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Dear Guy

Signs on the National Highways network

I am writing further to my acknowledgement of your letter dated 25 August 2021 regarding signs on the National Highways network in which I advised I would write back to you with a more detailed response about our plans to address the four principle concerns you have shared with us.

I'm aware that you recently met with Mel Clarke to discuss this issue and hope that you found it useful and that it provided you with the reassurance that National Highways are working hard in this area.

Firstly, thank you for recognising the work of our teams in supporting your Sort My Sign campaign and please be assured that we will continue to progress all submissions that we receive. I agree that signs need to be clear to be safe. Clear signs enable drivers to make timely and stress-free decisions and many customers still rely on conventional signage. We also recognise the opportunity to further enhance our reputation with customers.

Turning to the four principal areas where Transport Focus would like to see improvement, I would like to provide you with the reassurance that I recognise and acknowledge each of them:

1. It isn't acceptable for signs to be obscured by vegetation and we have included in our plans a focus on addressing situations such as these.
2. Whilst I acknowledge the need to address signage defects as quickly as possible, where a replacement sign needs to be designed and ordered there will inevitably be some time lag to resolve the problem. It's also important that we prioritise spend in fixing safety critical defects as our operational expenditure position in Road Period 2 remains challenging. To manage resources effectively we may decide to actively monitor some defects until a point where they do become safety critical or wait for a scheme to be programmed in that location. Nevertheless, I'm committed to improving our response to resolving customer identified defects in a timely way.

3. Signs with missing letters or lost reflectiveness are not acceptable and I would expect these to be picked up through our normal network inspection activities. I am aware that Mel is planning to launch an internal “Think Customer” campaign and will be using these examples as things to look out for.
4. Turning to your last point surrounding making incremental improvements to existing provision, I would again expect these to be included in our thinking when conducting our routine condition inspections, combining the output of walking the route with feedback received from customers.

The following sets out the specific actions we will take to address signage defects:

Develop a new approach to network inspections

Our approach to network inspections, including their frequency, is laid down within the document GS801 and I’ve provided a link to this for your information [here](#). Whilst this defines the minimum we expect, we’re proposing a new approach to inspections and cyclical maintenance interventions, ensuring we are far more customer focused and that these activities deliver the required outcomes.

I’m aware that Transport Focus are keen that we look again at the adequacy of our standards covering visibility splays. Just as we’ve taken onboard your observations surrounding network inspections, we will apply the same principles of being customer and outcome focused to this area also and as you are aware we’ve actively reviewed the standards surrounding visibility. I intend that we continue to engage closely with Transport Focus as we develop our approach.

Enabling customers to report signage defects more easily

Recognising that we can do more, we’ve been developing our self-service digital channel, the Defect Reporting Tool (DRT). The tool enables customers to report anything they see whilst on their journey that they feel needs to be addressed. Take up of this reporting channel has already increased by more than 75% in the period November 2020 to August 2021 and we will soon be communicating more about the new channel to customers.

Feedback from customers is invaluable in helping us understand what the network looks and feels like for those that use it and communities that live by it. I will ensure that our renewed focus on network stewardship combines what our inspectors see when discharging their role with feedback reported by customers and our own staff when using the network.

Enhancing our Fix Now approach

We introduced the “Fix Now” approach for our inspectors, enabling them safely to resolve minor defect issues as they come across them. We’ll be looking to enhance this approach during 2022/2023 as we introduce more reporting on the number of Fix Now jobs completed, efficiencies realised and our timeliness to resolve. The enhanced approach will include a proposal to trial of the use of Incident Support Units to quickly resolve a wider range of defects.

Fix When

We're also committed to better understanding and improving the time it takes to resolve issues with signs that we cannot fix there and then, as it's clearly unacceptable for these to remain unresolved for significant periods of time.

I discuss our performance against defect resolution targets on a monthly basis and report against the measure quarterly to the ORR. The data we use is gathered from Confirm and the reporting requirements, including how it is to be evidenced, is laid down in the Collaborative Performance Framework (CPF).

However, you make an interesting point about the outliers, those where the targets aren't met, and I will establish from my Performance Analysts how I might understand better the timescales for resolving these.

Inspections – A Customer View

We're planning to develop the concept of "Inspections – A Customer View" building on the success of "Roadworks – A Customer View". Whilst the plans are still taking shape, I'm keen to develop customer service capability for Highways Inspectors, enabling them to see their work through the eyes of our customers. Similarly to my earlier commitment, I intend that we engage closely with Transport Focus as we develop this new approach.

Customer audits

We'll be progressing work where customers will be able to audit Operations activity, ranging from diversion routes to litter and signage. This will provide an independent, customer-focussed assessment of how we're doing and will help us to target improvements against the expectations we are laying out in the "Inspections – A Customer View" document.

In bringing this note to a conclusion I would again like to thank you and the team at Transport Focus for the time you've taken to provide this feedback. Your photographs, whilst meant as merely indicative, have brought these matters into a sharper focus and I know that at the meeting with Mel, you were provided feedback on what has already been done to address some of those specific issues (Appendix A refers).

Yours sincerely



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Appendix A



This sign will be bagged before being removed.



The cleaning of this sign will be brought forward from 2022/2023 and completed before January 2022.

