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Dear Guy,

This letter is to comprehensively respond to you on the following published research:

- ***‘Cyclists, pedestrians and equestrians: a summary of priorities for Highways England’s Network’*** (January 2017)
- ***‘Cyclists, pedestrians and equestrians: measuring satisfaction with journeys on Highways England’s network in the North West and East Midlands’*** (October 2018)
- ***‘Cyclists, pedestrians and equestrians: measuring satisfaction with journeys on Highways England’s network in the West Midlands, Berkshire and Hampshire’*** (September 2019)

While you have been in discussions with my team on an ongoing basis I wanted to pull this together to respond formally to the 11 recommendations made in the first report and explain our approach to reviewing and responding to the key themes of the two following regional surveys. This letter explains the work that we have been doing in these areas since publication of the reports, and some of the actions we will be taking during Road Period 2.

Recommendation 1

“User input to design – prior to any new scheme entering the design process, Highways England should engage with cyclists, pedestrians and equestrians to ensure that their needs are at the heart of planning. This should include national representative groups for generic input which can then be shared internally within Highways England. Local user groups should also be consulted for project-specific detail. If designs change after initial engagement, Highways England should re-engage to find the next best solution.”

Highways England values the input of cyclists, pedestrians and equestrians and wants to ensure that their needs are understood and inform the planning of schemes. Since this recommendation was made, we have updated our standards, including the Walking, Cycling and Horse-Riding Assessment and Review (WCHAR, GG 142) process for highway schemes on motorways and all-purpose trunk roads.

The standard sets out how schemes are to identify and subsequently review, any opportunities resulting from the progression of the highway scheme. To inform this process, stakeholder

liaison is mandated. Stakeholders include local authorities and should include representatives for walking, cycling and horse-riding from the areas for which the highway scheme is within or extends across their boundaries. This standard recommends the appointment of a competent Lead Assessor to a scheme, whose role it is to identify which stakeholders, other than local authorities, should be engaged with; this allows for appropriate engagement based on the specifics on the scheme.

With regard to re-engaging with stakeholders if designs change, this forms part of our core scheme processes for stakeholder management and communications planning. We are reviewing these processes to identify any opportunities to strengthen this or provide further guidance.

To supplement our standards, including GG142, we have developed a series of tools and guidance for our teams and supply chain to use. Amongst other areas, this includes advice on common walking, cycling and horse-riding stakeholder groups we frequently engage with, the need to identify other local groups and tips for effective engagement and communication.

Having developed the standards and guidance, we are embedding these within Highways England. In 21/22 we have activities planned to assure the effectiveness of these measures so that we can understand that the guidance is being applied, that engagement is happening in an appropriate and proportionate manner, and that it is resulting in high quality interventions for our customers. Where we identify shortcomings, we will act to address this.

In addition to the above, we lead a national forum with our key stakeholders for walking, cycling and horse-riding. This forum includes representatives from organisations such as Living Streets, the Ramblers, Sustrans, Cycling UK and the British Horse Society. Strategic engagement with this group informs the ongoing development of our standards and ways of working, to ensure that customer needs are at the heart of everything we do, including planning. Where issues are identified, these are escalated to the forum, so lessons can be learned and applied to future interventions.

Recommendation 2

“Crossing the network – any new road scheme or major upgrade should incorporate crossings for cyclists, pedestrians and equestrians from the very beginning, considering both current and potential use. These should, where possible, be along ‘lines of desire’ between key points. Careful thought should be given to installing the most appropriate type of crossing whether it be on the surface, an underpass or bridge”

GG 142 (WCHAR; Walking, Cycling and Horse-Riding Assessment and Review) mandates an assessment which identifies the opportunities for schemes (new or upgraded), including the potential provision of crossings. Once a need is identified, standards CD 195 (Designing for cycle traffic) and CD 143 (Designing for walking, cycling and horse-riding) then provide requirements for crossing options and facilities.

In addition to the above, we have developed guidance for our teams and supply chain on ‘good design’ which includes specific information on the provision of crossing points, and the need to consider desire lines. One of the key criteria when reviewing scheme proposals for funding is whether a direct route has been provided i.e. following desire lines in the locale.

