateness of variable speed settings across the network.
- We're extending the use of portable variable message signs by our Traffic Officer Service and supply chain.
- We will improve the frequency of tweeting during major incidents – including rolling our tweeting capability out to regional teams – to help provide consistent real time messaging about how we are managing incidents.
- We'll ensure the main travel news provider, INRIX, is as informed as possible to disseminate helpful and consistent messages to road users.

Recommendation 9

“Highways England should develop a strategy to significantly improve communications at the roadside about forthcoming and current roadworks. The objective should be to allow drivers affected, or likely to be affected, to quickly assimilate the following:

- when it is happening and for how long
- how I will be affected
- what is being done
- how I will benefit
- if it's a lengthy project, how much time is left before completion.”

Our strategic intent

Our intent is to find better ways to provide good communications at the roadside. This does have challenges regarding how much information we can physically fit, as well as the potential for driver distraction and dissatisfaction due to potential sign clutter. Nevertheless, our own research has also shown that it is at the roadside that customers most want information.

Actions we have taken

- To show when roadworks are happening and for how long, we're putting billboards on all major schemes. This is to become our first customer service standard across the company and supply chain, which we're rolling out soon.
- To show customers how they will be affected, we're using electronic Travel Time variable message signs on all major schemes. Our customer audits have shown that both of the above add value for customers, particularly the electronic signs.
- Last year we piloted customer 'hubs' at motorway service areas near Smart Motorway projects, where our staff were present and customers could talk to



us face to face about nearby roadworks. This showed some promise and we're developing the next steps.

- We're testing out the concept of billboards and Travel Time messages on smaller roadworks, to understand how much customers value that and how affordable it is on these smaller projects.

Actions we will take

- To show how much time is left before completion, we're developing a 'progress-o-meter' to quickly show customers roadworks progress.
- To continue to improve our roadside communication, as mentioned above we are looking into the feasibility of electronic billboards – because the signs currently available to us don't provide the right level of communication capability; something you have also highlighted to us.
- Communicating how a customer will benefit from roadworks (at the roadside) is a longer-term ambition for us, which we will explore when we better understand if electronic billboards are feasible and can give us this capability.

Summary

We're here to connect the country, because we care about people's journeys. Every day we balance keeping our workers and customers safe, keeping the country moving, and delivering the best customer service we can. I hope this letter explains how Transport Focus and your recommendations are shaping our thinking, and how we're responding both to your input and to customer feedback provided directly to us.

We believe that our strategic customer plan focusses on the most important and immediate issues to enable us to improve our customer service, and we're committed to delivering it. We've developed detailed deliverables for 18/19, which we're engaged with you on, and we've really valued your input, both through your research and through direct discussions as the customer plan developed.

We're looking forward to continuing to work with you and your team.

Yours sincerely

Mel Clarke, Operations Customer Service Director
Melanie.Clarke@highwaysengland.co.uk
07768556299

&

Meg Downing, Major Projects Customer Service Director
Meghann.Downing@highwaysengland.co.uk
07768110203