During the first Road Period, Highways England reported on the number of new and upgraded crossings that were delivered as part of our Designated Funds and Major Projects programmes - 227 upgraded and 211 new. This was effective in embedding this need in the minds of our project teams and demonstrates tangible progress for the benefit of our customers.

Recommendation 3

“Connecting networks – careful thought should be given to how crossing roads can improve connectivity between communities and amenities. This should include collaboration with local authorities and local interest groups to maximise strategic and county-wide schemes to encourage non-motorised travel.”

Highways England understands the importance of connecting routes for walkers, cyclists and horse-riders, and this need is reflected across our ways of working. This includes our role in spatial and network planning, development of new or improved facilities, and identifying needs to inform our future programme.

We continue to engage with local authorities to understand their Local Cycling and Walking Investment Strategies and Plans (LCWIS/P), and to identify mutual opportunities. This informs both our current and future activities as we seek to contribute to and enhance their route plans. We recognise that not all authorities have LCWIPs, and their maturity varies. In these instances, we still undertake proactive engagement with Local Authorities and other local stakeholder groups, to understand demand, identify opportunities to support current networks, and potential future ones. This way of working is included within GG142.

We deliver improvements via two main mechanisms:

- Our Major Projects programme, where we identify opportunities within and around specific locations where we are undertaking major improvements to the strategic road network. This often enables us to deliver large scale improvements to communities such as the A180 Port of Immingham, A14 Cambridge to Huntingdon, the A30 in Cornwall and A63 Castle Street in Hull.
- Our Designated Fund programme for walking, cycling and horse-riding, provides the funding to undertake interventions across the country, regardless of whether we have other planned works in the vicinity. This gives us the opportunity to address strategic and country-wide opportunities, which we prioritise to deliver the best value for money for the public purse. These opportunities are identified through a variety of methods including engagement with stakeholders, feedback from customers, and national projects such as identifying severance of public rights of way. We have also developed a series of tools in Road Period 1 which will support our own internal teams to proactively identify potential issues and opportunities. This includes GIS based applications which map known walking and cycling networks such as the National Cycle Network, Canal and River Trust network, crossing points and the location of stables alongside the strategic road network (SRN). This proactive approach is being implemented and embedded through Road Period 2 with the intention to enable us to be more systematic in how we identify issues and opportunities directly on or adjacent to the SRN, and become less reliant on these being raised by others. Engagement with our stakeholders, customers and communities will remain a fundamental element of how we develop our forward programme. This approach will supplement, not replace our previous approach.

Recommendation 4

“Junctions and roundabouts – Highways England should seek to improve the experience of cyclists, pedestrians and equestrians at junctions and roundabouts. This should include the creation of traffic-free alternative routes.”

CD 143 and CD 195 provide our requirements for walking, cycling and horse-riding facilities at junctions and roundabouts. The WCHAR process outlined in GG 142 also helps to support early consideration of user needs when designing these facilities, as outlined in more detail in recommendation 1. Understanding the user experience is something we are embracing as part of our ongoing research to identify opportunities for further improvements to our standards - this includes traffic free routes for cyclists.

Recommendation 5

“Segregated paths – Highways England should investigate ways for new and existing road schemes to incorporate segregated paths for cyclists, pedestrians and equestrians. Where possible these should be physically separated from the carriageway, but with minimal diversion from the intended route.”

Since this recommendation was made, Highways England has published new and updated standards. Design parameters for cycle lanes are included in CD 195 (Designing for Cycle Traffic), which promotes dedicated provision.

Government has also now released their ‘Gear Change’ strategy, which sets expectations regarding provision for walking and cycling infrastructure.

We will work with the Department for Transport, Transport Focus and partners, to consider if any changes are required to our approach to providing segregated provision over the early part of Road Period 2.

Recommendation 6

“Standards – develop a set of minimum standards, beyond the current requirements of the Design Manual for Roads and Bridges (DMRB) for infrastructure intended for cyclists, pedestrians and equestrians. These should focus on the following areas: 1. Surface quality 2. Noise protection 3. Physical protection from motorised vehicles 4. Lighting (where appropriate) 5. Flood prevention 6. Signage 7. Limited divergence from the existing carriageway route 8. Maintenance and inspection regimes and 9. Crossings and underpasses. Once these standards have been developed and tested we would recommend Highways England incorporates them into the DMRB.”

During Road Period 1 we undertook significant work to develop new and improved standards and published CD 195 and CD 143 as a result. These provide requirements for the design and development of walking, cycling and horse-riding schemes alongside other DMRB documents that provide requirements for facilities such as lighting.

Our maintenance requirements mandate for our walking, cycling and horse-riding assets to be maintained through an intelligence and risk based approach in line with all other assets. We are working with the maintenance requirements team to consider where these requirements may need to be strengthened or specific asset needs highlighted.

As we review our DMRB standards, we undertake research into current best practice and any relevant innovations. We also use research into customer needs including our own, and Transport Focus’s customer satisfaction surveys and insight. This informs the facilities we provide for users, and we will continue to engage with Transport Focus on this.

Recommendation 7

“Connecting Public Rights of Way (PRoW) – where a PRoW commences or terminates at the edge of a Highways England ‘A’ road, Highways England should explore options to connect it with a PRoW on the other side of the road, especially if they are staggered by only a few hundred metres. Where this is not practicable, Highways England should engage with landowners and local authorities with a view to re-routing rights of way or constructing a path outside the current Highway boundary.”

We will continue to identify PRoW opportunities as we deliver our national Major Projects and Designated Fund programmes. GG 142 includes the assessment of user needs around the location of proposed schemes - identifying gaps in, and assessing opportunities to connect PRoWs forms part of this process.

Further to this, we are developing a strategic approach to how we consistently address PRow opportunities across the SRN. To support this we are undertaking a pilot study with two specific Local Authorities (one urban, one more rural) with the following aims:

- To validate our understanding of PRow routes in proximity to the SRN;
- To identify the specific issues e.g. severance, alignment of route etc, and the impact to our customers;
- To consider a range of interventions to address the findings; and
- To prioritise the interventions as part of our national forward programme.

We will be working with our national stakeholder groups, including Transport Focus, on this project to seek input and overcome barriers we may encounter.

Recommendation 8

“Explore existing assets – Highways England should fully evaluate whether assets within the Historic Railway Estate could be brought in to use for the benefit of cyclists, pedestrians and equestrians.”

Historic Railway Estate assets will be considered on an individual basis, as opportunities are raised within the programme. We will not discount use of these assets, however, from initial review we do not believe there is a major opportunity at a programme level for Highways England to utilise these assets as most infrastructure is a considerable distance (at least 1.5 miles away) from the SRN.

The Historic Railway Estate asset is however mapped within our internal GIS applications, so our teams can identify where the infrastructure is, and any the opportunities we may be able to support. Where a business case can be demonstrated, the use of these facilities would be supported.

Recommendation 9

“Bridge environment – Where a Highways England road crosses over another part of the SRN, a local authority road or a public right of way, the installation of spikes, netting or other means of preventing birds from perching underneath bridges would be helpful. It would help to reduce bird defecation onto paths below, reducing health risks and improving the pedestrian experience.”

The installation of methods to prevent bird perches / roosting is not currently a standard requirement for our structures but is assessed on a case by case basis. We recognise the issue that has been raised and will consider how we can address this. This will include the merits of: changes to our standards to prevent the issue occurring on new infrastructure; planned works addressing existing issues; and how we respond to specific issues that are fed back to us by stakeholders and customers.

Recommendation 10

“Conversion of ‘A roads’ to motorway or Expressway – Whenever an existing ‘A’ road is converted into a motorway, or upgraded to the proposed expressway standard, Highways England must carefully consider the impacts of excluding cyclists, pedestrians and equestrians; providing suitable alternative provision where necessary.”

Requirements for new and upgraded all-purpose trunk roads (expressways) have now been published in GD 300. This mandates that alternative provision for walkers, cyclists and horse-riders shall be assessed in line with GG 142 with the decision on what is appropriate therefore being taken in line with the WCHAR process.

GD 300 includes a walking, cycling and horse-riding safety objective that includes addressing severance of routes, with a specific consideration being latent demand. It steers the designer

to: provide facilities for WCHs that are at least as good as they were, and preferably better than prior to the improvement scheme; make careful consideration of separated facilities; and ensure that WCHs should not be disadvantaged when applying GD 300.

We are working to review opportunities to fine tune how GD 300 interacts with other standards, to deliver the right outcome for all road users in a wide range of contexts. Findings from this review will be fed back to our national stakeholders, including Transport Focus.

Recommendation 11

“Measuring usage of the network – Highways England should explore low cost solutions to gather data about the use of major ‘A’ roads by cyclists, pedestrians and equestrians. This would assist in building a national picture of route utilisation and provide a benchmark for, amongst other things, casualties versus usage on individual roads”

Highways England is exploring options to achieve a better understanding of the numbers of walkers, cyclists and horse-riders using of the SRN as part of our wider appraisal, monitoring and evaluation requirements across the business. GG 142 already requires collision data and various survey data to be collected.

In addition, there is now a RIS 2 commitment to investigate the potential of Highways England being able to provide a vulnerable user casualty rate. If implemented this would provide a wider perspective on use, not just linked to schemes, and would enable a safety rate to be established for these users. We are working on feasibility proposals for this in collaboration with the Department for Transport and Transport Focus.

Transport Focus cyclist, pedestrian and equestrian satisfaction surveys

We have worked with Transport Focus to develop and refine the customer satisfaction surveys that were undertaken in 2018/19, that focussed on the experience of pedestrians, cyclists and equestrians on the SRN.

Where specific locations were identified on or adjacent to the SRN, our regional teams have considered the issues raised. As a result of this exercise some locations were deemed as not requiring further consideration as there was no supporting evidence of the issue, or it had already been addressed. Where the issues were validated, these locations were included into the forward programme to be prioritised.

Having reviewed the issues raised at specific locations, we have identified a series of common themes. These include lack or poor provision of routes, parapet height, lighting, personal safety and route condition and maintenance. We recognise that although these issues were raised at specific locations, they are likely to apply nationwide and therefore warrant a systematic approach to addressing them. In these cases we have, and continue to, consider these trends across our ways of working. This includes our standards, how we identify potential demand and schemes, how we consistently develop and deliver high quality interventions, and put customer needs at the heart of what we do.

Some examples of where we have already made changes include:

- The development of robust internal guidance and tools to support the consistent development and delivery of interventions. This includes specific guidance of what good looks like for our users, and specifically addresses many of the themes we have identified e.g. GIS applications to proactively identify lack of provision and severance.
- Development of an internal safety tool that specifically identifies safety issues and risk for walkers, cyclists and horse-riders. This uses data from STATS 19, British Horse Society and Collidescope, and will inform the development of our future programme of interventions.

- Worked with our innovation team to pilot new lighting solutions. Lighting is a prominent issue within the surveys, and traditional methods for lighting can be expensive and contribute to environmental challenges i.e. light pollution. As a result, we are currently trialling luminescent discs on an unlit route and are awaiting the conclusion and evaluation of this project.
- We are also using the themes identified in all the surveys and feedback to inform the future development of CD 143.

Further to this, in 2019/20 we undertook some additional customer insight work, which will be used to develop additional improvements.

Summary

This letter explains how the recommendations in your three reports have influenced our thinking with regards to meeting the needs of the walkers, cyclists and horse-riders whose journeys interact with the SRN. It sets out how we are responding to these needs and making them integral to what we do.

In line with our strategic aims, the work we are undertaking is contributing to addressing the barriers our roads can sometimes create, helping to expand people's travel choices, enhancing and improving network facilities and making every day journeys as easy as possible for our customers.

I would like to take the opportunity to thank you for your input, both via your research and direct discussions. We look forward to continuing working with you and your colleagues, and updating you as our work progresses.

Yours sincerely,



Pete Martin
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